THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

His Twisted World:

An Analysis of Elliot Rodger and *Inceldom* Through Life-Course Theory

By

Marc Leroux-Parra

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Faculty Advisor: Maximilian Cuddy
Preceptor: Brianne Painia

Abstract

Incels are an online subculture of young men who espouse misogynistic and nihilistic worldviews and experience significant mental health challenges. This thesis analyzes contemporary scholarship on *incels* to provide a meta-level overview of the theories and approaches applied to *incels*. A significant finding is the determination that most scholarship analyzes *inceldom* from three perspectives which share an emphasis on responding to or classifying the phenomena. As a result, I draw from comparative human development to present life-course theory as an alternative approach to analyzing *incels*. Life-course theory may help illuminate hereto unidentified or underappreciated components of *incel* experiences and present pathways for conceptualizing a need for the prevention of *inceldom*, rather than simply a response to *inceldom*. The second half of the paper applies life-course theory to the case of Elliot Rodger, the first legitimate perpetrator of *incel*-related violence, using his positionality within *incel* mythos to articulate how developmental experiences which include familial instability, "off-time" social development, and ineffective interventions contributed to his pathway to *incel* philosophies. This analysis includes a queer reading of Rodger's text to highlight potentially repressed queer sexuality as a significantly overlooked possibility in contemporary analyses of Rodger and *inceldom* more broadly. This paper culminates with recommendations for future research and practical engagements with the subculture and its participants.

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Introduction

On May 23, 2014, Elliot Rodger, a 22-year-old college student, stabbed his two roommates and one of their friends in their shared dorm room in Santa Barbara, California. After tiding up, he recorded and published some videos to YouTube and sent a written autobiography explaining the motives of his attack to his family (Rodger, 2014). And then, he drove his BMW to a sorority, shot two girls on the lawn, and proceeded to drive around Isla Vista while shooting at bystanders and ramming people with his car. The attack ended when he crashed his car and committed suicide. In all, he killed seven people, including himself, and injured thirteen (Lovette & Nagourney, 2014).

In the aftermath, many sought to make sense of the seemingly senseless violence and turned to the materials Rodger left behind. His YouTube videos and autobiography, deemed by many to be a "manifesto," were chilling for their overt sexism, misogyny, and hatred. Rodger is quite explicit about his motivations, opening his autobiography with:

> *"All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity, particularly women. ... All I wanted was to fit in and live a happy life amongst humanity, but I was cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificance, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me." (Rodger, 2014, 1).*

Academics were quick to join attempts to make sense of Rodger and his manifesto. Burke and Alexander (2018) looked at the role social media played in Rodger's experience and subsequent descent. Larkin (2018) argued that Rodger had played out a uniquely American social script founded in the aftermath of the Columbine Massacre, where disaffected and emotionally disturbed young and white men turn to mass violence as a tool for grandiosity. Allely and Faccini (2017) took a more holistic approach to Rodger's case, examining his "pathway to violence" from a more forensic and psychiatric lens, arguing that Rodger's narcissistic rage—which encompassed a sense of injustice and need for revenge—played the defining role in the violence despite some strong indications of high functioning autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Murray (2017) indicated that a "fixation on deviant and misogynistic sexual fantasies" is common among notorious serial killers, and that psychosexual issues were a motivating factor in Rodger's attack (735). Blommaert, in a final example, examined the online spaces Rodger had participated in to argue that online cultures of masculine victimhood and misogyny played a significant role in Rodger's formation of a personal, offline culture (2017).

The online cultures Blommaert refers to are often termed the Manosphere (see Ging, 2019 for a review), and Rodger's personal ideology and worldview are most closely associated with *involuntary celibacy*; individuals are *incels*, while the cultural milieu is *inceldom*. There is some ongoing debate in the academic sphere about how to classify *inceldom* (see Czerwinsky, 2023 for a review). Some argue that it is a milieu of radicalization (Brzuszkiewicz, 2022), that it is a discourse (Hintz & Baker, 2021), that it ought to be a formal terrorist group (Lockyer, Halpin, & Maguire, 2024); most agree that it is a subculture (e.g. O'Malley, Holt, and Holt, 2020; Cottee, 2021; Pràzmo, 2024; Fowler, Green, & Palombi, 2023). *Incels* themselves claim that academia vindicates *inceldom* as a life circumstance, relying specifically on Donnelly and colleagues' 2001 study (Incels Wiki, 2024).

It is important however, to point out that young men are not the only ones who experience undesired celibacy. Therefore, in this thesis, I draw from Grunau and colleague's (2022) recommendation that the term *unwanted celibacy* be applied to a general population which is experiencing celibacy despite their best intentions to have a relationship; in this case, we can recontextualize Donnelly and colleague's study as studying *unwanted celibacy*, despite their usage of the term *involuntary celibacy*, as a study on a life circumstance. Thus, this thesis understands *incels* as young men who are experiencing the life circumstance of *unwanted celibacy* and additionally participate in a demarcated online environment with its own cultural (Blommaert, 2017; Witt, 2020) and linguistic patterns (e.g. Jaki, 2019); *inceldom* is the online cultural, linguistic, and social milieu of *incels*.

Inceldom is a space where much of the misogyny and violence articulated and ultimately performed by Rodger continues to fester. Most academic articles which research *inceldom* seek to understand why this cultural milieu exists and what interventions may be possible to steer young men to more healthy forms of meaning-making. This thesis seeks to contribute to this literature by taking an approach which has rarely been applied to *incels*: life-course theory and human development. As yet, only two academic papers have studied *incels* through this lens; first advocated by Stijelja and Mishara (2023b), only Utterback (2024) has taken up the mantle. Both papers point out the vast indications in *incel* rhetoric and discourse of complex relationships between violence, masculinity, family, education, environment, socialization, and mental health which are developed over the course of a lifetime. Both studies, however, are relatively exploratory. As such, this thesis serves to provide a detailed analysis of Rodger's 2014 autobiographical text through a life-course and human development perspective. In so doing, I hope to elucidate how these complex relationships played out in Rodger's life to better understand what experiences may be risk-factors for chasing the rabbit down the *incel* hole.

I emphasize that the point of this study is not to absolve Rodger—or *incels* more broadly—from the wrongs he committed along the course of his life, for he committed many; rather the point is to illustrate that he exhibited many comorbid risk-factors for a difficult and unstable human development trajectory. It is necessary to be able to track these risk factors as they become more or less salient throughout his life and narrative to identify how a little boy turned into a mass murderer. As we will see in the analysis, two fundamental emotions which characterize Rodger's lived experiences, although he rarely admits to them, are resentment and confusion. As he tries to make sense of his confusion, it fed his resentment in a vicious cycle which ultimately reached such a point that he believed the only way out was to harness his externalized anger, commit a mass killing, and die by suicide.

As a result, a core interest of this research is the extent to which familial and school environments factored into Rodger's claimed life-course narratives and see what other experiences reoccur in his life. How did his emotions, values, attitudes, and beliefs evolve over the course of his lived experiences? What is the relationship between Rodger's mental health, hopelessness, depression, and *incel* perspectives? And in so doing, can we see similarities in his experiences to those of young men in general and *incels* in particular? Is it possible to identify a series of comorbid experiences which increase the risk factor for the development of an *incel* worldview? If so, the knowledge of these comorbidities may help us—as policymakers, academics, educators, parents,

friends—better engage in preventative interventions to proactively steer children and adolescents away from *inceldom* and its subsequent risk of mass violence and misogyny.

I recognize and appreciate the literature which has rightly centered gender, terrorism and violence, and mental health. However, as indicated by Sparks, Zidenburg, and Olver, "it is possible that their moniker [*incel*] has resulted in an overemphasis on their sexual exclusion and frustration" (2023b, 1); I will expand this by claiming that their misogynistic discourses, plus cases of acute mass violence, have further contributed to an overemphasis on their violence. Even scholars who have argued for the inherent violence of *inceldom* have admitted that "the act of carrying out the violence is rare, [despite] many in the community [seemingly] very happy to cheer-on and celebrate those who have committed mass killings…" (Regehr, 2022). Therefore, I hope to understand Rodger's pathway to *inceldom* removed from these foci. I am interested in how these topics are related to a process of development, but the focus of my lens will not be colored strictly by the sexual moniker nor the acts of mass violence.

Crucially, while most of the existent literature attempts to understand those who are already *incel* or recommend interventions targeting current *incels*, my research attempts to identify how Rodger constructed misogynistic attitudes and worldviews over the course of his life. A crucial component of this is interrogating how his different environments may have failed to mitigate his internalizations low self-worth and externalized his resentment and confusion. In so doing, I hope to identify possible sites of intervention in childhood and adolescence which may be applicable to a broader *incel* population due to their overwhelming identification with Rodger's narrative (e.g. Blommaert, 2017; Witt, 2020; Miller, 2023). This is of utmost importance, as research has identified that *incel* subculture is growing amongst a broader population (Ribeiro et al., 2019), online misogyny is intensifying (Farrell et al., 2017), *inceldom* is correlated with abysmal mental and social health outcomes (Speckhard et al., 2021; Delaney, Pollet, & Cook, 2024; Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2023a), and *incels* are more diverse than expected (Speckhard et al., 2021). Thus, it seems necessary to not just deradicalize those who are already *incels*, but also to understand why young men continue to be drawn to a misogynistic and nihilistic worldview to divert them to more positive forms of meaning-making; in other words, we must not simply engage in responsive work, but long-term preventative work. And at the heart of prevention is understanding how these young men have hereto navigated the world and its challenges, and we are fortunate that Rodger has provided us as detailed—and difficult, painful, and problematic—an account as he did.

This thesis begins with a literature review that provides a descriptive overview of what *inceldom* is and a brief contextualization of who Elliot Rodger was. In the narrative review section, I break down the current academic perspectives which have been deployed to study and analyze *inceldom*. The narrative review provides a detailed and focused analysis of the scholarship, its findings and its assumptions, as a foundation and rationale for my proposed theoretical and analytical framework, life-course theory. With this established, I demonstrate an application of this approach through the case study of Elliot Rodger's text in the findings section to illuminate additional themes present within his manifesto which require further research. Finally, I tie the themes from Rodger's case to *inceldom* more broadly in the discussion section and provide both scholarly and practical recommendations in the recommendation section.

Literature Review

What is Inceldom?

Inceldom is a component of what some gender scholars have termed the "Manosphere," a loose confederacy of interest groups which have "established complex connections with a myriad of interconnected organizations, blogs, forums, communities, and subcultures, resulting in a much more extreme and ostensibly amorphous set of discourses and ideological positions" (Ging, 2019, 639). The "Manosphere" is a diverse online ecosystem of several male-first ideologies, worldviews, and subcultures. Some of the most infamous include: Pick Up Artists (PUAs), who consider dating and sex to be akin to a "game" men play and that there are specific tips and tricks to use in their pursuit of women as a prize; Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), who believe women are beneath them and that the primary goal in life is to put themselves first—almost like a community of voluntary celibates rooted in a "we'll reject them first so they don't have the chance to reject us" mentality (Jones, Trott, & Wright, 2019); and, of course, *incels*, who believe that they have failed a genetic lottery and have been relegated to "subhuman" or second-class status by women and sexually successful men (Ging, 2019).

These three online subcultures are deeply interlinked. Research indicates that there is considerable migration between these spaces, although this migration is largely moving from "less" extreme (PUA) spaces to "more" extreme (MGTOW and *incel*) spaces (Ribeiro et al., 2019). PUA is broadly defined by the "Red Pill," an allusion to the science fiction film written and directed by the Wachowski sisters, *The Matrix*. The Red Pill is both an ideology and worldview that is concerned primarily with discovering the rules of the mating "game" and believes that, by learning these rules and applying them in social interactions, men can develop an advantage in the sexual marketplace (Van Valkenburg, 2018). However, *inceldom* has its own version of the Red Pill which differs considerably from the PUA Red Pill. *Incels* resent PUAs for their ability to "play the game," and have often been jaded from failing to garner success and attention from PUA tips and tricks. *Incels* perceive PUAs as men who have genetic (physical) advantages who just need to "polish" their social conduct and skills, while they believe themselves to have genetic (physical) failures and must attempt to remedy their physical features. Rather than simply "playing the game" then, the *Incel* Red Pill is a belief that the genetic lottery can be mitigated and that they may "ascend" from their celibacy through self-improvement, although this requires considerable additional effort that PUAs and other men need not exert (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022; Purhmann & Schlaerth, 2023). In this article, I will be referring to the *incel* Red Pill exclusively.

The second stage of *inceldom* is the "Black Pill." The those who have taken the Black Pill have "jettisoned the self-help aspects of the Red Pill philosophy" and sunken into the nihilistic belief that their situation is innate, permanent, and negative (Zimmerman, 2024, 173). This nihilism drives the most sustained engagement and advocacy of violence, both toward the world in the form of mass killings and harassment, and inward against the self in the form of suicide (Ellenburg, Speckhard, Kruglanski, 2023). The Black Pill "operates as a sort of fatalistic echo-chamber, where failure is celebrated, and individuals discourage each other from pursuing romantic success" (Costello & Buss, 2023, 253). While both the Red Pill and the Black Pill are rooted in poorly understood and manipulated bastardizations of evolutionary psychology (see Lindsay, 2022; Costello et al., 2022), the Black Pill adds biological positivism and "provides a 'scientific'

justification for their sexual alienation," including eugenics, to established exclusionary social and sexual hierarchies (Lindsay, 2022, 217).

The Red Pill and the Black Pill are two sides of the same coin: both believe in the underlying root philosophy of *inceldom*, with the former holding out some hope that improvement is possible, and the latter believing they are doomed to their genetic shortcomings. In this thesis, *inceldom* will be used to refer to the root philosophy, the Red Pill to specifically reference the category of *incels* who hold out hope, and the Black Pill to specifically reference the category of *incels* who have embraced a more complete form of nihilism. A different term, the "Incelosphere," will be used to refer to the totality of *incel*-related spaces and individuals—a shorthand for "the *incel* environment"—in the recognition that there is considerable variation amongst *incels* but that there is a need to be able to refer to this more generally (Czerwinsky, 2023).

There has been much research on what the core philosophical and ideological components of *inceldom* are. At the heart of *inceldom* is a concept *incels* have coined as "lookism," which they define as a subordination experienced as "a social bias in favor of attractive people," and that women are the primary perpetrators of this injustice (Halpin, 2022). Women, so lookism goes, perpetuate a form of sexual injustice by following the 80/20 Rule, wherein 80 percent of women date the top 20 percent of men (Menzie, 2022). *Inceldom* has created an entire library of meaning around lookism and the 80/20 Rule in an attempt to rationalize and justify why these concepts are true and applicable (see Andersen, 2023 for a review of the Incel Wiki).

At the core of these meaning-making strategies are hierarchical constructions of modern, neoliberal society, divided along "castes" of gender. Women are classified as "Stacys," "Beckys," or some variant of "Female Humanoid Organism" ("*foids*") (Fowler, Green, & Palombi, 2023). Stacys are at the top of the hierarchy, simultaneously the pinnacle of *incel* desire, resentment, and lack; Beckys resort to feminism and anti-masculinity to compensate for their "tier two status"; and *foids* are both dehumanized ugly women or the catch-all category for femininity (Fowler, Green, & Palombi, 2023).

Men and masculinity follow a similar articulation of hierarchy. The top 20 percent of men are classified as "Chads," himself is a contested figure (see Menzie, 2022). Chad can be understood as a stereotyped hypermasculine figure who is strong, domineering, considers himself to be the center of the universe, and has looks that approximates a stereotypical "jock" archetype (Maxwell et al., 2020). Chads are a hegemonic caste, in that they "marginalize other men by being more attractive and sexually successful" and *incels* both assume that success is genetically inherent and that they are the "other men" who are marginalized (Daly & Reed, 2022, 28). Thus, the *inceldom* posits male hierarchy as rooted in political agency and power, which itself is based in sex (Fowler, 2022). Crucially, what differentiates Chads from PUAs, both classifications who are successful with women, is that Chad's success is inherent, effortless, and absolute, while PUAs have had to struggle and manipulate in order to be successful (Fowler, 2022, 1413). The hierarchy then descends from Chad as absolute political agency, down past PUAs as those who have struggled for and succeeded to gain political agency, all the way to Red Pillers, who aspire to become PUAs, and Black Pillers, who have given up and resent everyone, at the very bottom (Fowler, 2022).

These hierarchies and philosophies are rooted in violent and misogynistic language that is constantly deployed throughout the Incelosphere. Studies have indicated that there are subtle cultural variations between the subreddits of *inceldom* (the now-defunct r/Incels, r/Braincels) and the standalone mainstream *incel* forum (the former incels.me and incels.co, now incels.is) (e.g. compare Jaki et al., 2019 to Helm et al., 2024), but there are broad similarities in *incel* subculture. For one, the hierarchical structures outlined above are replete with dehumanizing, denigrating, and exculpatory language which is misandrist and leans misogynist; the majority of that vitriol is directed at women. Women are broadly painted as evil and egocentric, with clear double standards in how they treat Chads versus *incels* and how Chads versus *incels* are allowed to treat them (Helm et al., 2024). In studying forum threads on incels.is, Halpin and colleagues identified that 17.3 percent of all comments included misogynistic terms, with 83.3 percent of threads containing at least one misogynistic term and 81.2 percent of forum contributors using at least one misogynistic term during the study period (Halpin et al., 2023). There are also a host of posts which reference and venerate the perpetrators of *incel*-related mass violence and indicate a personal endorsement of *incel*-motivated violence (Jaki et al., 2019; Lockyer, Halpin, & Maguire, 2024; Halpin et al., 2024).

While the core philosophies and elements of *inceldom* are found across the Incelosphere, there are indications of considerable diversity of identity and demographics amongst *incels* at an individual level, contrary to mainstream assumptions of homogeneity. A survey of self-identified *incels* indicated that only 53 percent of *incel* forum users were white, with other ethnic and racial diversities being widely represented (Speckhard et al., 2021). In conducting interviews with self-identified *incels*, Daly and Reed (2022) found considerable diversity of thought within broader thematic categories; while *incels* organize around the same overarching themes and viewpoints, there is a considerable range of belief within each theme. For example, *incels* hold a considerable variety of viewpoints on "shit posting," ranging from being annoyed by it, considering it an unserious joke, doing it to gain attention, or even skepticism over whether *incels* are actually the ones posting those inflammatory comments (Daly & Nichols, 2024).

Some characteristics of identity and demographic are more widespread. A significant body of research as identified that *incels* self-report higher rates of depression, anxiety, and autism-related symptoms and higher rates of formal diagnoses compared to a broader control population (Costello et al., 2022; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022). Depression and anxiety seem particularly concerning, with 64.3 percent reporting symptoms of depression (38.6 percent formal diagnoses, versus 3.6 percent of men globally) and 59.6 percent reporting symptoms of anxiety (37.1 percent formal diagnoses, versus 2.6 percent of men globally) (Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022). The significant relationship between autism and *inceldom* is also concerning: 24.6 percent reported symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), with 18.4 percent reporting a formal diagnosis, compared to 0.62 percent in a global population (Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022). Speckhard and Ellenburg (2022) however, only count self-reported symptoms as "present" if respondents reported a 4 or 5 on the 5-point Likert scale (7). Using the same study data, Moskalenko and colleagues (2022) identify that these rates skyrocket if a more inclusive approach is taken, considering anything above "not at all" (1 on the Likert scale) as being an indicator of at least some symptoms (9). In this case, 95 percent of participants report at least some depression, 95 percent some anxiety, and 74 percent some ASD (Moskalenko, 2022). Thus, a small majority experiences significant mental health challenges, but almost all participants experience some. Disturbingly, research has indicated that

incels are broadly skeptical and mistrustful of therapy, with only a small minority indicating they've tried therapy at all and a sizable majority of those indicating that it had no effect or made them feel worse (Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022; Speckhard et al., 2021; Moskalenko et al., 2022).

Some social and environmental characteristics have also been identified. *Incels* broadly report poor social experiences in middle and high school, with 75.4 percent reporting that their middle and high school experiences were negative, 28.7 percent reporting a complete lack of friends during that time, and 88.1 percent reporting experiences of bullying (Speckhard et al., 2021; Moskalenko, 2022). Loneliness, hopelessness, and helplessness have been identified as core foundational experiences communicated on *incel* forums, of which the Black Pill is the epitome (Maxwell et al., 2020; Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2023b; Williams & Arntfield, 2020; Broyd et al., 2023; see Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2022 for a review). *Incels* tend to engage with content on mental health and relationships, and their participation with other hateful forums tend to predate participation in the Incelosphere (Stijelja & Mishara, 2023a). In fact, *incels* tend to arrive at the Incelosphere already using misogynistic language (Halpin et al., 2023), and that, although anger is overall more dominant in *incel* spaces as compared to other social media platforms (i.e. Reddit, Twitter, Facebook), new users tended to be the most emotional and their anger was moderated as they conformed to group norms and completed an initial expression and performance of their *inceldom* (de Roos, Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová, & Hanna, 2024). Thus, "incels are not necessarily radicalized within these forums, but rather join them with preexisting emotional turmoil," misogynistic attitudes, and maladaptive perceptions of their place in society (de Roos, Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová, & Hanna, 2024, 17).

This is further corroborated by the rise of the manosphere in more mainstream media channels. Certain platforms—such as YouTube (Papadamou et al., 2021), TikTok, and manospheric podcasters like Andrew Tate (Solea & Suguira, 2023)—are contributing to the normalization of the Red Pill and other components of *incel*-related ideology. The diffusion of these philosophies among broader populations is concerning because "boys and men are struggling in general" (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022, 621). Likewise, mainstream media has brought a lot of attention to *inceldom* through how the industry has reported on certain instances of mass violence (West, 2024). It is therefore concerning that there are increasing opportunities for entry into a manosphere-oriented mindset, the pathway of which culminates in nihilistic *inceldom*—and suicide or homicide—at the very bottom. Because of the prevalence of these themes in media and online spaces, young male adolescents and adults who develop persistent and chronic social struggles in their own lives which seek out information to engage in sense-making unwittingly develop a greater risk of chasing the rabbit down the hole.

It is important to remember that *inceldom* is a specific and online subculture which has developed these ideologies and worldviews in response to feelings of being "stuck" in an undesired social category. *Inceldom*, as a term, should *not* be applied more broadly to *unwanted celibacy*, which can be considered a legitimate, near-universal human experience (Grunau et al., 2022). It is also important to remember that not all young men who experience social challenges will necessarily be swayed by the Manosphere or the Incelosphere. There are divergent pathways for how individuals exit *inceldom* (see Osuna, 2024; Gheorghe & Clement, 2023), and therefore there likely is considerable variation in the pathways individuals travel to arrive at *inceldom*. This study hopes to provide an exploration into what themes may be present in those developmental pathways

by examining Rodger's experiences. In doing so, I do not seek to prove direct causality between Rodger's experiences and those of *incels*, nor do I set out to claim that Rodger's experience is representative of all *incels*; rather, I depart from the assumption that Rodger's narrative, not his violence, is highly relatable amongst *incels*. Thus, Rodger's narrative, from a more holistic perspective, might illustrate themes within *incel* experience that future research can engage with further.

Elliot Rodger & Inceldom

Elliot Rodger was a 22-year-old college student when he killed seven people, including himself, and injured thirteen on May 23, 2014 (Lovett & Nagourney, 2014). Prior to the attack, Rodger penned a 141-page autobiographical document outlining his life and ultimate rationale for the violence (Rodger, 2014), along with some videos published to YouTube. He had visited sites like PUAhate.com, which served as a repository for those disillusioned by the lies of PUA and were resentful of their lack of success (Rodger, 2014). Additionally, there are also indications that he posted on forums directly calling himself an *incel* (Nagourney et al., 2014), although he never uses the term in his autobiography nor does he seem to specifically claim having committed his attack for anyone but himself.

While some scholars have attempted to predate *incel* mass violence to Rodger (e.g. Halpin et al., 2024; Van Brunt et al., 2021), I share the pointed critique of DeCook & Kelly (2022) and Czerwinsky (2023) that to do so both obscures the broad structural misogyny that has existed in patriarchal societies. I also add that while these previous attackers may have been motivated in part by dissatisfaction with *unwanted celibacy*, they would not be *incels* because they did not engage in the specific subcultural milieu of *inceldom*, which really only started to crystalize and metastasize in 2011 with the r/Incels subreddit despite being traced back to a 1997 blog for *unwanted celibates* started by a female student at the University of Toronto. And while Williams and colleagues' argument that George Sodini's 2009 killing spree in a New Jersey fitness club is "the first true incel [attack]," is interesting and plausible, it is ultimately unverifiable because the precise contents of his detailed suicide letter have never been made public (2021, 389-290); likewise, *incels* themselves do not treat Sodini as they do Rodger. It is amid this context that we must understand Elliot Rodger as the first verifiable instance of *incel*-related mass violence.

As a result, Rodger holds a particularly special position within *inceldom*. As the first perpetrator of explicitly *incel*-related mass violence, who penned a detailed and widely distributed manifesto, and who received significant media coverage and caused a notable mass reaction, he has spurred a significant reaction from within the *incel* community. Rodger's actions and contributions spawned a proliferation of cultural material, both positive and negative, which *incels* actively use to engage in community building and sense-making (Blommaert, 2017). His manifesto, for example, is highly regarded by many *incels* as being "extremely relatable and inspiring" as a story from "someone who went through the exact same shit as us" (User D in Lockyer, Halpin, & Maguire, 2024, 7). His initials, ER, have been popularized as a shorthand for committing violence ("going ER") or referencing violence ("hERo") (O'Donnell & Shar, 2021, 342). Rodger, then, provides an opportunity to engage with a narrative which is central to the experiences of *incels* more broadly.

Incel engagement with Rodger, however, is not homogenous. *Incels* have retroactively inducted other perpetrators of mass misogynist violence—such as Marc Lepiné, Eric Harris, Seung-hui Cho, etc.—into their subculture as venerated figures, which has led some scholars to classify these as "proto-incel" or "ex-post facto incels" (Hoffman, Ware, Shapiro, 2020). The interplay between these ex-post facto community inductees to *inceldom* and post-Rodger attacks provides an interesting junction from which to evaluate *incels'* conceptualization of Rodger as a person. Minassian's violence elicited positive reaction and comparison to Rodger from *incels* (O'Donnell & Shor, 2021), despite the judge's ultimate verdict that he was being dishonest about his association with *inceldom* (Dupré et al., 2024). By contrast, Halpin and colleagues identify that some *incels* look down on Rodger as a "whiny little faggot" who failed because he only killed two women in a disorganized culmination of his narcissism; these *incels* instead claim the subculture should look up to Lepiné, perpetrator of the 1989 École Polytechnique Massacre in Montreal, instead (2024, 16). Thus, a tension exists amongst *incels* in how the subculture understands Rodger. Some see Rodger as both person and representation as relatable while a more extreme, politically oriented, and potentially violent subsect of the Black Pill look down on Rodger and believe that he should not be the one who represents what they consider to be approximating a movement.

Narrative Review & Analysis

Analysis and Categorization of Academic Literature to Date

As a part of this thesis, I conducted a systematic review of the *incel*-focused literature published in the past four years. I used the Web of Science database and bibliographies of published articles to conduct my search. Inclusion criteria was limited to articles that analyzed *incels* directly using some sort of methodology in some form; as a result, articles which had informal methodologies (e.g. Brzuskiewicz, 2022) or who did not focus significantly on *incels* as a primary component of their work (e.g. Brooks, 2021) or who discussed *incels* and *inceldom* but did not make arguments primarily related to *inceldom* (e.g. Murray, 2017) were excluded. In total, 74 articles met inclusion criteria.

I decided to conduct this detailed narrative analysis for three reasons. One was because certain patterns in the analysis of *inceldom* emerged as I conducted initial background reading on *inceldom*. As I read, I was struck by the way articles tended to align across relatively defined categories and by what they did, and subsequently did not, include. To conduct a productive reading of Rodger's document which cut across some of the patterns I was noticing in the literature, I established three preliminary categories for the scholarship—terrorist, feminist, and public health—and set out to establish a formalized understanding of how scholars approached *incels*, what they assumed about them, and what was and was not being included in the overall scholastic knowledge. As the analysis progressed, these preliminary categories crystalized into the primary classifications outlined in this section.

Second, I outline the strengths and weaknesses of each framework and articulate my rationale for why it is necessary to approach *inceldom* by careful and measured humanization. By providing this big-picture analysis as a point of reference, I take a critical and reflective look at how scholars have engaged with *inceldom* and each other across disciplines. A crucial recognition was that each

framework has legitimate strengths which help us understand parts of *inceldom*, but also currently sport blind spots which can be problematic.

Finally, I hope to adequately justify both my methodology and my conclusions. In conducting this analysis and classification, I was able to integrate the strengths from each framework into an interdisciplinary life-course analysis. By using life-course theory, I hoped to permit a detail-oriented, humanized, and critical reading of Rodger's narrative. Because I am drawing extensively from the entirety of the academic literature, including articles which contradict and argue against one another, I hope to present my baseline understanding of both *inceldom* and Rodger to accurately describe my positionality. By doing this type of theoretical synthesis and mediation, I hope to provide researchers with a strong starting point for how to continue to evolve *incel*-focused scholarship.

I classified *Incel*-focused scholarship into three primary scholarly and theoretical frameworks: terrorist, gender-centric, and public health. I classified articles into a terrorist framework if focused on the classification of *incels* as terrorists and/or the political ramifications of *inceldom*. Terrorist scholars tended to use the violent actions of Rodger, Minassian, and others as their topical entry point. Articles were classified as gender-centric they used the widely known misogyny, relationship to the manosphere, and sexual undertones of *inceldom* as their entry point. This category is heterogeneous in its approach and conclusions, but generally establish *inceldom* as a manifestation of broader social misogyny and hegemonic masculinities and draw heavily from critical feminist theories and perspectives. Articles were classified as public health if they were concerned with the mental health implications of *inceldom*, and/or apply a psychiatric or social work lens to their analysis. Some articles were mixed, pulling from multiple frameworks simultaneously, while others fall outside of these three primary categories.

Terrorist Frameworks

Terrorist frameworks establish *inceldom* primarily as a violent, radical, and dangerous milieu which is intentionally recruit young men to misogyny and radicalization. Several academics have flat out called for the classification of *inceldom* as terrorists for these reasons (Lockyner, Halpin, & Maguire, 2024; Miller, 2023; Wood, Tanteckchi, & Keatley, 2022). O'Donnell and Shor (2023) make an explicit case that *incels* endorse violence as a driver for concrete or imagined political change. Some argue that while *incels* should be classified as terrorists, the manifestation of their violence is hard to predict and arbitrary (Lindsay, 2022).

In addition to the classification of *incels* as terrorists, terrorist frameworks understand *inceldom* as a defined community wherein radicalization is actively occurring. Baele, Brace, and Coan (2021) argue that *inceldom* is a worldview characterized by a structural system—sharply separated groups that are considered inherent and immutable—that is common of radical groups. Zimmerman (2024) claims *inceldom* is moving in the direction of a social movement because it has political aims and intentions, with the ultimate goal of creating a fantastical sexually Marxist society where women are distributed amongst men like commodities. In taking a structural point of view, terrorist frameworks establish *inceldom* as a phenomenon which is tangible and comparable to other forms of hate-motivated terrorism like jihadism and the alt-right (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020).

Some terrorist scholars situate their analyses primarily amongst those who have committed mass violence. Miller (2023) for example, claims that Rodger followed a pathway to radicalization that aligned with a model of lone wolf terrorism. Conducting a broader study which takes an expansive approach to *incel*-based violence, Wood, Tanteckchi, and Keatley (2022) also conduct a "pathway to terrorism" approach to try and understand how these individuals arrived at mass violence; this approach is similar to life-course theory in its longitudinal approach, but assumes the radicalization and violence as guaranteed and is more forensic than developmental in its theoretical foundation. Other scholars indicate that perpetrators of *incel*-based violence exhibited extreme manifestations of sex-negativity—wherein they believed they were entitled to sexual and romantic relationships because they were white males—but that they were otherwise aligned with perpetrators of other forms of mass violence in experiencing helplessness and loneliness in multiple areas of their lives (Williams & Arntfield, 2020; Williams et al., 2021). Larkin (2018) claims Rodger learned from the unique, American script of mass violence established in the wake of Columbine, where insecure, disturbed, and disaffected young men commit mass violence to ultimately prove their masculinity.

Terrorist frameworks have some shortcomings. Analyzing mass violence prior to ER through the lens of *inceldom* is problematic because most instances of gender-based mass violence have been motivated by generalized misogyny, not the specific components, values, nor philosophical constructions of *inceldom* (DeCook & Kelly, 2023; Czerwinsky, 2022). Likewise, discursive and structural analyses fail to indicate any internal group hierarchy or leadership (Maxwell et al., 2020); while some individuals must nominally moderate *incel* spaces, it is a stretch to say that there are formal "recruitment and retention gambits," to use the words of Fowler, Green, & Palombi (2023, 1782). In fact, a recent linguistic analysis found that the "dynamics between offline events and online behaviors are not uniform and a growth in the number of daily posts to an online space does not correlate with an increase in the amount of extremist content" (Baele, Brace, & Ging, 2024). If there were a more formal structure, we would expect offline events to uniformly galvanize around these events as a legitimation of the subculture and their authority. Instead, *incels* seem to be primarily geared toward an individualized arrival at *inceldom*, manifested through the individual choice of taking the Red Pill (or the Black Pill). Even the primary resource shared by *incels*, the Incels Wiki, is technically crowd sourced and reflective of the general disagreements that are active amongst the population (Andersen, 2023), although some might argue that the wiki aims to standardize (e.g. DeCook, 2021). If *incels* as a broad category were formal terrorists, we could expect to see more ideological consolidation across *incel* platforms as some leadership outlined what is and is not considered *inceldom*; we do not however, see that pattern: "[*incels*] are not agentless victims in a game master-minded by 'charismatic' far-right recruiters" (Cottee, 2021, 103). To draw from the succinct analysis of Moldrup and Jensen (2024), "being incel is not experienced as a membership, but as an inferior man. … Therefore, defining inceldom as self-identified or political does not capture the meaning inscribed into the word by incels" (159).

That said, terrorist frameworks can be helpful if not used as a generalizable approach. There are legitimate indications that a small minority of *incels* are more radical than others. Those who would prefer to replace veneration of Elliot Rodger with Mark Lepiné are one such group, since the rationale for that decision is rooted in sending a message to women in a gender war (Halpin et al., 2024). Yet there is also much research that indicates many *incels* distance themselves from violence (Andersen, 2023; Ellenburg, Speckhard, & Kruglanski, 2023). Cottee's (2021) conclusion for understanding this tension is important: there is a strong case for classifying *incel*-related

violence as extremist and terrorist, but classifying the *incel* worldview as extremist violence is a much weaker case because "for many incels, the endpoint is not murderous violence, but fatalistic resignation" (97).

Gender-centric Frameworks

Most of what comprises *incel* ideology gets passed through the lens of gender-centric scholarship. As a result, there is a lot of emphasis on the gendered dynamics which are being performed, constructed, and validated through *incel* discourse. Many studies have identified that misogynistic language is highly present on *incel* forums (Jaki et al., 2019; Halpin et al., 2023; Daly & Nichols, 2024; Baele, Brace, & Ging, 2024; Prażmo, 2020; Helm et al., 2024) and that women are the majority target of *inceldom's* dehumanizing language and epithets (Bogetić et al., 2023). Price (2023) argues that *incels* have developed an interpretation of neoliberalism as uniformly pro-feminist, and they fall into the logical fallacy of collapsing distinctions between women, feminists, and elite power (i.e. under neoliberalism, all women are feminists are powerful elites). This illuminates just one of the great contradictions and paradoxes within *incel* thought, where women are simultaneously powerful elites and subhuman "*foids,*" the subject of their greatest desires and object of their most intense vitriol.

Inceldom is deeply related to broader cultural histories of misogyny. Many scholars point out that *inceldom* is simply another in a long line of misogynistic groups and subgroups which have proliferated in Western societies (Chang, 2022; Czerwinsky, 2022; DeCook & Kelly, 2023). Vink and colleagues (2023) argue that the patriarchal structure of sexism in North America has led *incels* to expect that women provide female-coded services to satisfy their male-coded privileges, and that the failure to receive these services justifies violence. Halpin and colleagues (2023) identify that most *incels* arrive at *inceldom* already misogynistic, meaning they must have developed misogyny through interactions with broader society. Kolano (2022) argues that "Incels are not so much the problem to be dealt with, but rather symptomatic of something recognizable in society. As a byproduct of extreme capitalist logic … what [*incels*] put on display is the unconscious imaginary fantasy of wholeness that structures us so deeply, despite our efforts to grow past it" (554). In other words, *incels* see women as Beauvorian "Others" who will make them whole (see Melo Lopes, 2023), since Western societies, and capitalism more broadly, are predicated on the gendered "illusion of fulfilling and being fulfilled by 'the other half'" (Kolano, 2022, 553).

Inceldom is also strongly tied to masculinities. Some scholars indicate that *incels* serve as an interesting case study in hegemonic masculinity. Daly and Reed (2022) indicate that Chads represent hegemonically masculine men and that some *incels* have responded by engaging in their own hegemonic practices to raise their own status; the result is that *incels* "legitimate unequal gender relations and hegemonic masculinity, rather than trying to find success in their own identity" (28). Vallerga and Zurbriggen (2022) indicate that many *incel* beliefs are aligned with traditional masculine gender roles and beliefs, and that both those who take both the Red Pill and the Black Pill "aspire towards hegemonic masculinity goals" (618). Some scholars take this a step further by arguing that *incels* not only engage in performances of hegemonic masculinity, but strategically oscillate between hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity (Halpin, 2022). In these cases, *incels* perform hegemonic masculinity by establishing themselves as ruthless, methodical, and violent while simultaneously placing themselves as subordinate to women (Halpin et al., 2024).

Gender-centric frameworks are strong at establishing a theoretical rationale, but their theories can lack the flexibility necessary to adequately make sense of multiple simultaneous contradictions. For example, Vallerga and Zurbiggen (2022) claim that *incel* beliefs are aligned with hegemonic and traditional masculinity, with Chads as the symbolic embodiments of the hegemonic masculinity they wish to perform (Daly & Reed, 2022). However, other research complicates the simplicity of that conclusion; "Chad" is both a source of admiration and resentment, as something to aspire to but also as something brutish and beneath them (Maxwell et al., 2020). Chad is representative of the power *incels* wish to have, but also of everything that *incels* believe they lack in their lives (Fowler, 2022). Some of the most virulent and misogynistic *incel* rhetoric, that of a form of sociosexual Marxism (e.g. Zimmerman, 2024), is not just rooted in a desire to control women as commodity, but also to render Chad inert. Therefore, are they hoping to remold hegemonic masculinity, perform current hegemonic masculinity, or chafe at their subordination? Hybrid masculinities attempt to make sense of this, but this assumes both that *incels* intend to move between forms of masculinity and that they understand what it means to represent each form of masculinity. Because one of the universal commonalities of *inceldom* is a poor grasp of social skills and chronic loneliness, it might well be that many *incels* themselves do not actually understand, in an intentional nor conscious way, why they say things in the way they do (Maxwell et al., 2020; Stijelja & Mishara, 2023b; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022). In other words, once gender-centric frameworks try to untangle the paradoxes and contradictions of *inceldom*, they can get stuck going in circles at a meta-level.

Thus, the serious shortcoming of gender-centric frameworks is its insistence in exclusively tying *inceldom* to macro-scale systems and structures of patriarchy, misogyny, and masculinity. Gender-centric frameworks currently assume an individual's *incel* status as inherent, focusing exclusively on those who already are, claim to be, or perform *inceldom*. Gender-centric frameworks are not currently evaluating the individual-level experiences which may be motivating young men to affiliate themselves and "become" *incel*. The roots of *incel* philosophy likely lie in legitimate human experiences surrounding gender and sexuality, the understanding of which became twisted and corrupted in a sense-making process. Gender-centric frameworks are currently not interrogating what that sense-making process is.

It seems particularly problematic to insist that a single discipline or perspective ought to hold a monopoly over *incel*-studies. While I do agree that scholars must be extraordinarily careful to not legitimize *incel* rhetoric, limitations on how scholars analyze *inceldom* seem counterproductive. This is mainly a response to the sentiment communicated by Carian, DiBranco, and Kelly (2023), who critique scholars who consider the possibility that *inceldom* may be rooted in or tied to poor mental health and loneliness; they claim that *incel* ideology must be understood exclusively as the products of male supremacist culture and structure. While *inceldom* certainly is a product of systemic hegemonic masculinity, it seems crucial that scholars also engage with *incels* as people, individual agents with complex experiences, emotions, and histories which may include any number of possible comorbidities to systemic patriarchy including mental health. In the words of Sharkey (2022), "A productive feminist engagement with the incel … does not rush to vilify but instead takes a slower, more considered approach in favor of descriptive understanding" (39) and "A more robust scholarly and political feminist approach need not ignore the violence that has inevitably and justifiably become part of the incel's image, but it must also not stop at

condemnation" (47). Therefore, scholarship might benefit overall from an increased integration of feminist perspectives into other disciplines, but also too from the perspectives of other disciplines into feminist scholarship. *Inceldom*, as a site of analysis, would benefit from more interdisciplinarity rather than being the exclusive domain of any framework, in this case feminist-informed, gender centrism.

Gender-centric frameworks are crucial for understanding macro-scale influences which impact *inceldom*. These are necessary for understanding why *inceldom* has manifested the way it has, and continuing to guide our understanding of how *inceldom* impacts the world. It can be helpful for understanding specific components of *inceldom* in isolation. But as Sparks, Zidenburg, and Olver (2023b) point out, "it is possible that [incels'] moniker, short for involuntary *celibate*, has resulted in an overemphasis on their sexual exclusion and frustration" (emphasis added, 1). Because gender-centric frameworks use gender, misogyny, and sex as their entry point, guided by celibacy as a named component of the subculture, it can run the risk of becoming hegemonic in the scholarship and obscuring many of the more subtle dynamics at play. Thus, scholars should take care to be particularly critical of gendered dynamics within *inceldom*, but also be particularly alert to the sweeping nature of the framework and sensitive to what they might miss.

Public Health Frameworks

A significant component of the public health literature is descriptive, focused specifically on the mental health characteristics of *incels*. Most *incels* experience significant levels of depression and anxiety, both in self-reported symptoms and self-reported formal diagnoses (Speckhard et al., 2021; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022); however, other studies have found that only rates of depression are greater than a control group, with anxiety and stress being on-par (Delaney, Pollet, & Cook, 2024). There is also a significant comorbidity between *inceldom* and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), including Asperger's (Tirkkonen & Vespermann, 2023). Crucially, *incels* also reported significantly lower social support and higher social isolation than a comparison group, even during the pandemic when the outcomes of the control group declined (Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2023b). *Incels* also seem to broadly exhibit higher levels of romantic rejection, insecure attachment, fear of being single, and loneliness when compared to a general population (Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2022). This is paired with a general mistrust of mental health resources, interventions, and practitioners, which renders them unlikely to seek care (Speckhard et al., 2019; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022).

Some public health work begins moving in the direction of theorization. In a review of the literature, Broyd and colleagues (2023) conclude that *incels* exhibit a significant variety of mental health challenges, to the extent that a single "catch-all" intervention is unlikely to be effective. Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver (2023b) were surprised that loneliness and social support were poor measures of predicting *inceldom*, despite being strongly correlated with mental health outcomes. Instead, they found that insecure attachment styles and the importance and significance attached to a relationship, what they termed "perceived mate value," were the best predictors of *inceldom*. They concluded that perceived mate value may be a strong predictor of *inceldom* due to the overly deterministic nature of *incel* philosophy which essentially stipulates that a good life is closely related to having a mate. Thus, those who believe mates are important, crucial, and even necessary, to having a good life are more at risk of *inceldom*. Ellenburg, Speckhard, and Kruglanski (2023) identified three different classifications of *incels* based on their public health risks: "hopers"

believe *inceldom* is a temporary status and are the most benign group of *incels* because they are low-risk for suicide and offline violence; "internalizers" are at high-risk for suicide because they exhibit signs of depressive self-loathing and believe *inceldom* is permanent as a result of their inherent personal flaws; and "externalizers" are the most significant public health risk because they exhibit high rates of ideation of mass murder suicide as a result of believing that *inceldom* is permanent but the fault of others as much as themselves. This system of classification roughly aligns with the tiered structure of *incel* ideology starting at the Red Pill, descending to the "fatalistic resignation" Black Pill (per Cottee, 2021, 97), and culminating in the Black Pill manifestation which sees *inceldom* as a movement for political change and revolutionary violence. This is crucial because scholarship indicates that the ideological path of development currently favors the more extreme Black Pill (see Ribeiro et al., 2021).

What public health frameworks do well is simultaneously approach the *incel* as an individual person, and *incels* as a category comprised of people. It is crucial for scholars to understand *incels* fundamentally as subculture dominated by those experiencing mental health challenges for two reasons. One, this allows us to understand that *incels* as individuals are isolated, lonely, struggling with life dissatisfaction and hardships and are therefore more likely to seek out support structures from similar individuals. Two, it contextualizes *incel* spaces as dominated by those who already have maladaptive perspectives and worldviews and this becomes problematic when support is sought from those who are already inherently negative. When individuals find these like-minded communities, what they find are deep holes of misogyny, fatalistic resignation, nihilism, and violence, both directed at the self and directed outward (Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2022). This is significant, as engagement with informal suicide resources (e.g. r/SuicideWatch) spike in the days following participation in *incel* forums, indicating that *incels* find a community of entrapment masquerading as a community of support (Stijelja & Mishara, 2023a; Tirkkonen & Vespermann, 2023). Thus, we understand *inceldom* not just as a crucial concern because of the threat it poses to a broader public and women, but also because of the threat it poses to *young men* who are seeking sense-making communities to help them navigate a multitude of challenges.

What public health frameworks struggle with is navigating the boundary between individual and social. They are great at highlighting what *incels* are feeling, or at least reporting that they are feeling, but have so far run into two major problems. One is that most of our data from these frameworks originate from self-reported surveys, which ask users to self-report symptomatic and diagnostic experience, rather than testing their self-reported data against a formal diagnostic metric. In this sense, we do not know if there is a legitimate discrepancy between *incels'* perceptions of mental health challenges and their experience of mental health challenges. These data also suffer from self-selection bias, in that they may only be capturing those who are tentatively or marginally distrustful of outsiders, researchers, and mental health practitioners and therefore are inherently less secluded and isolated than others. Because of the online nature of *inceldom*, it is nearly impossible to have confidence in the generalizing ability of these studies.

The second shortcoming of public health frameworks is the "apologist's trap." Despite my critique of Carian, DiBranco, and Kelly (2023), they are right in rejecting academics' involvement in possibly legitimizing the *incel* experience. *Incels* already twist science to mold their perspectives, including Donnelly and colleagues' 2001 study and multiple theories from evolutionary psychology (Andersen, 2023; DeCook, 2021; see also Costello et al., 2022). Public health

frameworks are at risk of providing *incels* with data they can use to further their problematic justifications of themselves as an "oppressed" category because they tend to be descriptive, rather than theoretically exploratory. Speckhard and colleague's (2021) study for example, provides a helpful overview of the mental health demographics of *incels*, but it lacks a component of rigorous theoretical interrogation which may help contextualize why these patterns are present. Because systemic gender is conspicuously absent from most of these works, the gap between the individual and the systemic has not been adequately bridged.

Other Frameworks

There are several other frameworks which have been applied to *inceldom*, albeit in a far more limited way. The most significant of these are frameworks rooted in sociological approaches that do not center gender, multifaceted psychology, and "*incel* exit" frameworks.

Non-gendered sociological frameworks are rooted in the systemic but seek to probe answers that move beyond the possible over emphasis on sexual exclusion and frustration. Puhrmann and Schlaerth (2023) argue that young men arrive at the Black Pill in part due to perceived social death. Young men who begin to lose a sense of who they are in relation to society, lose their social connections to others, and experience deteriorations or self-depreciations of the body may start to believe that they are socially dead because others reject their advances and treat them poorly. However, Puhrmann and Schlaerth rightly point out that the tragedy of this mentality: "Incels, therefore, view themselves as socially dead; *it is a self-perception that is self-imposed*" (emphasis added, 5). Thus, it may well be that *incels* are not as socially isolated as they believe themselves to be, and that the misery they experience on the pathway to *inceldom* is unnecessary. That misery festers into a resentment over a perceived, and possibly nonexistent, injustice and a desire for esteem (O'Malley & Helm, 2023). If these tendencies were to combine with the development of high perceived mate value, exposure to the latent patriarchal pressures of masculine expectations could lead to the internalization of nascent misogyny and male supremacy. Once these cognitive foundations have been laid, it is possible that *incel* spaces would become particularly attractive as repositories for those who believe in male supremacy but feel disaffected masculinity (O'Malley & Helm, 2023). *Incels* however, are not homogeneous in their experiences nor beliefs which causes tensions amongst *incels* (Cannito & Camoletto, 2022). This heterogeneity tends to be poorly engaged with by outsiders, including researchers, and tend to exacerbate resentment. During the peak of the *incel* subreddits, outsiders significantly participated in campaigns to counteract and prove *incel* ideologies and perspectives wrong (Helm et al., 2024), which is a poor technique for deradicalization (see Gemmerli, 2015). Thus, expansive sociological frameworks further emphasize that *inceldom* encompasses complex social dynamics which at not exclusive to gender and may serve as a particularly interesting site research on contemporary online/offline social phenomena.

Evolutionary psychology is interested in *incels* because its theories are often coopted by *incels* to justify their worldview. An interesting tension occurs as a result, where scholars of evolutionary psychology are disturbed that *incels* are coopting their theories to justify their problematic behavior, but are simultaneously satisfied that *incels* are "proving" the validity of their work. For example, a study that geolocated *incel* Tweets found that *incel* activity online was directly correlated to zip codes which had high competition in the sexual marketplace due to high male to female ratios, few single women, high income inequality, and small gender gaps in income

(Brooks, Russo-Batterham, & Blake, 2022). This raises the possibility that *incels* are simply this classification of young men who are "locked out" of the mating market and are thus causing problems we ought to expect (Costello & Buss, 2023). In this way, they are comparable to other instances throughout history where single, young men who feel they have been priced out of the marriage market have fermented social instability, including Boko Haram in present day Nigeria (Blake & Brooks, 2023). As Brooks, Russo-Batterham, & Blake (2022) make clear however, "the fact that groups such as incels have insights into their predicament that are consistent with science should never be interpreted to mean that those scientific ideas legitimize unacceptable behavior by members of those groups" (254). Despite the controversies over the discipline more broadly, the evolutionary psychology's perspective that *inceldom* is a novel manifestation of an established social phenomena helps recontextualize *incels* as neither sensational nor unique.

In my analysis of Rodger, I draw on the work of Moldrup and Jensen (2024), who argue that *incels* construct rigid borders in their mind between desire and action which precipitates a spiral of self-reflective doubt rooted in their assumptions of other peoples' perceptions. By constantly and reflexively doubting how other people perceive them, their inner dialogue gets hijacked by narratives of low self-worth. In response, they seek to distance themselves from the painful experience without confronting the actual emotions surrounding the experience, which inhibits their healing. Using this framework, we can reconceptualize much of *incels'* discourse. What the *incel* wants is not to be Chad, but to have what Chad represents: acceptance, power, contentment. Thus, *incels* simultaneously venerate Chad in a tacit recognition of their desires, but simultaneously denigrate Chad as a defense against the pain this recognition of lack triggers. Likewise, *incel* misogyny can be understood partly as a subliminal recognition of desire, not necessarily for the person the woman is, but for the social acceptance woman represents. This social acceptance however, is not primarily sought from the woman, but from other men.

Finally, some of the most interesting analysis is related to how individuals "exit" *inceldom*. This approach analyzes how some *incels* dig themselves out of the hole and begins to understand *inceldom* not as a rigid endpoint of socialization but as a moment in a person's overall trajectory of development. In many cases, *incels* disparage and resent those who "leave" *inceldom* (see Halpin et al., 2023), likely because this dispels the imaginary construct of *incel* as absolute and genetically inherent. Osuna (2024) identifies that most *incels* experience an initial instability in *incel* philosophy which emerged from a realization that they were not the only ones experiencing relational difficulties, including from basic interactions with women who communicated their own insecurities and relationship difficulties. Likewise, Gheorghe and Clement (2023) identify five key themes in the experience of exiting *inceldom*. Key in this process of exit is a cognitive shift toward greater open-mindedness, self-compassion, and self-improvement, coupled with a sustained community of encouragement toward exiting. Yet, exit is not a simple, linear process. Despite recognizing that *inceldom* was harming their health, many *incels* who might be inclined to leave were afraid to lose the sense of community they developed (Osuna, 2024) and that the "grueling, isolating, and emotionally taxing" process represented a significant barrier (Gheorghe & Clement, 2023, 14). A core component to this barrier are the high emotional and mental demands required for cognitive facework (Hintz & Baker, 2021). These demands require shifting internalized psychological schema such that an individual becomes capable of understanding themselves in alternative ways. For exit to be viable it seems, an individual must reach the point where

maintaining *incel* worldviews is worse than facing the insecurities that led them to *inceldom*, and that neither suicide nor externalized violence overcome both.

Paradigm Shift — Life-Course Theory Frameworks

This narrative review has provided a detailed analysis of what primary frameworks are used to understand and analyze *inceldom* as a social phenomenon, discourse, life circumstance, subculture. In doing so, I have attempted to highlight both the strengths and shortcomings of each framework as they are currently applied. To address the limitations of each framework while keeping their strengths, I propose a new primary framework: a life-course theory approach to *inceldom*. Life-course theory sees individuals as products of a process of human development, which incorporates psychological and social development, alongside the influences of a multitude of factors which include identity, culture, politics, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and many more (Bernardi, Huinink, & Settersten Jr., 2019). Life-course analysis requires recognizing that an individual's goals, resources, and behaviors in any domain (e.g. family) are tied to every other domain, balancing between an individual's life history and their current circumstances, and considering how the individual fits into broader systems and dynamics (Bernardi, Huinink, & Settersten Jr., 2019). As such, life-course theorists are interested in both how "changing lives alter developmental trajectories," (Elder Jr., 1998, 1), but also in how change in developmental trajectories alter lives.

Within life-course studies, one of the most significant components which has been studied include sociosexual development. In particular, there have been indications that developing sexually too early or too late compared to peers is potentially problematic (Gesselman, Webster, & Garcia, 2017). Central to this is the concept of being "off-time," which means undertaking a nonnormative or atypical pathway to development. In the case of sex, this may mean becoming sexually active at 14 when peers begin at 18 or becoming sexually active at 22 when peers begin at 16. This often occurs in the form of stigma, including self-stigmatization, such that late sexual development negatively impacts one's perception of themselves (Gesselman, Webster, & Garcia, 2017). Being off-time however, is not simply limited to sociosexual development: it is a helpful concept to understand the pressures to develop in a normative way alongside one's peers and following a social script. Thus, we might reasonably understand being off-time with regards to moving out of a parent's home, attending college, being "functional members of society," and many other developmental milestones which mark transitions from one stage of development to another as causing similar forms of psychosocial distress.

Others have recently called for applying life-course theory to *inceldom*. In 2023, Stijelja and Mishara conducted the first study on *inceldom* from a life-course perspective (2023b). They identified that many incels reported feeling "out of sync" with or "off-time" from their peers. They were concerned by the relative lack of attention paid to the importance of sex as a developmental milestone in adolescence, particularly for young males. What renders a life-course perspective particularly useful is that it draws from terrorist approaches to understanding a "pathway to violence" and reformulates it into a "pathway to *inceldom* (and beyond)." It draws from gender-centric social science by firmly positing the individual at the intersection of social expectations and manifestations of gender, dominated by latent patriarchy, misogyny, and hegemonic masculinity. And crucially, it centers the impact of these systems on the individual, who is affected

by and affects, in turn, these systems as they grow. Life-course theory sees the individual as ever changing and ever evolving, acting and reacting, initiating and responding.

In their article, Stijelja and Mishara were only able to broach the concept of bringing life-course theory to *incel*-studies by way of highlighting concerning parallels between *incels'* life trajectories and broad research indicating the consequences of those trajectories. Some work builds on this initial recommendation. Despite primarily being from a public health framework, Utterback (2024) expands on Stijelja and Mishara by establishing two taxonomies of *incels*: "adolescent-limited incels" and "life-course incels"; the former are *incels* who struggle in the initial transition from child to adolescent but recover during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, while the latter are those who fail to adequately transition during both points. When these off-time young men seek to make sense of the issues and learn how to navigate them, they get "snared" by *incel* spaces which, in turn, establish these developmental troubles as immutable and predetermined, rather than providing support in overcoming the issues. As a result, they argue that targeted interventions at the moments of transition from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood are crucial.

My approach to life-course theory will be rooted in Rodger's autobiographical text. By reading the text and qualitatively coding his life—with particular focus on his childhood, transition to adolescence, adolescence, and transition to adulthood—I hope to illuminate how Rodger evolved as a person throughout the course of his life and indicate sites of future and more generalizable life-course theory research. I also hope to provide more detail to how interventions may be shaped, where they might be deployed, and what mistakes we should hope to avoid. In so doing, I hope to recognize Rodger as the violent killer he became, but also analyze him as Elliot Rodger the person, rather than as the manifest of *inceldom*. I hope to illuminate how gender and mental health acted, interacted, and reacted to and with each other in his own life. And finally, I hope to inform my view of Rodger's life through the diverse research covered thus far to try and focus my findings on the subtle, overlooked, and crucial components of his story.

Methodology

As I have already outlined, my focus in this thesis will be on Elliot Rodger as a person who underwent a developmental process. In doing so, I attempt to situate him as pre-radicalized—as child, as adolescent, as emergent adult— outside of the development of his *incel* beliefs. Thus, I assume that Rodger-as-child was *not* an *incel*, nor were his experiences exactly how he describes them in his autobiography. I keep in mind O'Malley and Helm's caution that "[*incels*] reflect on their experiences and retroactively assign meaning to them in a process influenced by incel ideology" to guide my understanding of Rodger's experiences (2023, 1032). In fact, Rodger's text encapsulates how the line between retroactive assignment of meaning and experiences as they were lived imperceptibly, but notably, blurred over the course of his life. Eventually, they become one and the same, *incel* ideology and meaning become lived experience. Using this as a guideline, I try to toe the fine line between considering Rodger a somewhat unreliable narrator about his early childhood experiences and the ultimate authority for his own emotions. In this qualitative analysis, I do so by looking at implied meanings, hinted emotions, trends in human development, and his own tone to help discern rationalization from memory.

I conducted Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs (VAB) coding (see Saldaña, 2021, 167-173) to capture the evolution and representation of Rodger's perspectives and worldview. These would help discern between moments of reflexive rationalization and those attitudes which seem more in situ. As such, I understood Values to be the deep, largely inferred movements of Rodger's psyche through a process of development. Beliefs were often what Rodger stated explicitly, and rendered as a category for the rationalizations he presents or assumptions he makes. Attitudes became a more in situ category, capturing how he remembers the experience and how he positions himself within the action that is taking place.

I combined VAB coding with a modification of Emotions coding. Emotions coding (see Saldaña 161-164) is deeply rooted in both an in situ series of feelings *and* the retroactive sense of meaning-making. Thus, Rodger's feeling of resentment may be both in the moment and retroactively magnified, or it may be less prevalent in situ but rendered salient retroactively. Thus, to accurately track the "emotional journey or storyline" Rodger takes throughout his life, I combine Emotions coding with Experiences coding, intimately tying emotions to specific life events (Saldaña, 2021, 162). As such, I hold that the emotions Rodger experiences cannot be understood outside of the context of his history of life events, and these codes were often summaries plus emotion to provide the rigid structure needed to track development while separating retroactive meaning making. If VAB coding is how we can track the voice of already radicalized Rodger as he pens his autobiographical pseudo-manifesto prior to mass killing, then Emotions & Experiences (E/xp) coding is how we can track the trajectory of child and adolescent Rodger in a more compassionate way outside of the lens of violence.

Because my goal is not so much to illuminate a formal "path to intended violence," nor to broadly track Rodger's worsening descent into nihilistic fatalism and externalization, I concentrated the bulk of my analysis to Rodger's early childhood up through his 20th birthday (Rodger, 2014, 1-89). To do so, I conducted both line-by-line and lumping coding as appropriate, guided by the presence and concentration of VAB and E/xp components. The closer I got to Rodger's 20th birthday, the more the coding shifted to lump coding. Due to the ultimate alignment of Rodger's VAB as lived experiences, I decreasingly coded VABs due to saturation (although I continued to note events of particular importance) and relied heavily on E/xp to provide the tracking of his continued development. Most of the document past his 20th birthday (89-141) is covered in detail by other analyses, particularly those who analyze him from a "path to intended violence" standpoint (e.g. Miller, 2023; Allely & Faccini, 2017). As such, I continued to read the document, coding only allusions or references to things that are significant as they relate to the earlier themes. My coding schema, plus my focus on Rodger's developmental pathway, should then be understood as conducting an analysis on Rodger's "pathway to *inceldom*," where *inceldom* is neither static category nor group membership, but a social and psychological schema which served, however maladaptive, as a sense-making framework for the tumult and confusion he experienced throughout his life.

Scholars have yet to conduct rigorous qualitative analyses of Rodger's text despite his significance to *inceldom*. The closest we have gotten is applying a "path to intended violence" analysis of Rodger's experience from a terrorist framework (Allely & Faccini, 2017) or its slight modification in "emergence as a lone wolf violent actor" (Miller, 2023). While useful, these terrorist analyses

ultimately focus only on Rodger the killer, as if he was destined to become so. Most other scholarship which draws from Rodger's text engages with it either through an exclusive focus on the violence (terrorist frameworks), the misogyny (gender-centric frameworks), or provides the equivalency of a literary analysis, reading the text as a book. While each framework provides important insights, each fall into their own dogmatic trap: terrorist analyses focus on the violence, gender analyses on the misogyny and patriarchal systems, and literary analyses on both of those overt themes. Rather than assuming Rodger's violence or sexually negativity as rooted in individual characteristics, I reframe those as two constructs; Rodger constructed an understanding of himself and the world that was inherently violent and sexually negative. The question then, is what influenced him on the pathway to do so.

I do, however, assume two things about Rodger. One assumption is that there are things Rodger does not consider because he cannot consider them; he struggles with emotions and therefore there is a legitimate possibility that what he's feeling and why he thinks he's feeling them are misaligned. I take this assumption from experiences with gender orientation and sexuality, where fervent belief in the necessity of heterosexual relations is understood only from hetero- and cisnormativity and may serve instead as a blinder to possible deviance. For example, while Rodger may claim that his intense obsession for and fantasizing over heterosexual sex is because it would bring him the unimaginable "pleasures [he's] craved for so long," (Rodger, 2014, 60) we must be open to the possibility that Rodger is *hoping* that the experience of sex will answer some deep internal confusion. This applies not just to gender and sexuality, but also to his friendships, his family relationships, and his of self-conceptions. It could well be that his narcissistic grandiosity is what he truly believed, but we must also consider the chance that he is saying this without truly believing it, as if repetition and conviction is enough to will it into existence.

The second assumption I make about Rodger is that his is a story of multi-layered tragedy. This is a tragedy of the self, where a young man developed in such a way to consider mass violence and suicide as his "only escape" from misery. This is a tragedy of a family, who struggled to support a child who was neurodivergent, depressed and/or anxious, or some combination of the three. Criticisms of his family are not intended to vilify his parents nor shift the blame for Rodger's violence; rather, it is to illuminate that people make mistakes and poor decisions which can have downstream consequences without the intention of harm. We must remember that on May 23, 2014, Rodger's parents not only lost a son, but also had to reconceptualize the person they had known and loved as a murderer. If Rodger's upbringing has the thread of tragedy woven into it, it is not because of simple gross negligence, but because attempts to help did not help and only drove the roiling turmoil deeper, more internal, more repressed, more disturbed. And of course, we must not forget that Rodger's story did culminate in violence. Six families lost children, and thirteen others suffered serious injuries. *Incel* philosophy has become infamous since Isla Vista, and Rodger's manifesto resonates with and is to relatable to many. This is a tragedy for the acute violence it inflicted on those who lost their lives on and continue to suffer since May 23, 2014, but also because of the pervasive and pernicious subtle violence it encourages through *inceldom*. This is a subtle violence, where participants may not often translate their rhetoric into action but where the discourse itself serves to invisibly harm the world and *incels* themselves.

Rodger is so significant to *inceldom* that he has been subsumed as a component of *inceldom*. Witt (2020) articulates this by indicating a difference between "Rodger-that-was" and "Rodger-that-is."

Witt highlights that Rodger-that-was is the persona, the person who lived the life and penned the manifesto. Rodger-that-is, by contrast, has been recreated within *inceldom* as a "conceptual semiotic object" referred to as "Saint Elliot" or "The Supreme Gentleman" (682). *Incels* create memes, videos, and music in homage to Saint Elliot, and use him as the symbolic face of the movement and as a representation of their emotions. Understanding of this point is central to the approach this thesis takes. In my subsequent analysis of Rodger's manifesto, I seek to follow the trajectory only of Rodger-that-was and remove him from the semiotic objectification *incels* and academics have since foisted upon him. I therefore differentiate between Rodger-that-was as a person and the conceptualization of Rodger-that-is, by referring to Elliot Rodger as person by "Rodger," and to the conceptualization of Elliot Rodger by subverting and coopting *incels'* own term: ER.

Findings

If ER is the metaphorical and semiotic figurehead of *inceldom*, then it is important to somewhat draw out Rodger from *inceldom*. Elliot Rodger was a British-born son of a white Briton and Malaysian-born Chinese mother who emigrated to California, the Los Angeles area specifically, when he was six years old (Rodger, 2014). His parents were active within the film industry as directors, which is a predominantly white, affluent, and elitist social milieu. When he was seven, his parents divorced, partly a result of on-going disagreements regarding Rodger's mental health; his mother "filed an affidavit claiming Rodger was a 'high functioning autistic child,' and said she needed more child support to care for him" while his father rejected that claim and said that Rodger should be sent to a psychiatrist for depression and anxiety instead (Nagourney et al., 2014). His father ended up remarrying a wealthy actress from Morocco, and Rodger would develop a conflicted, back-and-forth relationship with his stepmother. Rodger himself self-describes as socially awkward, perennially terrified, and emotionally unstable (Rodger, 2014). Already by age seven, Rodger is demonstrating several developmental stressors—including being mixed-race, immigration to the United States, immersion into socially oriented and highly particular milieu, possible ASD, parents who are divorcing in part because of him, and relationship insecurity within the family due to both the divorce and the remarriage—which increase the risk of maladaptive development.

Through this qualitative analysis, I identified three major themes and two significant implications. Those themes are: 1) instability in family; 2) insecurities are not just rooted in being "off-time," but of being "stuck in time" or even "regressing in time"; and 3) many interventions failed to support Rodger adequately. These three themes lie at the heart of Rodger's experience, and deeply shape his human development. Each of those themes outlines, in detail, how: 1) the origins of Rodger's *incel* perspectives are rooted in the alignment of hopelessness, helplessness, and insecurity across his family milieu, his peer milieu, and his structural environments; and 2) entry to *incel* worldviews is complex and multifaceted. By establishing these themes and articulating these implications, I hope to provide a much more dynamic entry-point to *incel*-focused research.

Instability in Family

Something that becomes apparent quite early into Rodger's account of his life is that familial instability was a significant component of what Rodger experienced. There are a couple of crucial moments in Rodger's life that cue significant family instability, even if Rodger does not spend much time dwelling on them. The first is that his pregnancy is accidental; his mother had been on birth control when he was conceived. When he was five, his family emigrated from the UK to the LA-area in California. When he was six, his parents moved once again, to another part of the LA-area. Around the same time, he claims to have asked his mother about divorce; "The prospect baffled my little mind. I once sat with my mother on our outside deck and asked her if she and father would ever divorce. She told me it would never happen, and that I had nothing to worry about" (Rodger, 2014, 9). Not only did his parents divorce a few months after this, but Rodger himself was a contested reason during the divorce, despite Rodger never mentioning as much: his mother filled an affidavit claiming Rodger was a "high functioning autistic child" and she needed more child support to adequately take care of him, while his father rejected that claim and instead recommended Rodger be sent for a child psychiatrist for depression and anxiety (Nagourney et al., 2014). There is some murkiness around whether Rodger ever received a formal diagnosis for ASD; a journalist in 2014 cited court documents that confirmed Rodger was diagnosed with Asperger's (Duke, 2014) but a team of academic psychiatrists raised speculative doubts about this diagnosis based exclusively on Rodger's narrative (Allely & Faccini, 2017). At the very least, Rodger does not provide details surrounding what psychiatric care he did receive, nor does he explicitly claim an Asperger's diagnosis. In all, Rodger's parents would move a combined 12 times throughout the course of Rodger's life. Rodger changed living situations an additional 4 times during his two years in Isla Vista. In all, Rodger experienced 16 turnovers in physical living situation in 22 years, plus going back-and-forth each week under different rotational schedules.

The divorce is an obvious foundational experience for Rodger. While he claims three emotions quite explicitly—shock, outrage, being overwhelmed—he keys us into two additional foundational emotions: A deep feeling of resentment toward his mother by highlighting the lie, betrayal even, that was told to him months prior and confusion around what changed the family dynamic from "divorce is absolutely not happening" to "divorce absolutely is happening." Importantly, the way the divorce concluded was that Rodger, his mother, and his sister were required to leave their home and move away. A loss in family cohesion coincided with a forcible change in physical environment.

The only other thing Rodger has to say about the divorce is as follows:

> *"My life would change forever after this. ... **All the happy times I spent with my mother and father as a family were gone**, only to remain in memory. It was a very sad day. **Just like the move to the U.S.**, it would be like **starting a whole new life** ... [Visiting Father's] house was very different without mother being there. ... **The house was full of memories; happy, cheerful memories that were lost in the past.**" (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 10)*

There are two points to be made here. One is the deeply internalized conceptualization of "ends" as final. The family is irreparably "split in half," with the old life is stripped away, and he is left to rebuild. His reference to the emigration to the U.S. keys us into the fact that he has already experienced this strong sense of rupture once, only two and a half years prior. Thus, by eight, Rodger is already demonstrating the internalization of ends as permanent, of his life circumstances as out of his control, lack of trust in his parents, and a deep fear of loss and abandonment.

Rodger never explicitly returns to the divorce in his autobiography. He does not ever reference having sense-making conversations with his parents. He does not engage with his subsequent emotions. When he refers to realities which are intimately related to the divorce, such as changes in parental custody, he does so with detached matter-of-factness. This is not to say that he did not have those conversations, nor that attempts were not made to reach him and help him process the divorce, simply that Rodger does not seem to ever have been able to really overcome the confusion which lies at the heart of the divorce. What we can do however, is look at how the divorce and this deep-seeded confusion and emotional turmoil internalized by Rodger seeps out in his accounts of future events. The most significant place to find this type of emotional seepage is in Rodger's relationship with his father.

Within a year of the divorce, Rodger's father entered another long-term relationship with a wealthy Moroccan woman, Soumaya. Rodger claims that this event is the genesis of his nascent understandings of gender relationships, articulating that it shook his preconceived notions of marriage prior to cohabitation. What Rodger alludes to, but stops short of explicitly recognizing, is that he internalizes the belief, mistaken or not, that his father values relationships and achieves them easily. In this sense, the value of having a relationship, to gain one quickly and seemingly effortlessly, is learned. Here, we see the nascent origins of "high perceived mate value," in that Rodger begins to conceptualize relationships as preconditions for male social functioning. Rodger's perception of mate value is partially rooted in a misconception that having a mate, and proving competency in relationships, is a precursor to his father's acceptance. Yet for all his valorization of his father's skill in relationship attainment, Rodger does not seem to understand how this is achieved:

> *"Everything my father taught me was proven wrong.* **He raised me to be a polite, kind gentleman***. In a decent world, that would be ideal.* **But the polite, kind gentleman doesn't win** *in the real world.* **The girls don't flock to the gentlemen***." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 28)*

Thus, Rodger feels a disconnect between the conduct he learned from his father and the conduct that he perceived was rewarded in his peer milieu. Rodger believes himself to be acting as would a gentleman, but he does not understand how this behavior translates to what he is looking for. The contradiction here is the recognition of his father's positive outcomes with "being a gentleman" and his own negative outcomes; he *says* his father's lessons are wrong because he does not *know* why they have failed in his case. In other words, Rodger is confused and resents that no one, particularly his father, "[made] any effort to prepare [him] for facing such a cruel world" (59).

Throughout Rodger's narrative, he strongly implies that he is constantly chasing his father's acceptance. Rodger feels uneasy, uncertain, insecure, or outright unwelcome in his father's house, and he takes that as a sign of personal failure. Rodger desperately desires the acceptance of his father as a legitimate and fully respected member in the new family his father is creating and the attention of his father as the first born son. This implication broadly aligns with the narratives of other men. The absence of positive and nurturing relationships with between men and their fathers was a recurring theme amongst men who attempted suicide and fathers who were emotionally distant triggered emotions of sadness, rejection, and anger (Cleary, 2022). Many men reported experiencing emotional distance with their fathers, indicated by hesitancy in seeking support from their fathers (Heilman, Barker, & Harrison, 2017). Rodger, therefore, should not be understood as a special case; rather, he should illustrate a prime example of how poor familial dynamics,

especially dysfunctional father-son dynamics, can increase the risk that young men develop in maladaptive ways, including participation in problematic communities such as *inceldom*.

Rodger's core emotion in relation to his father and Soumaya is resentment. He resents that his father was often out of town and would want to spend time with him only to leave on a work trip or otherwise spend all his time working (e.g. 39). A prime example of this sentiment is when his father spent two and a half years working on a self-financed feature film which often took him out of the country. Not only was this film the reason Rodger's father was absent for prolonged periods of time, but it proved to be a financial failure and thus rendered all of that sacrificed time worthless in Rodger's eyes. Rodger captures the overall sentiment he feels for his father in one succinct quote: "My father thought all was well with me. *How could he be so blind?*" (emphasis in original, 59). Over time, Rodger felt his position in his father's life slip from son to guest, to second fiddle, to after-thought. In Rodger's mind, if his father were proud of him, if his father really wanted to spend time with him, he would have. The fact that work or Soumaya seemed to be more important sent a strong message that his father did not care.

Soumaya also plays a significant role in both Rodger's life and his relationship to his father. Rodger claims that his initial relationship with Soumaya was strong and he found her fun, but that as time passed, she increasingly disciplined him in ways he did not feel that she had a right to; in Rodger's own words, "because she wasn't my real parent" (11). This sort of conflict is shared with many other children, and outcomes of remarriage are significantly heterogeneous (see Raley & Sweeney, 2020 for a review). Thus, Rodger's conflicts with Soumaya simply indicate another risk factor for poor developmental outlooks and simply indicate that he continued to experience unresolved emotions related to the divorce throughout his life and into his evolving familial relationships.

Over the course of his life, the resentment for his father festered and fused with the injustice he felt he experienced at the hands of Soumaya; Rodger came to see Soumaya as emblematic of his father's rejection. When Rodger was sent to Morocco with Soumaya—against his will—at the end of his 17th year, he had a series of progressively worse mental breakdowns that culminated in his mother flying out to Morocco. When Soumaya returned months later, she was so angry and offended at his behavior that she unilaterally banished him from his father's home, despite Rodger's claims that he was getting back on track. Rodger describes his father standing by Soumaya, as the ultimate indication of his father's rejection.

> *"Not only did she kick me out of father's house, but she forbade me to go there even for a short visit. And still, father didn't do anything about it. Father kept saying that the house is her house as much as his, and that she has the right to kick me out. **No! I am the eldest son! The house should be MY house before hers!** This caused any respect I still had for my father to fade away completely. It was such a betrayal, to put his second wife before his eldest son. What kind of father would do that? **The bitch must be really good to him in bed,** I figured. **What a weak man.**" (emphasis in original, Rodger, 2014, 62)*

Rodger resents Soumaya in this exchange, but certainly not more than his father. That his father seemed quite content to have Rodger out of his life certainly would strike deep at the heart of his insecurities. In an attempt to make sense of what he considered unfathomable, Rodger turns to heteronormative structures—those he perceives his father to represent—such that the only conceivable way that his father could pick Soumaya over him is if Soumaya gave his father something particularly special. The only thing Rodger feels that Soumaya could give his father that he had not already tried? Sex. This quote also highlights issues of patriarchal power—that he

ought to be above Soumaya by virtue of being the *son*—and a conflictive relationship to sex—his father is weak for being controlled by sex, but so too is Rodger controlled by sex in the sense that his whole life is defined by the absence of. We can make sense of this by understanding it as Rodger distancing himself from, and putting down, people he cares about to minimize the sting of their rejection.

Eventually, Rodger describes how Soumaya calmed down and their relationship tepidly resumed. Soumaya and Rodger's father treat Rodger as a guest from this point on, and they make it clear that he is not welcome within the home. Rodger is adamant in his right to his father's home because of his position as son, leading to a second, more violent confrontation that once again ended in his banishment. It is at this moment where Rodger mourns a "non-death loss" as he realizes that the acceptance he sought from his father was unattainable (Tirkkonen & Vespermann, 2023). Rodger felt that his father's choice had been made apparent and clear. In the aftermath, the one thing Rodger can think of which he has not done, which may have changed the outcome of anything, is get a girlfriend.

If Rodger's experience with his father triggered acute anxieties over acceptance, Rodger's experience with his mother played out quite differently. Rodger writes about his father as something to chase, something desired but never quite in reach. By contrast, he takes his mother for granted as someone who is always there. He makes clear that he preferred his mother's house to his father's, that his mother was much more attentive to both his wants and his needs, and that his mother was far more supportive, sentiments that are shared by many young men (Heilman, Barker, & Harrison, 2017). In Rodger's case, a cascading effect from his conflicts with his father was an insecurity that his family ties were not unconditional. This bled into how he perceived his relationship with his mother, and he preemptively distanced himself from her to protect himself from her possible rejection as well.

Because the divorce is such a miniscule reference at the very start, completely removed from most of the rationalizations that culminate in misogyny and violence, it is quite easy to overlook. But Rodger never makes any indication of reconciling the ultimate confusion he experiences due to the divorce. Rodger's omission of a conversation with his father, at least not one he deigns important or meaningful enough to include, about the divorce is an indication that he may have never properly understood the full picture. The most important thing divorcing parents can do for their children is both be present and sensitive in explaining the reasons for the divorce (Westburg, Nelson, & Percy, 2002). Thus, his mother's mistaken betrayal, perhaps entirely out of unforeseeable circumstance, coupled with his father's eagerness to start another family eroded Rodger's feeling of stability within the family unit and impeded the resolution of his confusion.

Divorce has been shown to have significant consequences. Some research has found that divorce that occurs during early childhood, particularly around seven years of age, registers a long-term negative impact on anxiety peaking at twelve years of age (Pagani et al., 1997). In a later section, we will see that Rodger begins to experience other significant turbulence at 12-years-old, meaning he is experiencing the peak of his divorce-related anxiety at the same time of other generalized instability. Children who experience divorce also register anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness while their parents are actively divorcing (Kim, 2011). These impacts of divorce are long-lasting, meaning Rodger would be impacted by these consequences across other domains—

including long-term school performance, peer relationships, and his sense of self—for years. Family structure transitions—remarriage, change in custody schedule, home moves—significantly depresses the social and emotional development of children, with instability having a particularly negative effect for "the well-being of White youth who are socioeconomically advantaged" (Raley & Sweeney, 2020; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019). Residential moves can be particularly difficult for children to adapt to, and "demands greater than the family (or a family member) can handle introduce stress and dysregulation into the home" (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019, 498).

In this context, we ought to understand Rodger's familial environment playing a significant role in both how Rodger's life played out and how he presents his narrative. Despite this however, *incel*-focused literature has broadly neglected to interrogate how divorce has featured within *inceldom*. Wood, Tanteckchi, and Keatley (2022) pointed out that Rodger shared familial instability, including divorce, with other perpetrators of *incel* mass murders. Sparks, Zidenburg, and Olver (2023b) cite research that strong peer support networks can help mitigate the instability and difficulty of familial instability, including divorce, and theorize that *incels'* lack of peer support may heighten the negative impacts of divorce. More research is needed regarding the prevalence and contexts of childhood divorce experiences amongst *incels* and its relationship to maladaptive ideological formations around sex and gender.

The high frequency and impact of familial transitions that Rodger's family experienced likely overwhelmed everyone, particularly Rodger. Prolonged tensions between parents (i.e. Duke, 2014; Rodger, 2014, 125) precipitated a continuous environment of turmoil which only made it harder for everyone to readjust and find equilibrium; the family unit fell behind in adjusting to its own changes. As we will see in the next section, this played a significant role in Rodger's lived experience. We must not forget however, that Rodger contributed to his own family dynamics: "the developmental domain most consistently linked to family instability is children's socioemotional and problem behavior, typically operationalized as internalizing and externalizing behavior in early and middle childhood and as depression and delinquency in adolescence" (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019, 501). Just as Rodger was struggling to adjust to changes in his family environment and contexts, so too were his parents struggling to adjust to their changes *and* Rodger's reactions to those changes.

Not Just "Off-Time," but "Stuck in Time" and "Regressing in Time"

We must remember to treat Rodger as he was when he experienced these transitions: as a child, pre-teen, and adolescent. There are many American cultural motifs which emphasize how human development follows a formal march of expectation, in which each "promotion" between developmental stages, demarcated by schools, comes with expected behaviors and supposed accomplishments. Like many teens, and *incels* in particular, Rodger assumes these developmental pathways are rigid, and by doing so he assumes a considerable pressure to only move forward, where progress follows a neoliberal and linear march of progress only ever up and to the right (Burton, 2022). Thus, Rodger's perspectives though his development are threefold: 1) to develop in-time with his peers; 2) to remain in a constant state of progress; and 3) all transitions or ends are absolute. In the moment—as child, pre-teen, and adolescent—Rodger is actively participating in the many rituals of individual development which he is struggling through, not unlike many of his peers.

Broad perceptions of child development, at least in the U.S., frame major developmental transitions as aligning with each progressive stage of education: elementary school as child, middle school as pre-teen, high school as adolescent, and college as emergent adult. Rodger assumes that this progression means normative development is natural, effortless, and constant.

Rodger's perception of his own developmental trajectory is instead that it is difficult, sporadic, and off-time. This perception emerges because of the gap between what he believes development ought to be and what it is in his case. Rodger experiences his expected progression through school and development alongside transitions and instabilities that "[outstrip his] capacity to absorb these changes, making it increasingly difficult to reach a new equilibrium after each new change" (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019, 498). This capacity to absorb changes seems to be relatively individualized, but Rodger seems to confront contexts that demand both a high need to absorb changes and a low capacity to do so. Most of these changes are unwanted and unsolicited, leaving him with the perception that he is not in control of his life and that others have made his own development harder, which bred resignation and resentment. By the time his parallel narratives complete their convergence, Rodger perceives himself trapped by his accumulated failures to adjust and turns to *incel* ideologies as a sense-making tool, a structural system he can anchor himself to. Because Rodger is not unique in experiencing adversity, nor in arriving at *inceldom*, it seems crucial to identify the extent to which *incels* experience similar circumstances and whether a combination of experiences lead to a particular risk of *incel* beliefs.

Most of Rodger's acute educational instability occurred in early childhood and late adolescence, and he attended eight grade schools and three colleges overall. Rodger perceives his elementary school years most favorably, mainly because this was the only period where he attended school alongside friends. His middle school narrative shows a considerable divergence, with his out-of-school narrative being strongly positive and his in-school narrative being neutral at best. The end of his middle school experiences, through the tumultuous years of high school and college, are characterized by overwhelming negativity. Overall, Rodger exhibits significant challenges in his schooling experiences even during his nostalgically positive eras.

Schools as an environment are central in Rodger's narrative only for one reason: as a repository for structure and friends. Rodger experiences schools as places where the assumed goal is academic work, but the intended goal is social interaction. Rodger rarely mentions homework or anything academic related; homework is only mentioned five times in the entire document, he only indicates that middle school is more stressful both "socially and academically" (31), that his grades tanked in middle school amid a rise in sex-saliency and friend instability, and that be got a B in one of the only college courses he completed. In fact, most of his discussions around school environments as academic is concentrated during his college years, where he rotates through a revolving door of classes.

The root of Rodger's transition from child to adolescent begins in fourth grade at Topanga and culminates on entry to Pinecrest. At this moment, Rodger is arriving at a point where he is starting to poke his head above water and make sense of the experiences he lived through. What he finds does not comfort him:

> *"This made me realize that along with being short, I was physically weak compared to other boys my age." (Rodger, 2014, 16)*

> *"I realized, with some horror, that I wasn't "cool" at all. I had a dorky hairstyle, I wore plain and uncool clothing, and I was shy and unpopular.. ... On top of this was the feeling that I was different because I am of mixed race. I am half White, half Asian, and this made me different from the normal fully-white kids that I was trying to fit in with." (Rodger, 2014, 17)*

As Rodger progresses through fifth grade and into the transition to middle school, he makes clear that his attempt to rectify these insurmountable differences resulted in a hyper fixation with coolness. If Rodger could neither be all-white nor have a stable family nor be socially extraverted, then the one thing he could be is the embodiment of the style of coolness. When his attempts are met with indifference, Rodger fears that the more inherent differences are insurmountable.

> *"For the first week of Fifth Grade, I was at mother's house. I considered myself to be very 'cool' by now. I had gotten better at skateboarding, I had blonde hair, and I dressed like a skateboarder. I felt great anticipation for what the cool kids would think of me once they saw my transformation. To my disappointment, no one really cared. They were all in their own worlds. I don't remember any kids showing recognition of my new 'coolness'." (Rodger, 2014, 21)*

In Rodger's mind, he had completed the prerequisites for coolness simply by checking off a list. He had the skateboard, he had the clothes, he had the dyed hair, so where was his status? This disconnect between internal world and external world drives both confusion and resentment in his life. Rodger fails to recognize that coolness is a "social construction whose definition [is] in constant flux," and does not simply include clothes and style but also "individuals' self-presentational skills, their accessibility to expressive equipment, and their impression-management techniques" (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992, 173). Rodger stumbles in the subtle social dynamics that go into popularity in large part because he does not understand how to develop these soft social skills nor how to apply them. Rodger's failure to successfully claim coolness despite his repeated attempts may have contributed to an internalization of low self-worth and individual failure, especially as it relates to a masculine self. Rodger then resented others for how naturally they seemed to wield social skills and for not adequately appreciating the attempt he would make.

Here we also see the first signs of *incel* thought process. In an initial attempt to shift away from this hopeless position, Rodger shifts the onus of control from existence to society such that other people *could* ameliorate those existential insecurities if only they accepted him for what he was. The problem of this logical fallacy is that it does nothing to solve the initial insecurities. By chasing coolness, Rodger openly admits that he looks down on himself and that he is uncomfortable attempting to be someone else. This is why *incel* thought contains resentment against both existence and others: "existence" and "others" are not functionally different in that they both hold control over their lives as external actors, only that "others" have a more tangible face blame can be affixed to. Instead, a healthier approach could have been to reorient himself to feel at least secure and confident in his likes—such as Pokémon and video games—and rooting his happiness and social life with the milieu that was meeting him there.

As middle school approaches, Rodger must additionally, and increasingly, grapple with the emergence of heterosexual expectations. Right as Rodger starts to conceptualize his locus of control as held exclusively by others, the rules of popularity begin to shift as well. The boys he is around, motivated by their own interests and scripts of masculinity, begin to increasingly incorporate cross-gender relationships into their social meaning-making activities. As they do so, Rodger increasingly feels anxiety about not experiencing heterosexual *interest*.

"There was talk of girls, and how it would soon be "cool" to be popular with the girls. Girls were like completely foreign creatures to me. I never interacted with them... I wasn't expected to. In Elementary School, boys played with boys and girls played with girls. That was what I was used to. That was my world. I heard stories of how boys are expected to start kissing girls in Middle School! Such things overwhelmed me." (Rodger, 2014, 24)

"So... even at the early age of ten, boys were starting to be attracted to the female body. I didn't understand this... I hadn't yet reached that stage. I pretended to be interested just so that I wouldn't appear uncool." (Rodger, 2014, 25)

Here we see two things. One is that Rodger learns that he "should" be attracted to girls. He does so by adding girls to the list of prerequisites for coolness, as if it were one other component on the checklist. Thus, he starts to feel pressure to simply be attracted to them. He seems to have little innate curiosity in the matter, and he does not understand this. Rodger is off-time even before formal experiences of dating, relationships, and sex come into play. The fact that he does not experience attraction to women in time with everyone else adds to his acute anxieties of himself as defective.

As Rodger transitions from childhood to being a pre-teen, he is now directly grappling with three major insecurities: 1) his deeply internalized perception of himself as deficient, 2) feeling behind in the development of social skills, and 3) feeling off-time in the emergence of heterosexual attraction. He starts to feel slightly behind his peers and reacts poorly to perceiving those younger than him pass him.

*"I had been trying very hard to get better at skateboarding, but when I saw that there were boys a lot younger than me who could do more tricks, I realized that I sucked. ... It crushed me a little inside to see that I was a failure at skateboarding after more than a year of practicing it. I could never master the kickflip or heelflip. ... I saw eight-year-old boys at the skatepark who could do a kickflip with ease, and it made me so angry. **Why did I fail at everything I tried?**" (emphasis in original, Rodger, 2014, 26).*

The nature of Rodger's environmental change because of this transition placed significant stress in his already fragile sociability. By moving from a public charter school to a small, elite private school, Rodger enters a much more socioeconomically homogeneous milieu which is advantaged in the domains Rodger feels insecurity. This transition precipitates his social isolation, since he is not transferring with any of his preexisting friends and will be a "new kid" within an insular environment where social cliques have already been established. Because this middle school is the same school he left during kindergarten because of poor experiences, Rodger's preconceived perception of the school is negative. Thus, the stage is set for a particularly turbulent transition.

Despite his efforts, Rodger considers himself a perpetual outsider within his educational milieu despite predominantly describing instances of positive interactions with both girls and boys. It is likely that Rodger sought a deep, sustained, and in-school friendship which was mutually initiated to emulate his social trajectory in elementary school. The transition into middle school also occurred simultaneous with conflict between his parents: "My father cut off a portion of the child support he had been paying my mother, which forced my mother to move house" (Rodger, 2014, 29). This left Rodger feeling more vulnerable to comparison against his new, more wealthy and privileged peers. For example, Rodger "became vehemently obsessed with proving to [everyone] that [he] wasn't poor" because classmates start teasing him for the neighborhood his mom moved to (Rodger, 2014, 30). This reaction is the result of Rodger's familial insecurities, where he wants to prove that both him and his family do, in fact, have status. If we understand Rodger's constant

references to the status and wealth of his family through this lens, we understand id his classism as a learned behavior deployed in pursuit of belonging to an elitist milieu.

The core moderating factor through this insecurity is his close, offline friendship with an established friend group. During his early middle school years, Rodger had weekly sleepovers and outings to a gaming café with a group of four friends. Eventually the friendships started to dissipate. The way Rodger describes this indicates that *he* was not ready for this group to end, and his struggle to cope with the feelings of loss exacerbate his insecurities of abandonment and perception low self-worth.

Without his friend group, Rodger feels an acute need to tune into the social milieu of Pinecrest to make new friends. When he does, he found that everyone is bragging about girls and relationships to gain status and popularity, two things Rodger conflates with friendship. Rodger neither has anything to brag about, nor anyone to brag with. Rodger suddenly feels like he has taken a major step back; at the end of middle school, he now has fewer friends than when he started. At the same time, his mother once again moves, this time to an apartment, which further stressed Rodger about his comparative socioeconomic standing (Rodger, 2014, 40).

At this point, Rodger becomes overwhelmed by the changes, especially the lack of peer support, and this upheaval spills over into his behavior at school.

> *"[In eighth grade] I was extremely unpopular, widely disliked, and viewed as the weirdest kid in the school. **I had to act weird in order to gain attention**. **I was tired of being** the **invisible** shy kid. Infamy is better than total obscurity. The teasing I received was bittersweet. It felt horrible to be teased and bullied … but at the same time… It felt good to be confident enough to pick fights with the popular skateboarder kids." (Rodger, 2014, 42)*

Attention-seeking behavior is "is actually an effective response to a condition of unmet need" for many children (Waters, 2011, 213). "Therefore, in the absence of adequate positive attention, punitive attention actually reinforces inappropriate behavior. This behavior intensifies, which triggers an increase in punitive attention, and a cycle of negative family interactions develops" (Waters, 2011, 212). Waters describes how attention-seeking behavior can become pathogenic within a family dynamic, but it is almost certain that it applies to peer-on-peer domains as well. Based on Rodger's descriptions of his behavior throughout his life, he can be classified as an "attention-seeking immature" phenotype of anxious solitary children (Gazelle, 2008). The attention-seeking immature phenotype is defined as a child who is socially oriented toward others, but low in social skill; they exhibit "attention seeking … behavior that is geared toward attracting peer attention but is inappropriate or incongruous with ongoing peer activities and therefore socially unskillful" (Gazelle, 2008, 1606). Data from this study found that attention-seeking immature anxious solitary children were "often ignored by their peers and seldom actively accepted" and their peers considered them low in positive attributes (Gazelle, 2008, 1617-1618). While Gazelle points out that "these children more often experience exclusion than victimization" (1618), in Rodger's mind exclusion *is* victimization. This perceived invisibility triggered maladaptive attention-seeking behavior. The lack of strong attention, plus instabilities elsewhere in his life, pushed Rodger to seek attention in negative ways, likely to the irritation of many peers who considered him neutrally. In turn, this led to Rodger being more explicitly teased and excluded, which encouraged further immature and low social-skill behavior. Rodger acting out at this moment makes sense given the changes occurring in his life as he seeks attention from the only social outlet he has left: peers.

As middle school ended, Rodger was first exposed to sex through pornography at thirteen while at Planet Cyber, where he sees it on another person's screen. Rodger reacts poorly to seeing sex without much control over the form of exposure, and it is likely he would not have sought out sexual media at this time without this event.

> *"I barely even knew what sex was. ... I couldn't imagine human beings doing such things with each other. The sight was shocking, traumatizing, and arousing. ... I walked home and cried by myself for a bit. I felt too guilty about what I saw to talk to my parents about it." (Rodger, 2014, 38-39)*

His description of this event is striking for the emotion it conveys: confusion. His descriptions of this term are depersonalized and held at arm's length, almost in horror. The intense relationship between shock, trauma, and arousal is complicated, but indicates the presence sex-specific anxieties which go beyond simple expectations of heterosexual development. Rodger's exposure to sex has stirred something within him which he does not understand, and he believes he is aroused but not is quite sure what that even means. He still does not seem to understand what is so special about sex, but to see it so viscerally is to realize what those around him are establishing as a requisite of coolness and of the adolescent experience is something taboo, disgusting, enticing, confusing, frightening. To continue down the path he has set for himself, to chase coolness into the realm of the sexual, that is what he would have to do. *And he's not ready*. Rodger is now off-time by two tiers: confused by the point of heterosexual attraction and he had not even begun to consider what sex meant. He believes he is stuck in time for not being ready, and that the onset of puberty is the "beginning of his horrific downfall" (Rodger, 2014, 39). Unfortunately for him, this "downfall" started long before his exposure to sex, rooted instead in the many life transitions, internalizations, leaps of logic, and poor direct support and intervention around those formative experiences.

Rodger's second exposure to porn a year later elicited a less visceral description, but a conflicted one nonetheless (Rodger, 2014, 44-45). He continues to use loaded language to describe sex, heavily negative and reiterates his generalized confusion. However, he is now faced with an additional confusion: arousal despite revulsion. This combination spawns both guilt and shame, in that he feels like it should be wrong to be both simultaneously and hates that he finally is going through puberty. The person who showed Rodger this video is two years his junior, adding a level of temporal dysphoria. Once again, he feels off-time, two years late to a party he does not want to be at, starting a process he does not want to start.

Rodger's acute concern with being off-time with his peers existed long before sex and relationships became a component. Once sex and relationships became culturally significant as requisites for acceptance and masculinity narratives between middle and high school however, sex and relationships became salient as a panacea which could solve everything; because of the cultural significance of sex within adolescence, Rodger started to believe that he needed sex to both gain the acceptance of his fellow male peers and be a legitimate adolescent. But Rodger also feels acutely distressed about this supposed requirement, evidenced by his insistence and relief that he would go to Crespi, an all-boys catholic high school. Thus, Rodger resents sex being the solution to his problems because it is both out of reach and not something that causes him significant distress. Though this reading, we understand that what Rodger may have needed instead was someone to deescalate the salience of sex and reassure him, through tangible and repeated action, that sex was not a precondition to his broader social acceptance. Because Rodger is so convinced of sex as panacea, his writing leads us to believe that it is the lack of sex which drove his

experience. Though a more nuanced reading, we see that confusion, lack of direction, lack of structure, and anxiety central to his experiences.

Rodger's transition into high school occurs a few weeks into the school year establishing him, once again, as "the new kid." It did not help that his reputation preceded him. Some of his classmates from Pinecrest, none of whom he was particularly friendly with, spread the word of his weird antics and attention-seeking behavior. Rodger's opportunity at a fresh start was curtailed.

> *"Because I failed to become good at skateboarding, I developed a hatred for the sport … The whole school started calling me [skateboarder] just to anger me, along with other insulting names. They teased me because I was scared of girls, calling me names like "faggot". People also liked to steal my belongings and run away in an attempt to get me to chase after them. And I did chase after them in a furious rage, but I was so little and weak that they thought it was comical. I hated everyone at that school so much." (Rodger, 2014, 46)*

Although Rodger recognizes that people teased him with the explicit intention of eliciting an emotional response with him, he cannot help but react. By playing into this script, Rodger unwittingly feeds his bullies' motivation to continue to pick on him. Being an outsider, a late-bloomer, possibly autistic, vulnerable, and emotionally volatile made him an easy target for this sort of "entertainment." In fact, Rodger's former classmate from Crespi said as much in an interview with the New York Times after the Isla Vista Attack:

> *"'We said right from the get-go that that kid was going to lose it someday and just freak out. Everyone made fun of him and stuff.'" (Lovette & Nagourney, 2014)*

Because of his poor experiences, Rodger's parents pulled him from Crespi after ninth grade and enrolled him in a large public high school instead. In the face of yet another school transition where he would be the "new kid," Rodger reacted with indignation and terror:

> *"My parents shocked me with very horrible news. They were planning on sending me to Taft High School. Taft had five times as many students as Crespi, it was a public school, it had girls in it, and it had a bad reputation. I had never been so scared in my entire life. **How could they do this to me, after knowing what I went through at Crespi?** Taft High School would eat me alive and spit me out. I felt so betrayed by my parents." (emphasis in original, Rodger, 2014, 48)*

Once again, Rodger frames a significant life transition as outside of his control; it was his parents' decision to send him to Taft and he had no input. What Rodger would have wanted instead is unclear, but what he needed was to transition somewhere with a lot of guiding support. Instead, Rodger had only school counselors to support him. He lasted two weeks before his anxiety caused him to snap and his parents to pull him from the school. What seems to have cracked Rodger was not intense bullying, but a few poor experiences combined with everything catching up to him: all the compressed and repressed anxiety, confusion, and pressure in the face of his parent's mounting concern and the vast uncertainties of an unfamiliar environment filled with unfamiliar people. What he needed now was a clear, direct, and heavily structured and supportive intervention which would let him go through a formal education system. In being pulled from Taft, Rodger falls through a crack. He is now off-time from his peers in a more substantial way. He is not guided by the same social rituals of college preparation, nor of social experiences. Rather than structured guidance, Rodger gets absolute freedom and no oversight. His established maladaptive self-perception and inner dialogue are fueled by being bullied. Bullying did not create the preconditions for Rodger's *inceldom*, but bullying did catapult Rodger to seek knowledge which might make sense of his experiences.

Now in an unstructured educational environment, Rodger attempts to rationalize and operationalize a philosophy and framework which ascribes a logic to his assumed inferiority and social death. To do so, Rodger spent a lot of time at a Barnes & Noble bookstore, "reading books about history, politics, and sociology, trying to learn as much as he [could]" (Rodger, 2014, 57). As we saw earlier with how he compared himself to others, Rodger's instinct when making social observations was to assume his inferiority and seek confirmations for, rather than challenges to, his worldviews. It is likely that Rodger misconstrued and selectively cherrypicked from these nonfiction works to reaffirm his perceptions. Research indicates that *incels* routinely coopt and misrepresent findings from evolutionary psychology that "justify" their fatalistic beliefs (Costello et al., 2022). Likewise, the Incel Wiki uses Donnelley and colleagues' (2001) study to argue that *inceldom* is a life-circumstance rather than a subculture or group—which frames *inceldom* as inherent, natural, and expected (Andersen, 2023)—despite that study technically studying *unwanted celibacy* (per the criteria in Grunau et al., 2022). *Incels* also exhibit an internalization of "neoliberal ideas about social value being known only through market outcomes—and the extension of market principles appears uncritically accepted as including the interior self and sexual life" (Price, 2023, 14). If these ideas are used as the primary lens of analysis through which history, politics, and sociology are analyzed, then complex phenomena can easily become examples of market truisms.

Thus, we might understand how someone like Rodger—who assumes his own inferiority and minimal self-worth, believes that social value (friendships and acceptance) is known only through the acquisition of status, and is deeply distressed about masculine scripts of heterosexual relationships and sexual development—might radicalize themselves through a process of unstructured self-education. Because the majority of *incels* arrive at the Incelosphere already misogynist and convinced of a deterministic social hierarchy (Halpin et al., 2023) and previously participated in other hateful online communities (Stijelja & Mishara, 2023a) it seems like an initial period of self-education establishes a nascent *incel* philosophy. This is followed by a desire to seek others who are in a similar situation or hold similar worldviews (Puhrmann & Schlaerth, 2023), which they find in other problematic forums or mainstream outlets (see Solea & Sugiura, 2023) before ultimately migrating to *inceldom*. Once there, many take the Black Pill and accept nihilistic fatalism. Rodger never seems to have arrived in *incel* spaces—his participation in *incel* spaces is limited and contested (see Nagourney et al., 2014; Andersen, 2023)—suggesting that his radicalization occurred elsewhere, possibly the defunct website PUAhate.com which he frequented. Thus, it seems that a period of unguided self-education, conducted with the intention to provide justification for problematic nascent worldviews, is crucial to establishing the foundation for *incel* philosophy and the impetuous for community-seeking behavior. However, pinpointing the exact moment where the radicalization turns violent remains unclear, although it does seem limited to a minority of *incels*.

This process of self-radicalization occurs as Rodger transitions from adolescence to emergent adulthood and marks his complete isolation from his peers. In essence, Rodger becomes "NEET" (Not in Employment, Education, and Training), a social category which applies to many contemporary *incels* (Costello et al., 2022; DeCook, 2021). Rodger haphazardly drops out of his courses at schools, actively refuses to find jobs, and does not consider training a valid pathway. That he could drop his courses at all without sparking concern from the registrar and student services is a significant failure on the part of the schools he attended, irrespective of Rodger's

surprising savviness at lying. As an adult, Rodger feels like he is so completely removed from any traditional developmental pathway that there is no hope for him. On top of this, he realizes that his sister, four years his junior, is far more developed socially and relationally when she gets a boyfriend and he hears them having sex. Instead of finding more structure and support to get back on track, he is sent away to college, where he must be responsible for himself and his improvement. Once Rodger formulated *incel* philosophy as a *valid*, *accurate,* and (seemingly) *scientifically justified* account of his experiences, none of Rodger's social experiences in the years that followed could dislodge the ultimate foundational insecurities which were deeply rooted in his psyche; Rodger would simply not have the "cognitive openness" to "find the 'cracks'" in his own (*incel*) rhetoric and ideology (Gheorghe & Clement, 2023, 12). And the further along he went, the more he wanted to believe that sex would solve all his problems, reiterating and willing it to be true just as *The Secret* claimed the "Law of Attraction" would do. To read his constant reaffirmation and increasing hyper fixation of sex as legitimate is to give him too much credit. There was too much facework Rodger needed to do before sex could ever be satisfying to him (Hintz & Baker, 2021).

From this deep timeline of events, we understand Rodger as constantly experiencing himself as developmentally behind his peers. Over time, as expectations and missed milestones stack up, Rodger develops a perception of being "stuck in time."

> *"And there I was, stuck in the void of hopelessness once again; in the exact same position as I had been when I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and seventeen. For all the efforts I made to improve my life during my eighteenth year, I had nothing to show for it. No friends, no girls, no life." (Rodger, 2014, 71)*

Continued and acute instability in his familial domain have cascading effects on his social and structural contexts, leading in some cases to a perceived regression in his own development. We understand that Rodger is a "boy who fails to grow up" (Sharkey, 2022, 39) who eventually comes to blame the world around him because he believes he never has been, and never will be, in control of his own life. In his attempt to make sense of this all, he seeks out knowledge which will confirm what he already believes to be true about himself, and in a futile attempt to make himself feel better, he externalizes that pain onto the men whose attention he craves and the relationships and sex with the women he believes are necessary to do so.

Interventions Tried, Interventions Failed

Rodger's life-course illuminates that whatever interventions were attempted failed to provide Rodger with the support he needed to mitigate the combined influences of his maladaptive internal dialogue, hegemonic scripts of masculinity and relationships, developmental misalignment from peers, and externalizing behaviors. Overall, this combination of factors only fed Rodger's social and environmental instability. While Rodger's account is sparse on details, there seems to be a relatively simple reason all attempted interventions failed: they did not address the root causes of his distress. I will illustrate four grounds in Rodger's life-course which indicated a pressing need for intervention or modified approaches to attempted interventions: 1) decentralized mental health treatment; 2) a need for role model exposure; 3) more guided structure; 4) possible repressed sexuality.

The most straightforward intervention which was attempted was Rodger's engagement with mental health practitioners over the course of his life. The first time Rodger mentions having a psychiatrist is when he is twenty-one years old, despite supposedly seeing many counselors and

therapists throughout his lifetime (Nagourney et al., 2014) starting at seven (Burke & Alexander, 2018). Yet, Rodger's first description of meeting with anyone is at eighteen, when his mother puts him into contact with a life coach to help him find a job after his first impulsive set of course withdrawals from Pierce College. After that relationship fizzles due to Rodger's poor experiences with a "menial custodial job" that the life coach gave him (Rodger, 2014, 70), his next mention of any mental health engagements are with a psychiatrist in 2014, months before the Isla Vista Attack.

> *"My parents arranged for us to have a conference with my Psychiatrist, Dr. Charles Sophy. ... Soumaya and my mother had recently had an argument due to Soumaya refusing to let me stay at father's house during my mother's trip to Hawaii. For more than half of the conversation, the doctor spent time resolving this petty conflict instead of addressing the troubles that I was going through. When we finally did get to my situation, Dr. Sophy ended up giving me the same useless advice that every other psychiatrist, psychologist, and counsellor had given me in the past. The doctor ended up dismissing it by prescribing me a controversial medication, Risperidone. ... I refused to take it, and I never saw Dr. Sophy again after that." (Rodger, 2014, 125)*

Here, Rodger is referring to "troubles he has been going through," which by this point are already rooted in his internalized *incel* beliefs that he is at the bottom of the sociosexual hierarchy, his chronic social isolation, and his long struggle to both develop *and* implement social skills. This implementation part is crucial, since we can reasonably assume that the "same useless advice" he was given aligns with the advice his former life coach gave him, which was "advice on socializing and self-improvement" from a more theoretical and technical standpoint (67). Rodger then, did not necessarily lack information on what he "should do"; rather, he seems to have lacked the positionality to understand how to implement this information. As a result, Rodger reacts poorly to this psychiatric visit for two reasons: 1) Rodger's illness narrative (see Kleinman, 1988) is not qualitatively engaged by any party, family nor psychiatrist; and 2) the visit highlights on-going familial conflict and instability that takes attention away from Rodger.

Kleinman (1988) defines an illness narrative as the way a patient makes sense of and experiences their condition, and tasks practitioners with doing careful, ethnographic work to develop a cohesive picture of their patient's local moral worlds. Rodger's illness narrative is rooted in his family dysfunction, struggling with the cumulative difficulties of a possibly undiagnosed neurodivergent condition, deeply internalized stigma against himself, and a philosophical worldview that has at this point completed an externalization to completely shift the locus of control out of Rodger's grasp. Rodger has been dealing with a *chronic* condition, which tend to "oscillate between periods of exacerbation, when symptoms worsen, to periods of quiescence, when disability is less disruptive" and that psychological and social factors—including deeply threatening life event changes, impaired social support, and oppressive relationships—are the "determinants of the swing toward amplification" (Kleinman, 1988, 5). At every point where Rodger seems to start to adjust and get better, sudden changes in his experience plunge him once again into uncertainty and subsequent flaring of these uncontrollable symptoms. Thus, psychiatric or psychological interventions ought to have acknowledged both the chronic nature of Rodger's conditions and addressed the social irritants, particularly the volatile and unstable family domain, which were exacerbating Rodger's acute distress.

Rodger indicates a preexisting low trust of therapy, and he seems to meet Dr. Sophy to appease his parents. As soon as Dr. Sophy attends to the parents *first*, and then gives what Rodger feels is cursory attention, Rodger becomes defensive and unreceptive to further engagement in this psychiatric regimen. The salience of his parents' conflict in this space only cements, from

Rodger's perspective, that no one really wants to pay attention to him. As a result, Rodger is in even less of a position to trust or positively make use of therapy. Once a patient becomes stops being receptive to a form mental health treatment, or even treatment more broadly, the efficacy of the treatment declines. As the story of Ray in Aviv (2022) indicates, this is especially true once a patient believes that the origins of their problem are at odds with the goals of a treatment. By the time Rodger seriously confronts psychiatric avenues for treatment, he believed that his emotional turmoil—which included depression, anxiety, confusion, and resentment—was rooted in the behavior of external actors, making him unreceptive to a biomedical solution and, perhaps, also to an internal-facing psychotherapeutic intervention.

The primary argument here is that psychiatric interventions came too late to prevent Rodger from developing an adherence to *incel* beliefs. Because Rodger himself never admits to working with therapists until far later in his narrative, when he cannot avoid doing so, we must admit that earlier interventions were not significant enough to force him to address them. If, for example, a serious intervention like an internment at a psychiatric hospital had occurred following his admittance of suicidal ideation at seventeen (54), Rodger would have been unable to continue his narrative uninterrupted. It is also unlikely that subsequent investigative journalism would have failed to uncover this instance. Thus, we can reasonably assume that Rodger's ability to omit the reception of psychiatric care prior to twenty-one reflects its lack of impact. The laissez-fair and deflective attitude of his father in an ABC interview following the Isla Vista Attack, the same man who rejected an ASD diagnosis at best and blocked it at worst, further strengthens the assumption that not enough was done (Burke & Alexander, 2018; Waters, 2014).

By the time Rodger was required to confront serious psychiatric intervention, what he needed was deradicalization. Once Rodger developed *incel* beliefs, he had been "snared" (Utterback, 2024) by a deterministic and fatalistic thought process which led to his poor responses to intervention. This reaction is both rooted in Rodger's own unwillingness to consider alternative explanations for his distress and, too, in what Rodger felt was the practitioner's disregard for his experience as a distressed person seeking treatment. Rodger perceived his negative experiences to be externally located far before his development of *inceldom*, meaning that an intervention would need to begin by tailoring their approach accordingly to this perceived reality. This failure is at the doctor-patient stage, where Rodger continued to feel invisible and misunderstood even by those who were supposed to have helped. Thus, Rodger needed some deep and concerted psychiatric intervention, in his case likely both biomedical and psychoanalytical, *prior* to the manifestation of a core philosophy that recognized and validated his focus on the social experience of his distress. By contrast, the interventions that were attempted once he was on the *incel* track needed to approach from a point of deradicalization. Rodger, it seems, shared the negative experiences many *incels* claimed with therapy (Speckhard et al., 2021; Moskalenko, 2022; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2022). It is likely that therapeutic interventions in *incel* cases more generally also manifest as responses to acute symptoms of distress and maladaptation. But by that point, *incels* also indicate a conviction in the certainty of their plight and are thus likely already skeptical of the two primary schools of psychiatric interventions: biomedical and psychoanalytical. Therefore, it is likely that *incels* also would benefit from more proactive and preventative engagements with psychiatric interventions which validate the perceived social locus of their negative experiences while also providing them with guided spaces where they could also grapple with, and perhaps shift their efforts to, an internal locus of dissatisfaction. Responsive interventions must draw from terrorist

scholarship and seek to first deradicalize and then rehabilitate, but preventative interventions must prevent radicalization through guided and supportive structure.

Whatever psychiatric interventions were attempted failed because they A) did not succeed in establishing a widely-accepted diagnosis for a child who was developing abnormally; B) failed to provide Rodger with adequate, illness narrative-centered treatment which productively engaged with his externalization of control; and C) failed to overcome Rodger's resistance to mental health treatment more broadly and his histories and patterns of family, school, and peer instability more specifically.

A second point of intervention was Rodger's need for a positive and authoritative role model, preferably one who was masculine atypical or who fit Rodger's description for "coolnesss." This was somewhat attempted late in Rodger's life through a shift from psychiatrists to counsellors.

The one positive thing that Rodger mentions came out of his relationship with Dr. Sophy, the psychiatrist, was being set up with a peer-aged counselor.

> *"His name was Gavin, a clean-cut twenty five-year-old. He had a similar role to Tony, my old counsellor from the regional center back when I was nineteen, except Gavin was much younger and acted more like a friend who could take me out to places. Every time I went back to visit my parents, I would meet up with Gavin once. We usually met up at a restaurant somewhere, or went on a hike. I told him about all of my problems with girls, and all of the hardships I've had to face in Santa Barbara. Being familiar with Isla Vista himself, since he spent a great deal of time there when he was younger, he confirmed to me that yes, the girls in Isla Vista prefer tall, muscular, rowdy jock-type men." (Rodger, 2014, 119)*

Gavin then took the role of an older brother-like role model figure, someone who could be more of a friend. Unfortunately, by this point Rodger was too deep into his philosophy to appreciate Gavin's help. He constantly compared himself to Gavin and resented that "girls were checking him out instead of me" (119). Rodger needed this type of intervention back when he was growing up, someone he could anchor himself to and provide him some of the nurturing stability he desperately craved, particularly from a masculine figure. By the time Rodger starts seriously and pathogenically comparing himself to others, intimately and instinctually mistrustful of everyone including his own family, around twelve, this form of care-based intervention would be unsuccessful without supplementary work. By the time Gavin is in the picture, Rodger does not trust anyone but the rabbit he's chased into the hole.

Gavin will eventually continue to see Rodger as his instability in Isla Vista worsens. In fact, Gavin seems to be the only person who has much of a grasp on the reality of the situation:

> *"[Gavin] told me that the kind of brutal, rowdy atmosphere I've witnessed was part of the culture [in Isla Vista]. The boisterous, wild frat boys get all of the beautiful girls, and everyone is looking for a fight, like the vicious animals they are. He said it was a truth I had to accept, advising me to move out of there. I couldn't accept this truth, because it was unjust. I couldn't let such evil exist, and I will not run away from it by moving out of there. I will either thrive there, or destroy the place utterly." (Rodger, 2014, 124-125)*

Here, Gavin realizes that Rodger's move to Isla Vista only further isolated him from his remaining support structures and that he's deeply rooted in some sort of maladaptive worldview. The reason Rodger rejects Gavin's observation only further exemplifies his lack of receptiveness to the interventions of mental health practitioners. Rodger highlights that he cannot accept anything besides his extreme *incel* beliefs. By this point, his rigid, *incel*, philosophy has become his source

of structure and certainty, a guiding framework for understanding the world and his responsibilities. To move away from Isla Vista at this point would be to give up what little structure and certainty he had made for his life and return to a state of NEET uncertainty.

It is possible that Rodger's experience with counselors came too late in life to have much of a positive effect by themselves, and he seems to allude to this fact.

> *"With the help of Gavin, my parents arranged for me to have a couple of social skills counsellors to work with me in Santa Barbara. ... They would be like hired friends. Of course, I did need something like this, **and I should have signed up for it when I first moved to Santa Barbara**. It was **a little too late at this point, I feared**, but I went along with it anyway." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 120).*

Yet, an earlier experience with a positive male role model did a stronger positive impact. When Rodger was sixteen, his family hosted a nineteen-year-old French exchange student, Max, for a summer. Max was a lifeline for Rodger, a cool, savvy, older brother-like figure who *wanted* to spend time with him. Max was able to reach Rodger in a way his own family could not, by being someone Rodger cared about and looked up to who provided loving and enthusiastic encouragement, support, and accompaniment. Max' eventual return to France was a heartbreaker for Rodger.

> *"For the brief period that Max was staying at father's house, I enjoyed life a lot more. He was a big part of my life there. He drove me to places when father and Soumaya were busy, we played card games and had pleasant conversations after dinner, and we always took walks to the top of the hill overlooking father's neighborhood, which I called the Overlook. Most importantly, he made me feel less lonely." (Rodger, 2014, 53-54)*

Rodger was beginning to enjoy life, to feel less lonely. His precipitous decline into the clutches of nihilistic *inceldom* had been well underway prior to Max' arrival, but they seemed temporarily abated during his stay.

That summer however, Max invited Rodger to visit him in France for three weeks. The way Rodger describes this visit highlights the part of the complexity of *incel*-related loneliness and isolation. It becomes apparent that it is not enough for those on the pathway to *inceldom* to simply "go out and make friends," they must be "'at the very least … open to the possibility that they might be wrong about at least some stuff'" (User 614 in Gheorghe & Clement, 2023). But Rodger experiences this trip to France as a boon granted to him by cool young people for reasons he doesn't entirely understand but might have something to do with Max asking them to, rather than an as an example of the life he *could* achieve for himself in the U.S. While Rodger has not yet crystalized a formal *incel* philosophy by this point, the experience serves as an exception to his psychological schema rather than as a possible contradiction.

Rodger's experiences with Max, Sasha, and Gavin were positive, but they seemed to lack the longevity necessary for Rodger to start building security in his relationships. They also struggled to bridge the gap between explaining skills and supporting Rodger throughout an active practice and implementation of those skills. Because his counselor or role-model relationships were limited to a few months at a time, they might have been counterproductive as Rodger was constantly hurt as those he started to trust or confide in continuously left his life. While research has indicated that *incel* rhetoric highlights a perceived sense of loneliness (e.g. Maxwell et al., 2020; Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2023), there is a limited understanding about what contributes to that loneliness. We understand that poor social skills and lack of strong peer friendships, like in

Rodger's case, contribute to this perception. But it is unclear the extent to which *incels* lack lasting positive role-models or mentorship figures. If this is a pattern amongst *incels* more broadly, it may highlight another possible avenue for preventative intervention.

Rodger's interventions lacked the structured guidance necessary for improving his receptivity to change. This is not to say that they lacked structure, rather, that they lacked the type of structure Rodger would have benefitted from, which would have been high structure and high guidance over a long-term. Structure as guidance could have looked like "I understand you are afraid of asking your friend to come over, but it's ok! I'm right behind you." Authority is necessary in these interventions but deployed as a shield for the child's sake. The mother's authority is used to step in for comfort in the face of failure, the teacher or counselor's authority is used to encourage behaviors that lead to positive outcomes and discourage from behaviors that do not (see Gong, 2019). This sort of guided and supportive exposure would hinge on helping Rodger understand that neutral reactions are not negative, positive reactions not disingenuous, and negative reactions are something that can be overcome and are not absolute.

These guiding interventions should have, as their core goal, expanding an individual's openness to expansive thinking about themselves and their experiences and providing them with the tools to engage in facework. *Incels* who either successfully navigated out of *inceldom* or who were in the process of doing so broadly were able to do so because they were exposed to new life experiences which sparked realizations (Hintz & Baker, 2021), including the realization that women also struggled with relationships and celibacy (Osuna, 2024). *Incels* self-reported that this was accomplished by significant internal mobilization of motivation, including pushing themselves to sustain community involvement and overcome internal barriers to self-improvement and self-care (Gheorghe & Clement, 2023). It may be problematic to expect everyone to reach a point of overcoming *inceldom* alone and without support, and in fact the active encouragement of a community of guidance was a diving component in helping exiting *incels* navigate the non-linearity and emotionally difficult process of exit (Gheorghe & Clement, 2023). Crucially, exiting *incels* require lots of time to build more positive social relationships both outside of *incel* forums and offline. Unfortunately, Rodger, like the majority of *incels* who have thus far been unable to exit the subculture, lacked the social and environmental conditions necessary to perceive how an exit might be accomplished. Perhaps a highly structured intervention with external guidance in building core internal competencies through practice could have provided the sustained conditions necessary to originate the openness necessary for *incel*-exit facework. Thus, perhaps by proactively being immersed in communities of guidance, where the guidance is proactive in providing the social and emotional tools necessary for the development of a positive psychoanalytic self which is openminded in its reflectivity and structured support in practicing social skills, the lessons from *incel* exit strategies can help prevent *incel* entry.

There is however, one final, admittedly highly speculative, reason interventions could have failed. There exists the plausibility that Rodger was not heterosexual at all. Thus, interventions to address his hetero-based worldview would ultimately fail to address some deeply held insecurity of wrongness based in the reality that he did not resonate with the overwhelming hetero social pressures he experienced. In other words, it is plausible that Rodger is queer and that much of his frustration is failing to understand why he cannot just get himself to understand nor feel comfortable with the idea of hetero sex.

There are several reasons which I feel obligated to raise this possibility. The first is simply because it is unlikely, unverifiable, but possible. While almost every single respondent of any *incel* survey marks themselves as heterosexual (i.e. Speckhard et al., 2021; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2023), a qualitative study of the r/IncelExit forum, a space dedicated for those who are either former adherents to *incel* worldviews or actively in the process of exit, found considerable contribution from queer young men who originally believed in *inceldom* partly because of gender and sexuality confusion (Hintz & Baker, 2021). In this context, *inceldom* became a worldview schema which was a rationalization tool to constantly perform to expected heteronormative behaviors. Lacking alternative forms of sense-making, these former *incels* were taking their sex- and gender-based confusion and attempting to make sense of it through a heteronormative lens. This is only one category of former *incels*, but its existence should give all of us pause. It implies that there are many milieus, even in "accepting" communities, which may not necessarily be *affirming of* nor *informative about* non-heterosexuality.

In my analysis, I was struck by subtle, but repeated and pervasive references which could point to the existence of a seriously repressed sexual identity or ignorance of the fact. Because all readers of Rodger's account have obviously taken his heterosexuality for granted, and because we tend to assume "acters in a film [or other narrative] are straight unless labeled, coded, or otherwise proven to be queer," the passive heterosexual assumption remains pervasive (Doty, 2000 in Wotherspoon, 2020, 4). Wotherspoon (2020) recommends focusing on the "thinly described behaviours [*sic*] of some characters" to elucidate how they might be "open to queer possibilities, once the smog of presumed heterosexuality has dissipated" (Wotherspoon, 2020, 6). Thin description "provides a means of paying direct attention to character behaviour. [*sic*] The question of whether they are queer … becomes, then, 'do they seem behave in ways which are consistent with the ways someone who is queer might behave?' Likewise, of course, for the question of whether they are straight" (Wotherspoon, 2020, 7). In other words, in presenting this exploration I do not intend to prove Rodger as queer, gay to be more exact; rather, I simply hope to raise the specter of an interesting possibility which has hereto been unexplored in the academic literature, and, if it is so convincing, broaden how we conceptualize both Rodger's narrative and *inceldom* more broadly.

It is important to note that at no point does Rodger ever indicate A) exposure to hetero nonnormativity, or B) considering it as an existential category. Rodger does not claim to interact with anyone who is openly gay, nor describes any experiences with someone who is. It is hard to believe that he would live in such sexually forward milieus without *any* exposure to queerness. Which leads us to two possible conclusions. Either Rodger was legitimately underexposed to queerness, or he was exposed to it, wrote about it in the diaries he indicates were separate from this narrative (78, 101), and then used this document to rationalize against it. Given how Rodger writes about sexuality however, I find it more convincing that the former option is more plausible. I say this at the onset, because it is an assumption that will color my subsequent analysis.

The most immediate observation that keyed me into this possibility is how Rodger's narrative contains five major characters: himself, his mother, his father, Soumaya, and his best friend James. The number of times Rodger references characters is as follows: mother (384), father (368), Soumaya (112), James (153). This is more than his sister (62) or even his second most referenced friend, Philip (62). By tracking how Rodger introduces James, we notice that Rodger is constantly

referring to him even during times in his life where they are not particularly close. James, it seems, made more of an impression than anyone else in his life.

The way Rodger talks about James provides us with some interesting observations. The very first description of James is particularly striking because it is the only time he describes a male friend with deep, affective detail.

> *"... I **started noticing** this boy with **slightly long blonde hair** who also enjoyed kicking dust. Before I met him, **I always mentally nicknamed him the "King Arthur Kid", due the regal look his hairstyle gave him.** ... We then teamed up and starting playing the game together, and this was the start of a **long and interesting friendship**." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 8)*

There is almost no affective closeness in how he describes Philip, his other lifelong friend, a pattern which holds with most of his other friends. Maddy, a family friend, holds a separate special place in his heart as the first friend he made in the U.S. and because she was the only female peer he knew in his life outside of his sister. But James stands in stark contrast to both. Rodger takes considerable care to describe James' appearance and what he thought of him. They were already playing a similar game, connected instantly, and became inseparable. James is the *only* person in the entire narrative that Rodger claims to have "noticed" and approached organically to establish a friendship with without any sort of hesitancy.

Notice is a peculiar word in Rodger's vernacular because he tends to use conjugates of notice when describing the subjects of relational pursuits. Rodger constantly reiterates his desire of being "noticed" by "the girls," as social category, in that he claims wanting to be the subject of their social and relational pursuits. However, Rodger exclusively uses conjugates of notice when he describes boys, implying that the subjects of his social and relational pursuits are male-oriented. This leads me to suspect that Rodger *thinks* he wants to be noticed by the girls, because that's the dominant heterosexual schema, but what he really wants is to be noticed by the boys in the way that the boys notice the girls. In fact, Rodger *never* "notices" girls of his own volition, nor does he either claim interest in noticing them nor does he describe them in as detailed a manner as he does the boys.

James and Rodger spend a considerable amount of time together growing up. They had playdates every week, and their families became close friends. Each time Rodger describes time spent with James, he writes in a much lighter, more excited voice that centers James within his narrative.

Rodger also describes in detail how he experienced emotions of jealousy and envy when spending time with James simultaneously with other friends.

> *"During playdates with James, sometimes he would have other friends over as well, and I would feel **very jealous and upset when he paid more attention to them**. Feeling left out, I would find a quiet corner and start crying." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 16)*
>
> *"**I got a bit jealous**, however, when Philip and Jeffrey seemed to respect and **pay more attention to James** than they did to me. When we were playing on my Nintendo 64 and I was competing against James, **they rooted for James**, which really upset me." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 17)*

We could read this as simply a sign of Rodger's social anxieties and fears of abandonment, which they certainly are. If we compare this to how he describes a similar experience with Maddy, we might see some differences:

> *"On the rare occurrence that my mother would have Maddy and Mo over for dinner, or if we would go to visit them at their house, **Maddy often played** with my little sister Georgia instead of me, and **this too made me jealous**." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 16)*

Rodger claims to get upset when James is paying attention to others, while Maddy is playing with Georgia. While playing is a form of attention, it is an activity of involvement while "paying attention" is far more general. Despite claiming to "feel left out" in the first quote, he contradicts this by qualifying "more attention to them [than to me]." We might read this as Rodger being insecure because he wants to be the center of James' attention, while in the example with Maddy he just wants to be included. An added layer of meaning might be taken to be "I am jealous that they are paying more attention to James, because what business do they have with James?" In this reading, he is suddenly alert to the possibility that someone might be competing with him for James' attention, and this is not something that repeats in his future accounts with others.

Rodger's jealousy for James somewhat mirrors his jealousy of other boys. While growing up, he names many boys, and his focus on coolness seeks to establish himself worthy of being noticed by the boys. In his childhood, we see read this desire quite explicitly.

> "I noticed that there were two groups of cool, popular kids. ... They all seemed so confident and aggressive. I felt so intimidated by them, and I hated them for it. I hated them so much, but I had to increase my standing with them. I wanted to be friends with them." (Rodger, 2014, 28)
> "There was one group of pretty, popular girls, and they all seemed to like hanging out with that boy Robert. ... **What was so special about Robert?** I constantly asked myself." (emphasis in original, Rodger, 2014, 28)

Despite positioning his jealousy of these boys because girls were paying attention to them, what he seeks is male attention. His attention to the girls' position in this dynamic might indicate some degree of jealousy of the girls for *receiving* the boys' attention, rather of the boys for receiving the girls' attention. In this type of reading, Rodger desires to be the object of their nascent attraction just as much as he desires to be within the group. It should be noted that he *did* have conversations with and was invited to the birthday parties of these popular boys. In those contexts, Rodger focused on showing off, and the positive reactions he did receive were not good enough for him, leading to a resentment that he was treated as "any other boy."

Rodger continuously sees a heterosexual relationship as a pathway to sex as a pathway to male attention. Sex itself is not the end goal, highlighting contradictions and confusions in his thought process. Because he never mentioned exposure to or experiences with an alternative to the intense heteronormativity of his milieus, he translates his confused feelings into what he believes he should be feeling. In this case, by translating homosexuality into a category it does not fit (heterosexuality), he may be internalizing, and repressing, the feeling that something is "off." In so doing, sex and a relationship with a girl becomes a hyper fixation as a method of *proving to himself* that he is, in fact, heterosexual. It is for this reason I am particularly unconvinced that the experience of having sex will solve his problems. Sex is an experience designed to prove heteronormativity when, somewhere in Rodger's subconscious, the anxiety already exists that his sexual interests are different than those of everyone else. Even if Rodger were to have succeeded in establishing a heteronormative relationship, would he have been able to overcome his anxiety and *disgust* over the physical requirements of engaging in heterosexual sex? And if he had, would Rodger not have moved the target afterward? It is possible that he would have had sex and realized that it did not help him overcome his confusion over what is so special about sex (e.g. 28). Perhaps Rodger is feeling something like User ID#43 in Hintz & Baker's 2021 study: "Turns out I was gay and my jealousy of 'Chads' was attraction to them" (3056).

Rodger's unresolved sexual anxiety around heteronormativity leads him to perform what he believes is required of heteronormative individuals, despite his disgust and aversion to arousal upon exposure to pornography; perhaps these negative emotions result of a realization that the sexual acts he is watching are what he is expected to do, and he does not quite resonate with them. His descriptions of his masturbation sessions read more like a performance of "saying the right thing makes it real" rather than particularly compelling proof.

> *"... [masturbation] eventually escalated to looking at pictures of girls online while rubbing my penis against my pants, **fantasizing about doing sexual things with them**. I didn't know how to access any porn sites, so I would just **browse regular websites until I found a picture of a hot girl** to masturbate to." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 46-47)*

> *"During my masturbation sessions I often **built elaborate fantasies in my mind that I had a hot, blonde-haired girlfriend to have passionate sex with**; almost like having an imaginary girlfriend. **I told no one about this.**" (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 52)*

The construction of elaborate fantasies is not the exclusive domain of those actively engaged in sexual repression. These fantasies however, read as fetishistic and fantastical, pleasurable only because they are not real. Given Rodger's particular anxieties regarding the imagery of sex, it is notable that he chooses to browse images of "normal" girls rather than nude ones. In this way, the activity is less real, less distressing, perhaps even less dysmorphic. That his masturbation sessions are rooted in his own fantasies rather than media means he gets to have some plausible deniability about his relationship with the direct heterosexual act. In his mind, he can perform to standards of heteronormativity without feeling the discomfort, anxiety, and uncertainty he would be required to confront upon watching others engage in hetero sex. He does not think to explore anything else, because at least heteronormativity appears to be a structural certainty. To break down this structure and open the possibility of many ways of having relationships and sex would be to present Rodger with more possibilities, but also more unknowns. At least the familiar is safe. At least he *knows* he will be somewhat uncomfortable with heterosexuality, rather than facing whatever other host of emotions he may be feeling under the surface.

Rodger's later descriptions of his interactions with Maddy only serve to highlight his confusion and the arbitrariness of his heterosexual constructions.

> *"For some strange reason, I have never had any sexual attraction towards Maddy, despite the fact that she's a blonde girl and I'm obsessed with blondes. Perhaps it was because she used to be my friend when we were children, I don't know." (Rodger, 2014, 66)*

Here, Rodger makes a crucial admission: despite Maddy being everything Rodger *thinks* he should be attracted to, plus the existence of a preexisting friendship, plus their similarities (children of divorce, British heritage), he is not attracted to her, *and he does not know why*. This admission only serves to highlight his dissatisfaction with the only plausible answer he can reach, their preexisting friendship. Reading Rodger as experiencing repressed homosexuality offers a potential answer: Rodger was not attracted to Maddy because she is a full person, not simply some nebulous construct in Rodger's head. Her physical characteristics are not arousing because Rodger sees past them and into the person, and he simply is not attracted to the *woman* he sees.

James, by contrast, serves as Rodger's one foray into the possible. James was the only one able to convince Rodger to do things which were masculine atypical and get him to like it.

> *"On mother's week, I spent more and more time practicing skateboarding, and I had lots of **playdates with James where we would skateboard together. We also had a lot of fun** playing Nintendo 64 games, such as Donkey Kong 64, Banjo Kazooie, Banjo Tooie, James Bond Goldeneye, and many more. **He also got me interested in collecting Beanie Babies**. At first I thought **such a**

> *thing was very lame and girly, but we used them to fuel our imagination and have mock battles and wars with each other. It was **our secret hobby** that we told no one about.” (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 19)*

How interesting that they used these to fuel their imagination and have mock battles and wars? There is no shortage of male-coded toys for this form of play, particularly for nerdy-leaning, video game playing boys. Action figures for Star Wars, a franchise which united them in imagination, are designed for this explicit purpose. Even more interesting that Rodger, despite feeling stigma against Beanie Babies for being girly (and therefore lame), felt such excitement at having a special shared secret with James. There is no other point in the entire narrative Rodger indicates ever overcoming this type of stigmatized perception of “girly” ever again—in fact, Rodger weaponizes this against others. This speaks not just to the special bond these two shared, but that Rodger cared so much about James that he was willing to push the horizon of what was acceptable. It is also entirely possible that the stigmatization of Beanie Babies as girly is entirely retroactively applied, in which case it is nonetheless special that they shared such a hobby because it meant that Rodger *did* have a strong atypically masculine role model: James.

James is the *only* person Rodger seems to have discussed sex with. Rodger seems to experience concerns of shame regarding his position to sex, especially with his parents:

> *“In fact, I didn’t talk to my parents at all about my sexual development. I felt too guilty and embarrassed about it. Whenever they probed me, I lied to them, telling them that I had no sex drive.” (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 52)*

What makes James so different than his parents? Rodger may have felt too much pressure from his father and felt that relationships were not a valid subject of conversation with his mother. He may well also have been anxious about what might have come out during these conversations. Perhaps by breaking the barrier and approaching sex as something which is neither a big deal nor source of shame, they could have established more trusting lines of communication. By contrast, James instantly reads Rodger for what he was: insecure about sex. Rodger really wants sex to fill some lack of knowledge or clarity, yet simultaneously alludes to an intense fear regarding this lack of knowledge. The abolition of sex would commit Rodger to never learning what he needs to learn, and preclude anyone else from learning either. We see the duality of Rodger here in full relief: intense desire to know versus intense fear about what that knowledge might entail. Rodger is not capable of recognizing this circuitous logic, for it would require admitting the existence of a repressive tactic, which itself would require him to admit that there is *something* to be repressed. The tragic part is that, if we read Rodger in this queer way, it seems apparent that Rodger is aware that something is not quite right with his claim to heterosexuality, at some deep level of subconsciousness, but he cannot conceptualize how to make sense of this feeling of uncertainty.

The final points to make about the potential for Rodger’s repressed gayness is how he reacts to the rejection of two boys he thinks highly about: James, and Addison, a relative latecomer to the narrative. Rodger describes Addison as follows:

> *“With **his mustache and hairstyle,** he looked older than he was, **cultivating a refined and sophisticated personality** and **wearing an elegant blazer coat**. As I spent time with Addison that day, I started to enjoy **talking to him about politics and the world**. **He was very intelligent** and more informed than other people our age.” (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 61)*

This is the most description Rodger gives about anyone besides James. It is notable that he also begins his introduction by talking about Addison’s looks, as if his immediate reaction was to

"check him out." Yet Rodger would have a contentious relationship with Addison, who bragged about his success being cool and going after girls. Rodger responds with intense jealousy.

> *"The way Addison treated me made me realize what the world thinks of me. **If I was one of those popular kids, Addison would have treated me with deference and respect**, but I wasn't. I was a complete loser in his eyes, and everyone else's. **No effort I made** in the last few months **changed the way the world saw me**. The world still viewed me as a weak and undesirable loser, **even though I changed my wardrobe and started working out**." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 64)*

Rodger is so burned by this rejection that he forgets to root it in his supposed attraction to women. What he wanted was for Addison to see him as interesting, as an equal, perhaps even with attraction; deference plus respect are particular words implying hierarchy but are also two primary components of attraction. Had only Rodger been popular, been worthy of male attention, perhaps Addison would have paid attention to and validated him.

Arguably Rodger's point of no return is when his friendship with James implodes. Rodger had increasingly ramped up his vitriolic ranting to James, furious and confused as to why James did not feel similar rage for being a virgin. Eventually, James had enough.

> *"**I didn't understand why James wasn't angry like me.** The sight that we just witnessed was horrible to watch. To see another male be successful with females is torture for **males like us** who have no success with females. I was so angry that **I told James of all of the acts of revenge I wanted to exact** on those popular **boys**. ... James became deeply disturbed by my anger. **I wished that he wasn't disturbed** ... Once I had calmed down, the two of us had a long conversation in his room, and I ended up crying in front of him as **I explained how hopeless I felt about life**. ... He will never invite me over after that incident, and our friendship will slowly fade to dust." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 91)*

> *"... I felt offended by his attitude towards me, so I called him out on it. This sparked a long argument between us that resulted in James refusing to talk to me online anymore." (Rodger, 2014, 93)*

Each time Rodger and James have a conflict, Rodger responds with frustration, indignation, anger. But these reactions belie a deeper emotion: rejection. In having James start to make distance between them, Rodger reacts as an insecure-attachment person would sensing the impending end of a relationship. He lashes out in pain and anxiety and fear at the prospect of losing James, of being rejected for what he feels. This, in turn, cements his fate.

> *"In the month of April, **James officially ended the friendship between us**. ...**He blatantly said he didn't want to be friends anymore. He didn't even deign to tell me why.** After he said the fateful words, he refused to talk to me ever again. That was the last time I ever spoke to him. .... **He was a big part of my life.** And **now he was gone,** faded away into memory. I didn't have any friends left anymore." (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 105)*

Rodger describes this as if James were breaking up with him and reacts in kind. He thinks back on the relationship and all the ways James enhanced his life to give it meaning. In this moment, he feels that the one person he's trusted with his emotions and philosophy, his helplessness and hopelessness, has abandoned him like others in his life. Rodger subsequently masks this by deploying his classic approach to emotional distancing, denigrating James, but this reads as rationalizations in an ineffective attempt to mitigate some of the emotional pain he feels.

His one final attempt was to "shoot his shot," so to speak, with Addison.

> *"When we arrived at a beach park in Palos Verdes that overlooked the ocean, Philip had fallen asleep, so **it was just me and Addison who went out to walk around**. ... **As the two of us looked up at the stars, we had a few insightful conversations.** ... . I told him about all of my newfound philosophical views regarding women, and ... **He didn't show any hint of how he felt** about this. Addison told me that I was a person of high intelligence, and that I shouldn't waste it by doing*

something 'rash'. **I believe he had a suspicion** *that I was indeed planning on massacring my enemies and then killing myself.* **Of course he would** *have that suspicion... In a way I think* **he knew me better than anyone else.** *... I tactfully told Addison that I had no intentions of 'doing anything stupid'.* **That was my last conversation with him.***" (emphasis added, Rodger, 2014, 127)*

The way Rodger describes the night as if it could have been a romantic outing. The third wheel is asleep and out of the way, leaving the two alone to have a special and intimate experience under the stars. Rodger tells Addison about his philosophy, seeking some sort of unconditional acceptance, or perhaps even constructive engagement with his ideas. When Addison fails to show discernable emotion, Rodger reads this as a tactful rejection of both himself and his ideas. The lack of any sort of emotional response sours on Rodger's tongue, perceived as an indication that Addison is indifferent to Rodger's possible homicidal suicide. Alongside the attempt failed is the implied recognition that Addison would never see him the same way again. His chance is gone. There is nothing left for him but to chase the ultimate end of his confused logic.

I spend this time clearly articulating the legitimate pattern of homosexual subtext to frame another possible reason that the many interventions attempted by those around Rodger failed: they did nothing to open homosexuality or queerness as a viable nor possible alternative to heterosexuality. None of them attempted to undermine or address or even recognize the possibility that Rodger was not heteronormative. Even had Rodger been heteronormative, none of the interventions reduced the salience of heterosexual performance and hegemonic masculine expectations and pressures which could have allowed Rodger a more guided construction of his own atypical masculinity. Rodger seems to recognize the fact that something is amiss in his experience and perspective of sexuality. He does not seem to be developing the exact feelings others seem to expect, and the source of his desire does not seem to fall where he imagines it should. Perhaps that is why the only direct insults Rodger ever names in his entire life experience are "faggot" (46, 122) and "pussy" (122): these were the insults that hit him at the depths of his psyche and perhaps carried, however insulting and offensive the terms, a small grain of truth.

The possibility of this unprovable hypothesis becomes more plausible if Rodger was, in fact, some form of autistic. Recent research has found a considerable overlap between gender and sexual non-heteronormativity and autism, particularly reduced rates of heterosexuality (see Sala et al., 2020 for a review). Research has also found that one of the primary ways to improve the self-image of autistic adolescents is exposing them to the possibility of non-hetero sexualities and educating them about what they mean (Koller, 2000). Research also highlights the centrality of sexual experiences in autistic peoples' ability to explore and make sense of their sexuality (Dewinter, 2016). Strong indications of Rodger's ASD patterns put him at a greater likelihood of being non-heterosexually inclined, and his narrative also points to this plausibility. It seems like he lacked formal interventions to confirm or engage with, let alone accept or confront, either. For all the made attempts, two of the experiences with deepest psychological implications went unaddressed. This led first to *inceldom* at seventeen, and five more years under the pressure cooker eventually led to the deaths of seven and the injuring of thirteen.

Discussion

This detailed analysis of Rodger's life course has outlined that Rodger was a profoundly vulnerable individual. He was likely autistic, possibly gay, lived through considerable familial and home instability, was constantly late to school and social transitions, failed to develop strong social competencies, experienced multiple setbacks on the pathway through developmental milestones, indicated a significant lack of guiding support, and developed high rejection sensitivity in part because of his maladaptive emotional regulation strategies (see Ramadas et al., 2024). It is also entirely possible that Rodger's unwilling exposure to pornography could classify him as a child victimized by a peer, which has been found to lead those affected to "endorse significant sexual preoccupations and [manifest] borderline clinically significant symptomatology" which does not differ from children who have suffered sexual abuse at the hands of adults (Shaw et al., 2000, 5191). Thus, while many tried to help Rodger get back on track throughout the course of his life, those attempts failed due to their lack of engagement with Rodger's lived experiences, perceptions of his life, and deeply buried atypicalities.

Rodger had many variables stacked up against him, and this contributed to his internalization of maladaptive heterosexual and hegemonically masculine worldviews. Ultimately, this ended in tragedy and violence. Let me make this clear, Rodger was disturbed, and he had much stacked against him, but that does not absolve him from his own mistakes—and he had many of them, from his own self-destructive patterns, his own contributions to the dynamics in his many domains, his near-adamant refusal to believe anything he did not want to believe. The many attempted interventions also failed because Rodger never assumed the responsibility of pursuing serious facework to open himself to the support of others and the possibility that his worldview was wrong (i.e. Hintz & Baker, 2021; Gheorghe & Clement, 2023). We must recognize that Rodger likely did not include the extent of his maladaptive behavior in his narrative nor the extent of how others reacted to him. My lack of focus on the violence and the broad, explicitly misogynistic and patriarchal influences does not mean I do not recognize their validity nor their importance. It simply means that I tried to give Rodger's account space to breathe away from a focus entirely on these aspects of his life. This is not a condonement of *inceldom*, nor an apology for Rodger's violence. It is a condemnation of both *inceldom*, its violence, *and* the environments which contribute to their salience and validity amongst young men.

What this account cannot do it make sweeping generalizations to *inceldom* as a whole. Rodger's life course seems particular enough, and *inceldom* diverse enough, to prevent using Rodger's exact experiences as a one-to-one roadmap for solving *inceldom*. Not all *incels* are autistic nor possibly non-heterosexual, and many are not mixed-race. Many believe in the Red Pill, some in the nihilistic Black Pill, some in the violent Black Pill, some are neither here nor there, many seem confused, most seem in pain, some have escaped, others have yet to fall in. This is not an attempt to provide a definitive tome on the *incel* experience.

We can take a couple of lessons which are slightly more broadly applicable throughout *inceldom*. One is that *incels* are a profoundly vulnerable population and symptomatic of broader social failures impacting young men. Overall, young men face poor social forecasts the more they adhere to hegemonic masculinity— such as greater rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide—rooted in changing social norms around what masculinity means and the difficulty in shifting to the emergent realities (Heilman, Barker, & Harrison, 2017; Barker et al., 2023; see also Hill et al., 2020). The trends in poor therapeutic experiences, highlighted intimately by Rodger's case, also indicate a

significant failure of the therapeutic process to adequately with the illness narratives of many young men (Speckhard et al., 2021; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard & Ellenburg, 2023). Overall, research indicates that conformity to masculine gender norms is detrimental to mental health and help-seeking behaviors (Wong et al., 2017; also Barker et al., 2023).

Despite an increasing recognition that adherence to traditional masculine norms are harmful to young men, there are indications that the social environments of adolescents, bounded by the particularly rigid social and cultural environments of schools, encourage an engagement with particularly strict adherences to stereotyped gender norms; while heterosexual prowess may decrease in salience significantly outside of schools, it seems to be much higher in schools and is mostly influenced by peers and family (Kågesten et al., 2016). Adherence to these gender norms varies between schools, but schools which have particularly high salience of gender norms register the greatest distress regarding masculine atypicality (Smith et al., 2018). Gender norm salience within schools often aligns with intense social pressures to perform masculinity and is often peer enforced amongst boys through normalized bullying (Rosen & Nofziger, 2019). Private schools like Pinecrest and Crespi then, may be precisely the social milieus within which where gender norms are most salient and harmful.

Adolescents also adhere to certain patterns of gender-based expectations. Research has found that boys are broadly expected to be the ones to initiate romantic relationships—an expectation wielded by both girls *and* male peers—and experience significant distress in doing so and peer support is one of the key factors in being overcoming the distress associated with this expectation (De Meyer et al., 2017). Boys expect each other to develop relational experiences, but this is broadly an individual endeavor, with male peers playing less "wingman" roles or providing less peer-support around relationship formation than girl peer-networks (De Meyer et al., 2017). Some research has even found indications that girls tend to favor more hegemonically masculine "bad boys" for short-term relationships while preferring "good boys" (or "gentlemen") for long term relationships (Puigvert et al., 2016). The implication of this is that middle and high schools are overwhelmingly environments defined by short-term relationships, and this can give boys, especially those particularly distressed by gender role discrepancy, the perception that positive, nonhegemonic behavior is unfavored. This perception is especially harmful when considering that, in the long-term, positive and nonhegemonic masculine behavior experience *better* life and relationship outcomes once past college and into adulthood where people are overwhelming seeking long-term relationships (Heilman et al., 2017; Baker et al., 2023). Thus, the social messaging in formative environments is misaligned with long-term desires and operationalizes a crisis of misunderstanding between gender roles, expectations, and perceived outcomes.

Rodger explicitly references this conflict when he claims that "everything his father taught him was proven wrong" (28)—i.e. being a gentleman. Many *incels* likewise reference this misalignment of perception on their forums (e.g. Fowler, Green, and Palombi, 2023). There is an importance to recognize the discrepancy between social messaging which reinforces positive masculinities and direct, lived experience which presents seemingly tangible evidence to the contrary. The formative experiences at the middle and high school years can lead to internalizations and mischaracterizations which inhibit young men from changing their perspectives. Some may overcompensate and perform hegemonic masculinity online like many *incels* (e.g. Daly & Reed, 2022), and others may retreat into these spaces and become nihilistic, atrophying their social skills,

muddling their conception of masculinity, and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for themselves (Thorburn, Powell, & Chambers, 2023). It is likely many *incels* feel confusion around social norms and make references to them as "double standards" between their behavior and that of "Chad" (e.g. Helm et al., 2024). In this case, the double standards signify a confusion around what it means to be a man: hegemonic behavior seems to be the pathway to hookups in school environments, but broader social messaging also criticizes hegemonic masculinity as toxic and undesirable (Puigvert et al., 2019). *Incels* may simply lack the vantage to recognize that the short-term dynamics of their social environments—which are likely less sex-dominated than perceived (see Tolma et al., 2007; Hor et al., 2022; and Martinez & Abma, 2020)—are neither permanent nor inherent. This "perception-reality gap" should not be taken to blame girls and young women for the patterns; rather, to illustrate how social scripts surrounding adolescent behavior and performed by adolescents seem broadly disconnected from each other. The emergence of negative social messaging targeted specifically at young adult men, who have only the limited vantage of middle and high school experiences, through the Manosphere (i.e. Solea & Sugiura, 2023; Papadamou et al., 2019) serves to extend this perception into adulthood.

This "perception-reality" gap surrounding adolescent sexual behavior contrasts a societal and cultural perception that adolescents are hyper-sexual and overwhelmingly having sex with a reality where that is not happening. Adolescent sexual activity is generally trending downward, concentrated especially amongst boys (Martinez & Abma, 2020). This is despite much of the perception that sexual activity is rising, prompted by the media and proliferation of dating apps; this is especially prevalent among the perceptions of *incels* on dating apps (Preston, Halpin, & Maguire, 2021). During the time of Rodger's middle and high school experiences, roughly 43 percent of boys aged 15-19 had sex (Martinez & Abma, 2020). Yet, 29 percent of boys who are sexually inexperienced believe "everyone else is having sex," while 35 percent of those who are sexually experienced believe the same (Tolma et al., 2007). And, most disturbingly, there is limited research which studies the impact and extent to which adolescents claim sexual experience to gain social standing *despite not actually engaging in that behavior*. In other words, we do not know how common it is for adolescents to lie about their sexual experience to remain "on-time" with their peers; the logical implication of such behavior, if widely prevalent, would only serve to artificially inflate perceptions that "everyone is having sex." This is significant because perceptions of peer sexual activity are particularly salient for boys as a social influence and prestige tool (Hor et al., 2022). Thus, boys who perceive that everyone else is having sex, like Rodger and *incels*, may be particularly distressed despite the possibility that others are claiming experiences they do not have. Rodger attempted to challenge individuals on this count multiple times and failed, which means he either picked the wrong people, he was in a social milieu which was more sexually active than the national average, or they were lying. The takeaway is not to expect puritan abstinence of adolescents nor restrict their ability to explore and develop in this core way, rather, that there needs to be a cultural reckoning around how society and culture neutralizes the saliency of adolescent sex so that it is a balanced, rather than loaded, topic of discussion, interrogation, and acceptance.

Finally, it is important to consider the ways in which *incel* ideology is being constructed alongside emergent, gender- and sex-based social patterns and reframed in negative ways. A study of the General Social Survey found that the proportion of young men aged 18 to 24 who reported having no sexual activity increased from 18.9 percent to 30.9 percent between 2000 and 2018 but that a

similar increase *did not occur* amongst young women (Ueda et al., 2018). Other studies have indicated that dating apps may be contributing to a perception that looks-based matchmaking is highly important and determinant (Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver, 2023a; Preston, Halpin, & Maguire, 2021). However, dating apps ought to be understood as *magnifying* the perceptions rather than causing them; dating apps, of course, were not yet popularized nor existent at the time of Rodger's radicalization. Young men who correctly identify these patterns may easily be swayed by maladaptive thought patterns and seemingly logic-based conclusions to accept *incel* ideologies as reflective of reality; Rodger constructed his worldview by reading scholarship in a selective manner which would confirm, rather than challenge, his assumptions. Thus, it is likely that many young men who fall into *inceldom* feel that social messaging around gender is misaligned with their perceptions of the world and their lived experiences and they conduct their own "research" to try and make sense of the world.

While Rodger's case is not broadly generalizable, his experiences do track broadly across trends in other data and the self-identification of *incels* with his narrative. Thus, we can understand Rodger, and likely many *incels*, as experiencing multiple social comorbidities. These align across gender norm salience and stress, neurodivergent experiences with sex and gender, and legitimate social changes which they feel ill-equipped to navigate. In other words, as the world changes and what masculinity means changes, we must find ways to create structures for young men to help them arrive at productive and well-adapted understandings of the world, rather than the nihilism at the bottom of the well. As we have seen from Rodger's case, the markings and makings of *inceldom* begin far before the philosophizing and believing stages. Our exclusive focus on this late-stage step of this journey only distracts from the many who are already on a pathway of higher risk, and many more who may yet begin to chase the rabbit down the hole.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Recommendations for Research

There are several recommendations which can be gleamed from this thesis, some more academically relevant, others more practically inclined. Of the two categories which I present, the academic recommendations are what I am most authoritatively poised to speak on; I am admittedly not a practitioner of therapy, education, nor counseling, and thus I caution that my practical recommendations ought to serve entirely as careful, but imperfect, theories on what might be helpful and at which stage during development.

 The primary academic recommendation I make is that scholars of *inceldom*, and the "Manosphere" more broadly, must expand their lenses of analysis and deeply interrogate the patterns of thought they are applying to the subject matter. It is striking to me that ten years after the Isla Vista Attack, there are few deeply qualitative analyses of Elliot Rodger's text. Several academics have made explicit recommendations about the need to interview active *incels* and discern their life stories and experiences (e.g. Puhrmann & Schlaerth, 2023; O'Malley & Helm, 2024; Thorburn, Powell, & Chambers, 2023; Wood, Tanteckchi, & Keatley, 2022; among others). Thus, scholars ought to reconceptualize *inceldom* as a transitory life-stage rather than simply as an endpoint. It is but one stage, with many entrances and apparently many exits (e.g. Osuna, 2023;

Gheorghe & Clement, 2023). If we fail to engage with *incels* as people, albeit people engaged in problematic behavior, we will only be feeding into their perception that they are misunderstood and invisible.

To achieve this more holistic perspective, I encourage scholars from across the disciplines to work together to humanize, but not apologize. It seems necessary to also consider how systems besides terrorism and gender—like family, peer-dynamics, and mental health—impact the experiences of *incels* and the value of situating individuals within the social and cultural. Thus, I propose that *incel*-focused literature, and studies of the Manosphere too, would benefit from an additional level of researchers working at a life-course perspective. This work would draw from the specialized work of those in the terrorist, gender-centric, and public health/psychological fields and interrogate their working assumptions and patterns across lived experiences *and* trends in social life more broadly. Life-course scholarship can also draw on the methodologies presented by Levy and Hollan (1998) to also engage *incels* through "the anthropological study of individuals" which is "neglected in comparison with studies of 'culture' and 'society'" (334). By approaching the individual as a system within systems, with their own history and trajectory of development (both past and future), perhaps ethnographic work on *incels* can move beyond some of the descriptive limitations of current *incel* ethnographies (i.e. Sugiura, 2021; Regehr, 2022; Menzie, 2022). As such, life-course scholars can serve as the bridges between these disciplines and work to enhance our understanding of these complex social, individual, and cultural phenomena in a more holistic, complete, and humanistic way.

As a study which focused exclusively on Rodger's own account, I provide researchers with the following recommendations for life-course experiences which ought to be studied in the broader *incel* experience:

Prevalence of divorce	Prevalence of frequent home moves	Prevalence of sibling-sibling conflict (discerning between brother and sister)
Prevalence of parental conflict (i.e. amongst parents and between child and parent)	Prevalence of discomfort with heterosexual expectations	Prevalence of exposure to education or information on queer sexualities
Prevalence of school instability ("new kid" experiences)	Prevalence of, and narratives around, friend group collapse	Prevalence of positive male role models (and feelings regarding the relationship between them)
Prevalence and frequency of convergent transitions across life domains (family, school, friends, etc.)	Prevalence of "out-of-school" friendship expectations or experiences	Prevalence of hobbies (or lack thereof)
Whether or not *incels* felt lack of supportive encouragement growing up	Continued interrogation of geolocation and social conditions	Demographic and social composition of their offline milieus
When therapeutic interventions were sought out or began	What therapeutic interventions have looked like (i.e. biomedical,	Perceived duration of emotional relationships and prevalence of distressing or

	psychotherapeutic) and how *incels* perceive mental health treatment "should" feel like	emotional relational endings (amongst friends, role-models, family, partners)

Recommendations for Practice

It should be abundantly clear that interventions must start far earlier than currently recommended and mobilize a fear deeper engagement with young men. This does not mean we should aim to identify and pathologize certain young men as being "destined for *inceldom*," as this would likely have similar effects to telling young black boys that they are destined for jail (i.e. Ferguson, 2000). Instead, we ought to consider that the current social systems which are in place throughout the development of young men may be misaligned with what young men actually need. As society changes and expectations on young men change, perhaps we should also change the ways we conceptualize engaging with children. At the very least, changing and uncertain social contracts spell the need for concerted, perhaps explicit, education on social behaviors and dynamics across a diversity of contexts. By reconceptualizing our necessary support of children as authoritative or prescriptive, perhaps we may find ways of instituting more guiding-supportive approaches. For example, how might a teacher help a socially anxious boy make friends at school? Could that teacher play a "go on, I'll catch you if you fall" role in the life of that boy instead of just reassigning seats and hoping it would work out? Perhaps we all ought to be more explicit in the support and encouragement we provide to children, especially boys.

Another practical implication of Rodger's life-course is the role parents play in the diagnosing of their child. The stigmatizing attitude of Rodger's father may have prevented Rodger and his parents from accessing support and information which may have helped foster his development. This highlights the importance of providing parents with support raising their child, especially if they are neurodivergent or experiencing atypical development. It also seems important to consider the role of school cultures and social milieu. The U.S. school system has life milestones baked into its structure, but comparatively few significant transitions of social environment. A child who attends an elementary school since kindergarten, barring any moves, is nearly guaranteed to graduate middle school with broadly the same cohort of peers. Thus, social hierarchies which get developed early on may remain relatively static throughout middle school or even high school. This is particularly salient if a child has social anxiety and gets branded early on as a social pariah, or if a child transitions into new social environments.

One way to mitigate the stressful and restrictive social environment of schools is through social emotional learning (SEL) curricula. Research has shown that students who participate in SEL curricula outperform their peers in social emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Rodger himself would certainly have benefitted from a similar form of concerted development of his social and emotional skills. It may be particularly beneficial for SEL programming to specifically include units focused on helping boys develop positive relationships to masculinity, although this programming needs to focus on the development of emotional tools to proactively reshape masculinity and not just raise awareness about the problems of masculinity (Banyard et al., 2019). Failure to develop tools contributed to a rise in emotional dysregulation among the sample of this Banyard and colleagues' (2019) study, which highlights the importance of teaching boys how to create a healthier form of masculinity and not just criticize

the framework society continues to actively foist onto them. Finally, it may be worth considering offering curricula in middle and high schools focused specifically around relationship science, providing students with a space to learn about relationships removed from sex at a more scientific and sociological level; this type of programming seems overwhelmingly popular and of interest wherever it is offered, although it is nearly non-existent at the high school level (Verette-Lindenbaum, Bartolic, Miller, 2023).

One possible novel direction for SEL curricula could be to encourage the formation of peer communities of support, rather than peer communities of competition. This way, students can play the primary "go on, I'll catch you if you fall" role while teachers can be more supplementary. Likewise, by rooting social development in positive peer support, those who are socially awkward, socially anxious, or socially unskilled may develop core competencies rooted at the peer level and learn, directly from those who are more incorporated, why the social world is organized the way it is. This may also provide children with important gender role models who can help navigate confusion and supplement potentially unstable familial ties, and could be especially impactful for boys. If hegemonic masculinity can be disrupted as a marker of status within schools at the peer level, masculine atypicalities may well become less atypical. Relationship science could also complement conventional sexual education. There ought to be an expansion of sex-positive and sex-expansive education proactively provided to children, which must do more than awareness building and encompass tool formation and identify interrogation. Children ought to be encouraged to really explore their own feelings and have spaces to ask questions and interrogate their own assumptions and curiosities. This means providing children with a space to understand what it means to be non-heterosexual and be accepted and validated as such. Perhaps broader, more positive, and more comprehensive engagements with sex and gender writ-large could help provide a guiding space where children can come to understand these concepts as core parts of their lives, and those of others, which deserve no stigma.

It is imperative that therapy as a profession seriously consider its dominant approach to masculinities and male illness narratives. Let us remember that Rodger felt snubbed when his psychiatrist prescribed him a biochemical medicine when Rodger was explicit in his belief that his problems were entirely social (Rodger, 2014, 125). Likewise, many *incels* felt that therapy was a "scam" or "waste of money" that would not fix their physical and social conditions (Speckhard et al., 2021, 19). Costello and colleagues (2022) highlight the concern that this mistrust of therapy is rooted in unfair therapeutic dismissals of *incels'* worldviews that may "[risk] alienating incels who may consider themselves being unfairly pressed to doubt their own reality and the sincerity of the challenges they face in attracting a romantic partner" (9). More research needs to be done at this level, certainly, to identify the nature of the doctor-patient relationship for *incels* in therapy and elicit details about how those experiences were received. In the meantime, practitioners must take care to interrogate their positionality and tread carefully when interacting with someone who is either *incel* or on the pathway to *inceldom*.

At the very least, perhaps we ought to conceptualize off-time development and difficulties in socialization as chronic difficulties which are salient in the lives of some individuals. I am not arguing for the medicalization of these processes; rather, that they might ebb and flow as formal chronic illnesses (see Kleinman, 1988) and are legitimately as distressing to the individual as a diagnosable condition. The goal for the practitioner then, ought to be in treating the patient as

someone who has been struggling for a long time and will likely continue to struggle, shaped by their specific moral worlds. Centering the patient's narrative and providing feedback which are framed as directly responding to specific and expressed concerns can be initial transformations. This can take the form of compassion-focused therapy, which has been identified as a positive form of treatment for those who experience high shame and self-criticism, both of which *incels* exhibit (Leaviss & Uttley, 2015). It is crucial however, that practitioners of therapy, including CFT, also actively question and interrogate their assumption of heteronormativity, which continues to be the default assumption in clinical supervision (Dudley, 2013). Ultimately, how men approach mental health and how *mental health practitioners approach men* ought to be carefully evaluated so that they can both evolve in productive and positive ways.

Finally, it seems crucial to reconsider how we engage with *incels*. Research on deradicalizing online populations indicates that deradicalization strategies oriented around trying to "'win the argument' by deconstructing and delegitimizing extremist propaganda" is ineffective and fails to adequately challenge radicals' worldviews; in fact, there are indications that this approach simply pushes people further into radicalization due to the condescension or paternalism communicated by the rebuttal (Gemmerli, 2015). Researchers have found indications that this was likewise true on the *incel* subreddits when "normies" attempted to criticize *incel* ideology (Maxwell et al., 2020; Helm et al., 2024). Thus, it seems significant that any intervention—whether it be therapeutic, peer-driven, institutional, or parental—be rooted primarily in compassion and careful validation of the root emotions and experiences while shifting understandings away from nihilism. *Inceldom* will only be a more difficult problem to engage if the dominant approach is to criticize its adherents for ignorance, stupidity, or inhumanity. This approach will only serve to reinforce their perceptions that they are rejected from society and that their social death is complete.

By incorporating these recommendations into research and practice, we may better understand how *inceldom* is tied into broader social systems and processes and help young men proactively prior to the point where *inceldom* is a legitimate possibility. It is important that these early-starting interventions be understood as approaching a more existential crisis amongst men than simply *inceldom*, which seems to be merely one of many symptoms. As a result, practical interventions at the life-course stage should not be understood as *incel*-targeted interventions; rather, they are attempting to prevent the social and individual preconditions to *incel* formation.

At a practical level, we must understand *inceldom* as a symptom of broader social readjustments and misalignments between the lived experiences of young men and the social messaging reaching young men. By turning our attention to more existential preventative interventions, we might be able to divert young men away from *inceldom* before they even know what it is. Ultimately, *incels* are people beyond their *inceldom*. As scholars and practitioners, it is imperative that we see them, we hear them, and we recognize them, as people who both need help and engage in problematic behavior.

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Appendix A: Narrative Analysis Table

Article Title	Author (Date)	Researcher's Field of Study	Framework Applied[1]	Data Source	Methods of Analysis[2]	Theory or Argument	Recommendations (Practical)	Recommendations (Research)
The Angry Echo Chamber: A Study of Extremist and Emotional Language Changes in Incel Communities Over Time	de Roos, Veldhuizen-Ochodničan-ová, & Hanna (2024)	Clinical Psychology, Business Management	N/A	Incels.is (Posts)	Computer-assisted Language Analysis (LIWC); Data scraping	Individuals join forums already radicalized and emotional; anger is elevated compared to other platforms	Increased early monitoring and intervention across social media platforms	Increased analysis of individual's emotions prior to *incel*-forum involvement
"All women are like that": an overview of the linguistic deindividualization and dehumanization of women in the incelosphere	Pràzmo (2024)	Linguistics	Other (Cognitive Semantics)	Incel Wiki (Glossary; List of terms for females)	Literary Analysis	Incels depersonalize and deindividualize women through the language they've constructed to describe them	N/A	Unveil incels' political stance and motivations underlying "increasingly frequent crimes committed in the name of inceldom" (7)
The Emergence of Incel Community as a Misogyny-Motivated Terrorist Threat	Lockyer, Halpin, & Maguire (2024)	Internatio-nal Developm-ent; Sociology	Mixed (Terrorist; Gender-Centric)	Incels.is (Posts)	Qualitative Analysis (Line-by-Line, In Vivo coding)	Incel violence is inherently ideological, and Incels situate their violence as terrorism. Contemporary definitions of terrorism are sexist	Incel violence ought to be classified as ideological terrorism and treated as such by governments	Researchers ought to stop considering incel violence outside of terrorism

[1] Frameworks are the three primary classifications of literature on *inceldom*: Terrorist frameworks, Gender-Centric Frameworks, and Public Health Frameworks. A few secondary classifications may be present here: Mixed (mixed between primary frameworks), Other, and N/A (applied when an article is more descriptive than theoretical)

[2] Literary Analysis is applied when an author has conducted readings of texts but has not outlined a formal qualitative methodology used to engage with and extract meaning from the text. In this case, texts are analyzed and presented in ways similar to literary texts. While this does not take away from the findings of these analyses, it indicates that there are open questions about the depth and formality of these analyses of the texts as primary sources.

						and exclude gender-motivated violence		
A soldier and a victim: Masculinity, violence, and incels celebration of December 6th	Halpin et al., (2024)	Sociology	Gender-Centric	Incels.is (Posts)	Qualitative Analysis (Line-by-Line coding)	Incels perform both subordinate and hegemonic masculinities in relation to a perceived gender war. Incels also perform hegemonic masculinity by establishing themselves as ruthless, methodical, and violent. Incels justify their violence by positioning themselves as subordinate to women	"Deplatforming" Incels is unlikely to be successful, so interventions ought to focus more on directly countering Incels' arguments, including broad-stroke campaigns against gender-based violence	N/A
Anti-feminism as anti-establishment and emancipatory: the gendered metapolitics of Incel	Price (2023)	Sociology	Gender-Centric	Incels.co (Incels.is)	Qualitative Analysis	Incels have internalized neoliberalist ethos and created a worldview where women are feminists are political elites. Incel ideology is thus transgressive (being anti-feminist is being anti-establishment) and because the	N/A	Research should avoid framing Inceldom as fantastical or cultish; rather, as an extreme acceptance of neoliberal market-based ethos, the logic of whom is crushing and absolute

						establishment is oppressive, it is emancipatory		
Incels, autism, & hopelessness: affective incorporation of online interaction as a challenge for phenomenological psychopathology	Tirkkonen & Vespermann (2023)	Philosophy, Psychopathology	Public Health	Academic Articles	Meta Analysis	There is a significant indication of autism being a comorbid factor in Incel worldview. The online environments/ communities of inceldom consolidate the of loss of significant life possibilities and contribute significantly to hopelessness	Phenomenological psychopathology needs to be resituated in analyses and approaches to mental health	N/A
The mental well-being of involuntary celibates	Delaney, Pollet, & Cook (2024)	Psychology	Public Health	Survey (Advertised on incel forums)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	Incels scored significantly higher than a control group on depression, but not on anxiety or stress	Mental health interventions, especially those focused on depression, could be tailored to and effective for incels	Further work on incels and mental health is needed, specifically work with clinical measures and established measurement invariance
Taking the "Black Pill": Anomie. Perceived Social Death, and the Incel Phenomenon Online	Puhrmann & Schlaerth (2023)	Criminal Justice	Other (Sociological)	Incels.is (Sitewide)	Qualitative Analysis (Coding)	Young men seem to arrive at inceldom in significant part due to perceived social death, as evidenced by a loss of social identity, social isolation, and the deterioration of the body	N/A	Research on incels needs to shift to the root causes of inceldom. Further research needs to expand on and further test this theory of social death as cause or consequence of incel participation

Leaving the Incel Community: A Content Analysis	Osuna (2024)	Criminology/ Criminal Justice	N/A	/rIncelExit	Qualitative Analysis (Media Content Analysis; Inductive coding)	Incels who sought to "leave" inceldom exhibited mixed feelings regarding incel ideology and spaces, but ultimately recognized the harm they experienced as a result of the ideology	N/A	Continued research needs to be conducted around those who exit inceldom and how they do so
An Exploratory Study of Incels' Dating App Experiences, Mental Health, and Relational Well-Being	Sparks, Zidenburg, Olver (2023a)	Psychology	Public Health	Survey (Advertised on incel forums)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	Dating apps might be an environment where the worst of incels' insecurities are at rendered salient despite the idea of those apps helping them overcome those perceived deficits. Incels are comparatively less successful in dating apps than nonincel men.	The intersection between incels and dating app environments highlight clinically relevant areas for intervention by mental health practitioners	Future work exploring transitions in an out of inceldom is needed
Mainstreaming the Blackpill: Understanding the Incel Community on TikTok	Solea & Sugiura (2023)	Criminology & Criminal Justice	Other (Communications)	Two TikTok Accounts	Multimodal & Thematic Analysis	Accounts contribute to the normalization of incel ideological tenants through implicit messaging, emotional appeals, and pseudoscience in order to reach broader audiences	N/A	More research needs to be conducted that examines Incels within more mainstream spaces and why those spaces increasingly tolerate misogynistic content. Commentary that demystify and dismantle incel beliefs

						on mainstream social media platforms		within these environments also require more research.
Analyzing the Interaction Between Posting Behaviors on Incels.is and Violent Events Perpetrated by Members of the Community	West (2024)	Criminology	N/A	Incels.is (Inceldom Discussion thread)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	There is no significant increase in post interaction after an incel attack, media may unwittingly be advertising incel spaces following an attack, and post engagement increases as proximity to an attack increases (it is possible that users are encouraging the act)	It is possible that tracking post engagements may help prevent acute incel-related attacks: engagement climaxing may be an indicator of an imminent actualization of violence	Future work ought to consider a mixed methods approach, and linguistic analyses of posts before and after violent events could illuminate what engagement that looks like
From Stacys to Foids, a Discursive Analysis of the Incel's Gendered Spectrum of Political Agency	Fowler, Green, & Palombi (2023)	Criminal Justice	Gender-Centric	4 incel forums (incels.co; incels.is; incels.net; /rTheRedPill)	Qualitative Analysis (Grounded Theory & In Vivo)	Incels create a unique "interpretive repertoire" that establishes gender as a spectrum aligned with sociopolitical power and places themselves at the bottom with women at the top; the relative position of this spectrum then justifies violence against women as	N/A	N/A

						enemies of inceldom		
Men who hate women: The misogyny of involuntary celibate men	Halpin et al. (2023)	Sociology, Psychology, Computer Science	Gender-Centric	Incels.is (Inceldom Discussion Posts)	Mixed Methods (Computational Data Collection; Abductive Analysis)	Incel forums and their users are overwhelmingly misogynistic (and racist) over the course of their forum participation; most incels arrive at incel forums already misogynist	Deplatforming of incel forums is necessary, and must be paired with an *Agreeing, Refuting, Correcting, Challenging* (ARCC) approach to deconstructing incel ideologies with the goal of deradicalizing participants	N/A
Beyond Violent Extremism: A 3N Perspective of inceldom	Ellenburg, Speckhard, & Kruglanski (2023)	Psychology, Terrorist Studies	Public Health	Survey (via unspecified forum)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	There are three categories of incels: hopers (low violence/suicide and believe incel is a temporary status); internalizers (high suicide, low violent ideation and intent, believe it is permanent); externalizers (high violent ideation and intent, believe it is permanent)	The different classifications of incels require different interventions: hopers require active, pro-social interventions; externalizers require counter violent extremism interventions (CVE); internalizers require interventions that acknowledge their grievances and provide active constructions of social networks	Future research needs to tie these types of surveys to forum users to enable a more longitudinal comparison between type of participation and claims
Supreme Gentleman: The Path of Radicalization for the Incel Community's Lone Wolves	Miller (2023)	Terrorist Studies	Terrorist	Manifestos	Theory Application	Violence incels follow the pathway Haam & Spaaij's model of lone wold terrorism and radicalization	Violent incels ought to be classified and treated as lone wolf terrorists	Further research and theorization on the role of misogyny and gender in terrorism is needed

"Because They Are Women in a Man's World": A Critical Discourse Analysis of Incel Violent Extremists and the Stories They Tell	Vink et al. (2023)	Terrorist Studies	Gender-Centric	Manifestos	Qualitative Analysis (Critical Discourse Analysis)	Sexism in North America maintains a patriarchal structure where women provide feminine-coded services to masculine-coded privileges. Violent incels have articulated this expectation and justified their violence through female "failure" to provide them with their masculine privileges	Young men need more safe ways to communicate pain outside of violence	Further research should examine a narrative in which a "real man" is weak and vulnerable
'It's time to put the copes down and get to work': a qualitative study of incel exit strategies on r/incelExit	Gheorghe & Clement (2023)	Social Work	Other (Social Work; Counter Violent Extremism [CVE])	r/IncelExit	Qualitative Analysis (Reflexive Thematic Analysis)	Online community can be mobilized to help incels to develop and progress through exit strategies organized around self-improvement, community involvement, and disruption of incel rhetoric	CVE measures targeting incels specifically ought to be mindful of the unique roll peer-level online communities may be mobilized as an auxiliary support	N/A
'Incels are shit-post kings': incels' perceptions of online forum content	Daly & Nichols (2024)	Criminal Justice, Communications	Other (Criminology)	Direct, Semi-Structured Interviews	Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)	Incels broadly consider shit-posting to be attention-seeking and intended for humor/hyperbole. Incels explain, justify, and	It is increasingly clear that it is important to develop techniques to discern shit-posting from legitimate threats	Content analyses need to be careful when conducting analyses that remove language and discourse from their context so as to better differentiate shit-posting. Future

						interpret shit-posting generally reflect techniques of neutralization		research ought to also more intentionally engage with those who shit-post to more pointedly identify motivations
A Diachronic Cross-Platforms Analysis of Violent Extremist Language in the Incel Online Ecosystem	Baele, Brace, & Ging (2024)	Security, Computati-onal Social Science, Digital Media & Gender	N/A	Incel Forums (All)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis (Computer Assisted Language-analysis)	Overtime, incel spaces and communities across the internet have increasingly used dehumanizing terms and words depicting violence. Different platforms have their own linguistic typologies and certain platforms are more problematic than others	N/A	Future research ought to also consider a complementary study of visual tropes used on these platforms. Understanding cross-platform migrations is also of importance. Finally, additional research ought to identify if there are differences or discrepancies between particularly extreme contributors and less extreme individuals while also engaging with suicide and self-harm.
The Rules of Attraction: An Empirical Critique of Pseudoscientific Theories in the Manosphere	Cannito & Camoletto (2022)	Sexes	Other (Sociological)	Two Italian Incel Forums	Qualitative Analysis	Italian incels, and incels more broadly, cherry pick from scientific studies and theories to conclude that women have high sexual capital while they do not and sexual success is determined by genetic factors	N/A	Future research ought to conduct this type of Bourdieusian lens to non-Italian incels and include other tops, such as violence against women and prostitution

						outside their control. This leads to tensions within incel communities, since the extent to which looks, money, and status are deterministic are varied (incels are not a unified category)		
The Symbolic Boundary Work of Incels: Subcultural Negotiation of Meaning and Identity Online	Andersen (2023)	Criminology	Other (Cultural Criminology)	Incel.wiki	Qualitative Analysis	Incels work hard to formally create cultural boundaries between them and outsiders, which include: women, sexually successful men, and other manosphere groups. Incels also police each other and establish internal boundaries around degrees of inceldom, gender, and violent actors	Broader work which engages incels ought to be careful to not focus exclusively on the most controversial or sensational components of inceldom, at risk of exaggerating the incel threat and missing other influences	Future research ought to incorporate theories of cultural criminology more completely. Future research ought to also focus on the inherent ambiguities of incel ideology and its multiple, changeable, and contradictory stories
The Ideology of Incels: Misogyny and Victimhood as Justification for Political Violence	Zimmerman (2024)	National Security/ Terrorism Studies	Terrorist	Incels.is	Qualitative Analysis (Critical Narrative Analysis)	Incels are moving into the boundaries of a social movement, with political aims and intentions, which culminate in a fantastical sexual Marxist society where women are distributed	The need to understand incels, their evolving ideology, and their ultimate political intent is more pressing than ever	N/A

					amongst men as commodities		
The Role of Perceived Injustice and Need for Esteem on Incel Membership Online	O'Malley & Helm (2024)	Criminology	Other (Sociological)	Incels.is; r/TheRedPill	Qualitative Analysis (Grounded Theory)	Membership in incel communities is primarily motivated by both perceived injustice and a desire for esteem. These perceived injustices are primarily rooted in ideals of gender inequality, and incel spaces may be primarily attractive for those who are already male supremacist but feel marginalized by masculinity	Interventions that target incels need to be sensitive to their desire to discuss struggles related to dating, adulthood, and manhood while combating extremist language and pro-violence solutions	Future research may benefit from an examination of how broader, offline social movements and discourses affect incel narratives. Additional research is needed that disaggregates incels and differentiates between those who are more radical and those who are not.
Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence, Hate Speech, and Terrorism: A Risk Assessment on the Rise of the Incel Rebellion in Canada	Chan (2023)	Criminology	Mixed (Terrorist; Gender-Centric)	Incels.co; Alex Minassian Interview Transcript	Qualitative Analysis (Discourse Analysis; Risk Assessment Evaluation)	Governmental tools for predicting violent incel attacks are inadequate for predicting incel violence because they downplay the risk and significance of gender based violence. Technology is also playing a part in facilitating gender based violence,	Governments must reform extremist risk assessment measurements to better capture risks of gender-based violence. Furthermore, incels ought to not be considered lone wolf actors	Research on gender-based violence must expand to include the implications technologies have on women's online experiences and the risk of gendered harm

					which incels demonstrate			
Weaponized Subordination: How Incels Discredit Themselves to Degrade Women	Halpin (2022)	Sociology	Gender-Centric	Incels.is (Discussion Board)	Qualitative Analysis (Analytic Abduction)	Incels situate themselves as permanently subordinated men because of their physical looks, weaponize this subordination to justify their misogyny and violence against women. In this sense, incels are performing a type of hybrid masculinity that is both subordinate and hegemonic	N/A	Further research ought to analyze how incels reconcile their online misogyny with their offline relationships and interactions. There is also a need to engage with incel "lurkers" and understand the role of race and class in incel ideology and relations.
Involuntary Celibate (Incel): validation of the Incel Trait Scale (ITS) in the Italian male population	Fontanesi et al. (2022)	Public Health/ Medical Anthropology	N/A	Administered Survey	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	The ITS is an accurate predictor of Incel traits amongst the Italian male population	The ITS ought to be further validated amongst a population of incel-only Italian men	N/A
Denigrating Women, Venerating "Chad": Ingroup and Outgroup Evaluations among Male Supremacists on Reddit	Furl (2022)	Social Psychology	Other (Social Psychology)	r/MGTOW 3 former incel subreddits (r/incels; r/braincels; r/shortcels)	Qualitative Analysis (Iterative Coding)	Despite their intense self-denigration, incels ascribe some men ("Chads") with positive qualities and all women with negative qualities. Therefore, they engage in a patriarchal bargain wherein they claim	N/A	Additional research must engage with how the violent language of incels might perpetuate a "sustained, subtle violence" toward other out-groups, such as racial/ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and women

						in-group membership amongst a socially privileged category despite considering themselves unprivileged; something akin to 'we may be incels, but at least we're not women'		
Examining Incel Subculture on Reddit	Helm et al (2024)	Criminal Justice; Criminology	Other (Sociological)	r/Incels	Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)	The r/Incels subreddit was highly dynamic, with a lot of back and forth amongst incels about what inceldom meant, and between incels and outsiders. In many cases, outsiders attempted to provide input to counteract incel ideologies and perspectives, while most incels responded poorly. Upvote comments often included more dynamic conversations, indicating that out-group participation in the forum was drawing a lot of attention to	N/A	Future researchers should analyze threads as a unit, rather than analyzing each comment as an individual unit. Further research should also explore how offline events and environments (i.e. #MeToo) affects discourse on incel platforms. Finally research ought to identify characteristics that make individuals vulnerable to inceldom *and* characteristics that make people adhere to it despite being presented with alternative perspectives

						contended components of the ideology, while random comments tended to get much less attention. In both cases, argumentation regarding ideology were most popular, and buttressed by *ad homonym* attacks from both sides		
A world alone: Masculinities, humiliation and aggrieved entitlement on an incel forum	Thorburn, Powell, & Chambers (2023)	Social Sciences; Criminology	Gender-Centric	Incels.co	Qualitative Analysis (Digital ethnography)	Incels perform a hybrid masculinity based on aggrieved entitlement, basing their frustrations on the perceived injustice of biologically predetermined outcomes while arguing that cultural shifts have rendered those natural characteristics salient	N/A	Future studies need to be careful about inherently seeing singleness or celibacy as inherently bad, since incels are one category of men. Instead, research ought to consider individual mens' pathways into inceldom given that alternative (and presumably more positive) spaces for navigating these conditions exist. Future research also ought to compare incels to women and LGBTQ+ spaces for those who struggle with relationship attainment

Hegemonic masculinities in the 'Manosphere': A thematic analysis of beliefs about men and women on The Red Pill and Incel	Vallerga & Zurbriggen (2022)	Psychology	Gender-Centric	r/TheRedPill; incels.me	Qualitative Analysis (Reflexive Thematic Analysis)	Themes from incels.me and r/TheRedPill are similar and overlapping, in that both populations desire to perform hegemonic masculinities. Those who ascribe to the red pill work toward self-improvement in order to achieve hegemonic masculinities, while incels veer into nihilism. Both are rooted in traditional gender roles and involve self-objectification	Identifying inceldom as a security threat is necessary, alongside interventions that prevent their radicalization. Society also needs to identify ways to bring men and boys out of "crushing traditional gender roles and back into the fold of a welcoming, and liberating, community"	Additional research ought to be conducted using thematic analyses, surveys, and interviews with and of posters of incel and Red Pill content
A Crime Script Analysis of Involuntary Celibate (INCEL) Mass Murderers	Wood, Tanteckchi, & Keatley (2022)	Criminology	Terrorist	Ephemera (e.g. Manifestos+)	Qualitative Analysis (Crime Script Analysis)	Incels are not functionally distinct from lone-actor terrorists or (non-) violent extremists. Incels experienced negative or adverse childhood experiences, social ostracization and rejection, and community seeking behaviors. Their experiences overlapped with perpetrators of	"Understanding key transition points from being nonviolent to becoming a violent offender may offer a clearer indication of key intervention points."	Research ought to identify if nonviolent incels experience a divergent developmental pathway. They also recommend qualitative analyses of forum posts and manifestos

						other incidents of mass violence. There are no "single, clear pathways" that incels seem to experience on the pathway to inceldom		
"This is a political movement, friend": Why "incels" support violence	O'Donnell & Shor (2021)	Sociology	Mixed (Terrorist; Gender-Centric)	Incels.is	Qualitative Analysis	Incels ought to be classified as terrorists, as many both endorse violence and see it as a driver for concrete (or imagined) political change. Many incels also reported being excited at the rise in publicity following and took pleasure in the revenge of incel-related violent attacks	Incels ought to be classified as terrorists.	Future research is necessary into the mechanisms that transforms a violent discourse into violent action. Research should also take care to not over generalize and identify if this was just a vocal minority subset of inceldom or a broader sentiment throughout a majority of the community
Swallowing the Black Pill: involuntary Celibates' (Incels) Anti-Feminism within Digital Society	Lindsay (2022)	Social & Cultural Studies	Mixed (Terrorist; Gender-Centric)	Incels.is; r/Braincels	Qualitative Analysis (Constructivist Grounded Theory)	Incels have created a powerful, shared mythology of victimization called "the Black Pill." Not all incels adhere to the black pill, but the black pill is a considerable component of those who go on to commit incel-	Incels ought to be understood as terrorists, although their violence is inherently stochastic and arbitrary	Research ought to take into consideration that these worldviews do not emerge in isolation and often emerge as a result of uncontested belief structures that already exist. Future research ought to explore the specific techniques predominantly online

						related mass violence		cultures use to foster young men to commit acts of mass violence
From Chads to Blackpills, a Discursive Analysis of the Incel's Gendered Spectrum of Political Agency	Fowler (2022)	Criminal Justice	Gender-Centric	3 unidentified incel forums (incels.is is one)	Qualitative Analysis (Discourse Analysis)	Incels treat sex as a metaphor for a gendered political agency, and are using that to reinforce traditional gender roles and reconstruct them into even more stringent gendered traits. They do this to advance a world view that white men are the apex of political and social power and their place in the social order is inevitable	N/A	N/A
Levels of Well-Being Among Men Who Are Incel (Involuntary Celibate)	Costello et al. (2022)	Evolutionary Psychology	Other (Evolutionary Psychology)	Social Media Snowball Sample (Twitter; Facebook; Incel.wiki page)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	There are significant indications that incels experience poor mental health outcomes and would benefit from therapeutic interventions focusing on their beliefs and social conditions. Practitioners who are versed in evolutionary	Mental health professionals could benefit from an evolutionary-psychology-informed understanding of incels' problems and place in society so as to not be dismissed by incels out of hand	Further research ought to be conducted that does not rely exclusively on self-identifications of inceldom. Further research should also identify the extent to which forum participation contributes to incels' mental health

						psychology would be most optimally positioned to work with incel individuals		
Hidden Tragedies of the Self: The Stalemate of Involuntary Celibacy	Moldrup & Jensen (2024)	Psychology; Communications	Other (Cultural Psychology)	A single incel post	Theoretical Application	Incels create rigid borders within their mind between desire and action, which inhibits their ability to act and creates the possibility of a self-reflective cycle of self-doubt lived primarily though assumptions of others' perceptions. In doing so, the inner dialogue becomes corrupted and the low-self worth inhibits psychological healing by simply distancing one from the painful experience without addressing the actual emotions surrounding the rejection	N/A	Future research ought to further integrate cultural psychology into research on incels, including using it to study borders incels construct within their minds via interviews. Additionally, personal tragedies of the self ought to be studied further, both within incels and more broadly
The Black Pill: New Technology and the Male Supremacy of Involuntary Celibate Men	Preston, Halpin, & Findlay (2021)	Sociology; Computer Science	Gender-Centric	Incels.co	Qualitative Analysis (Analytic Abduction)	Incels argue that new technologies, specifically dating apps and social media, contribute	N/A	Future research ought to try to bridge the online-offline gap to better understand the extent to which incels

						to their plight as involuntarily celibate by modifying the "traditional" sexual marketplaces that existed. While Incels blame their technologies for their problems, their anger and emotions are levied squarely against women		believe what they write online. They also identified that a subset of incels differed significantly from the blackpill and further research is warranted on these incels in particular
Castration, the archive, and the Incel wiki	DeCook (2021)	Advocacy & Social Change	Other (Psycho-analysis)	Incels.wiki	Theory Application	The incel wiki gives incels the collective and argumentative basis for their beliefs, and does not reject their symbolic castration, but embraces it so as to regain some power and position themselves as subjects. The wiki is not just an archive, but a fantasy	N/A	N/A
Foids are worse than animals. A cognitive linguistics analysis of dehumanizing metaphors in online discourse	Prażmo (2020)	Cognitive Linguistics	Other (Cognitive Linguistics)	r/incels	Cognitive Linguistic Analysis	Women are particularly vulnerable to being victimized in metaphors of online discourse, of which incels are a primary driver	N/A	N/A

"I Think Most of Society Hates Us": A Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Incels	Daly & Reed (2022)	Criminology; Criminal Justice	Gender-Centric	Direct, Semi-Structured Interviews	Qualitative Analysis (Phenomeno-logy)	Inceldom is a unique case study of hegemonic masculinity, and incels tend to make decisions that seek to raise their status within and legitimate the hegemony, rather trying to find success in their own identities	Psychological and psychiatric approaches ought to consider how hegemonic masculinity plays out with incel individuals. Likewise, hegemonic masculinity ought to be engaged with at a political level	Future research ought to expand on the themes found in this article, and explore how incel individuals engage with hybrid masculinities
Online hatred of women in the Incels.me forum	Jaki et al (2019)	Communications	Gender-Centric	Incels.me	Mixed-Methods (Natural Language Processing; Discourse Analysis)	It is possible to identify key features of an online subculture by examining their language use. In this case, incels are more heterogeneous than assumed but broadly use misogynistic and anti-feminist language	There should be close monitoring of these types of platforms via automatic techniques such as those pioneered by this research	Additional research ought to be conducted on this particular corpus, and attention should be paid to how this language may evolve in the near future
"A Short Story of a Lonely Guy": A Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Involuntary Celibacy Using Reddit	Maxwell et al. (2020)	Social Work	Gender-Centric	r/Braincels	Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)	Incels experience loneliness, leading to attempts to attract a partner through cost-benefit analysis, experience romantic rejection, and then responds either by reducing women to "Stacys"	Healthy and safe spaces need to be created for people experiencing involuntary celibacy, such as group therapy or online CBT groups. They also indicate a need for comprehensive relational education	Scholars from non-feminist fields should study incels to see how their theories and frameworks make sense of incels. They also note the need to bridge the online-offline gap

						and men to "Chads" or become radicalized through anger toward women (depending on attachment style), and the cycle continues	for pre-teens and adolescents	
An Exploration of the Involuntary Celibate (Incel) Subculture Online	O'Malley, Holt, & Holt (2022)	Criminal Justice	Terrorist	2 unidentified incel forums (1 Reddit, 1 standalone)	Qualitative Analysis (Inductive)	Incels organize themselves around the sexual market, women as naturally evil, legitimizing masculinity, male oppression, and violence, and they structure their interactions with others based off this belief system rooted in natural selection and bio-determinism. Incels are broadly misogynist and inherently dangerous, but very small number of individuals are likely to act on the online beliefs	They recommend the deployment of CVE programs which rely on broad-spectrum messaging campaigns from within incels' comfort spaces. These campaigns should aim to diffuse violent rhetoric and counter incel narratives around gender, sexuality, and power. They also recommend the incorporation of digital literacy and critical consciousness within education for youth, and particularly young males	Future research should use larger sample sizes and try to analyze the behaviors of less frequent participators
"How over is it?" Understanding the Incel Community on YouTube	Papadamou (2021)	Computer Science; Criminal Justice	N/A	YouTube; r/Incels; r/Braincels	Quantitative Analysis (Networking, Statistical, & Computation-al Analysis)	Incels are increasingly using YouTube as a diffusion mechanism to reach each other and drive	Radicalization and online extremism is a cross platform problem, and it is imperative that platform-oriented solutions should be	Researchers would benefit from conducting cross-platform analyses on radicalization and online extremism

						community engagement. The YouTube recommendation algorithm also has a significant chance of showing an incel-related video to a viewer within 5 recommended videos	linked together via information sharing	
Incel Activity on Social Media Linked to Local Mating Ecology	Brooks, Russo-Batterham, & Blake (2022)	Evolutionary Psychology	N/A	Twitter; U.S. Census	Novel Online Geolocation	Tweets made by incels increased in commuting zones with high economic inequality and above-average sex ratios. Tweets about incels increased in commuting zones which were male biased, fewer women were single, income inequality was greater and gender-income gaps were smaller. Therefore, there is some indication that incels are partially right about some of the challenges they face in the dating market, although that does not	They indicate the need for early-warning systems to track marriage-market dynamics in order to predict destabilization, since young men with few prospects for marriage tend to drive conflict and instability. Social media may play a role in these early-warning systems	N/A

						absolve them of their violent rhetoric		
Masculinity Threat, "Incel" Traits, and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States	Scaptura & Boyle (2020)	Criminology; Criminal Justice	Mixed (Gender-Centric; Terrorist)	Survey Administered by private company (Centiment)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	Young men who aligned with incel traits also correlated with hatefulness and violence, and both indicated heightened gender role stress. This indicates young men who are outside of inceldom may feel similar emotions. Men who experience greater gender role stress, exhibit more hostile attitudes towards women, and exhibit "incel" traits report more frequent fantasies about murder and rape	N/A	Future research ought to incorporate various forms of strain (i.e. work stress, personal problems, long-term stress, etc.) to see how these related to incel traits and young men more broadly. This trait scale ought to be reevaluated with incel-only terms, and it may be beneficial to allow respondents to self-identify as incel or not
What Do Incels Want? Explaining Incel Violence Using Beauvoirian Otherness	Melo Lopes (2023)	Philosophy; Gender Studies	Gender-Centric	Manifesto (Rodger)	Qualitative Analysis (Illustrative Analysis)	Incels, and Rodger specifically, see women as "Other" as outlined by de Beauvoir. Incels neither objectify women nor feel entitled to them; instead, what incels desire is for women	Men, and particularly those already caught in the throes of inceldom, must renounce sovereignty and accept that they are a part of nature, have a body, and can be judged by others; that there is no action	Academics need to move away from objectification and entitlement when analyzing incels and instead use more complex gender theories (the "Other") when analyzing incels

						to reify them as sovereign subjects, with women freely choosing them to confirm that they are special	without judgement, and no praise without risk	
Involuntary Celibates' Experiences of and Greivance over Sexual Exclusion and the Potential Threat of Violence Among Those Active in an Online Incel Forum	Speckhard et al (2021)	Terrorism & Security Studies	Public Health	Self-Administered Survey (via incel forum)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	Most incels report significant mental health challenges, gratefulness for the forums, distrust of therapy, and vary in their misogyny (which they are aware of), with more misogynist individuals reporting higher violent ideation	Incel forum spaces might be considered as effective spaces for creative mental health and psychosocial interventions to humanize incels and counter hopelessness and despair. These interventions should mitigate the risk of self-harm and external violence	N/A
Online-offline modes of identity: Elliot Rodger's twisted world of masculine victimhood	Blommaert (2017)	Culture Studies	Other (Cultural Anthropolo-gy)	Manifestos (Rodger); Ephemera	Qualitative Analysis	Elliot Rodger constructed a particular logic of action through his online and offline enclosed communities of knowledge. In doing so, he also contributed into these communities his own templates of thought which further solidified those formats. Rodger's case illustrates how our online-offline worlds have	N/A	Researchers must critically reexamine the linguistic "lightness" which we currently use when describing the online-offline interaction

					powerful cultural effects on ourselves and society		
One is the loneliest number: Involuntary celibacy (incel), mental health, and loneliness	Sparks, Zidenburg, & Olver (2023b)	Forensic Psychology	Public Health	Self-Administered Survey	Incels: r/Virgins; r/Antifeminits Comparison group: Undergraduate Courses & University Forum	Incels reported significantly lower social support and higher on isolation than a comparison group, even during the pandemic (when the pandemic depressed values for the control group). Mental health challenges incels reported were significantly correlated with their social support and isolation metrics. However, social isolation was not a good predictor or incel beliefs; instead, perceived mate value and an insecure attachment style were the most significant predictors	These results could be used to inform interviews with incels that will identify their treatment needs, goals, and preferred approach. It is also of clinical relevance the degree to which incels have a fixed or growth mindset related to perceived mate value	Further research needs to be conducted on the relationship of insecure attachment styles and inceldom, particularly how they contribute to incels' misogyny
Characteristics of Incel Forum Users: Social Network Analysis and	Stijelja & Mishara (2023a)	Pychology	Other (Social Network Analysis)	Reddit (All subreddits and users)	Social Network Analysis	Incels tend to have a wide range of interests and hobbies outside of	Response to incels must adopt a comprehensive and systemic approach to	Research might benefit from exploring the extent to which the same user creates

| | | | | | | relationships and sex, although the latter dominate. Most incels engage with mental health (anti-suicide) subreddits immediately following their engagement with incel spaces for the first time (although there is an exception, where that is flipped). Participation in incel forums tends to be predated by participation in other controversial and hateful subreddits | intervention and prevention. Proactive support campaigns geared around combatting loneliness and misogyny, healing from bullying, and deconstructing virginity stigmas may divert young men from joining incel forums. Social networks should also "nudge" users toward mental health resources that are tailored to their needs | multiple accounts and participates online communities under more than one name. Likewise, future research ought to get at lurkers and the motivations of all participants more broadly |
| Psychosocial Characteristics of Involuntary Celibates (*Incels*): A Review of Empirical Research and Assessment of the Potential Implications of Research on Adult Virginity and Late Sexual Onset | Stijelja & Mishara (2023b) | Psychology | Other (**Life-Course Theory**) | Academic Articles | Meta Analysis | Incels report significant tension with feeling developmentally "off-time" with their peers and exhibit virulent misogyny, at odds with other late-onset virgin men who are not misogynistic. Why incels turn to misogyny while other men do not is a crucial piece | The 3N model of radicalization is helpful for understanding incels. Educational interventions focused around healthy coping tools and training for their use, development of social and interpersonal skills, and breaking down misogynistic perspectives seem promising | Future research needs to identify why some men who feel "off-time" turn to misogyny while others do not. Likewise, future research on incels ought to take a life-course theory approach to analyze pathways into inceldom, rather than simply a static snapshot of incels at the point of data collection |

						further research must address		
The Rise of the Incel Mission-Oriented Attacker	Van Brunt et al (2021)	Forensics	Mixed (Terrorism & Public Heath)	Ephemera (e.g. Manifestos+)	Qualitative Analysis	Inceldom has been an issue for a long time, even prior to the emergence of the term (as early as 1932). In order to engage with inceldom, we must understand why they are the way they are and engage with them through multiple forms of therapy (i.e. person-centered therapy, CBT, narrative therapy)	Practitioners ought to be familiar with incel ideology and use person-centered therapy, CBT, or narrative therapy when engaging with incels	N/A
Extreme Sex-Negativity: An Examination of Helplessness, Hopelessness, and Misattribution of Blame Among "Incel" Multiple Homicide Offenders	Williams & Arntfield (2020)	Criminology; Forensics	Mixed (Terrorist & Psychology)	Ephemera (e.g. Manifestos+)	Forensic & Cognitive Analysis	Incels who have committed multiple homicides all indicate severe indications of extreme sex-negativity, wherein they believe they are entitled to the sexual and romantic relationships they desire because they are white males. These offenders experienced	Widespread promotion and education on positive sex principles may help mitigate multiple risk factors for this type of violence	More research on preventing incel violence is necessary

						helplessness and loneliness in multiple areas of their life outside of sex and romantic relationships		
Wanting sex and willing to kill: Examining demographic and cognitive characteristics of violent "involuntary celibates"	Williams et al (2021)	Criminology; Forensics; Sociology	Mixed (Terrorist & Psychology)	Ephemera (e.g. Manifestos+)	Qualitative Analysis (Forensic & Inductive Coding)	Violence incel offenders shared many cognitive features with perpetrators of other forms of mass violence, of which their misogynistic worldviews seem to be a in ideological divergence. Violent incel offenders tended to be either grandiose or self-deprecating	N/A	More research on this topic is needed in order to understand, let alone prevent, incel mass violence
The Evolution of the Manosphere Across the Web	Ribeiro et al. (2021)	Informatics; Computer Science; Social Networking	N/A	Reddit API Data; 6 manosphere forums (including incels.is)	Mixed Methods Social Network Analysis	Users within the manosphere are increasingly migrating to newer and more toxic communities like inceldom and MGTOW at the expense of less overtly misogynistic groups like MRAs and PUAs; however, MGTOW sees significant	N/A	Additional research needs to be done as to why this sort of community migration happens, and to see if there is a logical progression of thought from one to another (e.g. MRA -> PUA -> MGTOW -> Incel). They also indicate it would be important to identify if there is migration to other

						migration into inceldom		fringe communities as well
Incels, violence, and mental disorder: a narrative review with recommendations for best practice in risk assessment and clinical intervention	Broyd et al. (2023)	Psychiatry; Forensics	Public Health	Academic Articles	Meta Analysis	There are broad indications that incels exhibit and experience significant mental health challenges, and there are no single, "catch-all" interventions which would adequately capture care	It is imperative that incels be encouraged to engage with mental health services. Online group-therapy may be helpful but it is important to be cognizant of incels' distrust of outsiders	Current research is limited by the lack of valid psychiatric diagnoses available in analyses. Future research needs to interview incels to explore their experiences with psychiatric challenges, including levels of cognitive function
Involuntary Celibacy: A Review of Incel Ideology and Experiences with Dating, Rejection, and Associated Mental Health and Emotional Sequelae	Sparks, Zidenburg, Olver (2022)	Forensic Psychology	Public Health	Academic Articles	Meta Analysis	Incel identity is nuanced. However, incels broadly seem to experience high levels of romantic rejection and a greater degree of depression/anxiety, insecure attachment, fear of being single, and loneliness	Exploring forums like r/IncelExit are necessary to understand how mental health providers might effectively intervene or nudge an incel toward exit	More research focusing on incels' personal experiences and relational struggles re necessary
From "Incel" to "Saint": Analyzing the violent worldview behind the 2018 Toronto Attack	Baele, Brace, & Coan (2021)	Security; Political Science	Mixed (Terrorist & Linguistics)	Incels.me	Mixed Methods	Incel worldview is characterized by a categorical structure common in extremist groups: sharply separated social groups are considered to objectively exist and are immutable	N/A	Further research should expand the simple relationship between language and violence and consider how images (memes), emotions, social dynamics, and activity impact both the environments within the forums and the

								worldviews of their participants
Self-reported psychiatric disorder and perceived psychological symptom rates among involuntary celibates (incels) and their perceptions of mental health treatment	Speckhard & Ellenbug (2022)	Psychiatry; Social Work	Public Health	Self-administered survey (via incel forum)	Quantitative Statistical Analysis	Incel populations have a disproportionately higher rate of self-reported formal diagnoses and self-reported symptoms when compared to global averages. At the same time, incels exhibited significant lack of trust in mental heath professionals and resources	Incel forums may be an important entry point to delivering creative mental health support, but it is crucial that mental health practitioners try to avoid making incels feel like they are being blamed for their problem	Future research should attempt to validate self-reports and perceptions with actual psychological assessments, and whether incels' perceptions of these mental health challenges align with the results of conventional measurements
'If I cannot have it, I will do everything I can do destroy it." The canonization of Elliot Rodger: 'incel' masculinities, secular sainthood, and justifications of ideological violence	Witt (2020)	Semiotics	Mixed (Gender-Centric & Semiotics)	Manifesto (Rodger)	Qualitative Analysis (Semiotic Analysis)	There are two Elliot Rodgers: one is "Rodger-that-was" which is the personae of Rodger encapsulated by his manifesto; the other is "Rodger-that-is" which is the saintly figure incels have coalesced around to imbue meaning with. That meaning is ultimately that to be the ideal incel is to follow a path like Rodger, who represents (in a twist of irony)	N/A	N/A

						saintly themes and patterns		
Breaking the Mirror of the Spectacle: Mass Murder/Suicide as the Ecstasy of Simulated Experience	Simpson (2020)	Sociology	Mixed (Terrorist; Gender-Centric; Philosophy)	Manifesto (Rodger)	Literary Analysis	Modernity and neoliberal ideology construct a social and cultural paradigm where there are perceptions of winner and losers, but in reality there are only losers and radical losers. In this sense, Rodger moved from loser to radical loser, where his nihilism moved from passivity to radicalism, but he was influenced by the neoliberal cultural paradigm which conditions us all to feel that there should be winners, but there are not	The point is not to "break the mirror of spectacle" but to "over-come the mirror of spectacle"	N/A
Learning to be a Rampage Shooter: The Case of Elliot Rodger	Larkin (2018)	N/A	Mixed (Terrorist; Cultural Studies)	Manifesto (Rodger)	Literary Analysis	Mass shootings in the U.S. have become cultural events with their own characteristics and scripts, which posit them as "the ultimate proof of masculinity" for	The U.S. requires more stringent gun control legislation and there should be more attention and support paid to organizations working on gender and sexual positivity to make the U.S. a more	N/A

						those insecure about it. In this context, Rodger was playing out a script that had been established in the wake of Columbine for disaffected, insecure, and disturbed young men	egalitarian and inclusive society	
"Path to intended violence" model to understand mass violence in the case of Elliot Rodger	Allely & Faccini (2017)	Health Sciences; Neuropsychiatry	Public Health	Manifesto (Rodger)	Literary Analysis	Elliot Rodger's violent actions followed a clear path to intended violence, and it was his narcissistic rage that set him on this pathway. Factors like Autism Spectrum Disorder were likely not the primary factors, but could have played a role	Data should be collected about the lives of perpetrators of mass shooting and analyzed through the pathway to intended violence model, to build confidence in its ability to predict violence and render it an effective identification tool	There needs to be more research on what renders certain individuals at greater risk for violence
Global mass violence: examining racial and gendered violence in the twilight of multiculturalism	Blake (2017)	Ethnic and Racial Studies	Mixed (Gender-Centric; Racial-Centric)	Manifestos (Behring Breivik, Rodger, Roof)	Literary Analysis	Many mass shootings in the U.S. and Europe increasingly cite nativist and racialized rationalizations for their mass violence. Rodger grappled with issues surrounding the U.S.' nominal	N/A	There needs to be increased research on the relationship between racism and mental health

						tendency for colorblindness, and in some ways exhibited severe internalized racism which could have contributed to the racism he exposed and the violence he committed		
In(cel)doctrination: How technologically facilitated misogyny moves off screens and onto streets	Regehr (2022)	Media Studies	Other (approximating Life-Course Theory)	Immersive In-Person Interviews; Video Ethnography	Discovery-oriented Qualitative Method (Narrative Inquiery)	There is a clear pattern of behavior and recognizable experience in becoming incel, starting with vulnerable and at-risk young men seeking out companionship to deal with loneliness, ideologies in incel spaces convert loneliness into anger and resentment through misogyny, processes of cultural creation and engagement in these spaces legitimize and normalize the ideologies, the online space serves as an echo-chamber, and	Incel violence should be classified in the same ways as other forms of violent misogyny and extremism. Embedded community programming may help prevent this violence	N/A

						offline violence gets reified and praised, contributing to a cycle of violence		
Stacys, Beckys, and Chads: the construction of femininity and hegemonic masculinity within incel rhetoric	Menzie (2022)	Sociology	Gender-Centric	Incel subreddits; Manifesto (Rodger)	Ethnographic Content Analysis; Online Participant Observation	Incels exhibit a strong (re)production of systemic femmephobia within their online rhetoric. Incels desire a prescribed status they believe is earned by having an objectively attractive partner through which they can display their masculinity and status to other men; incels thus desire socio-sexual capital	N/A	Additional research needs to be done to identify if these themes/findings can be replicated to incel forums and spaces beyond reddit
A Performative Face Theory Analysis of Online Facework by the Formerly Involuntary Celibate	Hintz & Baker (2021)	Communications	Other (Performative Face Theory)	r/AskReddit (Former Incel Thread)	Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis; Facework Coding Schema)	Contrary to the established assumptions, a variety of life events and circumstances lead young men to involuntary celibacy, not just sexlessness. In order to leave inceldom, users reported engagements with	Intervention for incels needs to occur at the level of incel discourse, since many incels experience near-universal human experiences. Thus, incels need counseling to both mitigate the nihilism of incel discourse *and* work through the preconditions that led them to the worldview	Future research ought to do similar work with access to demographic characteristics so as to interrogate discourse with sociological intersections. Second, there ought to be comparative work with those who are not former incels, see how that discourse differs

						topics beyond sexlessness as a prerequisite for leaving		
The Invisible Life of Elliot Rodger: Social Media and the Documentation of a Tragedy	Burke & Alexander (2018)	Communications	Other (Communications studies)	Ephemera (Manifestos; videos)	Literary Analysis	Social media and the virtual world failed to provide Rodger with the non-digital life he so desired, and thus it morphed into a platform where he demanded visibility for his "awesomeness"	N/A	N/A
Landwhales, femoids and sub-humans: Dehumanizing metaphors in incel discourse	Bogetić et al. (2023)	Linguistics	Other (Discursive approaches to metaphor)	r/Braincels	Mixed Methods	Incel usage of metaphoric language is creative and varied, but still contributes to uniform constructions of gendered relationships as oppositional, competitive, and contentious. Incels direct a majority of their dehumanizing metaphor toward women, but also exhibit a significant amount of self-directed dehumanization	N/A	There needs to be more research in how metaphor is used in constructing the discourse of online hate groups. Likewise, metaphor, gender, and language research needs to more formally and closely intersect

The monstrous-feminine in the incel imagination: Investigating the representation of women as "femoids" on /r/Braincels	Chang (2022)	Sociology; Gender Studies	Gender-Centric	r/Braincels	Qualitative Analysis (Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis)	The misogynistic language of incels are simply a new evolution in the historic "othering" of women, with "femoids" being a term which encapsulates women as other most completely. Inceldom cannot be understood outside of the patriarchal constructions of Western societies	N/A	N/A
Blackpill Science: Involuntary Celibacy, Rational Technique, and Economic Existence Under Neoliberalism	Burton (2022)	Communications	Mixed (Gender-Centric; Sociological Theory; Philosophy)	Incels.co; Incels.wiki	Qualitative Analysis	Incels use the blackpill to explain and reclaim their perceived social oppressions through the adoption of a Foucauldian "technology of the self"	N/A	N/A
Incel Ideology, Radicalization, and Mental Health: A Survey Study	Moskalenko et al. (2022)	Radicalizat-ion Studies	Public Health	Self-administered Survey	Quantitative Analysis	Incels self-report remarkably high rates of mental health challenges. Extremism in incel ideology tends to be greater than extremism in incel radicalization; the former is philosophy, the	There need to be more attempts to reach incels and get them mental health support.	This study needs to be further verified through additional and more comprehensive research

					latter endorsement of violence. Incels overwhelmingly rejected violence, which means that perpetrators of incel violence are not representative of the broader community		