

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**THE FOOTPRINT OF GENDERED NEOLIBERALISM ON INCEL'S  
ARCHIVES: HOW THE POSTFEMINISM IS IMPRINTED IN  
INCELS.WIKI**

**BACHELOR THESIS**

**Laura Blažeková**

**Bratislava, 2023**

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**Laura Blažeková**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used academic and other sources of literature are referenced and listed in Bibliography.

February 15, 2023 Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

In Bratislava

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the strong women I have the luxury to have met in my life. All those women that struggled and had their lives marked by hate crimes committed out of misogyny. Those women that stand with their heads straight up and fight for a brighter future. I would like to thank especially those strong and brave women that stood and stand by me forever and always.

## ABSTRACT

Author: Laura Blažeková

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University: Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

Thesis Advisor: PhD., prof. PhDr. Iveta Radičová, PhD.

Chair of the Defense Committee: Prof. PhDr. František Novosád

Committee Members: Prof. PhDr. František Novosád, CSc., doc. Samuel Abrahám, Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD., prof. Silvia Miháliková

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Young people are becoming lonely, unable to obtain the relationships and intimacy they desire even if the culture suggests them otherwise. How do they deal with such an issue? Sometimes hating what you can't have becomes just what such a lonely and desperate person needs. Somewhere in this mess along with changes which redistributed power within society, the Manosphere was born. And within the Manosphere, Incel, an abbreviation of "involuntary celibacy", arose and we were up for a big misogynistic hateful problem. Quite paradoxically, originally created by a woman back in the 1990s, Incel soon outgrew the purpose of a peaceful community for lonely people (Kassam, 2018). Simultaneously, as the postfeminist narrative started moving feminist theories into the mainstream realm, a whole bunch of social phenomena started popping their evil heads up to the society. How are these two interconnected and how is postfeminism actually represented and imprinted in Incel? This paper has the aim to observe and map the postfeminist narrative in introspective archives of Incel in incels.wiki, the introspective archives with articles written by Incels about Incel and Incel ideologies and concepts.

## ABSTRAKT

Autor bakalárskej práce: Laura Blažeková

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Členovia komisie pre obhajoby bakalárskych prác: Prof. PhDr. František Novosád, CSc., doc.

Samuel Abrahám, Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD., prof. Silvia Miháliková

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Mladí ľudia sa stávajú osamelými. Narážajú na problém pri socializácii, hľadajú si vzťahov a intimitu, po ktorej túžia, aj keď im kultúra naznačuje opak. Ako riešia takýto problém? Niekedy sa nenávisť k tomu, čo nemôžete mať, stane presne tým, čo takýto osamelý a zúfalý človek potrebuje. Niekde v tomto chaose, spolu so zmenami, ktoré prerozdělili moc v spoločnosti, sa zrodila Menosféra. A v rámci Menosféry vznikol Incel, skrátene pre „nedobrovoľný celibát“ a my sme stáli pred veľkým mizogýnnym nenávisťným problémom. Celkom paradoxne, pôvodne vytvorený ženou v 90. rokoch, Incel čoskoro prerástol účel pokojnej komunity pre osamelých ľudí (Kassam, 2018). Medzitým sa feministické teórie presunuli do populárnej kultúry a stali sa tak súčasťou každodenného života. Transformácia feminizmu z politiky do širšej spoločnosti však feminizmus poznamenala, a tak sa zrodil postfeminizmus. Ako sú tieto dve veci, Incel a postfeminizmus, prepojené a ako je postfeminizmus reprezentovaný v Inceli? Tento práca má za cieľ sledovať a zmapovať postfeministické naratívy v introspektívnych archívoch Incelu na incels.wiki, introspektívnych archívoch s článkami napísanými Incelmi o Inceloch a Incelových ideológiách a konceptoch.

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## INTRODUCTION

As the feminist goals become more successful within the larger population of the western-oriented countries, it is only natural to anticipate that the backlash in various shapes and sizes will follow. The gendered neoliberalism - postfeminism - has progressively moved from the political realm into the space of mainstream culture. Gendered detachment from a need for a systemic fight against gender-based inequality was gradually vulnerable to abuse by anti-feminist sentiments. The misogynist groups like Incel (Involuntary Celibate) have been overtaking this narrative and attacking feminist gains, oftentimes by the model from the political arena of the alt-right. Contemporary Incel is described as a subculture of awkward, unattractive, sexually frustrated heterosexual men (Hoffman, 2020; Chang, 2020). They channel their frustration through misogynistic rhetorics and anti-feminist sentiments (Hoffman, 2020). Incels operate within online social forums dedicated to incelism, where the manifestation of postfeminist narrative has been documented and linked to anti-feminist sentiments by Lindsay (2020). In this research I anticipate filling the gap of manifestation of postfeminist narratives within the introspective archives of Incel as well as to set the grounds for further missing research of the impact of postfeminism on masculinity, specifically the concept of hegemonic masculinity in vulnerable yet loosely defined groups like Manosphere that represent the spectrum of backlash against feminism.

It is highly necessary to research and understand the possible implication of the postfeminist narratives that run within our popular culture on subculture such as Incel which represents a further terrorist threat world wide.

## CHAPTER I: How to define Postfeminism?

Post democracy, post truth, post covid, and post war. As it seems, we live in the era of the ‘post’ everything. ‘Post’ is rolling at us and waiting behind every corner. Obviously, the wider public starts at one or the other point despising this prefix. It may be even the case with postfeminism for many doubting eyes. What does it mean exactly, when we turn the page and add the prefix post to a movement such as feminism? Well, it starts with a lot of ambiguity and leads us to the redoubted mainstream culture.

Let’s not get too lost in a linguistic description first and orient ourselves properly in the time framework first. There is a historical break narrative type of definition of postfeminism, in which different waves of feminism are understood to be framed by the time (Riley et al., 2017). From the 18th to the mid-20th century, we have the first-wave feminism addressing suffrage and access to education, followed by the second-wave feminism from 1960 to 1980 focused predominantly on gender equality, objectification and sexual agency. And after that the postfeminism or the third-wave feminism, in which the giant was tackled and women were free to participate in traditional feminine beauty while freed from its past patriarchal associations. Were they really?

The name postfeminism itself offers several explanations. The prefix post implies the outdatedness of feminism, which covers indeed two of the definitions by which scholars define postfeminism. Firstly, the postness of postfeminism invokes a narrative of progression, displaying postfeminism as a momentum within a linear structure (Kavka,2002). The second wave feminism is out, sisters turned to mothers and their daughters have started a rebellion against them. Out with the old and in with the new, feminism got modernized. Just like you once have claimed that you will never behave like your parents did, but in a slightly more radical way.

The postness, on the other hand, also signifies that the postfeminism itself is dependent and follows a certain continuity of second wave feminism (Fiske, 1989). There is no epistemological framework to postfeminism (Dentith, 2000), nor is there a clear political agenda, although some argue postfeminism can be described as an epistemological backlash against certain second wave ideas (Gill, 2007). Postfeminism is most precisely, as it seems paradoxical, most relevant due to its absence in politics and prevailing presence in the mainstream (Gill, 2007). You will not find

large groups of women chanting in the streets holding “I am a postfeminist” signs high up. Try to imagine it as more of a subtle framework, a construct that has been observed and predefined by a social scientist who has been watching what’s going on in contemporary society. There has not been any clear and united intention among women to enter the postfeminist era, as it goes with many societal changes it just happened.

The intention of the sisterhood movement got lost in translation to the next generation that came and traded values for a labeled bag. As the neoliberal economy took over feminism, the “free market feminism” was born (Whelehan, 2005). Under the pressure of consumerism and hyperproduction, the perception of postfeminism tends to seem like a retrogressive, anti-feminist backlash that cancels gains of previous waves and the whole feminist movement (Genz&Brabon, 2009).

## 1.1 The Free Market Feminism

*Can feminism be both political and popular?*

Quite paradoxically, as feminism left the political realm and shifted to mainstream culture, postfeminism became in some respect even more political. As within neoliberal framework freedom has been often linked to the ability to purchase, feminist movement was misread as binaristic, archaic and unproductive for contemporary women (Genz&Brabon, 2009). Does Beyonce need feminism and its previous gains? Within this framework, we can argue that she just does not. She has bought and accumulated enough material substance that her status deserved her respect. While money rains, feminism is so over. Women finally have the power in their hands, however, the pool of their choices prevails within the patriarchal system. A kind of a disempowerment through empowerment.

For example, the ideal contemporary postfeminist subject is white, middle-class, heterosexual girl, while the postfeminist man is the one with metrosexual appeal with sexist laddish (Genz&Brabon, 2009). Postfeminism suggests that the aims of feminism have been met and are no longer relevant to the lives of young women. Implicitly, feminism no longer has to be

enforced politically, it is up to individual women's choice (Genz&Brabon, 2009). We experience the shift to neoliberal values and from feminist idea of welfare to workfare (Segal, 2003). In this sense, postfeminism is a backlash. An illusion of progress which is really a promoted ideal that falls under personal consumer pleasures.

Let me demonstrate the neoliberal free market's impact and transformation of feminist values on the make-over paradigm. Neoliberal tendencies of mass consumption reframed consumption itself and appearance work as empowering, of course while reaffirming gender difference based on biological essentialism (Gill, 2007). Quite complicated, but essentially meaning that as a contemporary woman it is meant to be natural for you to want to be pretty, likable and pleasurable to concern yourself with your appearance and how do you do that exactly? Through more consumption. Your body is the locus of your success and identity.

Doubting eye could argue that there is nothing wrong with biological essentialism, after all we can not argue with nature right? But are we really that sure we have the 'right' information about the 'natural'? Quite many authors such as C.S. Vance, A van Kooten Nierkerk and T. Van Der Meer would argue that we might be very mistaken in our beliefs and ignorance of social construct theories.

To answer the initial question, yes, feminism became popular and even more political than before through a postfeminist framework. As a woman, you do not need to have the law to protect you from the oppression, you just need to make it rain and spend it in the right way to be objectified in a desirable way.

## **1.2 The Death of the Subject or Who's to blame?**

Another definition of postfeminism popular within academic circles adopts a theoretical, quite epistemological path of explaining the phenomenon of postfeminism. The posting of feminism is seen here as a shifting of the very subject of feminism. In this sense, the cause and common solution of women's subordination based on universal sisterhood becomes problematic and outdated (Genz&Brabon, 2009).

What or who is the subject of postfeminism then? Dow (2006) demonstrates this shift on three popular movies, namely *The Stepford Wives* from 1975, its remake from 2004 and the 1987's *Fatal Attraction*. Coming from Dow's (2006) claims, men and patriarchy / a systemic problem is no longer the primary source of females' struggles. Feminism is no longer within the political realm, and the burden is solely on women's shoulders. The vision of feminism becomes focused on women's self-improvement. The system stays the same, patriarchy does not go anywhere but women's fate becomes their responsibility. This narrative is strongly supported by the notion presented in popular culture. Contemporary women's pool of opportunities and possibilities is presented to be growing and exploding. Within the public sphere, previous inequality has disappeared. Is that really so or is that just an illusion? The legacy and gains of second wave feminists of women having equal rights and opportunities dismantles in opportunistic claims and victim blaming. Contemporary women are supposed to operate within the same sex/gender system that limits their choices but are also to have the responsibility over it since it is their choice.

*"You can't have it all."*

A phrase that embodies and underlines how wrong we are when we try to claim that feminism is no longer needed. Of course, women have the possibility to be at the dominant professional roles, but the narratives used in popular culture align with these archetypal features such as being single, anxious about their self image projection, desiring children and unsatisfied with her personal life. To a large extent the postfeminist feature is Susan Douglas' (1994)

*"the Battle of the Titans...between the traditional wife and mom and the feminist bitch from hell"*  
(p. 242).

Dow (2006) portrays this archetypal postfeminist conflict in her analysis of the movie *Fatal Attraction* released in 1987. So it seems that the subject is dead, at least pretending to be dead. What then is the role of masculinity and how exactly it is portrayed in this scheme? Postfeminist man is not aggressive, nor is dominant or the one oppressing. He is the one who got the message

from the second wave sisterhood and respects women, takes care of the chores and his children. He is a sweet guy, nonetheless, as Dow (2006) points out, he becomes the center of the universe. Women who “sacrifice” their lives for career and success are left with nothing but lamenting about how all the good ones are taken. Of course there is the preferential undertone of archetypal caring wives to be the winners and the feminist successful masculine women the losers. In other words, previous feminist gains became problematic and even the very source of female unhappiness and lack of fulfillment (Douglas, 2010).

### 1.3 The Postfeminist Sensibility Concept

When defining postfeminism and trying to address its common narratives, the term ‘postfeminist sensibility’ proposed by Gill (2007) should be no stranger. Postfeminist sensibility is a term articulating and combining ways in which popular media and popular culture address women and how they portray mutilated intertwining among second-wave feminist values and the objects of their critique (Gill,2007). We can call it a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification.

Let’s demonstrate this shift in the cosmetic surgery industry (Riley et al.,2017). Second-wave feminism values female autonomy and critiques a patriarchal society in which the women’s value lies in their sexual attractiveness for men. This value for female autonomy was used to construct women’s participation in cosmetic surgery as a personal choice, a personal choice of women to improve their quality of life. Another example is a Diamond’s (2005) analysis of media coverage on female celebrity same-sex kissing, which showed that these kisses even affirmed normative heterosexuality since they were portrayed as being done for the pleasure of men.

For whom is this relevant actually? The little research we have shows that there are different regional forms that postfeminist sensibility can take on. For example in Ukraine, a shift from sexual objectification was delineated from suspected sexual subjectification, which happens to be the norm at least for the Anglophone West, and took a turn towards cuteness as Evans and Riley (2017) concluded from their analysis of online living doll movement which was inspired by Japanese Kawaii culture. Another display of postfeminist sensibility taking in other parts of the globe would be Dosekun’s (2015) claims on the embracement of hyper-feminine appearance among young women in Lagos as a form of empowerment.

Butler (2013, p.45) in her analysis on presence of postfeminist sensibility concluded that it is

*“a versatile and pervasive cultural discourse that can travel through complex social terrains, deftly adapting to cultural, economic, and political shifts while maintaining its core characteristics”.*

Riley et al. (2017) concluded that

*“The set of ideas around ideal femininity that Gill termed ‘postfeminist sensibility’ continues to circulate in and across media and everyday sense-making”.*

#### **1.4 Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism in Conversation**

To grasp the variety of possible approaches to postfeminism, it would be reasonable to look at their interactions among academia. Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism are key streams of thinking about contemporary feminist narratives, and quite luckily, their dominant academic representatives were ‘in conversation’ about their junctions as well as permeable borders.

All three of these ‘feminisms’ depend on and subsequently validate media platforms and organizations. In this line of thought, postfeminism’ aim from the 1990s was to make sense of, oftentimes contradictory, representation of women (Banet-Weiser, et. al., 2020). The outlook on remaining structural inequalities was repressed by biological essentialism, by the claim that the reason such inequalities remained was no longer sexism but natural differences and women’s own choice. It is important there that we are speaking strictly about postfeminist narrative and/or culture, never academic. In academia, only feminist researchers and theorists who analyze postfeminism as phenomena exist. A new feminist object takes over the responsibility for her own well-being and self-care.

It is also very important to acknowledge the double-edged meaning of politics. the neoliberal feminism recognizes gender inequality yet simultaneously it rejects the social and cultural structures that shape our lives. It is the above mentioned theory of the new subject who takes on full responsibility for her own well-being. Neoliberalism, in this understanding, does not value care work. On the other hand we have popular feminism, which can not be analyzed in isolation and interacts with capitalist practices.

#### **1.5 Hegemonic Masculinity**

The concept of hegemonic masculinity comes from the early 1980s and has been widely applied in several fields including sociology, psychology and criminology (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). When we open a discussion about backlash to second wave feminist gains, we must

certainly ask who is committed to the backlash and why exactly. One way to perceive this would be through the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony in ‘*hegemonic masculinity*’ points towards a certain kind of persuasion of the societal majority through various channels depending highly on a given historical period. In a contemporary case it would be through the media, internet, social platforms as well as institutions and organizations about the naturalness of the male dominance (Donaldson, 1993). In other words, hegemonic masculinity is meant to be a pattern, consisting of practice, through which men’s dominance over women can continue in time. Now, it is important if not crucial to understand this concept as one that only a small proportion of men can enact, thus hegemonic masculinity per se does not have to correspond to the lives of any actual men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Another crucial aspect of hegemonic masculinity is that it does not exist alone by itself, it interacts and reflects on femininity as well as other masculinities, it is in its very nature relational. The concept of hegemonic masculinity itself is not conceptually universalising, as Connell and Messerschmidt explain:

*“...it (hegemonic masculinity) is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process.”*

It matters in the Incel case, because boys and young men have a tendency of choosing those discursive positions that help them fend off anxiety and powerlessness (Jefferson, 1994). Which might end up being unattainable standards of, for example, a certain body image or other chosen symbols that have authority over others. Of course, the construction of hegemonic masculinity can be observed on various levels. From the very early stage of academic understanding of hegemonic masculinity, local and regional scales were thought to play a key role in its construction. However, as the world underwent technological revolution, constructing inputs of hegemonic masculinity became globalized.

## **1.6 Different Outlooks on Postfeminism**

Genz (2006) approaches the concept of postfeminism through political life, namely the politics of The Third Way, which embraces globalization whilst enduring microeconomic flexibility. The market society is established, where human beings become a part of the market economy - human capital. This type of politics determines a hyper-competitive society and strongly differs between winners and losers. Such politics had a severe impact on the understanding as well as the place of women in society. McRobbie (2000) refers to it as the politics of women without feminism. Women’s position is in a double entanglement, which simultaneously accepts and refuses feminism (McRobbie, 2004). In postfeminism, feminist goals are depoliticized, directly opposing the activist and collective feminist politics (Genz, 2006). Feminism goes mainstream in postfeminism, the articulation of its ways becomes mainstream and therefore naturally contradictory (Genz, 2006). The discourse of neoliberal capitalism reflected in the existence of postfeminism gives the floor to a more dynamic and unstable political agency. For the purposes

of this thesis, neoliberal capitalism is understood as “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey, 2007). Feminism becomes a part of the identity that goes under the consumer capability and self-expression agency. Most importantly, postfeminism separates the academic feminist narratives and mainstream feminist narratives. The implications of postfeminism on culture are that backlash and innovation can never be fully separated and will be always entwined (Genz, 2006). In the context of the Incel movement, where the primary motives of frustration driving individuals are stemming from socio-economic shifts in society, it is important to acknowledge Genz’s claim of backlash and innovation being entwined.

## **1.7 Concluding Connections between Postfeminism and Incel**

Postfeminist narratives - the beliefs that goals of feminism have been achieved in day-to-day life - are often used as anti-feminist sentiments among misogynist groups. This is a result of the individualization of the political stance of feminism and its shift into mainstream culture (McRobbie, 2004). Misogynist groups, in the case of Incel, claim their aggrieved entitlement through a set of bio-essentialist claims and through the reverse oppression from women due to the abandonment of heteronormative gender roles which in their rhetorics of nostalgia for the past were not favoring women as they do now. In their perception, through their loss of the status of the breadwinner due to the socio-economic and cultural shifts towards neoliberalism and feminism, women have a higher social status and therefore are reversely oppressing men.

## CHAPTER II: Defining Incel

Incel, as a part of the broader Manosphere, has been present for more than a decade now. Originally created by a woman back in the 1990s, it soon outgrew the purpose of a peaceful community for lonely people (Kassam, 2018). Contemporary Incel is described as a subculture of awkward, unattractive, sexually frustrated heterosexual men (Hoffman, 2020; Chang, 2020). They channel their frustration through misogynistic rhetorics and anti-feminist sentiments (Hoffman, 2020). It is the term postfeminism that started being understood as a backlash against feminism (Gill, 2007), namely its extension of postfeminist culture which is defined by the anti-feminist sentiments (McRobbie, 2009) that became potentially worrisome to antifeminist narratives. These are represented within the forums of the Incel community (Lindsay, 2020). Postfeminist culture acts in synergy with neoliberal economics (Ging, 2019), which is, paradoxically, believed to favor women in all aspects of life, within the Incel community (Lindsay, 2020). The marks of postfeminism are clearly marked within the forums of Incel members (Lindsay, 2020), however, Incel members have also created an introspective archive - the incels.wiki, which strives to describe the phenomena of incelhood throughout the eyes of incels. For the purposes of this research, the incels.wiki serves as an introspective dataset for an exploration of the Incel community. This research maps the postfeminist narratives within Incel archives through qualitative content analysis.

### 2.1 Who are the Incels?

Perhaps the first question that comes to one's mind when told about the Involuntary celibates, an online community is who are they? Let's start with the most unacademic thing - a general truth, used in a very inspiring manner by Lindsay (2020), with the adage:

*“Hurt people, hurt people.”*

Speaking of generality, Incels are united through a shared mythology of victimization (Lindsay, 2020). The world's order, in Incels' eyes, is structurally 'against men' by economically, sexually and socially favoring women (Lindsay, 2020). In other words, they (Incels) blame women for

their isolation and rejection (Hoffman, 2020). The term aggrieved entitlement is used (Lindsay, 2020) to describe this emotional state of Incel individuals, who believe to be entitled to romantic relations with women. They feel deprived of their right to love by female emancipation. As women are able to be economically independent, and therefore have far more freedom in choosing a mate, or straight out no need for stable monogamy, Incels are left behind, the society deprives them of sexual activities (Papadamou et al., 2021). They are, of course, not the only one, Incel belongs under the broader network of misogynist movements of Manosphere, where groups such as Men's Rights Activists belong. Incels are also angry about the rise of so-called "lookism", meaning a shift of preferential focus of women to things that are out of one's control such as bone structure and hair (Papadamou et al., 2021). Society, mainly women attach the major value to these which inevitably puts Incels out of the game. If we look at the 133-page manifesto *My twisted life* by Elliot Rodger, who is responsible for the first recognized incel violence incident, we can clearly see the pain stemming from a deprivation of love from women.

*"All I have ever wanted was to love women, but their behavior has only earned my hatred. I want to have sex with them, and make them feel good, but they would be disgusted at the prospect. They have no sexual attraction towards me. It is such an injustice, and I vehemently questioned why things had to be this way. Why do women behave like vicious, stupid, cruel animals who take delight in my suffering and starvation? Why do they have a perverted sexual attraction for the most brutish of men instead of gentlemen of intelligence? I conclude that women are flawed. There is something mentally wrong with the way their brains are wired, as if they haven't evolved from animal-like thinking. They are incapable of reason or thinking rationally.....  
...They are beasts themselves. Beasts should not be able to have any rights in a civilized society.....  
...Women should not have the right to choose who to mate with. That choice should be made for them by civilized men of intelligence."*

Interesting is also the outlook of Rodger on sex and women when he describes the ideal world according to him:

*“In an ideal world, sexuality would not exist. It must be outlawed. In a world without sex, humanity will be pure and civilized.”...*

*...All women must be quarantined like the plague they are.”*

Elliot Rodger’s manifesto has been praised as a ‘patron saint’ on Incel online forums as well as by another incel terrorist, who committed so far the deadliest attack, Alek Minassian (Hoffman et al., 2020). Incel has its own set of vocabulary, which also involves the term “go ER”, which is a call to action to follow Rodger’s example and engage in acts of terrorism (Hoffman et al., 2020).

Not to be fooled by the extreme description, Incels do define inceldom as a one’s state, referring to a deficit of a sexual relationship with a woman (Cottee, 2020). The important point I wish to make here is to say that Incels do not perceive committing terrorist attacks as the end point, or the goal.

Certainly not all of them. We can imagine Incels as a spectrum of various self-help outcomes with the terrorist act on one pole and fatalism on the other. Fatalistic approach helps Incels to liberate themselves from constant improvement towards the beauty standard. Fatalism, in the Incel related context, means the ultimate rejection of the goal of sexual intimacy with women (Cottee, 2020), except the prostitution, may I add. They form the majority of Incels (Cottee, 2020), it is only few that resort to violence. Overall, there have been more than 50 fatalities with the very first one in 2014 (Hoffman et al., 2020).

## **2.2 The Manly Man: The Perception of Masculinity in Incel Community**

One of the key concepts to look into when striving for understanding the Incel community is definitely masculinity. It is the perception of one’s self, the identity that is in danger in Incels’ eyes. So, what exactly is masculinity, how do we define it and what is the perception of it by Incels?

Incels believe in a strict social hierarchy, which is unfortunately for them, based solely on physical appearance (Lindsay, 2020). The hierarchy starts with the so-called ‘Chads’ and

‘Stacys’, they represent the top desired contemporary display of beauty standards. They are both desired and despised by Incels. ‘Chads’ are not only representing the contemporary attractiveness standard, they also represent a type of masculinity - hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a heteronormative masculine standard represented mainly by aggression, competitiveness and handyness (Whitehead, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity is also closely tied to white ethnicity. In other words, ‘Chad’ is an archetype, often perceived as barbaric and unintelligent by Incels, though (Lindsay, 2020). Imagine somebody like Channing Tatum or David Beckham, white, economically and sexually successful men who assert their masculine identity through desire by being contemporary desirable. In a sense, it is a story of female reduction to sexual attractiveness. Incels feel like Chads can be stupid, unintelligent and barbaric, nobody cares about their deeper attributes. It is all about the package. Chad is an alpha male. Masculinity in this sense, is an identity that, in the case of Incels, is strongly tied to and validated by sexual attraction from women (Lindsay, 2020). Stacy, on the other hand, is a sexual object and a conquest for Chad (Lindsay, 2020). Below them are the average looking ones, the normies, the Beckys, just the ‘beta’ people. And below them, there are the Incels.

Incels believe we got to this hierarchy by several societal and structural changes, or rather disruptions. Hegemonic masculinity is placed in the traditional family system that has shifted due to the rise of neoliberal capitalism (Lindsay, 2020). Society started favoring women over men, at least in the eyes of Incel. Socio-economic shifts caused economic instability for young working-class men who are yet to find their place in the world. To put it simply, young males striving for fulfillment of and acceptance of and from society feel wounded by a vision of gender equality. If we want to understand the pain and the hate, perhaps we might try to understand the feelings and contradictions that happen inside these young men. They desire to be desired by women, simultaneously they believe they can be desired by displaying the hegemonic masculinity archetype, which by its nature they cannot because the society moved on and works differently. They believe women will desire them if they are attractive and rich and will be able to save ‘lady in need’, however, the lady in need stepped up her game and is no longer in need of saving. Incels desperately need this lady, in a sense adore the lady yet they are unable to attract her, since their strategy is outdated. Unable to detect the need to level up their strategy, Incels

develop hate for women and even for the very strategy they have. It is a paradox of hating and adoring women and hegemonic masculinity at the same time.

Growing their dissatisfaction and frustration with the order they seem to have to follow, Incels channel their feelings to online forums. Incels can be found on several popular platforms such as 4chan, Reddit, 8kun, Discord, GAB as well as independent websites such as LoveShy, IncelSupport and many more, since they get banned quite frequently (Hoffman et al., 2020). However, we can find an increase in the presence of Incel activity on Youtube (Papadamou et al., 2021) and of course, we can not forget on Twitter. And, for the purposes of this paper the most important, Incels also have their introspective website, an epistemic series of articles from Incels about Incel.

### **2.3 From The LDAR to The Red Pill; Concepts of Incel**

Incel ideology is backed by a structure of conceptualized terms. Incels.wiki has a section named Glossary which includes fifty one A4 pages of terms used by Incels that are explained by Incels. European Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) refers to Moonshot's Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology. As you may anticipate, it is not possible to cover all of the concepts Incels use, however, we will focus on the main ones.

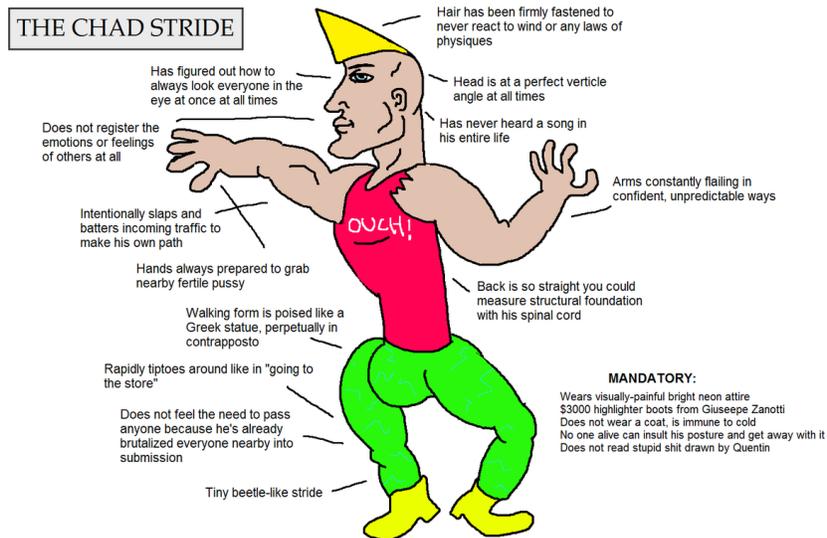
The Bluepill closely relates to 1999 movie The Matrix, bluepilled males are unaware of the 'real' society. Incels.wiki calls it a convenient lie. Bluepilled males are living their lives without acknowledging that the world is against them.

The Redpill is the one term that is not exclusive to Incel and is used among all of the Manosphere movements. To have swallowed the red pill equals to be woken up to the true reality of the world. In the real world, women desire to submit to traditional gender roles, female oppression is a myth covering how women are actually better off and if a man acknowledges the reality, it is possible for him to manipulate his way around.

The Blackpill goes against the previous possibility of manipulating man's way around in the world. The world according to the redpill is real, however, there is no way for a man to fight rejection stemming from female prejudice. It is a nihilistic approach disregarding any possibility of self improvement to the liking of women.

Lookism is a theory referring to eugenics and oftentimes plays a central role in the self definition of Incels. Incels evaluate their appearance and attractiveness and blame it for their lack of intimacy and relationships.

Chad is an archetype of a white dominant man. Physically he is displaying strongly all the secondary sex characters and in the context of postfeminism, he is everything that hegemonic masculinity represents. Incels have a clear visualization of how he looks, which is unattainable for them, yet strongly desired due to his success in intimacy with women.



Chad according to William (2019), former admin and co-creator of incels.wiki

Stacy is a counterpart to Chad. She is a female version of hegemonic masculinity, we might say a hegemonic femininity. Stacy represents the most desirable woman for Incels which they simultaneously despise and disregard as shallow.



Stacy according to William (2018), former admin and co-creator of incels.wiki

AWALT, short for “All Women Are Like That” is a generalization referring to all women acting based on a “female nature”.

Betabux is a man who is ranking just below the hegemonic Chad. He lacks sexual attractiveness, however he is still able to have relationships with women due to his wealth.

Cock Carousel is a concept assuming that women are sexually overly active in their 20s with attractive men, this period ends in their 30s, when they settle down with a less attractive man.

Femoid/ Foid is a term used for dehumanization of women, suggesting that they are not human.

JB, short for jail bait, refers to a sexually attractive girl aged below the age of consent.

JBPill is another pill concept that refers to the age of consent being an anti-male concept, since it prevents Incels from accessing sex with girls.

Sexual Marketplace is a code for a contemporary dating world.

The Wall tightly corresponds with SMV (Sexual Market Value) refers to the age, when women's SMV is on decline, according to Incels it is 25.

LDAR, short for Lay Down and Rot, is a commonly used phrase that refers like the blackpill, to the powerlessness of the incel-dom. Literally it means that there is nothing one can do to escape the struggle to achieve romantic relationships and intimacy with women.

-maxx/ -maxxing/ -max is, according to the incels.wiki, refers to the effort of Incel to improve aspects of one's life in order to secure sexual and/or romantic intimacy. In our context, it refers to the effort to be like 'Chad', to submit, actually to reach, the hegemonic masculine archetype.

## **2.4 Where does the Misogyny in the Incel come from?**

Lindsay (2020) explains the presence of misogyny in the Incel community through hegemonic and beta masculinities operating within the economic anxieties and pressures of the neoliberal era. His findings suggest that the postfeminist culture created the space for such movements through the depoliticization of feminism as a movement and its individualizing narratives of gender politics. Lindsay (2020) evaluated the relationship of Incel to postfeminism claiming that the neoliberalisation of gender politics caused the backlash against perceived feminist gains. Based on textual analysis of the data posted by the Incels to their forums, he concluded and described the imprint of postfeminism. Lindsay (2020) further argued that

*Incels subscribe to the neoliberal and individualist/essentialist understanding of gender believing in a gender-equal society.....Backlash against feminism and multiculturalism then makes sense within such a cultural context that stresses that feminism has achieved its goals...thus any perceived feminist gains exacerbate the sentiments of anger, resulting in vile misogyny and sometimes, leads to extraordinary violence events and calls for a 'beta-uprising.'*

Coming from the textual analysis of posts of Incels, the narrative of postfeminism is present and serves as a justification for the negative experience of Incels and simultaneously as a background

for the addressing of their anger. Lindsay (2020) further adds that this narrative cannot be dismissed as collective anger venting.

Postfeminism as a predetermining factor in the behavior of frustrated individuals who operate within the Incel community suggests that there is an interconnectedness between the factor that gave the predisposition for such a community as Incel is, the socioeconomic shift of neoliberalism which differs between winners and losers (Genz, 2006) and is based on the competitive consumer capabilities which give an individual sense of self-worth, and the gendered product of neoliberalism - the postfeminism which implies the contradictory actions, including hate. As was shown (Lindsay, 2020), Incels operating on their forums show signs that can be classified under the backlash theory of postfeminism. The textual data analysis from posts from the Incel forum is only a part of the collective stream of thoughts of Incels. There is also a collection of Incel archives available, which has been created by a collaboration of Incel members. Through a textual analysis of this archive, there is a great possibility of creating a bigger picture for understanding Incel. The Incel-made archive can serve as an introspective probe into the perception of Incel by Incels.

## Thesis Statement

In this research, the aim is to claim the implications of the postfeminist narrative are to be found present as a result of a content analysis of Incels.wiki.com. As it is indeed, a backlash against feminism, as one of the defining building blocks of postfeminism (Gill, 2007), the aim of this research is to address possible implications of the cultural discourse of postfeminist narratives, which are presented in popular culture, on to the rhetorics of Incel subculture through content analysis of the introspective source Incels.wiki.com, within which members of the subculture define themselves as well as their theories and beliefs.

The assumption is that these narratives will be well represented within Incels.wiki.com, implying the strong negative effect the cultural discourse of postfeminism has on sensitive groups that are likely to be further radicalized via social networks.

Content analysis of Incels.wiki.com will be set up to map the presence of bio-essentialist claims on gender subordination reaffirmation, make-over paradigm, focus on women as purchasing actors within an equal society, the concept of women's value restricted to their sexuality or shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification as well as through key elements of Gill's (2007) postfeminist sensibility.

## Methodology

Postfeminist narratives allow the escape from the political arena into individualization within culture, which can be then used in contradictory ways. The postfeminist narrative of the unnecessaryness of feminism, since all its goals have been already achieved, can be used as anti-feminist sentiment. The usage of this narrative among misogynist groups has been researched and confirmed, this is also true for the Incel (Lindsay, 2020). The confirmation of the presence of this narrative has been done through the textual analysis of posts of individual Incels submitted in Incel forums. However, the presence of postfeminist narrative within the introspective space of Incel archives has not been researched yet. Incels.wiki consists of 1365 articles written by Incels about Incel-related topics.

Through content analysis of Incel archives, namely, mapping the presence of references to the achievement of the defeat of gender-based inequality, the defeat of sexist oppression against women, achievement of women having freedom and control over their lives, in short, the achievement of feminist goals with a negative connotation.

The analysis based on the inductive coding approach on ten randomly selected texts from incels.wiki.com will provide an insight into narrations running within the website. Incels.wiki.com has a function of randomly selecting a text for the reader. For the purposes of this research, this function will be used. The inductive approach was selected in order to limit the bias coming from the theoretical background of Incel philosophies as it is helpful in establishing links between the objectives of narration and the raw source (Thomas, 2006). In order to focus specifically on introspections, the coding framework will be collected in an inductive manner by several coding strategies in place. Namely, the mixture of in vivo coding and structural coding. Mixture of these two types of coding will be applied in code categorization and will ensure the validity as well as reliability of the theme identification.

## Results and Discussion

The randomly chosen articles, using the random article button on the website, were *Astral Liberation Army*, *Females are socially inept*, *Halo effect*, *Heightism*, *Homocel hypothesis*, *Racepill*, *St. Blackops2cel*, *Tumescence*, *Uglyceldom* and *Weebs.fun*.

The in vivo coding was executed in order to find codes that would alert the presence of postfeminist narration, which was afterwards reassessed via structural analysis focusing specifically on concepts within postfeminist narratives. Several postfeminist related concepts were detected such as biological essentialism, the status of feminist calls being overdone, in other words women being better off as men leading to reverse oppression, as well as strong remarks on self image being a 'selling point' which reflects to the neoliberal capitalist roots of postfeminism.

Biological essentialism seems to be strongly rooted within the articles and it manifests itself in several ways. In noticeable straight forward manner such as:

*“...because the female brain is naturally programmed to consider short men exponentially unattractive.”*

This assumption of the “*natural*” is an example of attributing some behavior and/or desire to the solely biological influence with no data to support such a claim. The quote is from an article about heightism. The concept describes perceived discrimination based on height, implying it is usually women who describe men for inferior height. Usage of the label “*natural*” automatically refuses any other explanation of the phenomena such as some social construct playing a role, an inevitable sign of postfeminist narration - the refusal to consider inequality and/or discrimination and/or oppression stemming from structural and/or institutional order. Not to lose sight of no data given supporting that this, the discrimination based on height, would be even an issue. Since the article wrote that it is

*“usually women against men”*

who discriminates, the article implies that women from their position have the power to discriminate insinuating that women have power over men in this case, the article also denies the structural oppression of women which again highlights the postfeminist narration of no a priori oppression of women.

Biological essentialism was further reflected in the text via the entitlement to sex and romantic relationships:

*“It is also rumored that in certain Arabic terrorist organizations men dress as women and have sex with the other men, again as a cope for having no one to love.”*

The quote comes from the *Homocel hypothesis* article, referring to a model of homosexual tendency in excluded and sexually frustrated men. Once again, the article does not give substantial data to back up such claims. It offers just anecdotal evidence of prison homosexuality. The anecdotal generalization to natural processes continued:

*“After all, being denied access to “normal” sex, likely pushes individuals to consider alternative ways of satisfying their sexual needs. In fact, one robustly observes higher incidence rates of rape when prostitution is limited.”*

Assuming that the “normal” sex is, according to Incels, heterosexual, we can again trace the tendency of simplifying complexity of actions and attributing their cause to natural state. Another quite postfeminist tendency can be observed in the wording “*denied access*” referring to rejection. Access can be denied to resources, which in this case underlines the perception of women by Incels as resources, with their value linked to their sexual appearance and availability. This market analogy of dehumanization points toward the make-over paradigm.

The perception of women through their sexual availability continues in the article *Astral Liberation Army*, an article about a 27 years old autistic lesbian, who was an active member of incelistan.net.

Blažeková: How the Postfeminism is Imprinted in incels.wiki

*“She is/was trying to build a 3D printable sex and companion robot named Sylvie-The-Robot for her own personal enjoyment and to solve the incel problem.”*

The robot is/was to substitute for an intimate relationship because:

*“...she did not like to date because she feels that the LGBTQ community is only interested in hookups and not meaningful relationships.”*

It is an example of an Incel woman, however, her perception of women coincides with perception of Incel men. The reduction of perception of women's value through sexual availability and reduction of individuality of women seems to be in line with the postfeminist narration.

Biological essentialism was mixed with neoliberal capitalism associated with consumerism in the discussion of ethnicity as well. The example of such mixture was the text explaining the Racepill theory:

*“The race pill seems to affect ricecels and currycels in particular, presumably as their conspecifics rather chase after white Chads or Chadlites instead, presumably as a result of hypergamy and the fact that in a majority White country, Whites tend to occupy prominent high status positions like film actors, politicians and in history.”*

The quote is from the *Racepill* article, explaining the subset of blackpill applied on various ethnicities. It refers to the perceived sexual prejudice and/or discrimination based on their ethnicity. The quote suggests that white men have a higher chance to reach higher status within the society and therefore are deemed to be more desirable by women, leaving other men discriminated against. Two postfeminist concepts can be applied here, the neoliberal capitalist root of self-worth based on income and/or social status as well as biological essentialism coming from the generalized assumption of the dominance of white as far as sexual attraction goes.

The imprint of neoliberal capitalism and consumerism was also noticeable in other very postfeminist narrative-like remarks coded within selected articles, namely the worth of women being closely related to their age and proximity to the contemporary ideal body image:

*“The surplus of East Asian males among incels could also be related to their slower life history speed, which also might make female East Asians more neotenous and hence very attractive to other races, resulting in them marrying interracially much more than East Asian males”*

The remarks on body image as a key concept of self-worth and value definition did not stay on the women's side. Actually this neoliberal capitalist concept was dominant in explanation of Incels' suffering in several passages:

*“Normies think that if he and most incels take at least 3 showers and 2 haircuts a day, they will magically become good looking.”*

*“Involuntary celibates sometimes describe discrimination or rejection on the basis of their physical appearance as lookism.”*

*“No one questions Stacy's sexuality despite her strong jawline, and determined attitude, nor Chad's sexuality despite having huge duck lips, and dancing around in a multi colored jumpsuit, but if an incel guy were to wear the exact same outfit, the incel guy would be labeled as gay immediately.”*

Forgiving the beautiful is the definition of the *Halo effect*, the title of the article from which the quote about questioning the sexuality of Stacy and Chad is coming from. It is an interesting outlook on the representation of sexuality within society. If Chad, the ultimate personification of hegemonic masculinity behaves outside of the norm of hegemonic masculinity, he does not, in Incel's eyes become less hegemonic, his nonconformity to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, it does not disrupt his status, whereas if the same was done by an Incel, his vulnerable status would be ruined. In the quote, sexuality is mentioned, sexuality in the context of

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perception of hegemonic masculinity is a part of the status because one has to be heterosexual to display hegemonic masculinity.

The remarks on appearance playing a crucial role were supported by visual representation of the *St. Blackops2cel*, who is praised as a hero, as the sufferer due to his lack of sexappeal. In Incel's eyes, he is confirming the Blackpill view of the world. The irreversibility of incelhood for people who once find themselves in the incelhood.



Visual representation of *St. Blackops2cel* according to William (2018), former admin and co-creator of incels.wiki



Visual representation of *St. Blackops2cel* according to Bibipi (2019), editor and writer on incels.wiki

## **Implications/Conclusion**

This thesis anticipated filling the gap of mapping the postfeminist narratives within introspective Incel archives and setting the ground for further research on the impact of postfeminism on masculinity.

As was anticipated, the presence of postfeminist narratives was present within the sample of ten randomly chosen articles from incels.wiki. Biological essentialism, make-over paradigm, postfeminist sensibility and capitalist approach on one's value, the dominant concepts of postfeminist narrations were detected in articles creating a link between popular mainstream culture and media and Incel represented by young frustrated and lonely men.

This inevitably underlines the need for further research of the impact of postfeminist narratives which are highly present in popular media on the masculinity of vulnerable groups that are, as Incel has shown prone to incite violence and in several cases even terrorist attacks.

Further research is needed to establish the relation between postfeminism represented in popular culture and postfeminist narratives within the framework of Incel.

## Résumé

Táto bakalárska práca sa zaoberá otázkou prítomnosti postfeministických naratívov v introspektívnych mizogýnného hnutia Incelu, skrátene pre Involuntary Celibacy (nedobrovoľného celibátu). Hypotézou je, že postfeministické naratívy sú prítomné v introspektívach Incelu, a teda ideológie a koncepty preukázateľne vykazujú naratívy, ktoré sú prezentované v médiách, televízii a na sociálnych sieťach.

Prvá kapitola sa zaoberá definíciou postfeminizmu ako takého, vysvetľujúc viaceré akademické pohľady na postfeminizmus. Postfeminizmus sa vyznačuje prechodom zo sféry politickej do každodenného života širokej verejnosti. Stáva sa súčasťou populárnej kultúry prostredníctvom médií, televízie a sociálnych sietí. Tento prechod zo sebou nesie aj súhrn dezinterpretácie druhej vlny feminizmu a taktiež istú mieru odmietnutia a dezinterpretácie s proti-feministickými pohnútkami.

Prvou významnou interpretáciou postfeminizmu je zastaranosť feminizmu a jeho neadekvátnosť, keďže spoločnosť, ako ju chápe feminizmus, teda a priori štrukturálne nastavenú v prospech mužom, sa v postfeministickom chápaní sveta posunula. Štrukturálna opresia bola potlačená, požiadavky druhej vlny boli dosiahnuté a ak existuje nejaký útlak, ženy sú slobodnými aktérkami v spoločnosti, ktoré za túto opresiu nesú zodpovednosť. Inými slovami, ťarcha zodpovednosti sa individualizuje a definitívne opúšťa politický priestor.

Politický priestor v štrukturálnom ponímaní feminizmus síce opúšťa, no táto individualizácia zodpovednosti sa v istom ponímaní stáva ešte politickejšou ako predtým, a to vďaka neoliberalnému kapitalizmu. V štruktúre neoliberalného kapitalizmu sa feministické požiadavky stávajú vecou konzumu. inkluzívna myšlienka feminizmu sa stáva exkluzívnou, podmienenou socioekonomickým statusom. V praxi to znamená kapitalizáciu individuálnej plasticity. Rovnosť nie je a priori daná, je zaslúžená socioekonomickým statusom.

Socioekonomický status ako garancia rovnosti však nezrovnáva štartovaciu čiaru, práve naopak, nerovné podmienky sa taktiež individualizujú. Keďže za nerovnosť nie je zodpovedný systém,

zodpovednosť sa prenáša na individuálne ženy. Nerovnosť sa tak vysvetľuje ako nedostatok aktivity, či potenciálu zápasit' s nerovnými podmienkami, ktoré sú výsledkom prírody.

Generalizácia nerovnosti a jej spájanie s naturálnymi dôvodmi prečo vlastne perpetuálne existuje sa nazýva biologickým esencializmom.

Ďalším konceptom, nevyhnutným pre uchopenie postfeminizmu, je postfeministická vnímavosť. Ide o zmenu vnímania žien. Objektivizácia sa mení na subjektifikáciu. V praxi to znamená, že percepčia žien v médiách sa zmenila z pasívneho sexuálneho objektu na aktívny sexuálny objekt. Netreba sa však nechať zmiast', aktívny neznamená autonómny. Ženy vzali sexualitu do svojich rúk a stali sa sebedomými aktívnymi aktérmi v limitovanom a priori patriarchálnom systéme. Prakticky teda z tejto zmeny na aktívny objekt profitujú výlučne muži, nakoľko ženy sa stali síce aktívnym no naďalej len objektom.

Muži taktiež v tomto systéme profitujú vďaka konceptu hegemonickéj maskulinity. Archetypickej reprezentácii mužnosti, ktorá je tou pravou, a priori maskulinitou. Nejde o maskulinitu, ktorá by bola dosiahnuteľná pre majoritu mužov. Hegemonická maskulinita má na zodpovednosti kontinuálne pokračovanie subordinácie žien vďaka sérii vzorov správania. Hegemónna maskulinita neexistuje sama osebe, vyčleňuje sa vďaka betamaskulinitám a feminitám, s ktorými interaguje a zároveň sa mení v čase a priestore. Stáva sa však zdrojom frustrácie, nakoľko vytvára nedosiahnuteľné požiadavky na telesnú kompozíciu či socioekonomický status.

S konceptom hegemonickéj maskulinity operuje aj Incel, nakoľko Inceli simuntálne túžia dosiahnuť ideál hegemonickéj maskulinity, no kvôli zrejým dôvodom je pre nich nedosiahnuteľný. Kto teda môže za ich frustráciu? V očiach Incelu nesie zodpovednosť za ich nešťastie spoločnosť, ktorá dovolila opresiu mužov ženami. Ženy majú v očiach Incelu prílišnú moc, a to vďaka ekonomickej slobode a reprodukčným právam.

Incel vo všeobecnosti nie je homogénnym hnutím. Ide o spektrum mizogýnného sentimentu. Hnutie Incelu nemá hierarchiu, avšak má tendenciu vnútornej radikalizácie členov komunity,

ktorí komunikujú prevažne na sociálnych sieťach a dezignovaných fórach typu 4cha, 8kun, Reddit a ďalších. Incel má viacero konceptov, hypotéz a ideológií, s ktorými pracuje. Najvýznamnejšie sú teórie piluliek vychádzajúce z filmu Matrix, ktoré reflektujú svet očami Incelu. Svet, ktorí je a priori proti mužom, je založený na hodnote vychádzajúcej zo socioekonomického statusu, a v ktorom je správanie žien podmienené biologickými impulzmi.

Pomocou kvalitatívnej analýzy desiatich náhodne vybraných článkov z introspektívnych archívov Incelu z webovej stránky incels.wiki, sa vo výskumnej časti táto práca zaoberá prítomnosťou stopami postfeministických naratívov. Prostredníctvom mixu in vivo kódovania a štrukturálnej analýzy bola preukázaná prítomnosť postfeministických naratívov.

Implikácie, ktoré zo sebou prítomnosť postfeministických naratívov v introspektívach Incelu prináša sú jasné. Je nevyhnutné skúmať spôsoby ako tieto dve entity presne interagujú. Vzhľadom na stúpajúci počet mizogýnných teroristických útokov, je nevyhnutné porozumieť čo všetko má na ich existenciu dopad.

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