

Abstract for the general public

The following project concerns the predispositions to identify as an incel, and the influence this identity has on individual and interpersonal functioning, especially when searching for romantic relationships. Incels (a portmanteau of “involuntary celibates”), are men, mostly heterosexual and usually aged between 18 to 29 years old, who despite their efforts are unable to find romantic and/or sexual partners. Compared to other single men, they lack previous experiences in romantic and/or sexual relations – most of them are virgins, who faced numerous rejections when trying to find a partner, some of them to the point of never being in a relationship. Incels believe that success in romantic relationships is determined by one’s looks and genetics. Since they possess features often considered unattractive (e.g., low height, skin problems, hair loss), which are usually impossible or very hard to change, incels perceive themselves as “genetically imperfect” and thus unable to attract women, who they believe choose partners based only on physical characteristics. This view is often intertwined with sexism and misogyny, which has earned incels infamy as resentful men, aggressive towards women who reject them. This portrayal was enhanced by media coverages of American and Canadian incels who committed acts of violence against women. However, now it is emphasized that incels are a heterogeneous group, dominated rather by lonely men at risk of mental health issues, than dangerous assaulters.

Psychological research on incels is still in its infancy, especially when it comes to studying their individual characteristics. Studies on incels’ interpersonal functioning are similarly limited; the foregoing research focused mainly on surveying them about their online dating experiences. The present project proposes three lines of study – exploratory studies (line 1), online experiments (line 2) and laboratory experiments (line 3). The comparison group in each study will be single men not identifying as incels. Participants will be recruited on social media and incel forums, as well as through posters distributed in public places, and with the use of snowball sampling. Line 1 will use questionnaires assessing incels on key psychological characteristics. The aim of the experimental studies will be to explore incels’ behaviours and identify factors leading to their lack of success in dating. Experiments 1 and 2 will be conducted online (line 2) and experiments 3 and 4 – in laboratory settings (line 3). Experiment 1 will imitate a dating application, assessing the decision processes incels undergo while searching for a partner. It is hypothesized that incels will declare lower standards in women, when it comes to features like physical appearance, but will not differ from other single men when making actual choices, choosing only the most attractive dates. In order to verify if incels are characterized by lower trust towards women than other single men, experiment 2 is planned, using the procedure of a “trust game” where the measure of trust is monetary transfers between participants. The third line will cover laboratory experiments on the topic of risk taking (experiment 3), and individuals’ behaviour after rejection (experiment 4). It is assumed that when looking for a partner incels may take less risks than other single men, as well as show greater proneness to reject others after being rejected themselves. These tendencies may contribute to their lack of successes in dating.

Although Polish incels are present online since around 2013, to date no thorough psychological analysis of this community has been conducted. The main research objective of this project is to provide a detailed exploration of who Polish incels are and how they behave, as well as to assess whether they possess any features making them significantly different from other single men. Although not all singles identify as incels, this identity may soon grow in popularity. The number of singles in Europe is increasing, and along with it, the ratings of loneliness. Decrease in sexual activity is also common, along with the disappointment with the new forms of relationship search, such as online dating. It is thus plausible that incels represent the problems that many people, particularly men, face in the modern world. Investigating the predispositions leading young men to adapt the incel identity will help not only those already involved in the community, but also other single men encountering similar difficulties, as well as mental health practitioners, teachers and parents taking care of adolescents and young adults.