

“It's 2023, all that's left of the internet are trolls and bait.”
**Examining how the incel community anonymously builds trust online
through a content analysis**

23-11-2023

Master Thesis Communication Science
Faculty of Behaviour Management and Social Sciences

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Aim: The incel community, one of the more extreme communities within the wider Manosphere has the ideology that one's life trajectory is determined by a person's attractiveness and gender, thus giving handsome people and women a higher standing in society. In the last few years, the incel ideology has been linked to more than fifty cases of violence. The level of trust between members on online forum incel.is, as well as risk taking has been investigated. The relation that outsiders and trolls might have with these factors has also been examined.

Method: Through digital ethnography by way of a content analysis, threads and individual posts on incels.is were sampled for a period of three months. Incels.is was seen as the most fitting place to investigate trust building as the infrastructure allowed for the presence of a true community. In total, 30 threads were encoded, containing a total of 1510 individual posts.

Results and conclusion: The difficulty of making an account, as well as the abundance of rules on the forum make it clear that members of the community are aware of the risks involved when posting on the forum and the possible presence of outsiders. Trust is low when it comes to other members, but incels still engage with the community out of a primal desire of human contact. There however is little risk taking. Members also have the feeling that there are a lot of outsiders and/or trolls on the forum, decreasing trust and risk taking even more.

Discussion: It is suggested that interviews will be held with members of the community in order to affirm or refute the findings of the content analysis. The role of platform Discord is also discussed, and it is advised to look into trust building and risk taking on this particular communication medium.

Keywords: Incel community, trust building, online community, online risk taking, outsiders

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Theoretical Framework	7
2.1 The demographics of incels	7
2.1.1 Causes of becoming an incel and its effects	9
2.1.2 Phases of becoming an incel	11
2.2 The concept of trust	12
2.2.1 Building trust	13
2.2.2 Incels and online trust	15
2.3 Risk taking and anonymity on the internet	17
2.4 Outsiders and trolling	18
3. Method	20
3.1 Procedure	20
3.2 Data collection and analysis	22
4. Results	24
4.1 Distrust of Outsiders	24
4.1.1 Rules of incels.is	25
4.2 Incel perspectives on outsiders and trolling	26
4.3 Trust on incel forums	30
4.3.1 Incel desires	30
4.3.2 Trustworthiness of incels	33
4.4 Perception of risk and risk taking	36
5. Conclusion and Discussion	39
5.1 Main findings and conclusion	39
5.1.1 Answering the sub-questions	40
5.2 Limitations	42
5.3 Future Research	44
Reference List	45
Appendix 1: Glossary	53
Appendix 2: E-mail to incel.is admins and proposed message to members of incels.is	56
Appendix 3: Rules of incels.is	58

1. Introduction

The existence of subcultures within society showcases the uniqueness of a certain group of people, making it valuable for people who do not adhere to the mainstream ideas. However, not all subcultures are a good thing within society. Subcultures are a resistant response to mainstream culture where people create their own group aimed at celebrating unique interests that are different from the norms within society, with examples being hippies, punks, goths and cosplayers (Hebdige, 1979; Lennon et al., 2017). However, instead of celebrating something unique that all members share, a community could also revolve around negativity. One of the best examples is of this is the Involuntary Celibates community, better known as the incel community, which has been linked to violent extremism and is looked negatively upon due to members' degrading language and call for violence (The Guardian, 2022). The incel community is seen as one of the more extreme communities within the Manosphere, a collection of online spaces dedicated to highlighting the importance of masculinity and its battle against feminism, showing overlap with far-right communities (BBC, 2018). Incels have been linked to more than fifty cases of violence since 2014, often resulting in dead victims. The fact that the incel community is mostly known for these acts makes members vulnerable as every action could be monitored by the media or security services. One could imagine that as a result trust building becomes difficult for this community, making this a unique subculture that needs dedicated research.

Members of the incel community are often considered to be young, hetero-sexual, white men, which is mostly confirmed by a poll taken in March of 2020 (ADL, 2020). The incels' ideology is that life trajectories are determined by one's attractiveness and that there is no place in society for ugly people (Papadamou et al., 2021). Once they accept this worldview and see society as such, they refer to themselves as being blackpilled¹. Incels consider themselves to be lost causes and think that they are unable to get out of this situation. The most famous incel and seen as an important figure within the community is Elliot Rodger, who in 2014 killed six people and injured fourteen others, primarily because of his frustrations with being a virgin (BBC, 2018). Still, there are many people who consider themselves to be a part of the incel community.

Within an online community such as the incel community, it can be expected that a certain degree of social trust is to be established. When active in such a group, feelings of

¹ More information on the blackpill can be found in the glossary in Appendix 1.

attachment or identification towards the group might be established, in turn leading to a form of social cohesion (Bartley, 2014). The internet makes it easier to find others with the same interests who have a lot of knowledge about the topic at hand, which also happens with likeminded incels who find each other. The dedicated online spaces make members feel more comfortable with sharing their interests, leading to the perception that ideas could be shared that normally would be kept private (Holt et al., 2017). Sensitive information that is frowned upon by the rest of society will be shared by incels, meaning that there is risk involved and that the sharing party is vulnerable, making trust a crucial aspect for the members (Siegrist et al., 2005). The community could be seen as an emotional support group where there is a form of kinship (Labaf, 2019). By combining the violent image of incels that the media portrays with the incel's desire to let his frustrations be heard on the internet, it would be interesting to examine how the trust building process within this community occurs. This is especially relevant when comparing this particular case to the way other, more socially accepted online subcultures function and how those members consider anonymity when posting their thoughts.

The presence of outsiders and the aspect of trolling could also be related to the communication and trust within this community, especially in combination with the anonymity members have on the forum. Since it is possible that trolling happens upon and within the incel community, it would be interesting to investigate its relationship with trust building. Considering that the incel community could be seen as one with unorthodox views and opinions, it serves as a good and important example to examine, investigating if trolling happens upon this community. If this is the case, the relationship it has with trust, risk taking and ease of communication within these online forums will also be further explored.

In recent years, research has been done about the incel community and trolling within online communities separately, but the role that trolling plays within this particular online subculture has not been examined before. Research tends to focus on the radical intentions in incels or the vocabulary that they use, but little research has been done on how the community as a whole functions outside of how the violent rhetoric is being fed within the community (Helm et al., 2022; Labaf; 2019, O'Malley et al., 2020). Trust building between members of this community has also not been sufficiently researched up until this point in time. These facts bring relevance to this research, as the aspect of trolling brings an unique perspective on the relationship between the members of the community. It fills a gap that gives more insight into community building within these kind of communities. Based on this, it is important to

study this phenomenon and investigate how trust is built within this particular community. Thus, a content analysis was carried out with the goal of answering sub-questions related to what indicates trust, how risk is experienced on the forum, as well as the relation between these factors and the possible presence of outsiders and trolls, leading to an answer to the following main research question:

RQ: How does the online incel community anonymously build trust while also being subjected to the presence of outsiders and trolling?

In order to show how this research question could be answered, first a theoretical framework will be established in order to give arguments for certain sub-questions. Afterwards, the research method will be showcased, including reasons for conducting a qualitative content analysis and the manner of analysing the data. Then, an analysis of the found themes within the data will be presented, answering the sub-questions as presented in the theoretical framework. Lastly, based on the analysis, there will be a conclusion that answers the main research question, as well as a discussion about the limitations of this research and possible future research that could be done related to this paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, a foundation will be laid for research about the development of trust within an anonymous online social network, in this case the incel community on the forum incels.is. The influence that the presence of outsiders and trolling could have on this development also needs to be examined. This will be done through a theoretical framework done in three parts. First, the demographics of and earlier research about the incel community will be further explored. The thought processes of incels and their reasons for becoming a member of the community are described. Afterwards, the concept of trust will be dissected, showcasing the different factors that could influence trust building. Lastly, anonymity and trolling will be explored in the context of this research. Together, these parts will offer a comprehensive theoretical framework, forming the foundation for the themes found in the content analysis.

2.1 The demographics of incels

In order to better understand the trust process a member of the incel community goes through, it is important to first establish what the demographics of incels tend to be. The incel community is considered to be part of the Manosphere, which is viewed as the collective of subcultures and online sites that together are part of an anti-feminist movement (Nagle, 2017; Moskalenko et al., 2022). Other communities that are seen as part of the Manosphere include Men's Rights Activists and Men Going Their Own Way (Ribeiro et al., 2021). The Manosphere promotes the idea that masculinity is a good thing and that there currently is a crisis within society that threatens masculinity, giving women an unfair advantage (Lilly, 2016). Of the communities within the Manosphere, the incel community has been growing in recent years, while also being considered more rude and disrespectful than for example Men's Rights Activists (Ribeiro et al., 2021). There is notable overlap between the communities within the Manosphere, but the incel community and Men Going Their Own Way are both newer and more extreme with their toxicity and misogyny. This is what makes incels unique within the Manosphere. Incels also have their own unique terminology, with a few of these terms being explained in the glossary within Appendix 1.

Then who are the people who become part of the incel community? It has been found that incels can be put into three groups, according to Donnelly et al. (2001), showcasing the different types of incels that could be encountered on the forum. Firstly, there are the virginal incels, who tend to be younger and have a lack of dating experience and social skills.

Secondly, there are single incels, who used to lack dating experience when they were teens. Lastly, partnered incels are defined as incels who do have a current relationship, but this relationship has become unsatisfying throughout time, with a lack of sexual activity. When looking at seven homicides committed by incels, four of these members were virginal incels, one a single incel, and two were either virginal or single (Williams et al., 2021). With these findings it can be concluded that when looking at the incels who might use violence, there is a high probability that such members are virginal incels. Each type of incel has a different frustration and thus might have different trusting behaviour and a different outlook on outsiders. While it is not known what percentage of incels belong to each group, it could be reasonably assumed that most members belong to the group of virginal incels. Virginal incels tend to be younger than 34, which fits the results of a survey on a forum dedicated to incels where the mean age of the respondents was 24.84 (Donnelly et al., 2001; Moskalenko et al., 2022).

Other relevant characteristics of a person who might become an incel is that such a person tends to be someone who is in their late teens to late 20s, is a male, does not fit in the mainstream society, has mental health issues, as well as a difficult family background (Regehr, 2022). These characteristics could be used as an explanation on whether incels experience a lower level of trust compared to other people within society. People who do not fit in with the rest of society could be cautious with accepting outsiders who are part of the mainstream society. Mental health issues and difficulties within one's family might also have a significant effect on trust within others, as this trust might have been betrayed before by the ones closest to members of the incel community. These demographics and factors could have a significant effect on trust building, making it essential to use these facts as a possible explanation of the results as found in the content analysis.

What also could have an effect on trust building is that incels tend to have mental health issues, as has been confirmed within the survey conducted by Moskalenko et al. (2022). To illustrate, 95% of respondents had at least some form of depression, 94% dealt with anxiety, while three quarters of the respondents reported being on the autism-spectrum. These numbers are higher than the national American average as reported by Panchal et al. (2023). In this survey conducted in 2023, 32,3% of respondents experienced depression or had some form of anxiety. These numbers show how rampant depression and anxiety are within the incel community. Interestingly enough, only 51% of incels tried to combat these problems with therapy, and of these participants, only 6% felt that it had a positive effect,

with most (47%) feeling that it had no effect. These findings are supported by Costello et al. (2022), who also found that that incels have a worse mental health and well-being, compared to non-incels. These results might explain why members tend to stay in their online bubble and within the online community that they feel comfortable with, since the therapy in the real world does not seem to have any positive effects.

2.1.1 Causes of becoming an incel and its effects

It is important to determine what themes have been found within earlier research when interviewing members of the incel community, as these results could show significant patterns that explain the choices incels make on the forum. First, a look is taken at the interviews conducted by Daly and Reed (2022). This paper examined the causes of becoming an incel and the effects that come with being an incel through ten interviews. Five themes were found thanks to the insights given by the interviewees. In short, these themes are:

1. The inability to prove manhood through intimate or sexual relationships and the struggle this brings.
2. The feeling of being rejected and being viewed and treated as subhuman.
3. The feeling that handsome men and those with good looks in general are put on a pedestal in society. Those who do not meet these standards are put below the rest.
4. The use of violent, misogynistic and racist language online, referred to as shit-posting.
5. The negative feelings that are a result of being part of the incel community, leading to sadness, grief and loneliness.

These themes show the struggles that members of the incel community deal with, but also illustrate the way members express their feelings online and the way in which membership possibly affects an incel. The first three themes describe feelings that incels experience and the insecurities that these feelings bring. Members feel that they are being seen as subhuman and that they are unable to prove the contrary. One of the primary reasons for this is the fact that members observe that only people with good looks are getting the opportunity to do well within society. Generally, incels have had negative experiences during their youth, leading to a feeling that they are not part of this group. The forum incels.co held a survey in March of 2020, which showed that 71% of the incel respondents had been bullied during their childhood, while 83% felt that they had been discriminated against because of their appearance. By not meeting these societal standards, the first three themes found by Daly and

Reed (2022) about the struggles that incels deal with and their perception of unfairness within society are an explanation of the incel's frustration. This then leads to a negative outlook on everyone who is not an incel and who does not see the world in the same way.

There are additional explanations for how members of the incel community are being led to having a negative perception of the world around them. Lindsay (2020) notes that the fears relating to globalization are a significant factor towards the way that incels feel. The changes within society are seen as ones that are favouring women, making incels feel that they are a victim of these changes. Preston et al., (2021) elaborate on this conclusion by viewing technology as being the main reason for the incels' worldview, which has been agreed upon by members themselves on online forums. For example, social media and dating apps lead to creating an unfair advantage for women. Women are seen as hypergamous, meaning that women try to get a partner who is significantly successful and/or rich. This negatively affects incels, as they have a negative view of themselves and do not match this standard (Daly & Reed, 2022). Dating apps also give women a wide array of men, making incels feel like they are undesired. Thus, it becomes easier for dominant men to get all the sexual and romantic attention from women. These different views and themes show the frustrations that play a significant role for incels, while also serving as an explanation for how incels view outsiders and non-incels.

Going back to the themes found by Daly and Reed (2022), they also observed that incels value dominant masculinity, as seen in theme 4. The presence of online communities and their way of communicating online are seen by incels as a good way to establish this dominant masculinity within an online space. Because of the fact that incels feel like they do not belong within the normal society, there is a lot of value in a community where they feel understood and accepted. In order to express this dominant masculinity, incels at times interact by "shit-posting", which is "the act of commenting or posting intentionally shocking or disturbing content for reactions or popularity on forums or social media sites" (Daly & Reed, 2022, p. 15). This way of communicating online is seen as undesirable by most internet users, making the incel forums mostly accessible to just members of the community or people interested in the community.

However, because incels perceive that they are already hated in society, they care less about the backlash from outsiders. Shit-posting is seen as a way to show anger or sadness at how society is currently functioning (Daly & Reed, 2022). These posts tend to be incredibly popular on the incel forums, being viewed and commented on by many members before it can

be deleted when it violates forum guidelines. The definition of shit-posting is also interesting for the current research about outgroups trolling the incel community, since both shit-posting and trolling could be seen as different sides of the same coin. To illustrate, trolling is “an insulting, bullying and deliberate behaviour, designed to provoke a reaction which has significant emotive effects” (March & Marrington, 2019, p. 196). Daly and Reed’s (2022) definition of shit-posting contains the provoking behaviour as well, making it interesting to investigate how members of the incel community view trolling and if there is a difference between the shit-posting of incels compared to the trolling behaviour by the outgroup.

2.1.2 Phases of becoming an incel

While the research done by Daly and Reed (2022) showcased the frustrations that incels deal with, as well as how they express these feelings, it would be wise to take a closer look at the process members go through when joining this community. A year-long observation done by Regehr (2022) made it possible to identify five phases that incels go through that might lead to violent attacks. These five phases could be used in order to assess where the member currently are in this process and what kind of role outsiders could have when it comes to accelerating or decelerating the building of trust. These five phases are:

1. Because of the loneliness that potential members feel, the at that point future incels are looking for companionship. They are finding this on online forums and other online spaces.
2. The loneliness is then converted into anger. Themes as described by Daly and Reed (2022) in section 2.1.1 start to become apparent.
3. Incels are then encouraged to be creative and make art or other content, using dark and edgy humour. This way, the message of the incel community spreads.
4. Due to the echo-chamber that exists for most of the members of the community, the content promoting violence and an anti-women worldview keeps being repeated and being seen by incels. Because of the repetition, these views become normal for the members and become part of their beliefs and daily routine.
5. By encouraging and celebrating violence, the violent cycle will continue, possibly leading to a member of the community also performing a violent attack.

These phases as described by Regehr (2022) show a process where violence is being promoted and being seen as a good thing. However, this image does not seem to fit most of

the members of the community. For example, the research done by Moskalenko et al. (2022), paints a more peaceful picture of the majority of the incel community. There is not a high correlation between the ideology that incels have and having radical attitudes and intentions. These findings also fit other related results about radical groups and radical actions (Moskalenko, 2021; Sageman, 2021). 79% of the respondents in the survey conducted by Moskalenko et al. (2022) rejected radical attitudes and intentions, with only a small minority actually supporting the radical side of the incel community. It is possible that a minority puts forth ideas that the majority of the community does not actually agree with, as on the online forum incels.me, the top 50 posters on the forum together had a total of more than 4000 to 5000 posts per day (Baele et al., 2021). It is expected that the majority of the members does not want to commit violent acts and thus does not agree with the image of a violent community that the media portrays them as (BBC, 2018; The Guardian, 2022).

Although most members might not want to commit violent acts, it might still be that they do deify the mass killers and view violence against women as a good thing. According to Regehr (2022), there does not seem to be an ethical limit for incels as to the severity of graphic content that should be shared online. It will be interesting to see how this content influences risk taking, while also keeping in mind that most incels do not condone violent acts (Moskalenko et al., 2022). Since such graphic posts are negatively viewed upon by the mainstream society, the perceived risk increases when posting such content on the forums. The role that trolls play in this dynamic is also important, as it might be that these trolls influence the radicality on the forums.

2.2 The concept of trust

Now that it is known what the general characteristics of an incel are, what the processes are that an incel goes through, and what themes are an important part of an incel's identity, this information could be connected to the theories surrounding trust. For this paper, most attention goes to theories and findings connected to offline trust. It is assumed that these theories can be applied to this particular case, especially as researchers have said before that offline and online trust can be seen as virtually the same concept (Corritore et al., 2003). A fitting definition of trust that will be used for this research is "an attitude of confident expectation in an (online) situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited" (Corritore et al., 2003, p. 740). This definition keeps trust on an individual level and addresses the factor of risk and the assurance that someone can be vulnerable when trusting someone.

This definition fits the idea of sharing something personal with others, which then hopefully will not be exploited, in the end leading to a feeling of trust. With the content that incels are sharing online, there certainly is risk involved. They are also vulnerable when doing so on a public forum. Because of these reasons, this particular definition will be used.

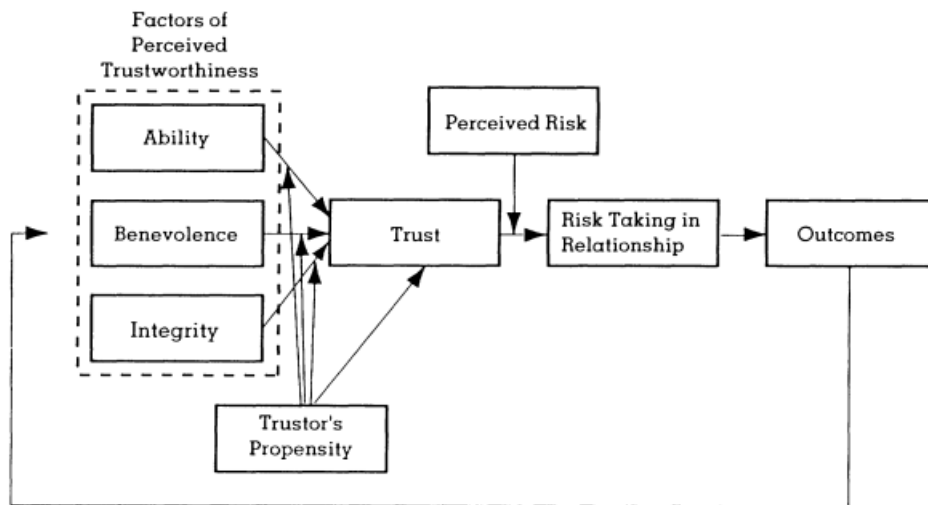
Trust and risk are intertwined with each other, as seen in the beforementioned definition from Corritore et al. (2003). This makes sense, as the risk that comes with giving a person your thoughts and ideas is a factor that helps to decide how much someone is trusted. There is an emotional and a logical side to trust. On an emotional level, one's vulnerabilities are exposed, because when someone is trusted, it is believed that no advantage will be taken of the openness that occurs. On a logical level, the probabilities of gain and loss are being calculated, which leads to a conclusion on whether the person can be trusted. Both levels show that risk is involved when it comes to trusting other persons. The probability of risk has to be minimized in order to increase the level of trust. In this particular case study, risk taking can be seen as posting privacy-related information online or sharing pictures that can be exploited. It is expected that the level of trust in others positively affects the amount of risk taking that is done by members.

2.2.1 Building trust

Moving on, a closer look will be taken at how trust can be built between persons. There are multiple factors leading up to the feeling of trust and the taking of risks, as seen in the trust model in Figure 1 as proposed by Mayer et al. (1995). According to this model, trustworthiness is perceived by the trustor as a combination of the trustee's ability, benevolence and integrity. The trustor is the one who trusts, while the trustee is the person who is to be trusted. These three factors lead to trust, which then outs itself as risk taking within a relationship. Mediating this relationship is the perceived risk. If the perception of risk is low, risk taking increases. Based on the outcomes of the interaction, the factors of perceived trustworthiness are re-evaluated. It needs to be discovered what members of the incel community perceive as risky when communicating online, especially considering the type of hurtful content that is being posted on forums (Daly & Reed, 2022). Thus, these factors of the trust model will be used in order to define what trust means within the incel community, as well as what the perceived risk is when interacting online.

Figure 1

Trust Model from Mayer et al. (1995)



Furthermore, Doney et al. (1998) gave four types of developing trust that would help to speed up the trust building. These types include:

1. Intentionality-based trust, where there is a belief that the trustee's intentions are good in nature.
2. Capability-based trust, indicating the belief that the trustee is competent and/or able.
3. Transference-based trust, referring to a third party who indicates that the trustee can be trusted.
4. Identification-based trust, when the trustee and trustor's desires and intentions are aligned.

In the case of the incel community, the identification-based trust is especially relevant. The incel community has a common frustration and topic to talk about and identify with. This means that they have the same desires and intentions, possibly making it easier to develop trust. It thus becomes easier to find common ground with others. What also could have a significant impact on trust behaviour is whether there are similarities between the interacting parties, which would increase the predictability of the person who is to be trusted (Tanis & Postmes, 2005). This fits the identification-based trust from Doney et al. (1998) as well. People within the ingroup could have the same values and goals, which within the incel community could for example be the way women are looked upon. Because of the similarity and predictability of the involved parties, it becomes easier to trust each other, as group membership is a strong predictor of trusting behaviour.

2.2.2 Incels and online trust

Trust can be developed in an online setting as well and much research has been done on online trust. A difference is that there tends to be an increase in uncertainty, dependency and risk within an online context compared to an offline context (Kautonen & Karjaluoto, 2008). One of the determinants of trusting something online is the proficiency and experience with the internet of the trustor (Beldad et al., 2010). When someone knows what to expect and how to interpret certain messages, it becomes easier to trust the genuineness of what is read. In the following subsection, the focus will be on the demographics of incels and the relationship it could have with online trust, as trust is built in an online setting. However, there first is the question on whether it is possible to have lasting and meaningful relationships on the internet.

Generally speaking, the level of trust can determine if shared information is perceived to be reliable and with whom we should share or from whom we can trust information, as found by Ghafari et al. (2020). This research focused on the predicting of trust among users of an online community, who do not know each other prior to meeting each other online. It was found that a large number of internet users only have a few trust relations, making trusting on the internet difficult. This is also a challenge within this research, as the question could be asked whether these anonymous accounts could truly build up a lasting relationship that could lead to a significant level of trust. On the other hand, as Baele et al. (2021) discovered, most of the posts on incel forums are made by a small group of users. These users' usernames are seen often, perhaps making it possible to lead to some degree of a lasting relationship. These questions make it necessary to further investigate how the demographics of incels might affect trust building and risk taking.

Looking at the demographics of incels as established by Moskalenko et al. (2022), incel communities almost exclusively consist of men, which could have an effect on their levels of trust and how quickly sensitive information is shared. For example, men are less concerned about their online privacy than women (Cho et al., 2009). This means that there is a high probability that members of the incel community, mostly consisting of young men, are less concerned about their privacy and might be more willing to share sensitive information. There are more similarities that members of the incel community tend to share. For example, members of this community tend to be young people (ADL, 2020; Regehr, 2022). What is important for young internet users is for emotional safety to be established, subtle cues for distress to be picked up on and for the showing of emotion to be allowed in order to engage in

online support (Gibson & Trnka, 2020). These are measures that could be used in order to support the online youth and that could be used to build trust within a community. Trusting relationships are needed in order to engage with online support and to help the youth with their mental health, although within the incel community this support could lead to encouraging extreme thoughts and violent actions (O'Malley et al., 2020). Young people are also found to be less concerned about privacy on the internet than internet users over the age of 45, possibly increasing the amount of risk taking that happens (Paine et al., 2007).

There is more research on young internet users and trust. Based on research focusing on young people between the 9 and 19 years old, it was found that trust is difficult to build in an online setting (Bryce & Fraser, 2014). When interacting with people outside of their known network, there was a low level of trust among young internet users. One potential reason for this general distrust is the possibility of being cyberbullied or deceived. There truly is an awareness of the risk that is coming with interacting with strangers online. Bryce and Fraser (2014) also mention a universally accepted prejudice that young people are naïve when it comes to trusting strangers online, as well as taking risks. Their research, however, shows that this is not necessarily the case. Supporting this research, it has been found that general trust increases with age (Daniels & Von Der Ruhr, 2010). This would mean that the younger people within the incel community might be having difficulties trusting others, making it more difficult to build lasting trustful relationships. On the other hand, risk taking decreases.

Incel members also tend to be very experienced with the internet based on the research done by Regehr (2022). When it comes to the relation between internet experience and privacy concerns, conflicting results have been shown. Cho et al., (2009) have shown that experienced internet users have less privacy concerns, while Miyazaki and Fernandez (2001) found that privacy is important for these users compared to people who do not use the internet often. Whether or not these concerns exist is important, as concerns about privacy could lead to feeling the need to mask your identity and to be anonymous on the internet. On the other hand, experienced internet users could either use or abuse their knowledge about the internet and use it against other, less experienced internet users. Perhaps this paper could give some insights into this situation and how the experienced internet users of this community perceive their own privacy concerns and thus their own risk when posting online. Because of the similarities within the incel community and the way young males with internet experience tend to behave on the internet, it would be wise to further investigate if there is trust and if so,

what causes trust within this community. Thus, the following sub-question will be further explored:

SQ1: According to members of the incel community, what indicates trust in other members?

2.3 Risk taking and anonymity on the internet

Being anonymous while on the internet could have significant effects on both the trust in other people and the amount of risk that is taken. For example, trust could be negatively affected since there might be fewer to no consequences for one's actions on the internet. Lying on the internet is common, as at most 32% of the participants of a survey stated that they never lied on the internet (Drouin et al., 2016). Even more relevant for this paper is the fact that just 2% of these participants believed that others were always honest, showing that the trust in others when it comes to this matter is incredibly low. With lies about personal information such as age and gender, it could be that anonymity has a negative effect on the trust in others, making it more difficult to bond and form meaningful relationships.

On incels.is, anonymity is encouraged and it is possible for accounts to be fully anonymous, protecting one's identity, while also preventing having consequences for the content of the posts. It has been found that people in favour of anonymity are positively correlated with having grandiosity, a component of narcissism and low self-esteem (Keipi et al., 2015). These people also tend to be younger, with an average age of 19 years old, and more trusting, while also having stronger ties to online communities. Gender did not make a significant difference within this research. However, seeing as members of the incel community also tend to be young and are also part of an online community, it is expected that these members use the anonymity in order to be a part of this community.

Papers about anonymity show interesting results, but findings on risk are insightful as well. With incels, we are dealing with young men. This demographic tends to take more risks, especially when they are in their earliest reproductive years (Wilson & Daly, 1985). This is called the young male syndrome and is especially strong for unmarried men, which incels often are. Digital skills also tend to increase online risk taking, giving the suggestion that the internet experienced incels also take more risks (Stoilova et al., 2021). This coupled with the

fact that members can be anonymous when posting content, might indicate a high degree of risk taking. However, with the conflicting results about privacy concerns and considering the fact that risk taking in an online setting like an incel forum might be different compared to other communities, the following sub-question will be further explored:

SQ2: How do members within the incel community experience risk when posting content?

2.4 Outsiders and trolling

Lastly, this research will also focus on the role outsiders and trolls play when considering the trust building that happens within an anonymous online community. When being part of a community, one tends to view the members of the community as the ingroup and everyone outside of the community as the outgroup (Tajfel, 1970). This categorization of us against them can even lead to a dehumanization of the outgroup, bringing with it a new level of hatred towards outsiders and in this case non-incels (Vaes et al., 2012). The relationship between incels and non-incels is already close to this level, with outsiders viewing incels as potentially violent men who hate women (Dyner, 2020). Meanwhile, incels view the norms within mainstream society as undesirable and anyone who is not blackpilled as inferior (Daly & Reed, 2022). What is interesting about this and will be researched further, is that the community that will be observed is communicating through an online forum that will be open for everyone to view. This means that any outsider can view what is happening within the community, whether it simply be out of interest or because of academic purposes as is the case for this research. This relationship between incels and outsiders on the forum will be the main focus of the third sub-question.

To take the concept of outsiders a step further, outsiders do not necessarily have to be good-natured. To elaborate, part of this group of outsiders can be so-called trolls. The definition of trolling is “an insulting, bullying and deliberate behaviour, designed to provoke a reaction which has significant emotive effects” (March & Marrington, 2019, p. 196). The act of trolling happens often and is present in many online surroundings. For example, in online gaming spaces, 97% of the interviewed gamers said to have been trolled before in textual format and 6% stated that they were frequent victims of trolling (Komac & Cagiltay, 2019). Trolling happens often because of the possibility of being anonymous on the internet, giving

the trolling parties a greater feeling of confidence (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2011). With the act of trolling being so widespread on the internet, it has become a significant part of the internet culture and thus it also becomes difficult to imagine that there are no online communities without any form of trolling inflicted upon the community.

Being trolled could have significant effects on both the individuals and on the community as a whole. A survey found that a third of the trolled adolescents between 14 and 18 years old experienced a loss of confidence due to the trolling (Rice, 2013, as cited in Griffiths, 2014). The trolling parties admit in the same survey that the trolling is mostly done due to it being funny and that there is no consideration of it being hurtful for the trolled party. These findings insinuate that trolling can have significant effects on the trolled people, making it important to note how these trolls are being handled within a community and what possible effects trolling could have on such a community. Respondents of another study mentioned that they view trolling as the mistreating of someone because of their social identity (Ortiz, 2020). Trolling happens often online, and people with a different identity are at more risk of being trolled. With the incel community having different points of view compared to the mainstream society, they also have a higher risk of being trolled.

The community as a whole could also be affected by the trolling. When it comes to these deviant trolling behaviours, it has been found that online communities are damaged because of these actions (Sanfilippo et al., 2017). Trolling can also be seen as harassment according to some online users, as found by Ortiz (2020). Because of these findings, it could be said that being trolled is seen as something negative and something to be avoided. It can be especially catastrophic when the online community is damaged because of the trolling, leading to incels not having a place where they can feel comfortable. This relation needs to be further investigated within the incel community. Connected to this is the general outlook on outsiders, which will also be further analysed, as it could showcase the general attitude towards non-incels and the way they are taken care of. Outsiders could also have negative effects on communities, including on the members' feelings of safety and privacy (Dym & Fiesler, 2020). Thus, the following sub-question is proposed:

SQ3: How does the possible presence of outsiders and the possibility of being trolled affect the sharing of personal information and trust within the incel community?

3. Method

3.1 Procedure

The main and sub-questions have been explored by way of a qualitative content analysis, collected through digital ethnography, comparable to the work about the incel community done by O'Malley et al. (2020), Maxwell et al. (2020) and Helm et al. (2022). These researchers collected data from online forums in order to gain more insight into the incel community, which has also been done for this paper. As the time of publication, most of the identifiable incels members are using a forum called incels.is to communicate with each other. Moloney et al. (2003) referred to forums as unmoderated “virtual focus groups”. A benefit of such a content analysis is that members of the incel community discuss their thoughts and feelings without any interference from the researcher, making its findings more reliable and the conversations more natural. Thus, the content that is collected from the forum could be considered natural data (Holtz et al., 2012). Within this paper, there is a distinction made between a thread, which contains the entire discussion started by someone called the Opening Poster (OP), and a post, which are the individual comments within the thread, being shown in sequential order (Holt, 2007). Incels.is is publicly accessible, and all the posts as presented in the data set are findable on the website without any need for logging in or accepting to certain terms and conditions.

The website that will be analysed, called incels.is, was created in 2017 as a response to the banning of incel-related subreddits on Reddit and has proven ideal for exploring this sub-culture, as on this forum the niche interest of incels is the main topic of discussion, leading to rich data that truly represents the community at large (Incels Wiki, 2023). Since 2017, this website has become the main destination for incels with over 21.000 members, 459.000 threads and more than 10 million posts in total as of August 2023. Other online destinations were considered for this content analysis, but ultimately not chosen. For example, it would have been possible to examine the old posts on Reddit and its dedicated subreddit /r/incels, but it was decided that it would be more useful to look at recent posts that show the incel community in its current form. There is also incel activity on online forum 4chan. However, due to the anonymous nature of the forum, it becomes difficult to have significant community building, as well as a building of trust. To illustrate, within the content analysis done by

Bernstein et al. (2011), 90% of the posters on 4chan were called Anonymous, making it difficult to accredit a post to a certain person. Thus, 4chan was not considered to be fitting for answering the research questions. Lastly, an incel community was found on the Reddit alternative Saidit. However, this community was found to be relatively inactive, with a total of three threads within a month at most. These threads also often contained few or no comments, which made Saidit's incel community unfit to analyse. Because of the inactivity on the forum, Saidit does not accurately represent the target group, as opposed to incels.is. with its abundance of threads and posts. Thus, after careful consideration, it was decided that only content from the forum incels.is would be gathered.

Before data collection began, were the plans for the data collection evaluated and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Twente. Incels.is is a publicly available forum where it is not necessary to make an account beforehand. Thus, it has been deemed ethical to collect this data and to use the collected texts for analytical purposes. The data also does not contain information that could potentially be traced back to certain individuals. Only the information that was truly needed for this research has been collected and analysed. The intent has not been to analyse individuals, but to examine the overarching community at large. Since the accounts on incels.is are anonymous and the shared information is publicly available, no ethical issues have been found when it comes to this particular research.

In order to achieve triangulation, the plan was made to include interviews with the members of the incel community as well. Within interviews of thirty minutes to an hour with at least five incels, questions would have been asked about their perception of trust and why they take the risks they do. This information would have been valuable as it gives the members a way to provide their own perspective on the situation. The interviews would have helped with gaining more insight and would have been a good source for answering the research questions. However, it has proven not possible to find members to interview due to a reluctance shown towards researchers by incels, as will be discussed in a later section. Thus, no qualitative interviews were held. As this process does provides valuable information on how members of the community view outsiders, more will be discussed within the results section.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

In total, 30 threads were encoded and analysed through theoretical sampling befitting grounded theory, containing active threads made between May and July 2023. Within these threads, there were a total of 1510 individual posts. The rules of the forum were also encoded and are discussed during the results section. It had been decided to code inductively when choosing threads that would be further analysed, chosen manually by the coder. This research is exploratory in nature, meaning that there is a desire for new themes and for unknown properties that are not yet established. It was not the goal to choose these threads with a pre-determined direction in mind, instead trying to have an open mind towards all potentially interesting threads, even when in hindsight they did not provide satisfying answers.

Inductive coding happened when a thread was found with an interesting topic that could possibly give an answer to one or multiple of the sub-questions, as the inductive approach by Boyatzis (1998) proposes. Of great interest were threads that were more introspective in nature in regards to how the community functions. Threads that contained the term of trolling or that discussed outsiders were also immediately chosen to be encoded, with posts about trust and risk being found by looking at threads that might discuss serious issues or contain risky information. The individual posts within the threads then were assigned to at least one of the related research questions, which were categorised as “SQ1: Trust”, containing 193 codes, “SQ2: Risk”, with 48 codes, and “SQ3: Trolling/Outsiders”, containing 128 codes. Only after the data had been collected and encoded, was it interpreted, leading to themes. These codes have also been compared to the factors of trustworthiness as proposed by Mayer et al. (1995) and will be further elaborated on in the results section. This way, existing theories are tested on the dataset as well, showing similarities and differences with established theories that can be detected and compared within this particular case study.

The coding of the data was done through ATLAS.ti, a software suited for qualitative data analysis. One of the features that this software has, is called AI coding, which has been used for assistive coding. With this feature, it becomes possible to let artificial intelligence do automated inductive coding, by using the GPT models from OpenAI (Atlas.ti, 2023). With this method, more than 900 new codes were created by the AI, giving a new interpretation of the text. It was not possible to instruct the AI on the aspects of the text that should have been focused on, meaning that the codes were created from every possible angle, therefore also leading to many codes that did not fit the research questions. These codes subsequently were ignored during the manual interpretation of the data. While these codes were not used as a

primary source for the interpretation of the data, it did serve as a good way to reevaluate the texts from a different perspective, leading to defamiliarization and a new point of view. While the researcher might only interpret one part or aspect of the post, it is possible that the AI has different interpretations that could be significant. For example, AI might detect certain emotions within the text that the manual coder might not have picked up, such as cynicism or empathy, giving a fresh point of view and giving the coder a need to reevaluate the text. However, at all times the thematic coding used for the results was done manually, with artificial intelligence not playing a decisive role. Only the 369 manual codes were used in order to determine themes and to make conclusions.

4. Results

4.1 Distrust of Outsiders

For this research, it was insightful to start with an outsider perspective. Whilst preparing the data collecting, the barriers that were discovered as an outsider showed the difficulty of becoming an insider. For example, at first the intention was to interview members of the incel community in combination with doing a content analysis. This way, interpretations and themes found within the texts could be supported or nuanced by the members themselves, thus leading to a more complete and reliable picture of the situation. The first hurdle when trying to approach members was the difficulty of sending a message, where the members could be invited to an interview. Immediately, it became clear that the original plan of making an account on the forum and sending private messages to potentially interesting incels who post often on the forum would not be executable. As stated in the rules of the forum (see Appendix 3), it is impossible to send private messages to another member with a new account. One first needs to be active for some time on the forum and then, with permission from the forum staff, rights will be given to send private messages. As it was not the intention to get involved within the community, which would mean pretending to be an incel and member of the community, it was decided against making an account and being active on the forum. It would be unethical to pretend to be an incel. The researcher could also possibly influence the subjects that need to be observed, potentially negatively affecting the reliability of the research. These factors would also lead to a form of deception, undermining the foundation of this research, which is based on trust within a community.

Another aspect that severely limited the chance to approach incels by way of private messaging was the fact that admitting that the account was made for research purposes might have led to a permanent ban from the forum, making it impossible to communicate any further. Non-incels are not allowed, and it is punishable to admit that one is not an incel, but instead a researcher. Actions such as receiving a permanent ban would have led to making it even more difficult to get in touch with incels. These arguments made it so that it was decided to try another method in approaching members. By using an alias, due to potential repercussions related to the hostility of the community, a mail was sent to the admins of the forum. This staff e-mail address was mentioned within the rules as a way to get in touch when someone has inquiries or proposals. Thus, a mail was sent requesting a possible pathway towards contacting members of the forum. The initial mail can be found within Appendix 2. Unfortunately, there never came an answer from the admins of incels.is, even after multiple

reminders that were sent throughout the weeks. This meant that it became close to impossible to find interviewees that would be able to answer the interview questions in a satisfying and representative manner. These situations showcase how difficult it is to get in contact with incels and how secluded the community is from outsiders. While anyone can view the forum and the comments posted by members, it is more difficult to truly become a part of the community.

4.1.1 Rules of incels.is

After reading the rules and Frequently Asked Questions on the forum, findable in Appendix 3, some interesting aspects came forward. For example, only true incels are allowed to be a member of the forum. Even when someone is interested in the incel ideology and the blackpill, it has been decided by the community that these potential new believers are not allowed to make an account. Women, people under 18 years old and LGBT members are also not allowed to join. Outsiders are not welcome within this community and it is easy for admins to ban accounts when they feel these members are not true incels. When making an account, one first has to give an explanation of his current situation as an incel, which shows that there is little initial trust when it comes to new accounts. Thus, the rules give an idea of how outsiders are viewed by the incel community on this particular forum and how difficult it can be to trust others. There is more useful information within the rules, as for example trolling is not allowed on the website. Members are also discouraged to post selfies, showing that the admins have considered the possibility of these pictures being taken advantage of, and determined it to be risky to post such information. These rules can be used in order to draw early conclusions and are seen as representative, as making and changing rules tend to be openly discussed with the members of the forum before being implemented. This way, the rules become a reflection of the entire community at large. As for the reason why these rules exist, the staff gives the following explanation:

Figure 2

Explanation of rules on incels.is

Why are the rules so unusual?
This is a forum for men who can't get a partner and feel sad about it. Seeing romantically successful people brag about their experiences on the forum would be insulting, and would only exacerbate the issue.

These words are reaffirming the aversion that exists toward outsiders and the hurt that they could cause members of the community. It also gives an explanation as to why the staff

is strict about only allowing true incels on the forum. The rules and Frequently Asked Questions already show a barrier for outsiders and the difficulty of becoming a member of the community and a true insider. Next, a closer look will be taken at posts on the forum about outsiders and how members view outsiders and trolls, as well as how they deal with members who violate the rules.

4.2 Incel perspectives on outsiders and trolling

While conducting the content analysis, which happened concurrently with trying to contact the admins of the forum for an interview with members, it was found that there was a dislike of researchers among the incel community. Members seem to feel misrepresented by researchers or journalists, who, according to them, are looking to put incels in a negative light. One of the examples being discussed within the dataset is the article written by Emezue (2023), discussing the community and the dangers that incels bring. With the article negatively looking upon incels, there was outrage among the members about this article. It shows that the incels do not feel that they are being fairly represented within the mainstream media. Another example shows how researchers are viewed by members of the community, showcasing a negative perception of scientific papers written about incels, as they are “shitty easy papers about incels to complete their meme degrees in gender studies or some shit”.

This aversion towards researchers found within the texts might also be the main explanation as to why the admins did not answer the mails requesting an interview, knowing that members of the community would react negatively to the proposal. The dislike of such outsiders might also partially demonstrate how incels view outsiders and how they tend to deal with them. Because of the inability to contact incels through incels.is, it was decided to no longer do interviews with members, instead focusing on having a thorough content analysis in order to find themes and answer the research questions. The experience, however, gave insightful information about the community’s view on outsiders. There were more moments that happened during the data collection that exemplify the members’ view on both outsiders and trolls.

One of these instances happened in May of 2023, when a proposal for a new section on incels.is was made public, which would allow non-incels to become members of the forum with a dedicated section where they could post. The threads in this section would mostly be meant for asking incels questions about the blackpill and their worldviews. The reactions to

this idea were mixed, as could be seen with the results of the poll included with the proposal. 54,5% was in favour, while 41,1% was against the new section. The comments on this thread show a divisive community as well. Some members wanted to use the opportunity to show a different side of the community, making the average person realize that incels are “not evil cartoonish caricatures”, while others assumed that outsiders would only use the section for misuse:

Figure 3

A user about outsiders²

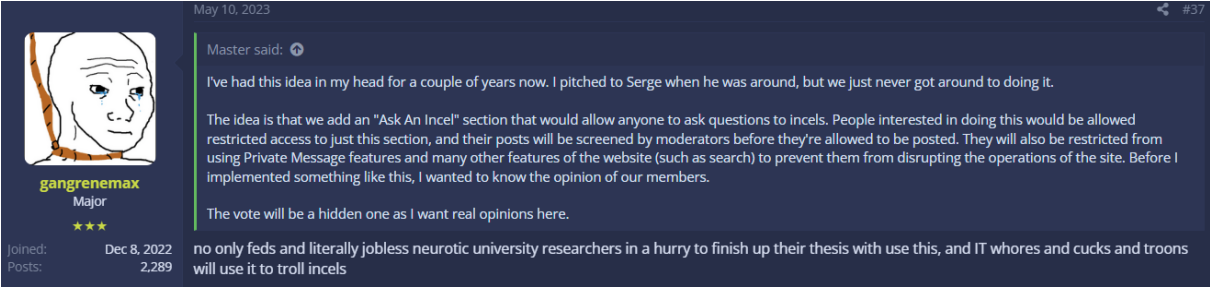
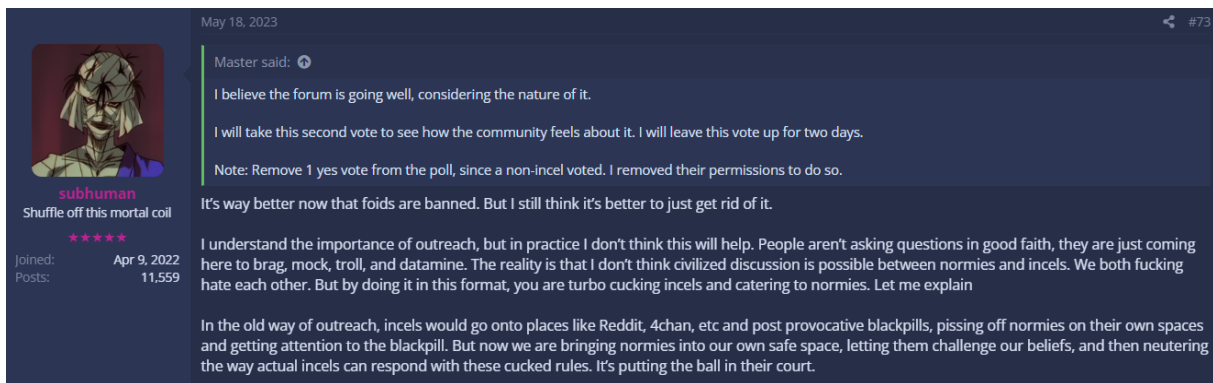


Figure 3 shows a member who does not view this section as a place where truly interested potential incels would come to. The place would only be used by people looking to make a mockery of the community. However, after evaluating the results of the poll, it was decided that the section would be created as the majority of voters voted in favour of it. However, later that month, another thread and poll were made, asking the members if the section should be kept. This time, only 39,6% voted yes, while 60,4% voted against. Thus, the subforum was deleted. Posts within this thread show how the members who were against the section viewed the members who voted in favour as fake incels or as members aiming to destroy the community, saying that “any cuck who votes yes should be hanged with the toilets”. These particular members were truly against allowing outsiders to be part of the forum, and this sentiment was shown multiple times throughout both threads.

² For a definition of vocabulary used by incels, see the Glossary in Appendix 1.

Figure 4

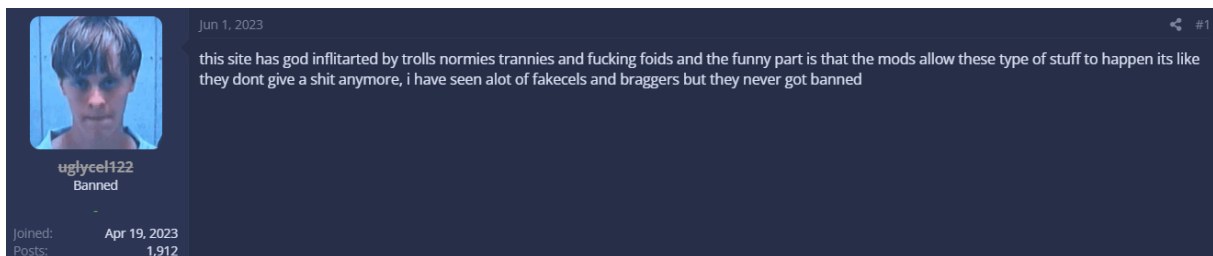
A user about the relationship between incels and non-incels



In another post within the second thread about the new section, it is noted that this new part of the forum only brought with it trolls or dataminers instead of the truly interested persons who wanted to know more about the community. This sentiment can also be seen in Figure 4. In conclusion, outsiders are being negatively looked upon and are seen as having bad intentions that would not do the incel community any good. This also means that members of the community expect there to be trolls on the forum, establishing the fact that there is a perception that there are not only true incels on the website. This belief that there are both non-incels and trolls on the website has often been found within the dataset. These users are being accused of trolling and gaslighting others, and when a member posts something that is not taken seriously by others, this member is being called a troll, whether it is true or not. It is, however, an effective way to silence these members and to paint them as users who cannot be trusted.

Figure 5

A user about the infiltration of non-incels



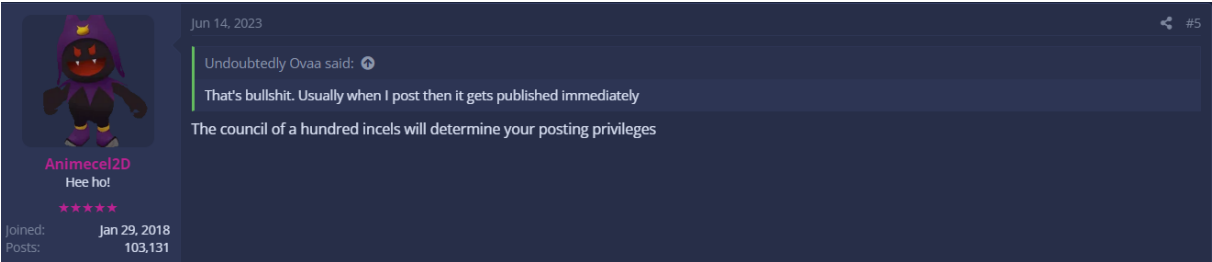
There are also threads where long-time members view the forum as being worse off because of the infiltration of trolls and non-incels, while also accusing the staff of not doing anything about it, as shown in Figure 5. Not only are the rules being broken repeatedly, meaning that there are fake incels on the forum, but it also has become difficult to trust others

due to these non-incels who are now a part of the community. Multiple times the forum has been referred to as a zoo everyone can look at and where the incel community can be studied. The members are thus aware of being observed by outsiders, showcasing how unwise it would be to share any personal information or to take a lot of risk. What also could affect how members react to the presence of outsiders is the fact that most non-incels are being painted as bad people by members of the incel community. Members of /r/incelstear, a subreddit on online forum Reddit where the incel community is being discussed, are being accused of touching kids or for being responsible for the death of an incel. Another example is a thread discussing the suicide of an incel, where the family of this deceased member is being discussed in a negative manner and viewed as spineless. These people are considered to be the reason for the current situation of incels, which might explain the demonising that is happening. By viewing all non-incels as bad, it also becomes more probable for the incel community to trust the other true incels more as they are the only ones who understand the situation they are in. As a result, the forum should, according to the members, become the only safe place away from the bad people, although with the alleged infiltration of non-incels, this cannot be considered the current reality according to the members themselves.

There is also a feeling within the incel community of being unable to block out the trolls or outsiders. Mods and admins are being accused of not doing anything about these users, showing the power that they have compared to the normal users who can only make the staff aware of the trolls. However, there actually is a method that members use in order to block out these trolls and outsiders. This can come down to either ignoring such users or ridiculing them to the point where the accused can no longer be taken seriously. By calling the accused member a fed or troll or by making a joke out of their questions, the non-incels become less effective and thus the members of the community solve these problems on their own. Figure 6 shows this use of humour in order to neutralize accused trolls or non-incels.

Figure 6

A member using humour to drive away non-incels



The truth is that the community perceives that a significant percentage of the users on the website are either non-incels or trolls, and they are also aware of the fact that the forum is accessible for everyone and thus that every post is viewable for non-incels. While it is true that members have their own methods for dealing with accused trolls, it still does not solve the level of distrust that the outsiders cause. By not knowing the incel vocabulary or by baiting certain responses, users become suspects, but no one can say with any certainty who is a true incel and who not. Based on the dataset, there seems to be a close relationship between the distrust that members of the forum have for each other and the role that trolling plays in the risk taking. Members become mistrustful and are unwilling to share personal information, either due to someone making a joke out of it or because of federal agents using it for their own purposes.

4.3 Trust on incel forums

With the former section giving insight into the workings of the forum and the relation between members and outsiders, it is now time to delve into how trust is built and what constitutes trust on this forum where there is a perception of trolls and outsiders being part of the community. The goal was to find ways in which members showcase their (dis)trust of others in the community. With the content analysis, concrete examples of trust within others were found, as well as a reasoning for why members tend to trust strangers online. Three themes were found when it comes to reasons for trusting others. These include the main theme, the desire for human contact, and its two subthemes, the desire to feel wanted and/or heard, and the desire to get answers for questions one might have. The three themes will be individually discussed, containing examples showcasing how members indicate these desires on the forum. Afterwards, the factors as presented in the trust model by Mayer et al. (1995) will be used in order to assess if these factors could have any influence on the perceived trustworthiness between members of the community. Together, these themes and factors give a complete image of what indicates (dis)trust within the incel community.

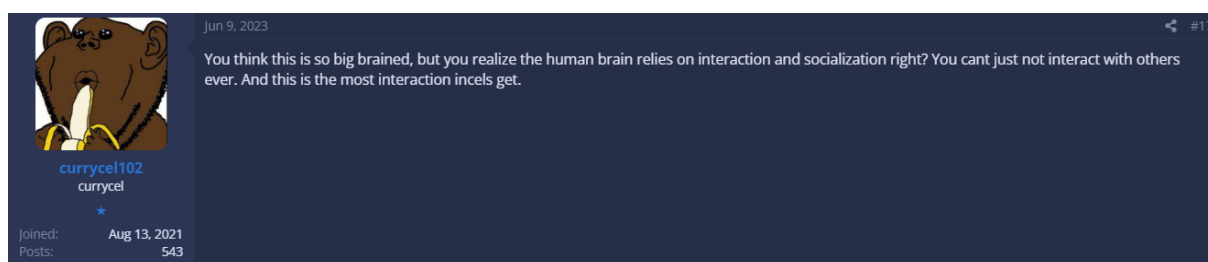
4.3.1 Incel desires

The main theme discovered within the dataset related to why members would trust others is the desire for human contact. It was found that members often refer to incels.is as the only place where they can get interaction with other people. It should be acknowledged that it is

true that within the dataset there are instances where members refer to real life friends that they have. However, these texts also often mention that these real life friends do not understand the members, making it desirable for incels to be a part of the online community so that they can share their thoughts. Multiple members expressed that they do not have a lot of contact with people outside of their own family, making it apparent that this is the case with many of the incels. The forum is one of the few means of getting into contact with other, likeminded people, as Figure 7 showcases.

Figure 7

A user about the reason for being active on the forum



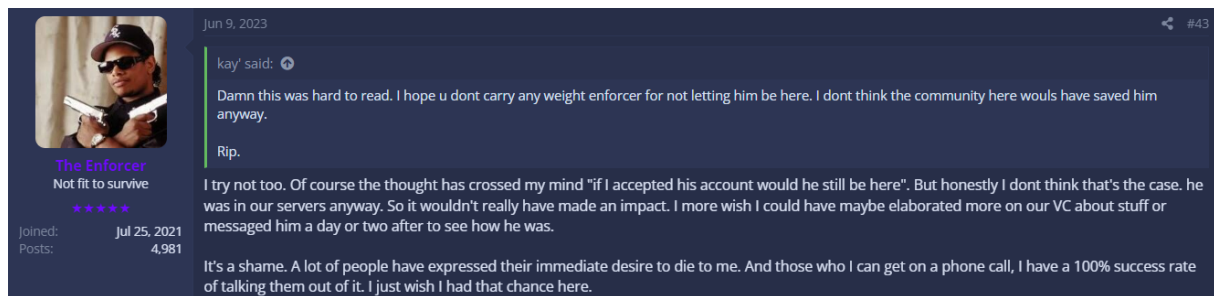
Within the dataset, members refer to the forum as the last place where they have contact with people outside of their own family, or they share that only their mother wished them a happy birthday. These thoughts become even darker in nature at certain times, with members expressing a wish to die, but mentioning as well that nobody would care. The forum brings with it a way to get human contact without being shunned for it. This shunning does happen on other online destinations. For example, within the threads there is a hate for other channels where one cannot speak so freely as on incels.is, with forum 4chan being the most notable inclusion. There is a primal desire of having contact with other human beings, and all other channels are being exhausted, either due to there being no freedom of speech or due to the channel outright being banned, as was the case with incel-related subreddits on forum Reddit in 2018. Thus, the only option remaining is to communicate through incels.is.

The first subtheme connected to the desire of human contact is the desire to feel wanted and/or heard. This theme shares many familiarities with the main theme, as the desire for human contact could be explained by a desire to feel heard, especially when it comes to the controversial topics the members of the incel community discuss. However, there is a distinct difference in having contact with someone because it is a primal need for human beings to interact with others, and having contact with others because there is a need to reaffirm one's thoughts or feelings. Because of the closeness between these two themes, there is a lot of overlap in labelled posts. Incels do not feel heard in real life or on other channels,

such as the aforementioned 4chan, making incels.is one of the only options for sharing thoughts and finding likeminded people. Members feel unwanted within society, while this sentiment is also apparent within the dataset as one member says that “Soyciety is to blame, this site is just an outlet for the unwanted to speak about their problems, and find some kind of solace in their predicament”.

Figure 8

A user talking about his relationship with other members



One thread that stood out in particular and felt representative of the members’ desire to feel heard is the thread about a 16 year old incel who committed suicide. This member was bullied in real life and therapy was not successful. While this person used to have an account on incels.is, he was rejected and banned from the forum due to being underage, which is not allowed on the website. The thread contains condolences for the victim, while it also becomes a place for members to share their own struggles and open up about their feelings. The OP, short for Opening Poster, of the thread had contact with the victim a few days before his death, mentioning that he often talks with other members about wanting to die. One of the posts from this user about his own thoughts about the situation is shown in Figure 8. This shows that incels want a place to express themselves and to feel wanted and/or heard, while there also is a desire for trust to be built between members.

The second subtheme is about the desire to get questions for answers that one will not get within the mainstream society. As the discussed topics tend to be incredibly unorthodox and the thoughts that incels have are not viewed as normal within society, it becomes convenient to go online and to find answers to these questions by participating within the online incel community. An example of this is a member who wants to know why he is an incel and what factors led to this lifestyle. He wonders if it is due to his looks, his autism or something else. There is a desire to know why this person is an incel. This shows how a forum like incels.is is viewed as one of, if not the only place to get answers about life, being an incel or practical aspects like balding. This makes sense, as a forum such as incels.is

contains many likeminded people who have been through the same things you have. They would be able to answer any questions you have and might help someone with a situation that they are in. These three themes give a glimpse into why members might be inclined to share more than they normally do, as there are primal desires that every human being has or because it is the only outlet that members have, while also showcasing why incels go to these channels in the first place.

4.3.2 Trustworthiness of incels

Next, the trust model as proposed by Mayer et al. (1995) will be used in order to assess if members view each other as trustworthy, using the factors of perceived trustworthiness. These factors are influenced by someone's general expectation of others being trustworthy, in this model being referred to as the trustor's propensity. Based on what is found within both the theoretical framework and the analysis of the dataset, it becomes difficult to predict what the trustor's propensity could be for incels. On one hand, almost all incels deal with anxiety, and methods like therapy do not help, potentially making the situation seem hopeless (Moskalenko et al., 2022). These factors would probably decrease one's trust in others. At the same time, there are still significant desires for members that lead to them making contact with others. Since these desires could even be primal in nature, for example as an incel looks for human contact, it could increase the propensity to trust. It could be seen as a last ditch effort to be treated like a human being, leading to the incel consciously making the decision to be more trustful. The fact that one communicates with likeminded people could also help in the propensity to trust them. However, no conclusive statements can be made on this based on the content analysis.

The first factor that might show trustworthiness is ability, referring to having skills or competencies that demonstrate that the other person knows what to do in relevant situations. One could look at this factor as the perceived expertise that the trustor thinks the trustee has of the inceldom and about the blackpill. For example, incels that give accurate and/or reliable information could be viewed as having a high ability, potentially leading to a higher degree of trust. In the dataset, it was found that members view older incels as more authoritative, which applies for both the real life age (these members are referred to as eldercels) and the amount of posts one has on the forum. One thread within the dataset is about a member identifying himself as an eldercel and giving an introduction. The reactions show that other members appreciate the knowledge that such an incel brings with him, thanking him for sharing his

thoughts and that “it will probably help some of us and future incels as well”. A post in another thread shows that new members are not seen as authoritative and that they still have to prove how competent they are, as “their perspective on this means nothing” when they have an account of two months old. These examples show that the age of the account and of the user matter when viewing someone as having a high ability and thus possibly being deemed trustworthy.

Members also showed little trust in the staff of the forum, implying a lack of ability in governing the website. This was especially apparent during the discussion on whether or not to allow non-incels on the forum within a remote section of the website. Members also blamed the staff for letting incels.is deteriorate, to the point where there are threads within the dataset solely focused on the way the forum has gotten worse throughout the years. These examples show little trust in the admins and mods, with the repeating pattern that is found within the texts being that members want more regulation and stricter rules on who is allowed to be on the forum and who is not. This sentiment is not shared by everyone, as the two polls about the new section were answered with 50% yes and 50% no and with 40% yes and 60% no, but the members who are against opening up the forum are more vocal than the proponents. A lot of blame is placed on the moderators and on the members who did want the new section, implying that there is little trust.

Benevolence is another factor of Mayer’s (1995) trust model that has been detected within the dataset. This factor refers to the trustor believing that the trustee wants to perform good-natured acts, and is not acting purely out of egotistical motivations. There are instances where true benevolence can be seen on incels.is. These moments are labelled within the dataset as the community helping each other. Another label that refers to benevolence within the community is that of the desire to prevent others from the same bad fate that long-time incels have endured. In the beforementioned thread about a 16 year old member committing suicide, members talked about how bad it is for a teenager to be a part of a community like incels.is. According to them, not everyone should be blackpilled, especially at such a young age. Such comments are showing that these members truly care about the wellbeing of their fellow incels, while also not wanting each other to be in the worst possible situations. Another example is when members are helping each other with hair problems, in particular with combatting balding, showing that there can be a desire to help others and make each other a better person.

However, while benevolence was found within the dataset, the opposite was also detected, with mainly the fear of being exposed to cruelty being present. This is apparent in an example where a member wants to get honest opinions about his looks, while also being scared of the possible negative consequences that could arise from putting pictures of himself on the internet. There is fear that “sending my face on an incel website is going to turn out wrong”. There is no trust in the benevolence of other members, and the belief is that they will not act morally right once they have possessions of the sent pictures. There is a significant feeling that certain members, referred to as either trolls, LARPs or infiltrators will take advantage of others and their trust. This indicates that benevolence is not present for certain members, meaning that it is more difficult for them to be trusted.

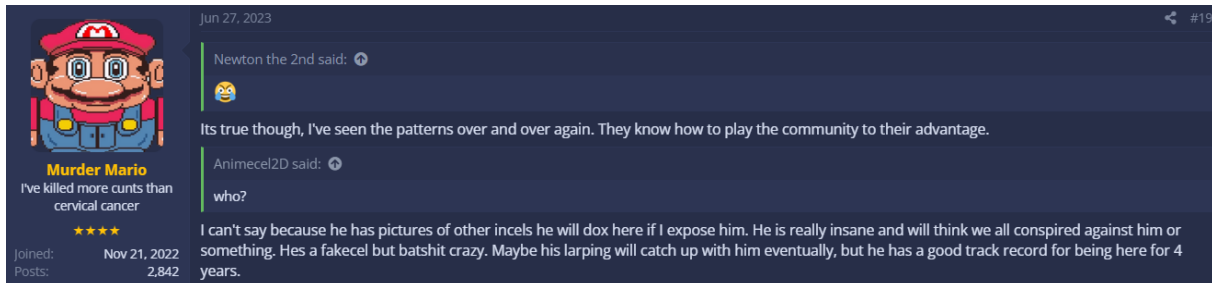
This fear of being taken advantage of is found multiple times within the dataset, as well as the fear of having to deal with members with bad intentions. This mostly refers to members who are secretly trolling or who are undercover cops or journalists. Another example of this distrust in the benevolence of others is found within the earlier mentioned thread about a proposal to the members to make a section on the forum where non-incels can ask incels about their beliefs and views. Such a section could be seen as a way for the members to bring themselves in a better light for the mainstream society, perhaps being represented more fairly in the aftermath by journalists or researchers. However, there were comments from members who were concerned that members would not act benevolent once this section would be created. According to one user, the members would use shitposts and insults, leading to an even worse reputation for the incel community and the forum. This particular member did not have trust in the benevolence of the other members, and thus viewed it as impossible to have a good, sincere conversation with a non-incel.

Integrity is the last factor that is assessed through the dataset. It refers to the set of rules and principles that exist within the community and the trustor’s perception of whether or not the trustee adheres to them. One thing that has become clear while analysing the dataset is that it is not wise to share confidential information with others. Screenshots are being shared on the forum with the goal of discrediting others, while information about someone’s personal life is being put online as well. This breaking of trust shows that with some members there is little integrity to be found. One of these examples is the possibility of being doxed and the potential sharing of pictures, meaning that integrity and having a code of honour are not present. This can be seen in Figure 9, highlighting the manipulation that can happen when

someone has more power than others, leading to a situation similar to mutually assured destruction.

Figure 9

A user talking about the possibility of being doxed



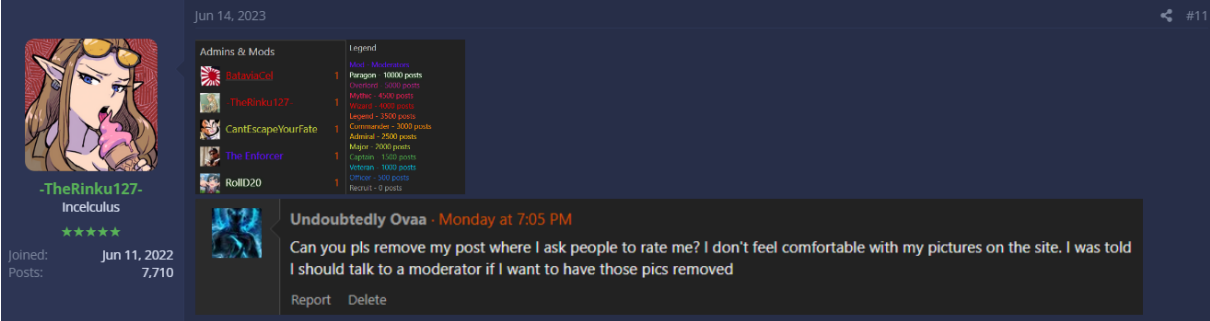
What also indicates distrust when it comes to integrity is the fact that members themselves believe that the rules of the forum are constantly being broken. Within the rules it is stated that non-incels are not allowed to have an account, so one would expect other members to have integrity when making an account and that they thus are not lying. This would mean that only true incels would communicate on the forum. However, the opposite seems to be deemed true when looking at the dataset. All the time, members accuse each other of being a fake incel, an infiltrator or a troll. Whether this is true or not does not matter. When members have the perception of there being non-incels on the forum, they have the feeling that the rules of the forum are not being adhered to. Thus, integrity does not seem to exist and there is good reason for the trustor to distrust the trustee. Based on these findings, it is believed that members of the incel community do not view each other as having a lot of integrity on the forum.

4.4 Perception of risk and risk taking

Lastly, there will be a focus on the experience of risk that members have when posting content on the forum. This experience of risk is difficult to accurately assess by conducting only a content analysis, as it is hard to see what content members consider risky to post and what considerations there are before posting risky content. Still, the experience of risk can be found in some instances within the dataset, but these examples are scarce and thus it would be unwise to consider conclusions when it comes to risk taking as definitive. What does showcase risk, though, are the rules of the community. These rules already imply that posting on the forum could be considered risky. It is advised to use a proxy or VPN in order to protect one's identity, while members are also heavily discouraged to post personal information.

Additionally, the rules state that it is difficult to delete posts, as this can only be done within thirty minutes of posting. After these thirty minutes, a moderator needs to be involved, who will delete the post when members truly desire it to be done so. That this comment will be deleted, however, is not guaranteed and is only done after a moderator deems it just to do so. This means that a third party has to judge the post, making it possible that the post will not be deleted. This fact increases the risk for the members when posting. Figure 10 is an example of a member being ridiculed for asking pictures of himself to be removed, showcasing the risk involved in sharing personal information and the possible negative consequences involved:

Figure 10
A user exposing another member of the forum



In general, there were few threads or posts found where personal information was shared or where members showcased risk. What comes closest is the sharing of personal stories or experiences, but while these posts give a glimpse into the life of the members, it does not contain any information that could be considered risky to share. A few instances were found where members discouraged each other of sharing personal information, but these moments were so few and far in between that it is difficult to state whether or not the community is truly concerned about other members doxing themselves. What was found within this dataset, however, was members sharing personal information of other members. The earlier example about a member being exposed for wanting a picture to be deleted showcases this, as well as the aforementioned thread about an incel committing suicide filled with personal information about the deceased member. Details about his family and personal life were shared, either showing him as a tragic figure or as a fake incel who had a girlfriend and thus was not deserving of being mourned. An example of this is someone sharing that the deceased member used to be active on another forum called looksmax.org, as well as that he used to have a girlfriend. This user even mentions that “suicide is a sad topic, but why the tears for a normie?”.

While these examples give the idea that members mostly tend to be aware of the risk that is involved with posting on a forum dedicated to incels, it is difficult to make such statements with certainty. To illustrate, there is a thread where one member is considering sending his face to strangers on the internet in order to get an assessment of his physical appearance. In the end, he decides to not take the risk, even after considering sending pictures through private messages to users who according to him seem trustworthy. However, this is only one instance and other threads do not have any risk taking or at most little risk taking. Thus, this example has to be viewed as an exception. What could help with this awareness of the risks when posting online is the minimum age that the forum enforces, as members have to be at least 18 years old to make an account. A counterpoint to this could be that people are not always honest on the internet, with one of the main things that internet users often lie about is their age (Drouin et al., 2016). This means that it could be disputed whether or not these rules are being adhered to. Still, the findings within this dataset show that members within the incel community are aware of the risk involved with posting on this forum, while there were also instances found of this risk taking being exploited by other members.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Main findings and conclusion

This paper showcases the incel community in a light that has not been done before. While other research has put the focus on the incels themselves and their beliefs and potential radicalization, the goal of this particular research was to look at the community as a whole and how the community deal with other anonymous members (Daly & Reed, 2022; Donnelly et al., 2021; Lindsay, 2020; Regehr, 2022). This concerns the trust in others, but also the perception that currently is a part of the community when it comes to outsiders and trolls. With this different point of view, more will be understood about incels, but also about community building in general, making it research that adds novelty to this academic field.

The main question was about how the online incel community anonymously builds trust while also being subjected to trolling. As was found often within the dataset, it can be concluded that it is incredibly difficult for the incel community to build trust on a forum such as incels.is, even though the members try to build meaningful relationships due to their desire to engage in human contact. It might be difficult to do so because of the large amount of users, when internet users tend to have only a few trust relations, making it close to impossible to trust everyone on the forum (Ghafari et al., 2020). The impact of the potential presence of trolls or other non-incels on the forum cannot be overstated either. Members have the feeling that these non-incels make the true incels seem as violent and cruel people, while in truth that is not what they perceive themselves to be. Because of this suspicion, building trust becomes close to impossible, especially in a community where anonymity is normal and where sharing personal information is discouraged. What also does not help is that lying is common on the internet, making it difficult to trust one's words (Drouin et al., 2016). One factor that does help trust building, however, is the fact that these members have a lot in common, such as their reasons for becoming an incels, similar to the different themes found by Daly and Reed (2022). Especially their theme of being rejected and viewed as subhuman proposed within this paper has been found often within the dataset. The three suggested themes found within this paper related to the incels desires are a direct effect of these feelings of rejection. It shows a deeper understanding of why incels become a part of these communities, even when distrusting other members. Moments of trust between members are sparse and are mostly reserved for only the most serious of topics. To conclude, as long as this forum is publicly accessible and as long as it is relatively easy to make a new account, it is difficult for this community to have a significant level of trust building.

5.1.1 Answering the sub-questions

When looking back at the first sub-question about what indicates trust in other members for incels, themes were formulated related to why members flock to the forum in the first place and why they might be more inclined to trust others. The main theme is the desire for human contact, while the subthemes are the desire to feel wanted and/or heard, and the desire to get answers for questions related to the incel community or life in general. Members of the incel community tend to have little contact outside of their own family or have no contact with anyone at all, making it necessary to get into contact with others through a platform like incels.is in order to satisfy their primal desire for human contact. This also leads to a want to feel heard when it comes to someone's thoughts and feelings. There is a desire for the receiving of more positive feelings from others that would make the recipient feel good and assured. The last theme, the desire to get answers is related to the fact that the accepted ideology of the incel community is different in nature than the acceptable ideas within mainstream society, which is one of the main reasons why incels have the desire to feel heard in the first place. As stated within the theoretical framework, incels often find that therapy does not work, while they also often have negative experiences with non-incels (Incels.co, 2020; Moskalenko et al., 2022). These are two examples of how incels are being pushed towards an online community filled with likeminded people, building an echo-chamber and potentially thinking even more negative about non-incels.

In order to gain more insight into how trust is shown on incels.is, the data from the forum was also compared to the factors of ability, benevolence and integrity that Mayer et al. (1995) proposed. All factors were found within the texts, showing that the trustworthiness of others can be assessed on an online forum and with this specific community. Ability was shown through either the age of the member, or through the age of the account the member is using. Being a member for a long period of time brings with it more authority and the feeling that the member is more capable and competent. The reason for this can be coupled with the desire to get answers to questions. When someone has questions, it makes sense to trust someone with a lot of life experience or experience within the community. This desire makes it easier to trust others with a high ability, showing a connection between the findings. There is also a connection to capability-based trust, as it is easier to trust someone when they are deemed competent (Doney et al., 1998). Another factor from Mayer et al. (1995) is integrity, mainly shown through the way members handle sensitive information from others. It was found that this information was mainly used as a way to blackmail others, showcasing an

immediate betrayal of trust when someone is perceived to be in danger. The resulting situation is one of mutually assured destruction, where one cannot make a move without being exposed in the aftermath. Ghafari et al. (2020) claim that the level of trust determines with whom we should share information. Based on these findings, it seems that there is little trust as there generally is not a feeling among the members that information should be shared with others within the community.

Lastly, the factor of benevolence was found to be significantly present and considered to be the most relevant factor. However, mostly negative instances were found. There is a fear of being treated badly, which includes sensitive information being exposed or the taking advantage of others. When members have the feeling that others will not act morally right when it comes to sensitive information and feel that others are not good-natured, this perceived lack of benevolence negatively affects one's trustworthiness. As mentioned in the results section, there are seemingly genuine acts of benevolence that can be found on the forum, but these instances are less common and mostly seen when discussing serious topics, such as the suicide of one of the members. To conclude, a general lack of perceived trustworthiness has been found, meaning that there is little that indicates trust in others. What could have an effect on this, however, is that incels view this forum as the only place to get a fulfilment of a primal desire; being in contact with other human beings, while also using the forum to share their thoughts and feelings and to make sense of their world. Thus, while there is little trust in others on incels.is, there are still reasons to engage with others on the forum and there are reasons to trust them, even when that is not immediately able to happen.

When it comes to the sub-question about the experience of risk, it was found that incels take few risks on the forum itself, which would indicate that there indeed is a feeling of risk involved. A significant reason for this is the fact that the forum is publicly available for everyone, making it riskier to post truly sensitive information. Also, as found when answering the first sub-question, there is generally little trust in other members within the incel community on incels.is, which also, according to the trust model from Mayer et al. (1995), would negatively affect the risk taking from members. This shows how intertwined the terms risk and trust are with each other, as was suggested by Corritore et al. (2003). Within the dataset there were instances of risk taking being negatively rewarded, with this trust being betrayed. By exploiting this trust, it can be concluded that members of the incel community experience a lot of risk when being a part of incels.is, leading to more caution and less risk taking from the members. Seeing as the young males, which most incels are, tend to take

more risks, these findings are interesting, as they show less risk taking (Stoilova et al., 2021; Wilson & Daly, 1985). The incel community seems to be aware of the even higher risks compared to other online communities when communicating on the forum, making it a potential outlier compared to these other communities.

The last sub-question as part of this research was about how the potential presence of outsiders and trolls affect the level of sharing, as well as the level of trust within this community. The ingroup versus outgroup mentality was strongly present within the texts, even leading to the dehumanization of outsiders at times (Tajfel, 1970; Vaes et al., 2012). Within the dataset there was a dislike for any outsider, mostly being classified as trolls, infiltrators or feds. Incels feel that there is a significant quantity of these non-incels on the forum, making it difficult to trust others and increasing the risk involved with posting on the forum. The content within the dataset makes it clear that there is a connection between the perception of there being non-incels and the feelings of trust within the community, as well as risk taking being negatively affected. There is a feeling within the community that the staff is not doing enough about this situation, leading to members trying to block out perceived non-incels by doing their own trolling. These feelings fit Dym and Fiesler's (2020) findings, as the presence of outsiders has a negative effect on the incels' feeling of safety and privacy. The community itself is being damaged by the possible presence of outsiders and trolls, which is one of the consequences of trolling (Sanfilippo et al., 2017). All in all, trust and risk taking decrease due to the perception that outsiders and trolls might be active on the forum.

5.2 Limitations

The main limitation with this research was the difficulty of getting in touch with members of the incel community, especially when looking for members who have truly been a part of the community for a long time and have many interactions with other incels. While it is disappointing that no members were interviewed for this research, satisfying answers and logical themes were found through the content analysis. It must be noted, however, that these observations only show one side of the situation, as the motivations behind the community's online behaviour are neglected. Thus, these themes could only be an estimation of members' feelings about trust, risk and trolling. In order for these findings to be verified, interviews with incels still need to be held. This way, themes can either be approved or denied, leading to a more complete picture that then also might be compared to findings within other (online) subcultures. While some posts could and would immediately be interpreted as satirical or with

fun intentions, this is not the case with every post. Incels tend to often use shitposting within their community, making the line of serious and light-hearted a thin one (Daly & Reed, 2022). This means that the researcher's interpretation might not always have been corresponding with the intention of the poster. Interviews would add a lot of nuance and a better understanding of the community.

While doing the data analysis, it was found that there was a dislike for researchers and journalists, with the main reason for this being that incels have the feeling that they were not properly represented, with articles mostly being written for sensationalism. By having this perception it becomes more difficult to speak to members of this community as they do not trust researchers. In turn, this aversion takes away the incels' voice, making it even more difficult to write fair papers or articles that take multiple points of view into account. The same problem occurs within this paper, as all the researcher can do is interpret texts, without offering the members an opportunity to give a rebuttal or to nuance the researcher's conclusions. It seems like some of the other researchers have not properly engaged with the members of the incel community, which led to the members feeling disrespected and giving them distrust towards researchers and journalists. This would be unfortunate, as such cases could lead to a higher degree of radicalization as incels have the idea that the outside world is not attempting to understand them.

Lastly, it is possible that the moment of time in which this research has been done might be giving a different image of the incel community than when the same data collection is done at another time. For example, during this period of data collecting, the community had to reflect often about how the community functions at large. This happened because of the addition of a new section on the forum meant for non-incels. Members might have had negative experiences with outsiders because of this section, making them even more detached from any non-incel. These experiences could have led to a more extreme view of outsiders, while if another data collection is done in a few months, the sentiment might be more nuanced. The time and context of the data collection is incredibly important and might lead to different conclusions. Thus, it is advised to keep the limitations of the collection period of three months in mind.

5.3 Future Research

While the forum and its posts contained enough information that could be interpreted in order to identify themes, it was found that there were many references to Discord and its channel dedicated to the incel community. In fact, this channel is even promoted on the homepage of incels.is, showing that this is an often used, alternative way for members to communicate. Discord is meant for both chatting and voice chat, giving members the possibility of getting in touch with others through multiple ways (Discord, n.d.). Because of the activity that there seems to be on Discord for this community, it would be wise to examine the way trust is built on this platform. It is possible that members communicate more freely when it is more difficult to become a part of the community, as one needs to be approved before being given access to the Discord channel. The perceived risk involved when communicating on Discord could also be studied, as well as the role that the option to voice chat plays in this decision to take risks. Because of the extra security layer, members could have the feeling that they are speaking with genuine people. However, the possibility of interacting with trolls might still linger in the back of their mind. These are a few of the topics that would be interesting to further explore in another research paper, taking today's findings one step further and testing whether these themes could be transferred across platforms, even when accounting for the different affordances each platform brings.

However, one thing that should be held into account is that ethical questions might arise when doing the research as proposed. Unlike the forum that is Incels.is, the Discord channel is not publicly available. For example, the Discord channel connected to Incels.is requires you to state that you are a true incel yourself. It would be unethical to infiltrate such a channel and pretend to be something you are not. Once the researcher starts to interact with others, which is necessary, it might be so that the researcher starts to influence the community, bringing into question the validity of the observations. Were the researcher to only observe the channel and agree with the owner of the Discord channel to only observe and to use the posted content for research, one could also start to question how natural the members will be when communicating, potentially knowing that they are being observed for academic purposes.. Since this is a private channel, instead of a public forum, users should have to give consent before being observed. The result would be a more ethical observation, but one that might not be all that reliable. All in all, trying to answer the same research questions within a different context would be truly valuable, but questions remain about how to handle such research in both an ethical and reliable manner.

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Appendix 1: Glossary

3D – Real women as opposed to 2D women, like chatbots or female fiction characters.

Ascending – Getting out of the incel community by way of having sex.

Avi – Shortened term for Avatar.

Based – Term in the alt-right online community, meaning ‘un-woke’. You are based when you do not care about being politically correct or what others think of you.

Becky – Average looking women and subordinate to the more attractive Stacy. The majority of the female population is a Becky. Incels feel that they are owed attention and sex from Becky’s.

Betabux – A male in a relationship who uses money or other desirable means in order to get a relationship. This makes up for his looks and/or status.

Blackpill – The same situation as the redpill, with the main difference being that someone who is blackpilled does not believe in being able to game the system to his advantage. Nothing can change the situation, leading to nihilism and viewing oneself as doomed.

Bluepill – A man who has normal dating practices and who is unaware of the society that incels see.

Chad – Archetypal white male different from incels in both physicality and access to sex. Is tall, chiseled, square jawed, well-endowed and has a full head of hair. Synonyms related to race are Tyrone, Chadpreet, Chaddam, and Chang.

Chadlite - A lower tier of Chad.

Cuck – Men who are deprived of their male identity through their own behaviour.

Curry/Currycel – Derogatory term for a person/incel from India.

Dox – Putting someone’s personal information online for the public to see. Often done as a way to shame or extort someone.

ER – Elliot Rodger. At times phrased as ‘going ER’ which refers to committing a mass murder, followed by a suicide.

FBIcels - A term referring to FBI agents posing as incels on forums.

Fed - A federal agent.

Femcels – Female version of an incel.

Femoid/Foid – Short version of Femanoid, which is a combination of female and humanoid. A way to refer to women who are not considered to be human.

Gigachad - A chad who is in the 0.1% of men when it comes to physical attractiveness.

Glow/glowing/glowtards – Someone is glowing when they are part of the police, FBI, or an informant.

Gymmaxxing – Working out in the gym to have a better chance with women.

Hypergamy – The belief that women are more sexually selective, and will leave men for more physically attractive men who have a better socioeconomic standing.

IT - Subreddit on Reddit called IncelTear, discussing incel communities.

JFL - Acronym for Just Fucking Lol.

Kike - Derogatory term for someone who is Jewish.

KYS – Acronym for Kill Yourself.

LARP – Acronym for Live Action Role Play. In the context of the incel community, it means someone who is pretending to be someone they are not.

LDAR - Acronym for Lay Down And Rot. The belief that one's situation can no longer be improved.

Lifefuel – Something that encourages incels to keep living.

Lookism - The belief that objective beauty draws on eugenics and scientific racism. Part of redpill and blackpill.

Looksmaxxing – Term for any attempt to improve or maximize one's appearance.

Manlet – Men who are short or have a small frame.

NEET – Acronym for Not in Education, Employment or Training. Refers to people unable to support themselves due to lack of motivation or ambition.

Normie – Slang for normal person.

Ragefuel – Acts, events or information that makes an incel angry.

Redpill – Situation where a man starts to wake up in the real world according to the incels. In this world, women are in higher standing than men and female oppression is a myth. Women desire traditional gender roles. A man can use this knowledge to this advantage.

Rope/roping – Term for committing suicide.

SEAMaxx – The belief that one can improve dating ability by travelling to Southeast Asia. This is because of the idea that Southeast Asian women prefer white men with Nordic looks.

Simp - A term for a man who invests a lot of time and money on a woman who does not want anything romantically with him.

Soyboy – Slang term that describes feminist and/or left-wing men who do not have the necessary masculine qualities.

Soyciety – A reference to a society where weak men live. Men lack independent thought and live without for example honour.

Spic – A Spanish speaking person.

Stacy – Female version of a chad. Female archetype high in the sexual and social hierarchy. Viewed as unattainable for incels.

Toilet - A derogatory term for women.

Troon – A term mixing the words ‘transgender’ and ‘loon’.

Truecel – A true incel. Someone who never experienced any form of physical intimacy.

Appendix 2: E-mail to incel.is admins and proposed message to members of incels.is

Hello admins of incels.is,

Currently I am doing research on the incel community and I would like input from you and your forum’s members. For this research my focus is on the level of trust that members of the community have in each other, as well as how comfortable they are with sharing things with each other. Another aspect that I am looking into is how members view outsiders who want to know more about the community and its members, especially when considering the possibility of trolls on the forum. The situation that recently happened with ‘Ask an Incel’ already shows how some members view outsiders, but I would like to have more details, which I hope to get directly from the source: the members themselves.

Since it seems to be against the rules to make a new account as a non-incel and as it is impossible to message members privately with a new account, I am hoping that you could help me. There are a few members that I would like to interview, making it possible to paint a better picture of the situation. Only using my observations would be unfair and incomplete, so I really would like to give the members a voice so they are not misrepresented.

Hopefully you can help me in any way. It would help a lot if you could try to get me in touch with some of your members that might be interested. If that doesn’t work, perhaps you could help me by showing another way to approach members of the incel community. Below is the message that I would have sent members on your forum, which gives more information and a way to contact me. If you have any questions or suggestions you can always send me a mail.

Kind regards and thanks in advance,

David T.

Dear reader,

My name is David and I am sending you a message because I am interested in having a conversation for academic purposes with you about the incel community and how you deal with trusting others online and how you deal with outsiders. For a master dissertation for a university in the Netherlands I am currently doing qualitative research about incels, which means that I want to interview multiple members of the incel community. Based on your activity on this forum I think that you are an interesting person to interview with good insights about this community.

My question for you is whether you are interested in participating in my research. I assure you that your privacy will be of the utmost importance and that you do not have to share any sensitive, personal information if you are not feeling comfortable about doing so. We would have a conversation through Zoom or Discord (or any other channel you would prefer) for about an half hour to one hour. No webcam is required. The conversation will be recorded with the sole purpose of having an accurate transcription of the conversation. I want to present this community in a fair way within this paper, which makes an accurate transcription a must. As soon as the transcription is done, the recording will be deleted. Privacy is very important for both me and the university, so we will do everything in our power to assure a safe handling of the recording and keeping you anonymous.

Let me know if you are interested in participating or if there is someone from the incel community within your network who would be interested in participating. For any other questions I am always available by sending a mail to

Kind regards,

David

Appendix 3: Rules of incels.is

- [Nov 9, 2017](#)
-
- [#1](#)

Welcome!

This is a forum for male involuntary celibates, single men who have trouble finding a significant other.

MEMBERSHIP

- **Incel (Allowed):**
 - A man (18+) who desires a romantic relationship but is unable to enter one.
- **Women and LGBT Individuals (Not allowed):**
 - Banned on sight, no exceptions. This is a heterosexual male-only forum.
- **Non-incel (Not allowed):**
 - Even if interested in blackpill philosophy, the community has voted not to allow non-incels.
- **Under 18's (Not allowed):**
 - Forum accepts only those who are 18+, no exceptions aside from those grandfathered

RULES

Note that moderators will consider rules on a case-by-case basis.

- **Experiences:**
 - Do not discuss or request personal romantic or sexual experiences, even if they happened long ago. Discussion of paid sex is allowed as an exception, as the community has voted to allow it.

Spoiler: Community poll

Discussion of personal romantic/sexual experiences outside of the forum may result in a warning or ban.

Spoiler: Community poll

- Do not LARP; there is a difference between withholding your experiences and pretending that they never happened.
- **Behavior:**
 - Do not persecute, harass, or attack others.

- Do not humble-brag, such as by subtly praising your own features ("I'm incel even though I'm muscular and 6'2").
- Do not troll, bait, proselytize, post platitudes, mass tag users, or necropost (i.e., do not post in inactive threads older than ~1 month unless you have something to contribute - plain agreement, mere quoting, and meaningless one-liners don't qualify as contributing).

- **Accounts:**

- You can only have one account, do not make more. Do not share your account, or post on behalf of other users.

- **Content:**

- Do not post low effort, spam, advertisement, or in all-caps.
- Do not ask to be rated or post selfies.
- Do not worship or praise people (i.e. do not put people on a pedestal or post pictures admiring them).
- Do not cherrypick (e.g. posting an unattractive man with a girlfriend to generalize and try to prove a point).
- Use the [NSFW] tag if your thread has shocking content, but use it sparingly.
- Do not post illegal content. If in doubt, don't post it.
- Do not post bluepilled content of any kind.
- Do not sexualize minors in any way, shape, or form.
- No gay or LGBT content, unless you're criticising it.
- Do not post animal abuse content.

These rules are very flexible. You WILL be warned or banned if you attempt to circumvent any of them.

Please also read our [terms and rules](#) and [privacy policy](#) for more information on data and content. By using this site you agree to all our policies and rules.

SUBFORUM-SPECIFIC RULES

- **Must-Read Content:**

- Necroposting is allowed on all threads, they all remain relevant to this day.

- **Inceldom Discussion:**

- Low effort is not allowed here. Please post quality threads and responses only.

- **The Lounge:**

- Lax rules on low effort, just don't spam.

- **The Sewers:**

- Necropost anytime, spam all you want. However, do not mass tag people, mass create threads, or spam responses on many different threads (i.e. don't overly annoy people and ruin the experience for the rest).

Spoiler: Community Poll

RESOURCES

- Official Twitter: [@IncelsCo](#)
- Official Telegram: <https://t.me/incels>
- [Incel Blog](#)
- [The Incel Wiki](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [The Scientific Blackpill](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I have an inquiry or proposal, where can I reach you?

Email master@incels.is

Why are the rules so unusual?

This is a forum for men who can't get a partner and feel sad about it. Seeing romantically successful people brag about their experiences on the forum would be insulting, and would only exacerbate the issue.

Is there a Dark theme?

Yes. Press the theme button on the bottom left of the page.

Can I change my username?

Not directly. The community voted and decided against it.

Spoiler: Poll

However, check the below section on account deletion/making new accounts.

Can I change the tag under my username?

Yes. From your preferences panel.

How do I get alerts?

At the top right of every thread, there's a button that says "Watch".

If you want to Watch a particular thread without having to post, simply click the button.

To automatically Watch threads after you create them or post in them, change your alert preferences.

Can I block users?

Yes. Click on their username, followed by the button "Ignore".

Can I edit or delete my posts?

Yes. You have a 30-minute window to edit or delete posts. You have a 30-minute window to edit threads. You cannot delete threads.

You can ask a mod to remove content if you really need it gone, but we do not mass delete content.

I can't send private messages or vote in polls!

You're new. Be active on the site, and you'll be given permission automatically in time.

How do I add an image to my signature?

Upload the image to imgur.com. Click on the down arrow once it's uploaded -> Get share links and use the BBCode (forums) link.

How do ranks and stars work?

You earn one star per 100 posts, up to 5 stars. Once you get 500 posts your rank and color change, and you reset to one star again.

For each rank you need to have been registered one extra week on the site, this is so spamming to skip ranks isn't possible.

You can see all ranks in the Members section's sidebar. If you have the post count + registered time required for a rank, be patient; the 'upgrade' process runs every hour.

Can I erase my account?

Yes. Select the "Disable Account" option from your user dropdown or from your preferences. This is irreversible! Your username will be randomized, your email and password purged from the database, and your account fully disabled forever.

I deleted my account. Can I make a new one?

Yes, but only three (3) months after the deletion of your old one. Just register again and link to your old account, so we can whitelist you. Don't pretend to be a new account because we'll confuse you for someone trying to avoid a ban. If you got banned and only then deleted the account, you don't qualify for this. You need to wait one (1) year instead. If you try to make an account before that, you will get banned and the 1-year timer will be reset. And yes, if you delete your account and then wait three months, you can get a new username by making a new account. Three months is a long time though, think about it carefully.

How can I stay safe online?

The same way you do anywhere else: Don't post personal information (name, address, phone, email, pictures, etc), unless you are comfortable exposing that information to the whole internet. If you want to go a step further, you can post with a proxy or a VPN.

How do warnings work?

Warnings are active for exactly 1 month by default. Active warnings will add up, and if they total 60% or more you will get a temporary ban (up to 4 days). At 100%, you'll be permanently banned.

Why was X user banned?

We do not announce reasons for warnings or bans, but you can try asking the user yourself. Otherwise, use the ban megathread in Offtopic.

What is low effort?

It is content that is unrelated to a thread, posted for memetic value, or spam-like in nature. Examples: an emote reply, quoting someone and adding nothing else, one-word replies, and many other variations. The content might as well not have been posted.