ISD

Spitting out the blackpill:

Evaluating how incels present themselves in their own words on the incel Wiki

Meg Roser, Charlotte Chalker and Tim Squirrell

About this paper

The term 'incel' has become widespread in both internet culture and, increasingly, mainstream discourse. Questions about who incels are, what beliefs they hold, and whether they should be considered a violent threat, have become subjects of debate. Incels themselves, increasingly de-platformed from mainstream social media, have sought to repair their reputation, pushing back against what they consider to be unreasonable associations between their community and multiple incidents of mass violence. This report examines one such effort, the incel Wiki, which was founded and is run by self-identified incels. The report uses qualitative analysis to scrutinise how the Wiki attempts to present itself as an authority on incels, and how it struggles to reconcile the purposes of providing an objective insight into incel beliefs, convincing visitors of those beliefs' accuracy, and fostering a shared sense of incel identity.

About the authors

Meg Roser is a MA Modern and Contemporary Writing student at UEA. She graduated from Lancaster University with a First in English Literature and Creative Writing, where she wrote her dissertation on the relationship between food, desire, and religious faith in the works of Beckett and Crace. She is particularly interested in representations of suffering, religion and bodies in modern literature, and her paper on resistance in pre-1900 American literature was recently published in the LUX undergraduate journal of literature and culture.

Charlotte Chalker is a student at Lancaster University, where she studies and is writing her dissertation on the relationship between motherhood constructions and working mothers' experiences of COVID-19. She will graduate with a BA in Politics and Sociology, continuing her interests in motherhood and education into the future.

Dr Tim Squirrell is ISD's Head of Communications and Editorial. He has previously worked for the UK government as a Senior Strategic Communications and Policy Advisor, focusing on right-wing and misogynist extremism and terrorism, as well as non-ideological threats. He holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, where he wrote his thesis on the construction of authority and expertise in online communities. His work has been published in outlets including VICE, The Independent, and the New Statesman.

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Introduction

'Incel' is a word that very few people had heard before 2018, but is ubiquitous in internet discourse today. Since the Toronto van attack that year, in which 11 people were killed, increased attention has been paid to the community of individuals who call themselves 'involuntary celibates', predominantly men and boys who define themselves by their inability to achieve romantic or sexual fulfilment.

What does it mean to be an incel? What kind of person takes up that label? What beliefs do they hold? Media outlets, think tanks, governments, academics and the wider public have all sought to answer these questions. Some have speculated that incel 'culture' might fuel terrorism,[1] arguing that the violent misogynistic and nihilistic attitudes displayed in incel communities, combined with the veneration of previous mass killers who have been inspired by incel ideology, may encourage others towards violence. Other scholarship has argued that incel-inspired violence shouldn't be considered terrorism,[2] critiquing the push to include misogynist violence under the umbrella of 'terrorism' as a well-meaning but misguided attempt to demonstrate that the problem is being taken seriously.

These, along with documentaries seeking to get 'inside' the worlds and minds of incels,[3] and media panic over rising numbers of 'incels' off the back of survey results showing an increasing number of people (not just men) are having less sex,[4] are only the tip of the iceberg of incel-related discourse.

Of particular concern to those in incel communities is the narrative that incels, by dint of their commonly violent rhetoric about women and the multiple attacks inspired by incel ideology, should be considered extremists or terrorists. Since November 2017, incels have had numerous communities removed from Reddit, the site of the largest incel forums, and have also suffered numerous losses of hosting from service providers such as GoDaddy, who provide the web hosting that keeps sites online and accessible. The reasons given for these withdrawals of service have varied, but ultimately connect to the violent and hateful content posted in incel-populated spaces.

High-profile incels such as Lamarcus Small (aka 'Master', one of two owners of the largest extant incel forum incels. is) have sought to change public perception of incels, pushing back on the characterisation that incels promote violence or that incel discourse might lead to violence. They hope to improve the reputation of incels and reduce the likelihood that they will continue to be deplatformed or spoken of poorly. The incel Wiki is one project aimed at this kind of reputation management.

The incel Wiki presents itself as "a repository of academia, folk theories, memes, people, and art associated with involuntary celibates."[5] In its own words, it was "created because of daily heated arguments [ex-incels.wiki admin] William had with Wikipedia admins about the Wikipedia Incel article in early 2018."

Incels.wiki is an important source of knowledge about incels and the incel worldview. The About page claims that its articles had occupied top spots in Google rankings (though it also claims the Wiki has been purposely downranked by Google). A substantial proportion of searches on Google and other search engines that lead users to incels.wiki are for incel terminology. It has also been used in at least one peer-reviewed study as a source of knowledge about incels.[6] These users receive information about the incel worldview and lexicon from incel writers, who have created and curated the incel Wiki with this intention. Previous studies have found that the incel vernacular is a key component of impression management, separating insiders from outsiders and allowing the group to create and control a cohesive collective identity.[7]

Incels have been the subject of relatively few studies due to the newness of their communities and public notoriety. Previous studies have looked to understand incels through the lens of hegemonic masculinity,[8] primarily looking at their online communities.[9] [10] By studying the incel Wiki, this report looks to understand how incels present their worldview to a wider audience, and the difficulties and contradictions this uncovers. As with other Wikis, the Incel Wiki's purpose is purportedly encyclopaedic,[11] but this specific Wiki is also a project to 'rectify' perceived unfair and one-sided coverage of incels in the media.

The sharp increase in focus on incels in mainstream discourse since the Toronto van attack of 2018[12] has precipitated an incel community that sees itself talked about in the media, and understands itself as an object of surveillance, but does not feel that its own voice and worldview is fairly represented. The Wiki is an attempt by a small number of incels to manage the impression of their community to those seeking out information about incels. As such, the Wiki constitutes both a site for knowledge construction, as well as a project of optics: presenting the incel community as it wishes to be seen, in the words of incels themselves. This report uses the concepts of impression management and framing to understand how incels have sought to present their worldview in this encyclopaedic context.[13]

The term 'incel' has evolved in usage from early definitions, which emphasised an inability to secure sexual relationships despite desiring them.[14] As incels became more widely known, 'incel' became more of a byword for those in the incel subculture and the violent misogyny expressed by some within that culture. Arguably, there has been further definitional slippage as 'incel' has come to stand in as a derogatory term for a man expressing misogynist opinions.

The expansion of 'incel' as a referent has also encroached on other groups in the broader 'manosphere', the 'online milieu which includes groups who are embittered with a hostile attitude towards women, especially feminists'.[15] This milieu is home to Pick Up Artists (PUAs), Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), as well as incels. Consequently, what 'incel' means has changed substantially over the course of several years. This further cements the perceived importance for some incels of carving out a space in which they can define themselves, distinguish themselves from other parts of the manosphere, and present their worldview without interruption or mediation.

The incel Wiki provides its own definition of incel, writing: "Involuntary celibates are defined on incel Wiki as being those who for an extended period of time could not establish a romantic and/or sexual relationship even after approaching a wide variety of people." The framing of inceldom as an "adverse life circumstance", repeated across the Wiki, lends credibility to the framing used by incels who wish to dissociate themselves from the common descriptions of incels as a 'movement', 'ideology' or 'community'.

For much of the time that incels have self-described as such, their collective worldview has been synonymous with the 'blackpill'. This is the idea, advanced in contrast with the 'redpill', that people's life circumstances are broadly outside their control, and that people's romantic and sexual behaviours are usually driven by essential biological traits such as facial shape and bone structure. Those who believe in the blackpill tend to adopt violently misogynistic beliefs about the nature of women, particularly with regard to their sexual behaviour. They also tend towards nihilism, with many incels considering or advocating suicide or mass violence as the only ways out of their predicament. This report finds that the Wiki is a site of attempts to divorce the concept of being an incel from believing in the blackpill, and we argue that this is intended as a means of both expanding the category of incels to make them politically relevant, and dissociating

the label 'incel' from violent misogyny.

This report explores several of the most important pages of incels.wiki, as well as their associated Talk pages,[16] to understand how the authors of the Wiki attempt to present the incel worldview as reasonable, non-violent, and empirically well grounded. Our analysis provides a snapshot of the Wiki's presentation of the incel worldview, and finds a range of rhetorical and discursive techniques used to present the Wiki as an authoritative, even definitive, source of information on the incel experience.

Key findings

- The incel Wiki is a popular source of knowledge about incels, receiving over 500,000 visits per month in late 2022. Most of these are referred from search engine results, and many of them bring viewers directly to pages explaining concepts in the incel space.

- Contributors use various rhetorical techniques to portray the Wiki as authoritative about incels, including appeals to large quantities of external scientific literature, assertive language, in-group jargon, and attempts to appear objective.

- Substantial differences in tone across the Wiki demonstrate tensions around the purpose of the Wiki, which can be variously seen as an attempt to educate outsiders on incel concepts, advocate for the accuracy of the incel worldview, foster a shared sense of incel identity, and push back on perceived misrepresentations.

- Incels.wiki advocates an extreme misogynist worldview, with the explicit stated aim of some contributors being to expose "normies" to incel ideas and recruit them to this worldview, despite the ostensible purpose of the site being to provide an objective source of knowledge about incels.

- There is a concerted effort amongst some contributors to expand the category of 'incel' to include people who would not self-describe as incels, and minimise the category of those who subscribe to the blackpill ideology. There is an explicit admission by the primary author that the Wiki "seeks to separate incels from the blackpillers," to push back on media portrayals of incels as violently misogynistic.

- The definition of 'incel' is manipulated to fit different purposes in different spaces, again trying to dissociate incels from violence and misogyny. While many would consider incels a community or ideological movement, contributors to the incel Wiki claim that they are unified solely by their inability to find sex and romance, not any worldview or self-identification.
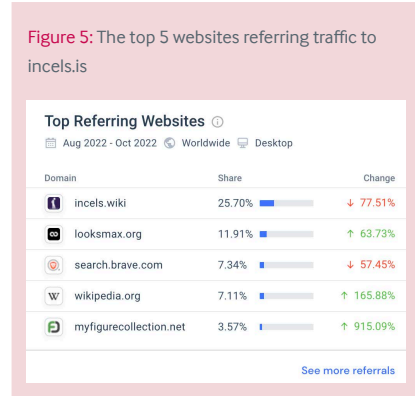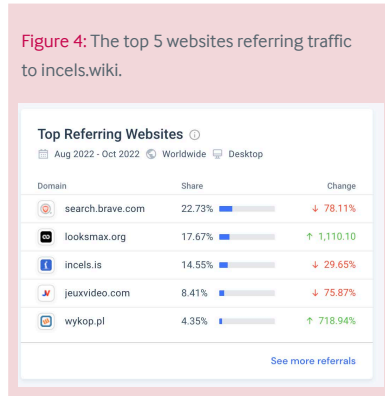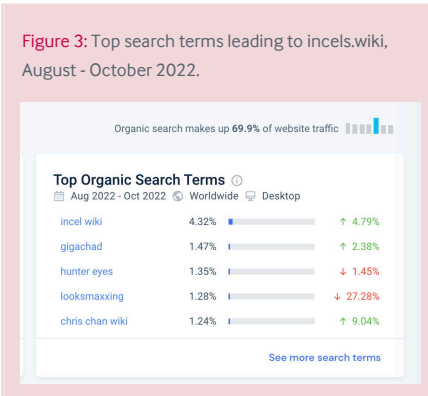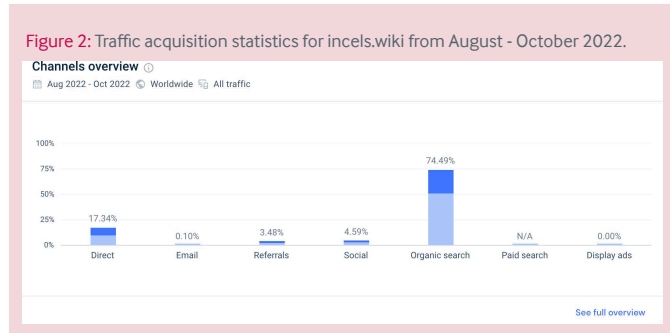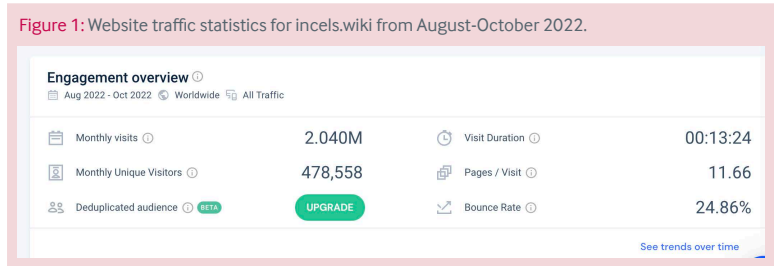
Incels.wiki stats

This section provides context for the popularity of Incels.wiki, as well as how and from where it acquires its traffic. The tool SimilarWeb was used to provide these statistics.

From August - October 2022, incels.wiki received 574,817 monthly visits, 285,718 of which were unique users. Visitors stayed on average for 3 minutes and 41 seconds, and visited 6 pages during their visit.

The vast majority of traffic incels.wiki received during this period comes from search engines, at nearly 75% (referrals from other websites provided 3.5% and social media links accounted for 4.6% of traffic).

The terms that most commonly lead people to the wiki are - predictably - 'incel Wiki', followed by a number of terms from the incel lexicon, including 'gigachad', 'hunter eyes', and 'looksmaxxing' (a term used to describe incels trying to improve their appearance).

Figure 1: Website traffic statistics for incels.wiki from August-October 2022.

Figure 2: Traffic acquisition statistics for incels.wiki from August - October 2022.

Figure 3: Top search terms leading to incels.wiki, August - October 2022.

Figure 4: The top 5 websites referring traffic to incels.wiki.

Figure 5: The top 5 websites referring traffic to incels.is

There is significant cross-referral between incel websites. The sites that send the second and third highest volume of traffic to incels.wiki are looksmax.org (an incel forum dedicated to 'looksmaxxing') and incels.is. Likewise, incels. wiki refers the largest amount of traffic of any site to incels.wiki, making up over 25% of the forum's referrals during the period August - October 2022. And when users click links on incels.wiki, the most common place they go to is incels.is, making up 14% of all links. Nearly 6% of link clicks go to looksmax.org.

Inceldom is a global phenomenon, but both incels.is and incels.wiki are written predominantly in English. This is reflected in the dominance of the Anglosphere in the visitor statistics for incels.wiki, where the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada contribute the most visitors, in that order. Canada is closely followed by Germany, and then Russia, both hovering around 4 or 5% of visitors, indicating a non-trivial number of individuals from non-English-speaking countries are finding themselves on incels.wiki.

Analysis

For the main study, eight pages were analysed, chosen due to their high levels of traffic or direct relevance to the research question. High traffic pages selected were the Main Page (5,407,572 visits), Scientific Blackpill page (646,263 visits) and the Blackpill page (369,974 visits).[17] A supplementary analysis considered the pages for Gigachad, Hunter Eyes and Looksmaxxing on the basis of their high volume of traffic obtained from search engines. The key themes uncovered in this analysis were: the use of external sources of knowledge to validate the incel worldview; in-group incel terminology used to demonstrate authority; attempts to show a detached, objective stance; assertive and authoritative language used to dismiss criticism; and attempts to illustrate the depth and breadth of incels and their ideas.

Theme 1: Sources of external knowledge
Subcodes: academia; numerical data; evolutionary psychology; literature

Academic citations, and research into inceldom: the Wiki positions inceldom as a long-time object of study by researchers, citing numerous academics who have studied involuntary celibacy (though noting that not all of them have used this term), and detailing the range of disciplinary perspectives of these authors, including sociology, psychology and evolutionary psychology.

Non-academic literature is also enshrined as part of the canon of the incelosphere, including the books 'Whatever' by Michel Houellebecq and 'How to Get the Women you Desire into Bed' by Ross Jefferies. Both are included on the Incelosphere timeline page as milestones, and both predate the advent of the internet.

The aim of citing a long and varied pedigree of researchers of involuntary celibacy is to lend legitimacy to inceldom as a long-lived and deep-rooted concept. This serves two functions. The first is to support the argument that being an incel can be separated out from the blackpill, and therefore from violently misogynistic attitudes. This aims to reduce the perception of incels as necessarily supportive of violence against women. The second function is to expand the category of 'incel' to include anyone who is unable to find sexual relationships despite wanting and trying for them. Some incels want more people to identify as incel, because having a greater number of people in the group might increase the likelihood that their grievances are taken seriously by society.

Numerical data: there is a strong cultural tradition that frames numerical data as particularly 'objective', and the inclusion of (often decontextualised) numerical data about involuntary celibacy was noted across the pages sampled.

In particular, the following claim was repeated numerous times across the dataset:

> "This category [of early adult virgins] is increasingly common these days, with about half of U.S. 12th graders never having dated."

The claim here is that the number of incels is likely far higher than readers may realise and that it is rising as a proportion of young people. This presentation of inceldom as an issue exacerbated by contemporary society is common in incel spaces. There, as here, the subtext appears to be that inceldom should be taken seriously as a problem and that incels are an important group to listen to in order to understand the experiences of a growing category of young people.

Similarly, the Blackpill page states, "Women reject 80% of the male population." This uncited statistic is a truncated presentation of an incel interpretation of the 'Pareto Principle'[18] that claims 80% of women will only be romantically interested in 20% of men. The use of such statistics - usually without empirical backing - is common on the incel Wiki. In this case, the purpose is to position men as victims of 'sexual selection'; in other cases, statistics are presented to legitimate arguments about the demographics of inceldom, mental health, and generalisations about women.

Evolutionary Psychology: the manosphere community at large invests a great amount of trust in the field of evolutionary psychology, which attempts to establish how evolution by natural selection may shape human emotions and behaviours. Studies from this field are used to establish a scientific foundation for the existence of incels as a category, as well as the legitimacy of incel beliefs, particularly the blackpill.

"Nothing can change female sexual desire (biological essentialism). Dating success is determined by things men cannot easily improve on such as looks, money, status, physical stature, race, IQ and neurotypicality, rather than personality. [...] Everyone's sexual market value is mostly or entirely genetically determined." [Blackpill]

Taken from the Blackpill page, the quotation above attempts to use evolutionary psychology to legitimise the blackpill. The claim, widely made by incels and repeated here, is that the factors that determine sexual success are immutable and that there is no hope for genetically 'unlucky' men to improve their sexual success with women. Incels also suggest that women are 'picky' and voluntarily choose certain men (which is a key reason for incels' worldview of women). This would appear to undermine the assertion that sexual preference is genetically determined. In order to sustain these two competing premises simultaneously, incels will typically argue that women are by nature 'hypergamous'; that is, they are genetically programmed to seek out mates who have a higher 'status' than them.

Theme 2: Terminology
Subcode: incel terminology

Incel vernacular is employed across incels.wiki, along with technical and verbose language, to establish a sense of authority about the subject matter. For example, the FAQ page comments that 'the term "incel" is an abbreviated version and sniglonym of the term "involuntary celibacy," whose usage reaches back at least to the 18th century.'" The term 'sniglonym' is itself an example of deploying verbose language. The word refers to a term whose date of coinage postdates the pre-existing concept or object it defines.

Tracing the lineage of 'incel' to before the word was coined is another example of the Wiki contributors' attempts to establish the historical pedigree of 'inceldom' as a condition, separate from the existence of the community of incels associated with the term today. Likewise, the Blackpill page contains a section dedicated to the etymology of 'blackpill': "The term blackpill was first used in November 2011 by a blog commenter named Paragon on the Dalrock anti-feminist blog." It traces the lineage of the concept as a mechanism for illustrating both the authors' authority and the epistemological weight behind the idea itself.

We also encountered numerous uses of incel terminology (such as the phrase 'off-gridders') that were not tied to definitions. This offhand use of jargon is another mechanism for conveying authority and establishing a sense of legitimacy. By using technical words or jargon without explaining them, the author attempts to demonstrate that they are so familiar with the terminology that they would not consider that their audience might not be aware of it. In doing so they may hope to demonstrate that their level of knowledge in this field (or indeed their intellectual sophistication overall) is sufficient that any audience ought to give them credence.

Theme 3: Attempts at objectivity
Subcodes: objectivity and neutrality; subjectivity

Incels.wiki attempts to present itself as objective and neutral, a key rhetorical technique for cultivating authority and legitimacy. As with Wikipedia, these attempts at neutrality often descend into "a miasma of subjectivity, relativism, and factionalist rancor".[19] The About page of incels.wiki notes some of these disagreements, writing that "a disagreement about whether the Wiki should remain scientific and blackpill-centric or not unfortunately lead to a split between the admins," with the primary authors of the Wiki being banned.

Some pages, such as the Scientific Blackpill, take active measures to maintain a sense of distance and objectivity, putting description of the blackpill worldview at the forefront of the article and relegating advocacy for and argument about this worldview to demarcated 'Discussion' sections. In contrast, other pages are not as neatly curated, undermining attempts to appear detached. For example, there are assertions that "according to some anecdotal evidence, incels often do not look particularly ugly," that "women mostly have a horrible character, if any," and "there is some anecdotal evidence suggesting that an unspecific proportion of homosexuality is actually caused by inceldom." In no cases are these claims substantiated.

Theme 4: Assertion and authority
Subcodes: authoritative language, delegitimising criticism

The incel Wiki frequently uses authoritative language as a means of defending both incels and the Wiki from criticism. This is most notably used to claim that attempts to associate incels with violence and extremism are founded on misunderstandings by interlocutors who are not themselves incels.

While many researchers consider the incel community (people who actively self-identify as incels, rather than people who meet the criteria for being considered involuntarily celibate) to be synonymous with the blackpill worldview, the Wiki asserts that this is not the case on multiple occasions. On the Blackpill page, authors write, "the media often conflates incels with … blackpillers, while only a minority of incels actually subscribe to the blackpill," while the Main Page asserts, "No mass shooters or other criminals identified by the media as 'incels', or that self-described as such, are known to have been primarily motivated to commit their crimes by online communities devoted to involuntary celibacy." These statements convey the Wiki's purpose: to create a space for 'knowledge' that aims to supersede others' attempts to describe incels.

The FAQ section in particular is illuminating in light of previous work showing that such pages "[stabilise] a particular set of facts as the basic worldview from which discussion proceeds by answering questions in a definitive manner."[20] Because these pages are written and maintained by those with authority in the community or on the website, they reflect their vision for the epistemic foundations of the community. Here, the Wiki contributors use the FAQ page to delegitimise criticism and defend the incel community by proposing their own questions for the contributors to answer, establishing the foundations of the 'knowledge' presented in the Wiki. For example:

> 2) Are incels a group, ideology, subculture, organisation, community, or movement?
>
> **No.**

Incel is an abbreviation of involuntarily celibate, which is self-descriptive. Up to 28% of American young men are Incel, according to the Washington Post, depending on how strict one wants to be when defining this term. "Incel," isn't a single community any more than, for example, trans people are a single community. [...]

[...]
5) Are incels violent?
In short, no. That is a stereotype nurtured by pigeonholing and broadbrushing media portrayals. [...]

[...]

14) Is inceldom related to the alt-right?
No. Whites constitute a minority in the English incelosphere: see the race article. The reason for this pigeonholing is that people from the alt-right are among the few public defenders of incels. This is due to many reasons, the most important one being that both the alt-right and some incel forums tend to be pro-natalist, but for different reasons. If there were some other pro-natalist movement today, they would instead probably be the public defenders of incels. Other defenders of incels outside the alt-right also exist. See Angela Nagle, MRAs, and the rest of the people in this list minus Devlin and Spencer.

[...]

15) Are incels narcissists?
This stereotype probably comes from Elliot Rodger's vlogs, who appeared extremely narcissistic. [...]

The Wiki is presented as an authority on inceldom through the FAQ, repeatedly distancing both incels and the Wiki itself from 'negative' presentations of incels in the media in particular — with heavy focus placed on distancing themselves from the presentation of incels as political, racist, and violent.

Theme 5: Depth of the incel space
Subcodes: depth of the incel space; in-group notability; out-group notability

Our analysis revealed that the incel Wiki attempts to establish the temporal, spatial and ideological depth of inceldom. It does so by presenting incels and the communities in which they gather (and have historically gathered) as multi-dimensional, drawing on a wide range of sources and considering a wide range of experiences. The aim in conveying this depth is once again to distance incels from media presentations as racist, misogynistic, violent white men; by illustrating the diversity of the incel space, the Wiki provides a counter-balance to these narratives.

The Main page refers to incels as "highly diverse politically, racially, religiously, and socioeconomically," and makes a particular point that "online communities of self-described incels are also extremely diverse in terms of racial/ethnic make-up [and] political beliefs."

The racial diversity of self-described incels is emphasised, likely due to reporting often describing the group as predominantly white due to (sometimes only perceived) overlaps with far-right ideology and communities. The FAQ page notes that "East Asian males are particularly prone to experiencing inceldom, compared to men of other races."

Though the incel Wiki contain numerous highly misogynistic pages (for example the 'Sluts' page), it does acknowledge that female incels can exist — which again attempts to show the 'diversity' of people affected by the 'adverse life circumstance' of involuntary celibacy. However, this is a divisive opinion within the incel community — the Wiki comments that some incels do not think that femcels exist at all: "Since the early days of the incelosphere, there has been a controversy between mancels and femcels over inclusiveness in the incelosphere. This sometimes consisted of malecels having a proclivity for suggesting that femcels are standardcels or nearcels."[21]

The 'Incelosphere Timeline' page is particularly illustrative of both attempts to convey the depths of the incel space and the authors' own authority about incels. The page emphasises the creation of diverse incel spaces online while outlining events the authors see as relevant to the history of online inceldom. Examples include support groups, anti-feminist spaces, and even anti-incel communities, as well as more well-recognised incel spaces.

The timeline also outlines individuals, events and spaces that have contributed to the development of incel thought and the study of inceldom. Most of these examples are esoteric and unlikely to be recognised by many outside (or indeed inside) the incel space. Referencing them serves to stabilise the history of incels and establish the Wiki as an authority on inceldom, whilst reinforcing in-group cohesion by creating and disseminating a shared narrative of incel history.

Discussion

How incels present themselves as authorities on incels

Contributors to incels.wiki demonstrate authority and legitimacy by leaning heavily on external sources and their own knowledge of the incel space, as well as the Wiki structure.

The incel Wiki falls into the category of what Flanagin and Metzger refer to as 'less formal information generated by special interest groups, individuals, and organisations'. Crucially, this form of information has a 'level of editorial review [...] which is not explicit'.[22] Due to the tendency for audiences to attribute more authority to forms of information with high levels of editorial review (or information which is validated by multiple people), the incel Wiki aims to use another technique to establish itself as a credible source of knowledge – namely by 'referring to sources with credible reputations'.[23]

The incel Wiki frequently utilises a phenomenon we have labelled 'citation loading', in which large numbers of references of dubious quality are made to back up questionable assertions. This is particularly visible on the Scientific Blackpill page. Due to the sheer volume of academics, literature and studies cited, readers of the Wiki who may attempt to debunk or unpick the assertions made on the incel Wiki are forced to refer back to numerous sources and sift through the material in order to ascertain whether they agree or disagree with the use of each particular source. Squirrell refers to this as an 'argument by exhaustion' – critics of the opinions on the Wiki have a significant number of sources to analyse before they can effectively disprove assertions on the Wiki.

Academic authority figures are the most highly valued figures for contributors to the incel Wiki. There is a strong tendency amongst incels to consider things that appear to be scientific or claim objectivity to be the most valid kinds of claim to truth. Sources of knowledge that are reinforced by statistics or studies and are offered by individuals with credentials are therefore prized in the incelosphere.

Famous authority figures or cultural touchstones (such as Beethoven) are used across the incel Wiki in an attempt to appeal to cultural relevance and history. The aim is to demonstrate that incel themes and worldviews have existed for a long period of time and can be traced back to these figures or touchstones – positioning these ideas as recognisable and not 'made up'. These authority figures are less convincing and valuable when contributors to the Wiki space attempt to use them to convey authority and borrow their cultural relevance – the use of authoritative language often collapses when discussing famous figures who were supposedly 'protocels', with contributors to the Wiki frequently using terms such as 'could be considered', demonstrating a descent into subjectivity.

Incels.wiki erects boundaries between inceldom and violence

Our analysis demonstrates the two-fold boundary-making process engaged in by the authors of the incel Wiki. They first attempt to create a coherent conception of what it means to be an incel, enhancing in-group cohesion and emphasising a non-violent, non-political incel identity defined by the 'condition' of being involuntarily celibate. From there, they attempt to distance what it means to be an incel from perceived misrepresentation by non-incel actors, delegitimising criticism of incels.

The Wiki creates legitimacy through the creation of a collective identity, the established distinction of those inside and outside of a group.[24] Incels create a collective identity around their discourse and terminology,[25] which creates a boundary between those who do and do not understand the terminology. This boundary acts to promote in-group legitimacy and cohesion, which is utilised when outsiders make attempts to criticise incels.

The Wiki demonstrates this by using hyperlinks and the 'Incel Glossary', sending users to different pages that define and present terminology and worldviews. In contrast with incel forums, where in-group jargon is used to exclude, guard and maintain boundaries through slurs and derogatory language, the Wiki uses jargon to educate viewers on certain terms while signifying authority and expertise. The Wiki's contributors, the message goes, are knowledgeable about the history of inceldom. As a result, the wiki presents an outward face that the website's function and its use of jargon are to present as a well-archived document for and about incels.

The second function of boundary-making is to directly challenge rhetoric critical of incels. To combat perceived misrepresentation, incels attempt to distinguish themselves both from violent misogynists and from right-wing extremists. This is accomplished by using the collective identity of incels as a non-violent and non-extreme group, unified only by an adverse life condition. Consequently, the Wiki presents the contributors of the Wiki as separate from extremist individuals who are reported as incels in the media.

The Wiki demonstrates this on the main page: 'The incel Wiki does not condone the violence committed by these individuals.'[26] This signifies the Wiki's intention to persuade others that the contributors should be viewed differently to media discourse. The FAQ page demonstrates the Wiki's boundary work, particularly questions 'Are incels violent?' and 'Is inceldom related to the alt-right?'. Authors push back against criticism by formulating a boundary so contributors can be viewed as serious, rational individuals, rather than misogynist extremists.

The Wiki also responds to the generalised misrepresentation that all incels are white men to demonstrate the depth of the incelsophere. The 'demographics of inceldom' page attempts to broaden the generalisation by making inferences from national surveys to present inceldom in other countries. Similarly, the FAQ page responds to the generalisation by stating, "The largest poll by the whitest forum: incels.co showed only 50% of its members were whitecels, the rest being ethnicel, [...]".[27] The reference to data here attempts to claim that not only are incels racially diverse, the 'whitest' forum of incels is still over 50% non-white. The claim here is that incels should not be associated with right-wing extremists such as white supremacists, or the 'alt-right', because they are a racially diverse group.

Clashes between desires for objectivity and advocacy

There is a crisis of self-presentation on the incel Wiki, reflecting the tension between its different purposes. These can be understood as: a political tool to push back against perceived misrepresentations of incels, particularly claims that incel ideology is violent; a persuasive document designed to demonstrate that the incel worldview is backed by evidence; and a foundation of clear, well-articulated knowledge for those new to the incelosphere.

Figure 6: A Discussion page in which a user discusses "blackpilling normies".

2018 [edit source]

Expansion [edit source]

Any ideas on how to expand the blackpill article? I'd like to expand on each of the five thesises with data. You're free to propose ideas to me here or on Discord. Mahlo#2892

> I would love to contribute. I've made my first edit (removing the poetry intro from this article). We get one chance to blackpill normies, so we have to 'cut our darlings' and get to the point. Also, I dislike that each edit has to be mod-approved before it goes live. It's very unsatisfying to contribute that way, and makes it impossible to run my regular wiki workflow. Limerencel (talk) 04:48, 24 July 2018 (UTC)

Figure 7: Discussion page in which contributor William argues that incels.wiki is not an advocacy project.

Also, This article has served as place for you to paint the blackpill as something that has scientific rigor, which is not what this article is about, but you can do whatever you want on the scientific blackpill page. You have written 90% of the content on the blackpill page, expanding it enormously in way that makes it seem like the wiki is a blackpill wiki rather than an incel wiki. I think you've put in enough of your opinion here and I'm done seeing this page turn into this monolith, or a political advocacy page that is pill-biased. Limerencel was just drive-by editing to make the lede more congruent with the rest of the page, which is mostly a boring repetition of facts to make the blackpill seem like a scientific discipline, which it is not. William (talk) 13:15, 29 February 2020 (UTC)s

In a Discussion tab post from 2018, a contributor writes, "We get one chance to blackpill normies, so we have to … get to the point," demonstrating the view that the Wiki ought to be used to advocate the incel worldview.

In contrast, a Discussion post from 2020 has William, one of the Wiki's primary authors, advancing the view that the Wiki is not meant to advocate an incel worldview. He writes, "I'm done seeing this page turn into … a political advocacy page that is pill-based." This reflects the view that the Wiki is meant to simply describe incel concepts accurately, rather than trying to "make the blackpill seem like a scientific discipline, which it is not." This conflict illustrates the tension between advocacy and description, while also demonstrating attempts to divorce 'being incel' from 'believing in the blackpill'.

Elsewhere, William writes, "The media makes a lot of horrible accusations against incels. Thing is those accusations don't come from nowhere, so this Wiki seeks to separate incels from the blackpillers, so the blame lays accurately, ie on blackpillers and not incels at large." Again, the tension between competing aims is laid bare here, as some contributors seek to use the Wiki to blackpill viewers and bring them round to an incel worldview, while others believe that the only way to salvage incels' reputation is to carve out the blackpill as a belief system adhered to by a small minority. This is particularly difficult, however, when the Blackpill and Scientific Blackpill are two of the most popular, prominent pages on the incel Wiki.

Figure 8: Wiki contributor William says that the Wiki seeks to separate incels from blackpillers.

The media makes a lot of horrible accusation against incels. Thing is those accusations don't come from nowhere, so this wiki seeks to separate incels from the blackpillers, so the blame lays accurately, ie on blackpillers and not incels at large. Point of this wiki was to be accurate, not to whitewash.William (talk) 12:58, 10 April 2020 (UTC)

Balancing these sometimes competing objectives, along with the multiple audiences they entail, fosters inconsistencies in the wiki. Context collapse dogs the Wiki's reception,[28] as authors use multiple mutually incompatible self-presentation strategies, each of which is designed for a different audience but all of which can be seen by any any visitor.[29] On the Wiki, authors use loaded citations, incel-specific jargon, authoritative language and references to external sources of knowledge to achieve rhetorical objectives. The tensions between these techniques, as well as the resulting tensions between Wiki contributors, are exemplified by Figure 9 (next page).

Contributors' awareness of the outward appearance of the Wiki, and the potential for thwarting their own objectives through an inadequate self-presentation, is on display in the 'back stage' of a Talk Page. This awareness lends itself to an understanding of the Wiki as 'exhibition': a space that is not a single performance, but a permanent (and revisable) installation that can be revisited by different audiences at different times.[30] The importance given to different objectives for the Wiki may change over time, but one consequence is that what was once an amusing performance to an in-group (e.g. a giant out-of-context thumbnail) can become an obstacle to the Wiki's new primary purpose: being an objective source of knowledge about a non-violent community of people.

These discrepancies in tone can be noticed elsewhere. For example, the 'Poems' page features poems written by incels, exploring their attitudes towards women and celibacy. While this may constitute an interesting exploration of incels' own experiences, it creates further tensions in tone and messaging that reflect fissures within the incel community as well as the tensions in what the Wiki is designed to be and do.

When the purposes of the Wiki collide, attempts at objectivity are often jettisoned in favour of pushing specific narratives. For example, the 'Gigachad' page, one of the most visited on the site from Google search, adopts a jovial tone about the gigachad meme. However, the authors cannot help but inflect the page with advocacy for incel positions, claiming that the existence of morally questionable men who are deemed 'hot', such as Jeremy Meeks (see Figure 10), implicitly proves the accuracy of the blackpill worldview: "Jeremy Meeks has shown that even morally questionable convicts still benefit from the halo effect, thus by extension, inheriting a societal position whereby he has been assured an easy pathway towards a romantic life."

The sense of persecution that inspired the creation of incels.wiki extends to its pages, and reflects the enduring attempts of the Wiki to appeal to the in-group, incels, as well as to persuade and educate outsiders. On the Gigachad page, an author writes, "Due to [a] lack of experience of being bullied, gigachad is unlikely to express sympathy for the bullied."

This tone of victimhood persists in the retelling of incel history on the Timeline. In November 2017 r/incels was banned from Reddit, beginning a years-long process of incel communities being isolated and then removed from the site which had once hosted the largest communities of their kind. Figure X shows how incels.wiki describes the removal of one such community, r/braincels.
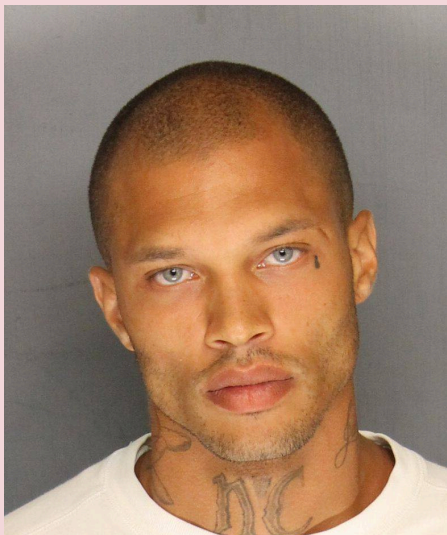

Figure 10: Jeremy Meeks, the 'hot felon'.

Figure 9: A Discussion page in which a contributor complains about a lack of professional tone on the Wiki.

Can people please stop putting giant irrelevant images outside of thumbnails on pages?   [edit source]

Let's make the Wiki look more "professional", easier and more enjoyable to read. And stop plaguing the articles with shitty humor as if this were uncyclopedia. We could use some controversial remarks or slurs here and there, but let's make things straightfoward. - BlackPillBlackBelt (talk) 01:32, 6 September 2019 (UTC)

Figure 11: An extract from the Incelosphere Timeline page describing the process by which r/Braincels was banned from Reddit.

On September 31st 2019, Reddit's "Braincels", one of the most popular and well-known incel forums was banned due to new rules being made by Reddit on the spot. Braincels was given no notice. Users moved to incels.co, incelistan.net, incelswithouthate, reddit.com/r/celouts, saidit.net/s/incels, or simply stopped using incel forums. Smaller forums went into high gear to attract Braincels users, however no mass exodus happened, leaving some wondering how many real users were on Braincels in the first place.

The political purpose of the Wiki's founding is further illustrated by the description in the Incelosphere Timeline of an instance in which a large anti-incel Facebook group was banned from the platform (see figure 12).

In 2019, two contributors to the incel Wiki (one being Lamarcus Small aka 'Master', one of the two owners of incels.is, the largest extant incel forum) took credit for the banning of 'Found the Incel' from Facebook. The celebratory tone contrasts with the typical description of the deplatforming of incel spaces as 'censorship'; in this case, the authors seem content to count this as a victory. In this way they erode the claims of the Wiki offering an objective perspective, instead allowing the space to be perceived as an advocacy platform for the incel community.

Figure 12: Description from the Incelosphere Timeline of the banning of 'Found the Incel' from Facebook

In 2019, Incels.info moves to incels.wiki. Also, the largest anti-incel group: Found the Incel, was banned from the internet by Facebook for violent speech after an outing of sample posts on Youtube by William and courageous flagging by Master and others.[10][11][12][13][14]

That year, the Washington Post and other outlets released articles detailing how rates of celibacy among men between ages 18-30 was approaching 30% per year (an all time high), validating the intuition of many incel forums, and ending some of the gaslighting directed at incels[15]. This became one of the largest topics of discussion across the entire incelosphere.

Conclusions

Incels.wiki has been constructed by a small subset of self-described incels around the world who have a vested interest in the reputation of incels. It began as an explicitly political project to protect incels from further deplatforming and criticism by writing about incels and their worldview in a way that disavows violence and mass killers who have been associated with incels. It has since grown into a significant source of knowledge about incels and incel beliefs.

The incel Wiki has been used by multiple researchers as a source in published studies. Insofar as the site functions as a window into the incel worldview, it can be a useful source. Its contributors do also appear to know a substantial amount about the history of the incel space, as well as the evidence they claim, underpins the incel perspective of the world. However, the Wiki is not an objective, unbiased, or at times even coherent source of knowledge.

This study demonstrates the ideological drivers behind the construction and maintenance of incels.wiki. While it purports to be an objective source of knowledge about incels, and in some cases it fulfils this function, it is also a site of advocacy, a site for the creation of an in-group identity, and a space to persuade outsiders that incels are correct in how their perceive the world.

Attempts to expand the category of 'incels' to include many people who would never self-identify as incels - and would vociferously disavow beliefs associated with that label - have been somewhat successful, though it is not clear whether incels themselves or the incel Wiki have had a hand in this. Recent discourse around male virginity and rates of sexlessness has increasingly adopted the term 'incel' to refer to people who simply do not have, or have not recently had, a romantic or sexual partner.

This shift in definition is, we contend, concerning and potentially dangerous. The term 'incel' should remain a word used to describe a set of people who self-describe as involuntarily celibate, and congregate in communities of like-minded individuals. They are not the only people who have a claim to romantic and sexual frustration, and the overwhelming misogyny and violent animus in these communities should not be taken as a reflection of the worldview of others who are involuntarily termed 'incels'.

A small minority of self-identified incels have engaged in acts of mass violence. Not all incels advocate for the most extreme forms of misogyny seen in incel forums, and it is not accurate or fair to homogenise them. However, violent misogynistic rhetoric is accepted, normalised and encouraged in incel spaces. This can foster an environment where violence towards women and girls is seen as acceptable, and individuals immersed in this culture may come to engage in any number of adverse behaviours that should still concern us, even if they stop short of mass violence.

Those who study and understand incel communities and ideologies must continue to advocate for a nuanced portrayal of incels in public discourse, media and policy. There must be a zero tolerance approach to rhetoric that dehumanises women, and ideologies that foster this rhetoric. The blackpill must be spat out.

Appendix 1 - Methodology

This study was conducted primarily using a qualitative analysis of data from incels.wiki. A content analysis of public pages of the wiki focussed on observing mechanisms through which the pages constructed legitimacy, creating a window into the authors' self-perception, conflicts arising in the space, and the execution of the strategic aims of the wiki.

NVivo was used to retrieve and systematically code 8 pages from incels.wiki between June and July 2022. The site at time of writing has 1,361 articles and over 70,000 edits, with 85 registered users (of whom only a few edit actively, according to the site). The 'Discussion' tabs of the chosen pages were also analysed as a window into the 'backstage' of the wiki's construction.

The first pages chosen were selected purposively from the front page of incels.wiki: the Main page, the Scientific Blackpill page, and the Incelosphere timeline. Further purposive selection of pages linked from the homepage (as an indicator that these pages are attributed importance by the authors, and that they are more likely to be read by casual users accessing the homepage) resulted in five further pages, focussing on those containing substantial content about manosphere concepts, given the wiki's purpose as an encyclopaedia of, among other things, incel concepts.

Where pages were too large to be permeable to exhaustive analysis, in the case of the Scientific Blackpill page, we used random sampling for support. We used a number generator to choose one subsection from each category as the page had 18 categories and within these categories, there were a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 21 subsections.

Ethics

The primary ethical issues in this study are twofold. First, there is the risk of researchers' exposure to potentially harmful material. We mitigated this in part through our choice of research site, using the incel Wiki rather than a forum due to the substantially higher amount of questionable material on the latter. The second issue is whether the analysis of the wiki breaches any reasonable expectation of privacy. There are no identifiable research subjects, the wiki is publically available and accessible, and its own policy on its 'Disclaimers' page is that they permit researchers, academics and journalists to use the material.

Coding
Table 1: Overview of codes – Legitimacy

Codes	Sub-codes	Code definition	Examples of code
Legitimacy	Numerical data	The use of graphs, data and statistics (external sources) as factual evidence.	"Women reject 80% of the male population"
	In-group notability	These include well-known/ notable figures, names and forums that are part of or have status in the incelosphere. These individuals are not necessarily well known in wider society and are more known by those in the incelosphere.	"The first large blackpill communities were hosted on Reddit. /r/incels (a quarantine evasion of /r/truecels) was the first major incel community to use the term 'blackpill' and /r/braincels was the largest one."
	Authoritative language	Whenever the Wiki asserts material as reliable, accurate, and commanding to present it as being able to be trusted.	"The media often conflates incels with these blackpillers, while only a minority of incels actually subscribe to the blackpill."

Appendix 2 - Codebook

Codes	Sub-codes	Code definition	Examples of code
Legitimacy	Academia	These are references to external sources, studies, researchers, and disciplines.	"This research was published and is colloquially known as the Donnelly Study referring to its main sociologist Denise Donnelly. The terms "incel" and "involuntary celibate" subsequently became valid sociological terms."
	Authoritative language	Whenever the Wiki asserts material as reliable, accurate, commanding to present it as being able to be trusted.	"The media often conflates incels with these blackpillers, while only a minority of incels actually subscribe to the blackpill."
	Delegitimising critics	This is when contributors to the incel Wiki try to counter-argue criticisms or critics either with data, arguments, or no references.	"However, looks do matter somewhat in terms of assortative mating as attractiveness ratings within couples (both short and long-term) are moderately correlated (r = .4), meaning very attractive people rarely mate with very unattractive ones"
	Depth of the incel space	Conveying the incelosphere as a diverse and far-reaching space. This includes the use of long histories (a mechanism of a movement to show its diversity and depth); acknowledgements to other parts of the incelosphere i.e., forums/websites; referencing different 'types' of incels/terminology; different views and different causes of inceldom etc.	"Online platforms designed for venting (like incels.co) are the most likely to have prejudicial tendencies, while those whose primary focus is ascending (like Looksmax.me) or as a support group (like Incelistan) are the least likely to have such tendencies."
	Evolutionary psychology	Any reference to the study of behaviour, thought, and feeling viewed through the lens of evolutionary biology. Also, the idea that all human behaviours reflect the influence of physical and psychological predispositions that helped human ancestors survive and reproduce.	"Blackpillers mostly believe in biological essentialism and evolutionary explanations for human social and sexual behaviour."
	In-group notability	These include well-known/notable figures, names and forums that are part of or have status in the incelosphere. These are individuals who are not necessarily well known in wider society and are more known by those in the incelosphere.	"The first large blackpill communities were hosted on Reddit. /r/incels (a quarantine evasion of /r/truecels) was the first major incel community to use the term 'blackpill' and /r/braincels was the largest one."
	Incel terminology	These include their own definitions and community specific terms.	"Incel is an academic sociological term that is short for involuntary celibate or involuntary celibacy (also called "inceldom"), an adverse life circumstance."
	Literature	Calling on fiction and non-fiction sources to show how involuntary celibacy is ingrained in society and literature/arts.	"While never directly using the verbatim terms, "involuntarily celibate" or "incel," famous French author Michel Houellebecq has written about the topic vicariously through his many fictional works about involuntarily celibate and layless men, such as in his novel Whatever."
	Numerical data	The use of graphs, data and statistics (external sources) as factual evidence.	"Women reject 80% of the male population."
	Objectivity and neutrality	This is when the Wiki demonstrates a neutral stance or acknowledges objectivity.	"This page maintains a neutral tone and conveys the scientific findings without judgment."
	Out-group notability	These include notable figures from society that most individuals in society will know of/heard of.	"Morpheus in the film The Matrix, narrates the line "You take the blue pill, the story ends here, you wake up and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill ... and I'll show you just how deep the rabbit hole goes.""
	Subjectivity	Makes subjective conclusions and discussions from external sources, data, statistics and studies or concludes without references and states these as reliable.	"...according to some anecdotal evidence, incels often do not look particularly ugly."

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