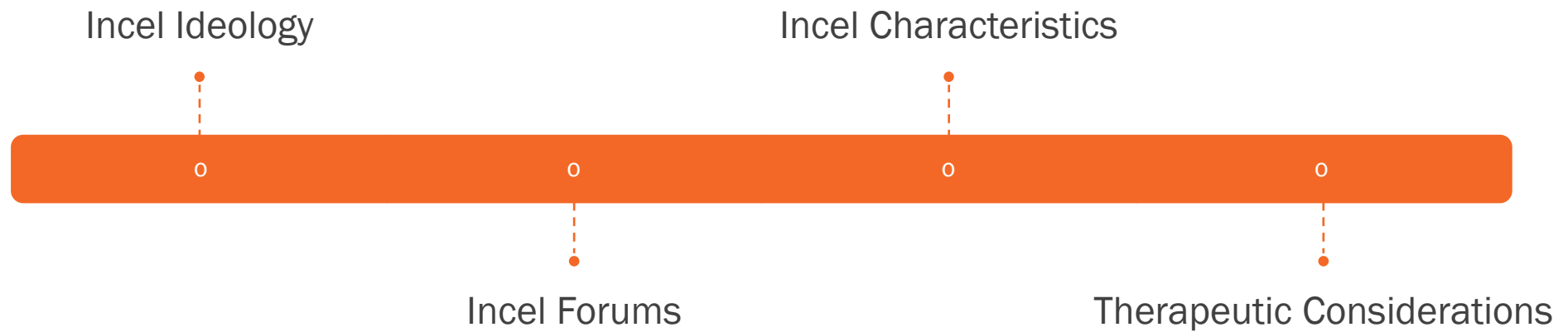


Why Incels are Worth Talking About

BRANDON SPARKS
SENIOR LECTURER IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY
KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

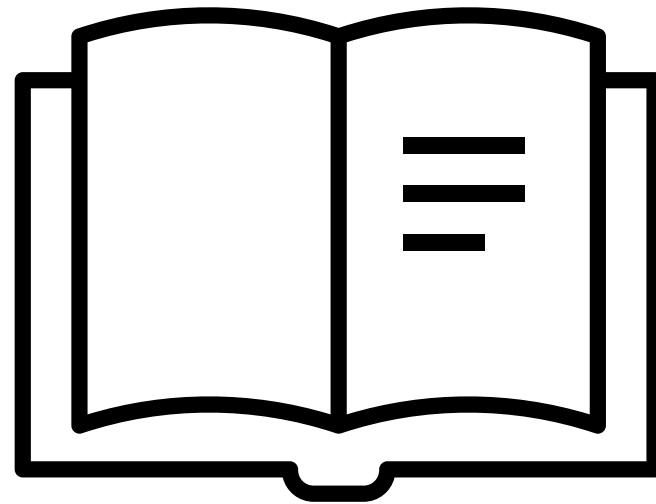


Outline



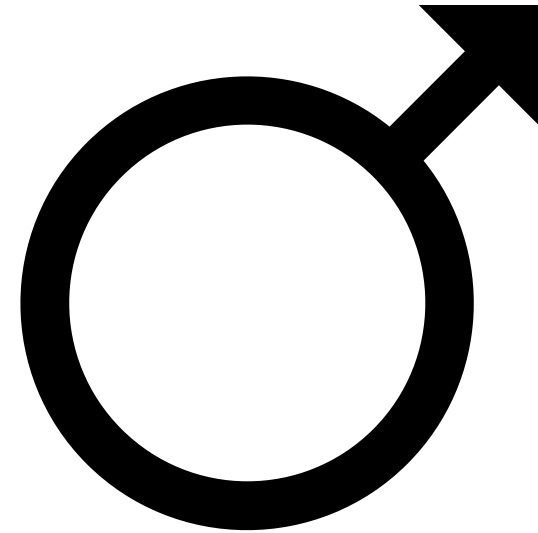
History of Involuntary Celibacy

- Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project
 - Online forum for those struggling to form romantic or sexual relationships
 - Open to all genders, well-moderated
- No research on involuntary celibacy at time
- First "incel" study:
 - Incels had little experience with teen dating
 - Issues with shyness, ability to relate to others
 - Body image issues
 - Feel that life has passed them by; are different from peers



Modern Inceldom

- Remains an online collection of individuals who struggle to form romantic or sexual bonds
- Predominantly male
 - Existence of femcels disputed (by incels, not femcels)
- Achieved notoriety for controversial forum content, carrying out deadly attacks
 - Promotion of Pill ideologies



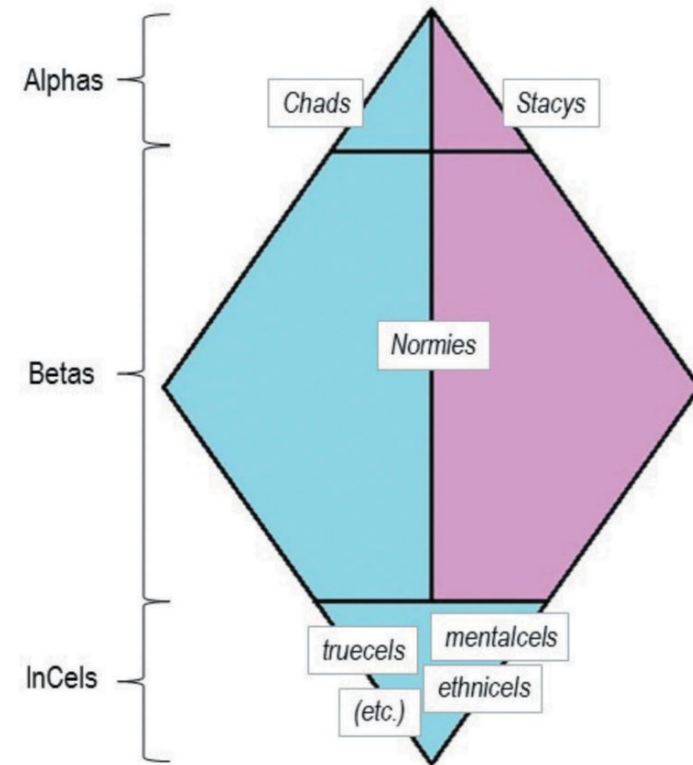
Pill Ideologies

- Pill ideologies based on *The Matrix*
 - BluePill = continue through life, blissfully unaware of issues
 - RedPill = awaken to life's cruel realities
- Incels claimed to be RedPilled; those that argued with them were BluePilled



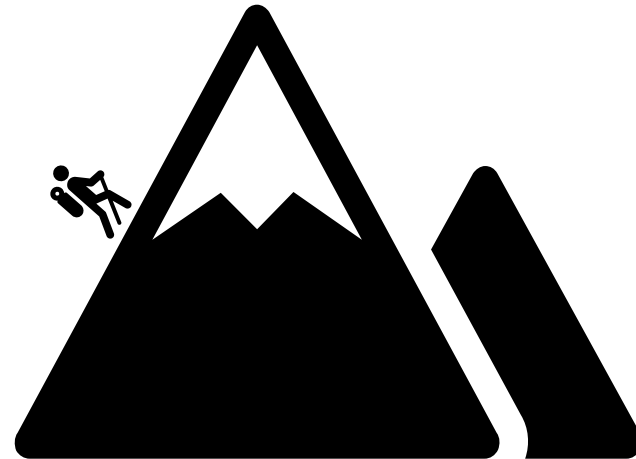
Social Hierarchies

- Society is based on looks-based hierarchy
 - Alphas, betas, and incels
- Chads and Stacys are caricatures of highly attractive, resourceful men and women
 - Women *only* want Chads, but will settle for beta men with resources
 - Positions women as shallow, manipulative



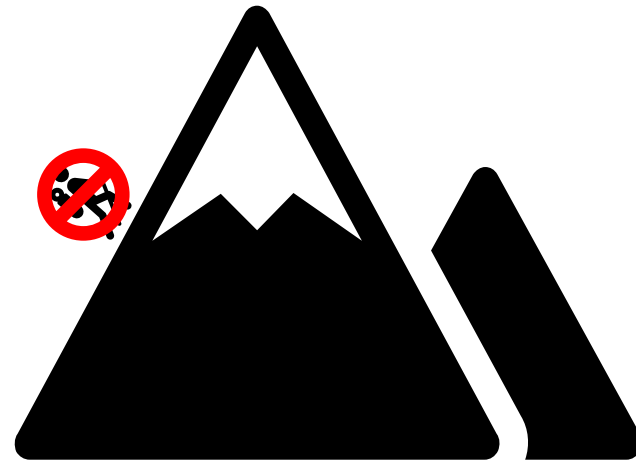
Climbing

- Incels (and normies) could move up in the hierarchy by enhancing appearance
 - Looksmaxxing = enhancing one's physical appearance, often facial appearance
 - Plastic surgery, jaw exercises, bonemashing
 - Gymmaxxing = enhancing one's physical appearance through exercise, weightlifting
 - Lose weight, develop muscular physique



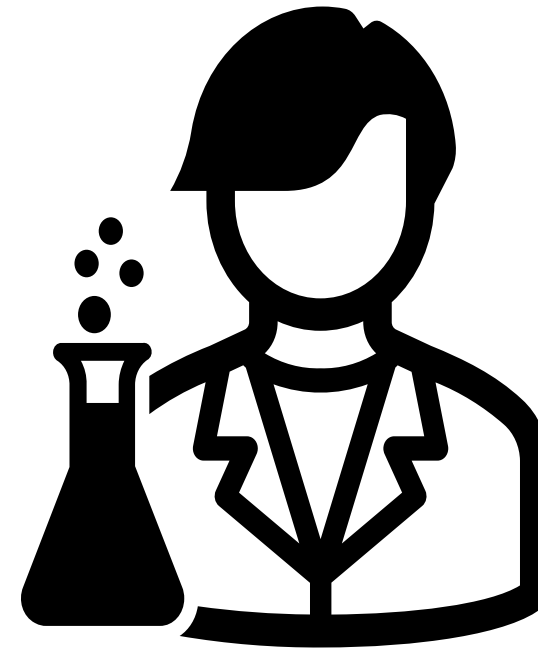
BlackPill

- Self-improvement cannot help an incel ascend
 - Once an incel, always an incel; it is a fixed status
 - Nihilistic version of RedPill
- Yet, still lots of discussion of looksmaxxing and gymmaxxing on incel forums



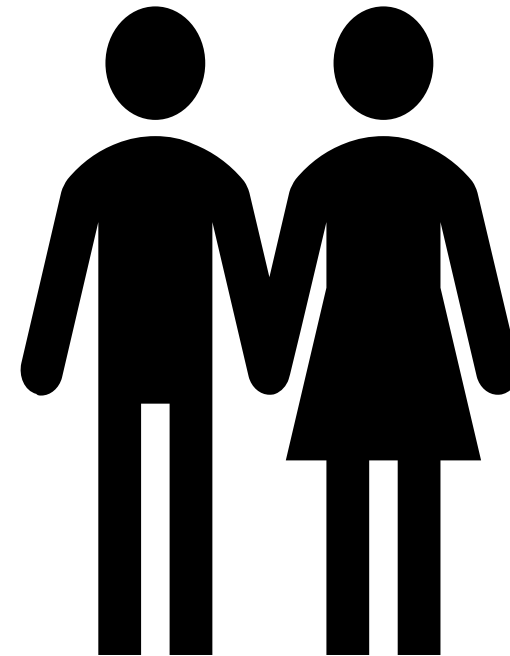
Scientific BlackPill

- Many incel claims supported by (some) evolutionary psychology studies
- Incels Wiki collates these on Scientific BlackPill page
 - Personality, mental health, race, looks, face, money, height, body, penis, voice, age, etc.
 - E.g., women attracted to Dark Triad traits
 - E.g., women experience sexual disgust when envisioning talking to unattractive man
 - E.g., women prefer dominant, aggressive, wide faces (high fWHR)



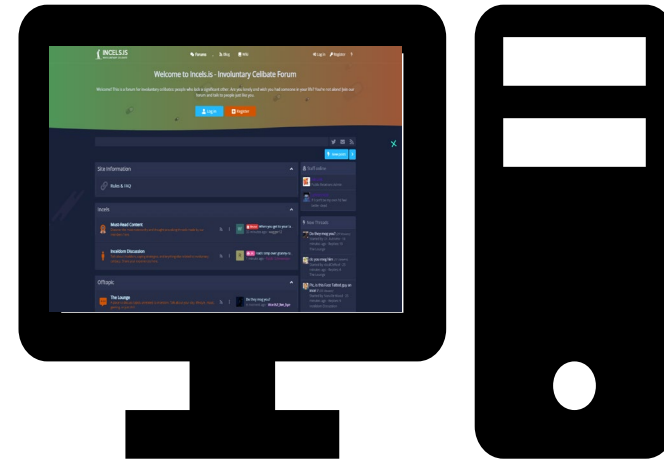
Societal Views

- Women as sex objects
- Hostile and benevolent sexism
 - Women as incompetent, emotional, manipulative
 - Women as delicate, pure, in need of protection
- Traditional gender roles
- Sexual/dating scripts
- Hegemonic masculinity
 - Emphasizes Alpha/Chad ideal



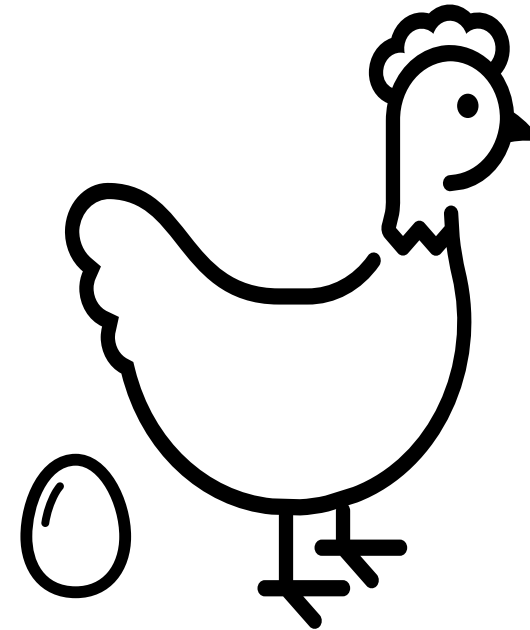
Incel Forums

- Notorious for hosting misogynistic, xenophobic, hateful, and violent content
 - 10% of users responsible for majority of hate speech
 - Violence makes up ~1% of content
- There is a lot of content; more inflammatory posts more likely to get picked up
- Only 10% of incels endorse (incel) perpetrators of violent acts



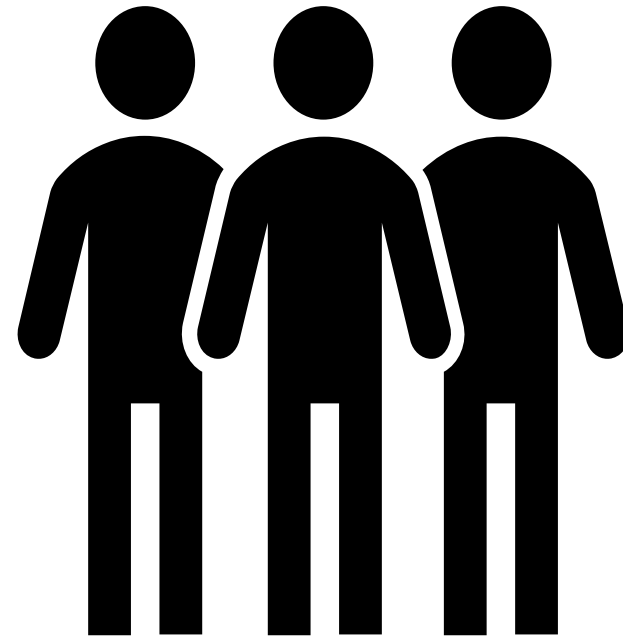
Forum Impact

- Do forums impact attitudes, or are they pre-existing?
- Engagement with hateful or controversial subreddits predates engagement with incel forums
 - Early activity in r/relationships, r/sex, r/amiugly, r/AskWomen, r/depression
- 12-week analysis of incels.is users
 - Express anger, sadness, and incel vocabulary upon joining forum



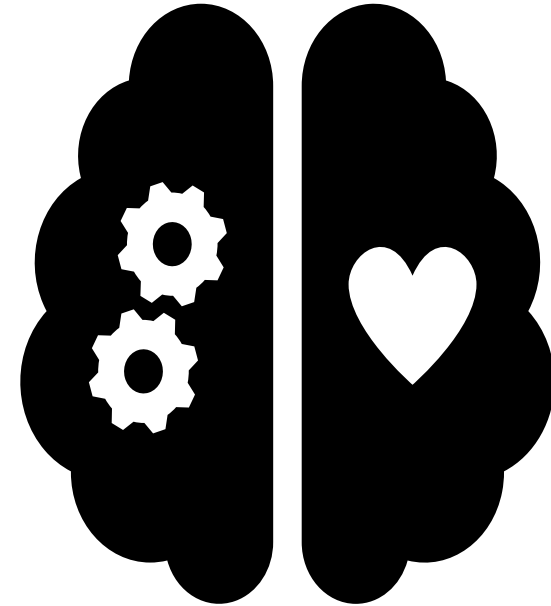
Incel Demographics

- Characterized as White, right-wing
- Mid 20's (late teens to mid-30s)
- Overwhelmingly heterosexual
- 36-42% of incels identify as BIPOC
- Politically diverse
 - Slight skew to left
- Higher rates of NEET



Autism Spectrum Disorder

- High prevalence among incel population
- “Aspie”
- Belief ASD linked to their incelhood
 - RESEARCH ON ASD AND DATING
- ASD could explain BlackPill appeal/adherence
 - ASD associated with dichotomous thinking
 - ASD associated with cognitive inflexibility
 - ASD associated with fixated thinking



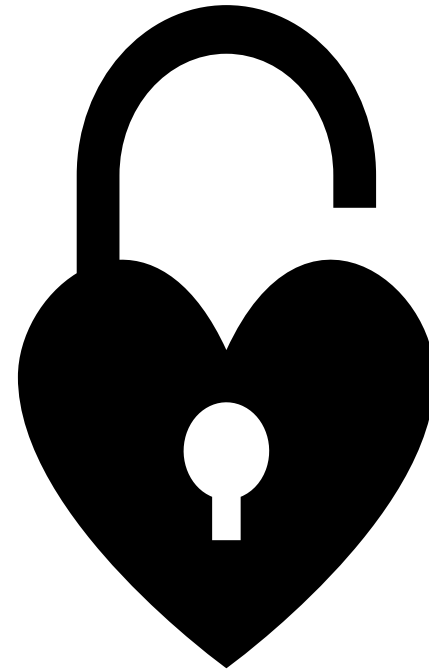
Mental Health

- High prevalence of depressive and anxious symptoms
 - 73% severely or moderately depressed
 - 67% severely or moderately anxious
- Over one quarter have PTSD symptoms
- Roughly half report suicidal ideations
 - Hopelessness major discussion topic



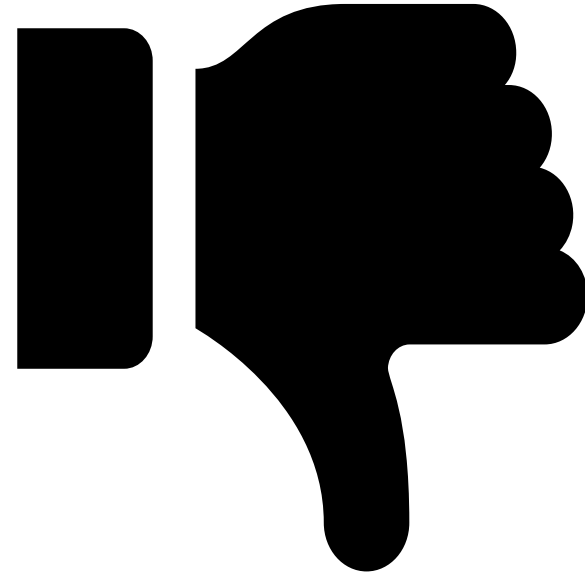
Relational Health

- Low levels of secure attachment
- Elevated levels of anxious and avoidant attachment
- Feelings of loneliness and exclusion
 - Incels report feeling detached from society
 - Incels report history of exclusion by peers
- Incels report less social support
 - Missing key buffer against elevated rates of rejection they experience



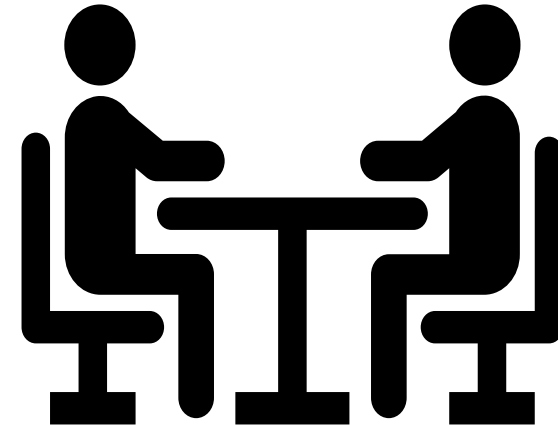
Coping with Rejection

- Incels more sensitive to rejection
- Solitary coping strategies
- Greater use of problematic coping strategies (self-distraction, behavioural disengagement, self-blame)
- Less use of adaptive strategies (seeking emotional support, positive reframing)
- Engage in more self-critical rumination, less externalization of blame



Therapy

- Incels present with higher levels of mental health symptomology
- Incels also have fewer social supports
- Incels report poor therapeutic experiences
 - 6% said therapy helped
 - 15% said therapy made them feel worse
 - Treatment approach, modality, duration, etc. not specified



BlackPill Exposure

- Adoption of BlackPill ideology mixed
 - Ranging from very low to 90%
- Inflammatory posts generate traffic
- What impact does the BlackPill have...
 - On incels who adopt this belief?
 - On incels who are exposed to this belief?



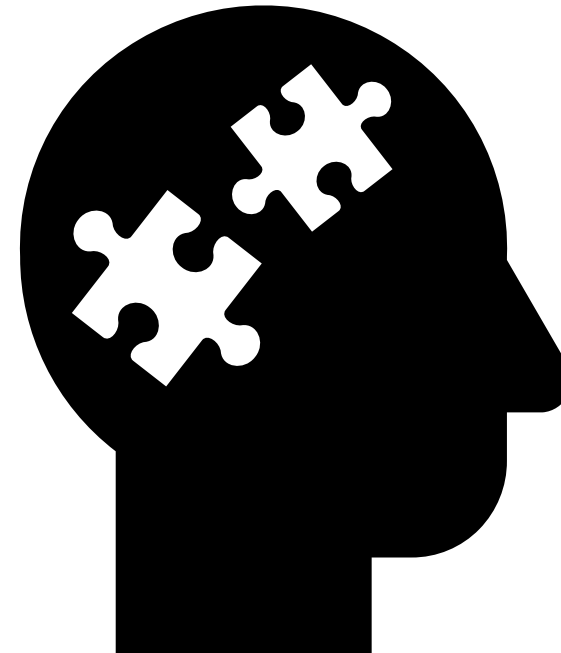
Therapeutic Issues

- Roughly half of incels have tried therapy
 - Some consider therapy a BluePill concept
 - Small minority of incels report therapy was beneficial
- Most incels exposed to misogynistic, sexist content on forums
- Most mental health providers are women
 - Does BlackPill influence therapeutic alliance?
 - Does Blackpill influence therapeutic expectations?



Therapeutic Recommendations

- Empathy and validation of experience
 - Incels report feeling like society doesn't care about them
 - Incels view advice as insulting, minimizing
- Suggested therapeutic approaches include existential therapy, narrative therapy, person-centred therapy, & reality therapy
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) recommended
 - Helps incels find alternative ways of understanding the world



Thank You

QUESTIONS?