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## The Phenomenon of Involuntary Celibates (Incels) in Internet Meme Culture: A Reflection of Masculine Domination

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### Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of groups of men known as Involuntary Celibates (Incels) in an internet meme culture. This research used Visual methodologies by Rose Gillian, and Masculine domination by Pierre Bourdieu. In addition, this research used the additional The Red Pill psychology theoretical framework by Peter Wright and Paul Elam followed by several Red Pill ideologies which spread across The Red Pill communities. All the data are collected from several internet memes platforms and the following memes are downloaded that represent Incels-related subjects. The results show that the correlation between Masculine domination and The Red Pill hierarchical masculinity had formed the heteronormative masculinity in which men are considered attractively masculine if they fulfilled the heteronormative scale of desired men, such as physical appearances (height, facial features, and muscularity), psychological traits, and socioeconomic behaviour. Furthermore, Incels' celibacy reflected in a meme culture is rooted in their unattractiveness, thus perfectly manifesting the emphasizing of heteronormative masculinity as a standard of real desired men as Incels are rejected both by society and women based on their unfulfillment of heteronormative masculinity which displays in Incels-related memes.

**Keywords:** Incels, Internet meme culture, masculine domination, Red Pill, heteronormative masculinity, media.

### 1. Introduction

In the recent development of meme culture, the spreading of Incels' ideological movement has become the signifying phenomenon of the idea of masculinity among men. Incels refers to a large group of socially organized men as an explanation behind their celibacy, including their ugly characteristics and inadequate social characters; the feminist plan that has created in order women reject unattractive men; and society, which has efficiently prevented them to gain their access of sexual activity (Segalewicz, 2020). In addition, The Incels community retreat themselves to the internet sphere to express their political idea and emotions towards each other. In recent years, internet space has become a medium to express people's political views, thus creating a collective political expression space. In social media, a collection of political statements is a recognizable fusion of mutual interaction (with other people) and broadly shared to a large amount of (unknown) audience (Literat, Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). In this case, the Incels community take refuge in a male-based internet sphere to express themselves, and thus, became one of the sub-culture, which is called the manosphere. Segalewicz explained that manosphere where Incels, is an identity asserted in a "manosphere" or the digital sphere of the antifeminists and men's rights advocates (Segalewicz, 2020).

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Furthermore, the Incels community became the internet sub-culture of Men's Right Movement (MRM) due to the ideological intersectionality and similar internet platform (Manosphere). In addition, memes, as the most frequent inter-communicational means to each individual in the manosphere, became the most prominent language to express their feelings of celibacy. MRMs, memes, and other cultural substances function as a collective expression of anger, rather than nuanced political debate (Ging, 2019; Lindsay 2020). In the scope of Incels' ideological concept of masculinity with the MRM, they solely believed in the Red Pill philosophy. However, since MRM's Red Pill is prominently mentioning that men are not individually responsible for the harms and oppression that feminists describe, some men feel unjustly persecuted by feminist politics (Hodapp, 2017) Incels believe on the other narration of the Red Pill, which they believe that the world is regulated through a group of categorizations within a structure of a three-tier social hierarchy based specifically on a physical form (Bael et al., 2019; Lindsay, 2020).

Moreover, Incels' Red Pill masculinity is matched with the concept of hegemonical masculinity, the traits which signifying traits of men attractiveness. In addition, hegemonical masculinism is the as of now acknowledged practices, convictions, and introductions related to masculinity which secure the deployment of androcentric norms and sets authority to generate the distinction of role inside of intersexual relationships (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987; Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005; Diefendorf, 2015; Segalewicz, 2020; Wilkins, 2009). Due to this realization of hegemonical masculinity, as the sense of attractiveness on men, women can express their preference to pick a potential mate. Therefore, Incels believe that women are 'naturally' hypergamous, which emphasizes the mechanisms through which it produces both symbolic and real violence (Lindsay, 2021). in other words, women's 'sexual selection' is a regular and crucial subject that points to a reversal point of hegemonic masculinity which emphasizes the sexual authority of men on women (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2008; Kimmel, 2014; Lindsay, 2021; Whitehead, 2002).

Incels' phenomenon, which emphasized their lack of idealized masculinity which leads to a lack of authoritative or domineering power over women, based on a sense of rejection and humiliation, is perfectly reflected with the narration of masculine domination. Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1998) argued that masculine domination can be defined as a *paradox of Doxa*; a subconscious social order or system which regulates roles in society, alongside punishment and reward. In addition, masculine domination or hegemonic masculinity can be defined as hegemonic masculinity; the social implementation and governmental structures that encourage men to hold the authoritative role, while simultaneously promoting the subordinative position towards women in society (Martin, 2021). In addition, P. Bourdieu argued that there are two valuations of men and masculinity. First is *nif*, masculine appearances and traits which later produce an expected trait of men (virility) (Bourdieu, 1998); which passed through parental influences, education, media, and peers group (Connel, 2020), to be observed by the opposite sex as a sign of masculinity, even by the lack of it (Buchbinder, 2012) and subsequently become the hypothesis as a major pattern of both social admiration and affirmation to achieve a successful relationship (Gonalons-Pons, Gangl, 2021; Lamont, 2014; Lamont, 2020; West, Zimmerman, 1987).

The second evaluation is *phallus*, which focuses every one of the aggregate expectations towards men's fertility strength (Bourdieu, 1998). In other words, men's realization towards his reproductive activity is the way to embrace his role in nature (Cheng, 2021; Moore, 1994a) in a form of a biological tendency to have sexual intercourse (Hollway, 2001; Huysamen, 2020), which subsequently, enforcing hegemonical masculinity that motivates hetero-sexual activity (Burnett, 2021; Connell, 1987; Terry, 2012).

Thus, with embracement of *nif* and *phallus*, men are motivated to be potential partners in a relationship by participating in a labouring field (Baranov et al., 2018; Wei, Zang, 2011), to obtain a potential career and promotion (Hamermesh, Biddle, 1994; Klein, Shtudiner, 2020; Mobius, Rosenblat, 2006; Parrett, 2015; Ruffle, Shtudiner, 2015; Shtudiner, Klein, 2019), also become the potential father as the main discourse of men's manliness in a modern world (Bodin, Käll, 2020; Forsberg, 2017; Johansson, Klinth, 2008; Keizer, 2015; Lengersdorf et al., 2016; Machin, 2015; Plantin, 2007). Furthermore, men are motivated to enhance their physical appearance to gain physical self-esteem (Grogan, 2008; Lennon, Johnson, 2021), display a facial masculinity to signify their masculine-reproductive healthiness (Little et al., 2011; Marcinkowska et al., 2021; Thornhill et al., 1999), and some even improve their sexual activity and confidence by undergoing surgical-

penile enlargement to satisfy their partner (Al-Ansari et al., 2010; Al-maghlouth et al., 2021; Kwak et al.; Nyir'ady et al., 2008; Yang et al., 2020).

In exploring the study of Incels' meme culture, The Red Pill philosophy, and masculine domination or hegemonical masculinity, it is crucial to examine how other scholars were doing similar researches. In addition, we give prominence to three contemporary pieces of research related to this work. First, A.C. Lindsay's work entitled "Swallowing the Black Pill: A Qualitative Exploration of Incel Anti-feminism within Digital Society" investigated the Involuntary Celibates (Incels) in the online 'manosphere' subculture. This research tried to uncover the online culture of Incels since this community has been generally referred to as an extremist movement due to a few mass shootings and aggression which occurred in a public space media in recent years and have been associated as a dangerous phenomenon by a mainstream media. A.C. Lindsay (Lindsay, 2020) argued that Incels phenomenon can be observed in a broad structure of masculinity and economic anxiety, post-feminism cultural period, and dehumanizing and radicalizing ideological discourse of the Black Pill.

Second, the study by D. Ging entitled "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere." She argued that "Beta masculinity" became a topic for debate among journalists and bloggers regarding the Incel phenomenon in online culture, which can be defined as an expression of "toxic masculinity" due to sexual rejection and unstable employment to video game violence, pornography, and the erosion of white male privilege (Ging, 2019).

Third, J.A. Segalewicz's work "You Don't Understand... It's Not About Virginity": Sexual Markets, Identity Construction, and Violent Masculinity on an Incel Forum Board" also refers to the "manosphere" as an online assortment of men's rights activists and antifeminists in the scope of Incel's phenomenon. He identified three dominant discourses among incels: sexual markets and disparities in sexual market values, identity construction and border patrolling according to "incel traits," and violent masculine performance under incel experiences (Segalewicz, 2020).

This research adopts several studies about Incel's ideology. To make a visible distinction from the previous research, we use the concept of masculine domination as a gender theory inside a meme culture to recognize how masculinism is formed, why it is glorified and why it is implemented by men. Since this research use meme as the main source, we use the visual methodology to recognize the hierarchal types of men as a product of masculine domination which affects the depiction of Incels in meme culture. Unfortunately, new research comes with a new problem. The main problem is the concept of masculinity itself is such a controversial matter since it is currently believed as a socially constructed and varies from one culture to another. Fortunately, since the memes as a primary source inside this research which are depicting the Incel's lack of masculinity are depicted by several differences in body and manner.

This research is designated to give an understanding regarding this social phenomenon; Incel, as one of the social outcasts or the lowest of the low in a society's preference of men. They're mostly depicted inside of memes as a man with a lack of masculine traits and behaviours, mostly by depicting them with crippling insecurity as they are unable to reach the idea of the 'real' men should be. Meanwhile, to understand the existence of this involuntary celibacy, we try to explain this phenomenon with the idea of masculinism in the scope of bio-social preferable traits of men, which creates the hierarchal structure of men and affects the Incel's celibacy. Also, this paper is designated to people who want to study or want to have a better understanding of the concept of the "Red Pill" as an intersexual and individual guide for men in popular culture as a post-feminism phenomenon.

The concept of the Red Pill may vary across the various implementation and understanding by several groups in the manosphere. Regardless, the main and similar idea of this philosophy is the belief in an orthodox concept of masculinity in which contains several traits, influenced by a socio-biological structure for men for millennia to participate in society. we wish this research will put a better understanding about men's issues, in this case, why men adopt the traditional type of masculinity and subsequently create a hierarchal stratification class of men. Nonetheless, this research needs more developments to support the main idea of this article. This research's main focus is to explain how meme culture reflects masculine domination as an Incel's ideology.

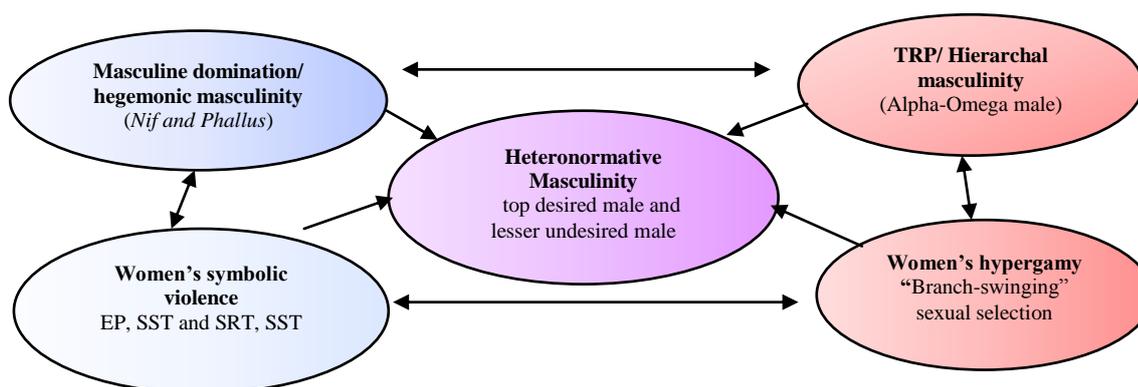
## 2. Materials and methods

This research uses visual methodologies to identify the concept of hegemonical masculinity, ie., masculine domination which caused Incels' celibacy in internet meme culture. According to R. Gillian (Gillian, 2018), the basic structure developed in this methodology is to analyses the

visual objects according to the four sites: the site of production, which is where an image is made; the site of the image, which its visual content; the site of circulation, which is where it circulates, and the site of audiences, which the visual image faces the spectators or users. Regarding masculine domination, P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1998) argued that masculine domination can be defined as a *paradox of Doxa*; a subconscious social order or system which regulates roles in society, alongside punishment and reward, alongside with two valuations: *nif*, or masculine appearances and traits which later produce an expected trait of men (virility) (Bourdieu, 1998), and *phallus*, which focuses every one of the aggregate expectations towards the of men’s fertility strength (Bourdieu, 1998).

Meanwhile, Symbolic violence in masculine domination can be defined as women’s sexual evaluation of their potential mate. In this case, we had found two sets of women’s valuations and mechanisms, the first mechanism is prominently influenced by Evolutionary Psychology (EP), which can be defined as Darwinian natural selection (Darwin, 1859), that suggests the intrasexual competition by showing their attributes of sexual potency to other sex (intersexual selection) (Darwin, 1875) and Sexual Strategy Theory (SST) or complex mating strategies (Jaime, 2021). Thus, women’s valuation towards men’s physical attributes; such as body symmetry, facial symmetry, and overall physical attractiveness as an indicator of good genes (Robinson, 2021). The second set of valuation is called Social Role Theory which displayed a “near-universality” of division of labour (Jaime, 2021), thus created the mechanism called Social Cognition Theory (SCT); Individual factors (such as cognitive or biological processes and behavioural expressions) and environmental factors (such as context and influences from others) interact with each other (Bandura, 1986; Bussey, Bandura, 1999; Jaime, 2021; McAlister et al., 2008). In other words, SCT is women’s valuation towards men’s role in a division of labour, regardless of the outgoing gender deconstruction movement that, in fact, in many cases, men are still expected to live up to masculine ideals (Blakemore, 2003; Jaime, 2021; Kane, 2006; Roberts et al., 2013; Rudman et al., 2012).

As Figure 1 displays, distinct possession of the valuated idea of masculinity between men is society resulting in the distinct possession of sexual power over women or, in another scope, the ability to attract women; TRP hierarchal classification of men or Alpha to Omega male (Smith, 2013; Wright, Elam, 2017), based on their quality or possession of idealized masculinity. Meanwhile, TRP concept of women’s hypergamy as female tendency to mate with dominant or high-status males or to be selective about one’s choice of mate—is also widely observed in other species (Taranto, 2012). Thus, hypergamy emphasizes the men’s higher-position concept of men’s attractiveness, which resulting in the valuation, formulation and establishment of Masculine domination and TRP hierarchal masculinity. Thus, the causality of this circulation and establishment resulting in the formulation of heteronormative masculinity; top desired male and lesser undesired male.

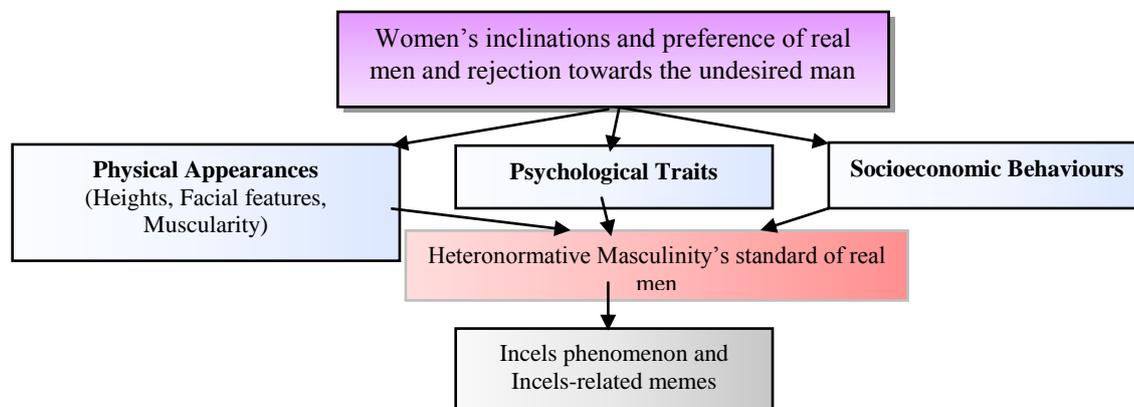


**Fig. 1.** The formulation of heteronormative masculinity

### 3. Discussion

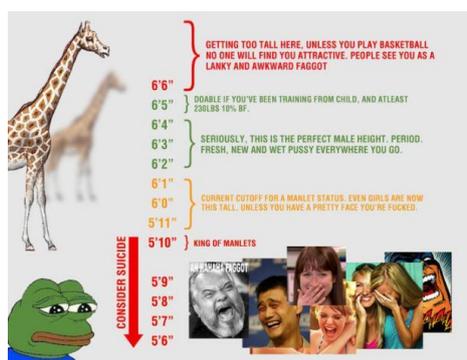
As the previous diagram shows, the correlation between the theoretical concept of masculine domination and TRP has legitimized the circulation of heteronormative masculinity. Meanwhile, the concept of heteronormativity compresses the idea that established heterosexuality consists of the standardized for legitimated social and sexual relationships (Berlant, Warner, 1998; Scandurra

et al., 2021; Warner, 1991; 1993). Thus, heteronormative masculinity legitimizes the intrasexual relationship on men, based on the idealized and expected masculine features. In addition, as Figure 2 shows, after several findings regarding Incels phenomenon in meme culture, this research had found three prominent evaluations regarding heteronormative masculinity, which Incels' community claimed to be the reasons behind their celibacy or women's rejection; a form of symbolic violence. In addition, these heteronormative valuations of men's masculinity, which Incels are lacking, as they are reflected in Incels-related memes, such as physical appearances, psychological traits, and socioeconomic behaviors.



**Fig. 2.** Depiction on how heteronormative masculinity in which consists of several points that lead to women's preference and cause rejection, leading to the Incels phenomenon and Incels-related memes

Regarding Incels' celibacy and heteronormative masculinity, Incels are described based on their experiences of devalued masculinity on the heterosexual marketplace through lookism, or perceived discrimination by physical appearance (Jones, 2020). Furthermore, Incels' meme culture had displayed the usage of several lexicons which related to their expression of 'devaluated' towards their unmasculine features. These lexicons are identified to describe the three subcategories of heteronormative masculinity's valuation of men's physical appearances: heights, facial features, and muscularity. First, men's height is considered to be the prominent signifier of men's masculinity. Meanwhile, Incels' dimensions of their physical appearance are deemed undesirable, such as their facial features and height according to (Jones, 2020). In addition, the circulation and the mass usage of the lexicon "Manlet", which can be defined as a male who suffers women's rejection by his lack of heights, does prominently reflect Incels' sense of personal anguish due to women's rejection, based on their lack of height.



**Fig. 3.** Manlet Scale Meme exported from Knowyourmeme.com

Regarding Figure 3, the meme reflects a measurement of idealized masculine body height as a physical evaluation of heteronormative masculinity. Before we move into a meme analytical approach of heteronormative masculinity, the attempt to prove the Incels' participation in this meme's circulation is crucial. For instance, the appearance of the meme character "Pepe the frog" on the left-bottom of the meme, indicates Incels' meme culture, which circulates inside 4chan's

discussion forum. In addition, 4chan had transformed a certain meme into another sense of context to evoke a cynical gesture which leads to a certain kind of movement, in this case, 4chan's version of Pepe the frog has been associated with alt-right supportive means towards Donald Trump in US's presidential election and influenced his campaign on Twitter (Aktunç et al., 2020).

As the first chapter mentioned the sense of Incels' anti-feminism, 4chan's Alt-right ideological frameworks, which are more related to Nazism; anti-feminism, white-supremacy, and anti-Semitism, notoriously circulate inside 4chan's forums. Based on their synthesis of the literature, the Nazi ideology legitimizes anti-feminism, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism; the conclusion is that the most prominent characteristics of misogyny, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism; follow the same pattern for alt-right movements (Aktunç et al., 2020). Regarding the notions of 4chan's ideological framework which manifests in Pepe the Frog, indicates a prominent role of Incels in the circulation of the memes.

Moving into the analytical purpose of heteronormative masculinity's effects and reflection towards Incels' meme culture, the following meme reflects Incels' anguish which is based on their rejection by women and society (symbolic violence). In this case, Incels express their hatred towards women's hypergamy due to their rejections by women in an online culture through

In addition, the reflection of rejections manifests on the words "Consider Suicide" for the men with the title of "King of Manlet". In addition, the following pictures of men and women who laugh towards the manlet Pepe reflect societal rejections which lead to Incels phenomenon; the origin and the main cause of Incels phenomenon and memes.



Fig. 4. "Chinlet manlet dicklet" archived 4chan post exported from 4plebs.org

In the scope of facial features, the lexicon "*Chinlet*", which according to Urban Dictionary as male lacking a prominent chin, instead of having a withdrawn chin. This is seen as ugly, unmanly and lowering your sexual market value. Used mainly on 4chan, and similar to words such as *brainlet* (lack of intelligence), *voicetlet* (lack of voice deepness), *manlet* (being too short), *wristlet* (lack of wrist appearance), *hairlet* (bald or lack of hair density). In addition, since Incels cannot change their genes: their facial bones and bone structure, so they are doomed to a life without sex and worth in society (Høiland, 2019).

Furthermore, with the combination of their lack of expected biological facial features and constant rejection from the opposite sex in a form of symbolic violence, Incels have developed a sense of societal rejection. Thus, this leads to the circulation of the memes and the lexicon which reflects on Incels' discussion on the 4chan's discussion board. For instance, we have managed to find the archived post of 4chan regarding *Chinlet* lexicon which emphasized the importance of facial stature as a sign of attractiveness.

As Figure 4 displays, the original poster (OP) mentioned the lack of attractiveness based on heteronormative masculinity ("Is it worse to be chinlet, manlet, or a dicklet"), and later on replied with the notion which emphasized the lack of possession towards heteronormative masculinity on men ("I am all of above") which caused the women's rejection (Symbolic violence) towards men. In addition, the sense of rejection due to his lack of masculinity leads to self-realization which glorifies the importance of possessing heteronormative masculinity in order to succeed in getting women (breaching symbolic violence), which in this case, by emphasizing the heteronormative masculinity's valuation towards facial appearance ("The chin is what holds me the most").

Regarding 4chan's post previously, we have managed to find the related meme (Figure 5) which emphasized the importance of possessing heteronormative masculinity to be considered attractive; avoiding rejection. This meme displays a blatant distinction between the most

unattractive person based on his lack of masculine facial appearances which followed by the premise of unattractiveness (“*Incel*”), followed by mediocre masculine facial features (“*Pretty Boy*”), and finally, asserting the most attractive masculine facial features followed by the premise “*Slayer*”, which according to *YourDictionary.com*, can be defined similarly to “*Lady-killer*” or as a man considered to be extremely attractive to women, a man which considered particularly attractive or seductive by women, or typically such a man who aggressively seeks to seduce women. Thus, since male faces with more masculine traits (DeBrune et al., 2006; Holzleitner, Perret, 2017; Nakamura, Watanabe, 2020) and female faces with more feminine traits (Nakamura, Watanabe, 2020; Perret et al., 1998; Rhodes et al., 2000) are perceived as more attractive, the “*Slayer*” indicating the peak of men’s possession of valued facial appearance by heteronormative masculinity, compared to a figure of men which considered as an “*Incel*”.



**Fig. 5.** “Incel, Pretty Boy, Slayer” meme exported from Dazeddigital.com article by Clementine Prendergast

In addition, due to the circulation of heteronormative masculinity which emphasized men to possess the idealized masculine facial features, a man who lacked in following features eventually got socially outcasted even bullied by his peer group. Regarding women’s preference, women may reject bullied potential partners to find a mate who can better protect them (an evolutionarily based strategy) or avoid social repercussions from being associated with a socially undesirable partner (Saraf et al., 2021). In conclusion, correlating the depiction of a man with a lack of chin appearance or sharpness or “*Chinlet*” (Figure 6), leads to social persecution (“*Leave her alone*”) and previous statement of women’s preference towards a man whose is targeted as a bullied man, describes Incels’ sense of rejection based on his lack of desired or idealized heteronormative masculinity by society, which later affects his attractiveness towards women and leads to devaluation towards him.



**Fig. 6.** “Hey man, leave her alone” meme exported from Knowyourmeme.com

In addition, regarding women’s preference of men’s masculine features; women’s selective behavior regarding their potential partner, they tend to choose or pick a partner based on another women’s preference of men. It has been shown that women tend to adjust their judgments of potential mates by observing the choices of others (Jones et al., 2007; Zhuang et al., 2021). By this statement, the role of heteronormative masculine is not only caused by men’s biological construct but also women’s inclination towards the desired or potential biological masculine features, which later affects the ideal masculine, thus attractive, features of men.

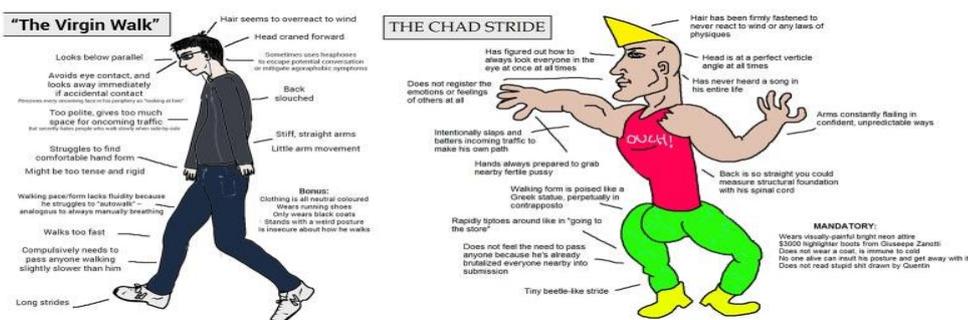
In this case, the following meme (Figure 7) depicts the idea circulation and hegemonical power of heteronormative masculinity. The displayed premise; emphasized men’s confidence instead of the possession of masculine facial features, provide a satirical message. In another word, by displaying a comparison between the two men by a distinct facial feature, this meme emphasized the hegemonical valuation of heteronormative masculinity towards the ideal attractive men. Correlating women’s inclination of preference with their fellow women and the depiction of men with a suit on the left, which indicates a higher social status and social influence followed by

his masculine facial features, he managed to be considered attractive by the majority of women and leads to centralization of ideal and desired masculine face by women. In addition, simulating the attractive men who emphasized confidence over masculine features indicates a satirical message; an emphasis on possessing heteronormative masculinity's idealized facial appearance.



**Fig. 7.** “You just need to be more confident bro” meme exported from Starecat.com

In addition, regarding Incels' meme culture, this meme describes Incels' anger towards Pickup Artist(s) that constantly emphasized confidence or “niceness” over physical appearance to successfully date a woman. Incels' believe that being a “nice guy” towards women are useless (Marcotte, 2014; Rouda, 2020); no matter how well the Incels are dressed or physically fit, they would never be able to overcome the “vile sexual impulses” that compelled women to choose the attractive alphas over Incels (The Extremist Medicine Cabinet, 2019; Rouda, 2020).

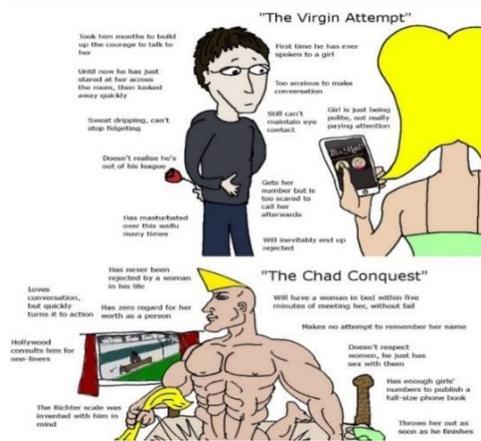


**Fig. 8.** “Virgin vs Chad” meme exported from Slate.com

Furthermore, the second physical valuation of heteronormative masculinity lies in men's muscularity. In a scope Incels' meme culture, the infamous “*Virgin vs Chad*” reflects the ideal valuation towards muscularity on men by heteronormative masculinity. “*Chad*” is the “top 20 percent” most desirable men, and because men are naturally promiscuous, the top 20 percent can essentially monopolize the sex market (Gallagher, 2020: 36). On the contrary, Incels depict themselves as the “*Virgin*”. This label reflects their celibacy or their virginity. In addition, Incels' status of virginity is debatable, however, they tend to express their anguish in Incels-related internet forums (Price, 2020: 12). Correlating both the previous description and the following meme, the reflection of heteronormative masculinity is blatantly displayed. The characterization of the ideal masculine man reflects his confidence gesture (“*Chad Stride*”); realization of his fulfillment of possessing heteronormative masculinity, contrasting “*The Virgin's*” unconfident gesture which reflects the way he “*Walks*”.

In addition, the related meme reflects women's sexual selection based on heteronormative masculinity in a form of dating activity. In the scope of dating culture in western society, since a massive sexual liberalization had spread in western society, the traditional dating strategies are less valued, or even abandoned compared to the more “liberalized” short-term relationship, as the following Figure 9 has displayed. In addition, online dating applications have been internationally used not only to seek a serious and committed relationship but also both casual romantic relationships and non-romantic intimate relationships. Thus, this phenomenon leads to the trend or behavior of seeking only sexual partners or casual encounters (Homnack, 2015; Purwaningtyas et al. 2020; Rochadiat et al., 2018).

Regarding women’s preference, women also value physical attractiveness in their mates but, unlike men, women’s selectivity led to a lack of interest in forming a relationship with a person of low physical attractiveness, no matter what type of relationship they seek (Li, Kenrick, 2006; in White et al., 2021). Furthermore, since heteronormative masculinity’s valuations of men lie on women’s preference, women have a role of “sexual selection” towards men by a “swiping mechanism”. Dana Berkowitz et al (Berkowitz et al., 2021) on their study had shown the “swiping mechanism” of Tinder had eventually confirmed the subsisting gender norms that position men as the chaser of relationships and women as the selector.



**Fig. 9.** “The Virgin Attempt vs The Chad Conquest” meme exported from Reddit.com subreddit r/virginvschad

In addition, Incels’ perspective which reflects on Incels.co (one of Incels’ web forum) users, try to argue for their perspective is through “Tinder experiments” which entails using the online dating app Tinder to “match” with as many women as possible as a case study for proving what is the most important feature for attracting women (Engholm, 2021). Hence, heteronormative masculinity has a hegemonic power to dictate the ideal masculine features; “*The Chad and Virgin*”, which leads to women’s rejection and inclination through the “Tinder Experience”.

In the following meme (Figure 10), we found indicates Incels’ devaluation towards their physical lack of muscularity even more than the previous depiction of “*The Virgin*”; “*The Incel Incel*”. In this case, Incels are depicted by their own archetypal physical appearances and personal anguish towards women’s rejection by the word “*feemales*”, which according to Urban Dictionary means a prostitute.



**Fig. 10.** “The Incel Incel, The Virgin Simp, The Chad Normal Fucking Person” meme exported from Twitter.com

However, regardless of the meme’s premise; Incels’ radical believes in physical appearance to succeed in dating women or/and obtain women’s consent to do sexual intercourse to end their virginity, the depiction of distinct physical muscularity which followed by the concept of masculine dualism reflects the subconscious valuation of muscularity as an idealized masculine man; Heteronormative masculinity. In another word, the classification of Incels being in the lowest

strata bellows the previous Incels' depiction as the *Virgin*, indicating an emphasis of the lowest characterization of men in masculine hierarchy.

The second heteronormative masculinity's valuation lies in men's psychological traits.

Regarding Incels' meme culture, one of their sub-categories can be identified as a "*Mentalcel*", which according to *Incels Wiki* as someone whose *Inceldom* (Incel community) can be attributed to some psychological factor; an umbrella term that encompasses several mental health issues including depression, autism, spectrum disorder, schizophrenia, dementia, PTSD, AVPD (avoidant personality disorder), schizoid personality disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, severe anxiety disorders (particularly social anxiety), and general neuroticism.

Regarding the following [Figure 11](#), this meme is related to Reddit's internet "conflict" between *r/Braincels* and *r/Inceltears* sub-forums. *r/inceltears* subreddit community are sometimes referred to as "incel hunters" presumably because they seek incel-related content to expose it to criticism; that importantly, this usage pattern also provides the necessary pairings of original content and critical content that could eventually, once the linguistic and semantic patterns are better understood, serve as training data for an algorithm to identify hate speech ([Sang, Stanton, 2020](#)).

### Undiagnosed Mental illness Virgin



**Fig. 11.** "Undiagnosed Mental illness Virgin" meme exported from Rarereddit.com

However, regardless of the previous statement and this meme's premises towards the irrelevance of physical appearances towards their societal rejection; Incels' anguish is based on their negative mindset, the concept of heteronormative masculinity values physical appearance which leads to whether women's inclination or rejections. Thus, the sense of rejection based on Incels' lack of physical appearances leads to a body dysmorphic disorder which damaged their quality of life; thus, are mentally damaged. In addition, quality of life has also been shown to relate to body dissatisfaction ([Griffiths et al., 2016; 2017; Talbot, Mahlberg, 2021](#)) eating disorders ([Mitchison et al., 2017; Talbot, Mahlberg, 2021](#)), and body dysmorphic disorder ([Mitchison et al., 2017; Schneider et al., 2017; Talbot, Mahlberg, 2021](#)). Therefore, Incels' body dysmorphic disorder is a result of societal rejections towards their lack of an attractive physical appearance, which leads to their expressions of sadness and anger.



**Fig. 12.** "Incel Problem" meme exported from Imgflip.com

Furthermore, Heteronormative masculinity valuations which lie on the men's biological mechanism lead to socio-economic behaviors. Relating to Incels' mental disorders which previously mentioned, Incels' meme culture or their sense of personal anguish towards rejection, both intrasexual and intersexual rejections, Incels spend their time on the internet sphere to express their sense of struggling to date, especially in the gaming community. For instance, American writer, Vox Day, who is also a game designer, had created a blog called "*Alpha game*" in

which several gamers in a gaming community are discussing and expressing their struggle in a modern dating style (Smith, 2013).

Regarding Incels' asocial behavior which leads to their inclinations towards the internet sphere, in this case, Incels' meme culture is often related to the gaming community. For instance, the following Fig. which depicts "St. Blackops2cel", which originated from a *FunnyJunk.com* imageboard which the uploader asked the forums' opinion about his appearance; thus, this figure, which later is identified as a man named Morgan Lahaye, began to circulate on Incels' forums, such as 4chan and now-banned r/braincels subreddit. Thus, the correlation between the Fig. 12 usage by Incels community, Figure's appearances, the premise of rejection ("Why don't women want to date me?"), and followed by a statement that indicates a lack of his socioeconomic masculinity ("I'm an Incel loser who lives online with no job...") indicates the valuation of heteronormative masculinity's valuation of socioeconomic behaviour which leads to whether women's rejection.

Related to the previous figure, due to societal rejection based on their lack of social skills, material possession, and stability, Incels are depicted with asocial behavior which leads to the condition of their mental state which caused them to be a jobless basement dweller. For instance, Incels are related to geek culture which later on is stigmatized as a man with a mental deficiency. In addition, geek culture is associated or stigmatized with autistic behavior. In this case, in a sample of males self-identifying with autism and asked to select a series of personality traits from an online dating website, two of the most popular selections were 'gamer' and 'geek' (Finister et al., 2021; Gavin et al. 2019).



**Fig. 13.** "Incel gamer conspiracy" meme exported from Meme-arsenal.com

In another word, online forums, especially in the online gaming community, this platform has become an escape place or safe place for Incels to take refuge; A place where they feel welcomed and be able to express their anguish of women's rejection. In this meme (Figure 13), Incels are depicted as a mentally ill person which has a delusional behavior ("The Incel gamer conspiracy...") with no economical possession (...from their mother's basements.)—indicates zero socioeconomic attractive traits according to heteronormative masculinity.

#### 4. Results

Incels phenomenon in which is represented in a meme culture is perfectly displayed the theoretical framework of masculine domination and additional The Red Pill theory which emphasizes the importance of embracing heteronormative masculinity to be a socially functional man, thus become an attractive man in a women's perspective or symbolic violence. By using visual methodologies, this study has uncovered the cause of Incels' celibacy in a meme culture that circulates on several internet platforms.

This research had found, that Incels are depicted in a meme culture as an unattractive man based on their lack of possession of several points of masculinity in which emphasizes by heteronormative masculinity, thus leads to their involuntary celibacy based on societal, especially women's rejection due to Incels' unattractive traits. For instance, Incels are frequently labelled as *Manlet*, *Chinlet* as they experienced rejections by women and bullying by their peer groups due to their lack of desired height and facial stature. Also, Incels are rejected due to their lack of muscularity as depicted in various *Virgin vs Chad* meme templates. Thus, Incels experience a body dissatisfaction that leads to several mental illnesses that is displayed in *Mentalcel* meme, and also considered as an unattractive psychological traits. Finally, Incels seek refuge at online sphere, especially in online gaming community, in order to be accepted. Unfortunately, Incels put their

entire life in an online sphere—neglecting socioeconomic activity, thus are considered socioeconomically undesired.

## 5. Conclusion

Incels phenomenon in a meme culture reflects the existence of masculine domination manifested in heteronormative masculinity. Incels are depicted as unmasculine unattractive men, this research had found several measurements of attractive men based on heteronormative masculinity which manifests in Incels' meme culture, such as physical appearance (heights, facial features, and muscularity), psychological traits, and socioeconomic condition. By conducting a deep visual observation of Incels' unattractive traits in physical appearance, this research has found that Incels are considered unattractive as they are depicted as men with the lack of height (*manlet*), lack of facial structure (*chinlet*) and unmuscular men (the distinction between Incel as a "The Virgin" character, Incels representation in internet meme culture and masculine character "The Chad").

Furthermore, due to societal and women's rejection, Incels have developed a physical dysmorphic behaviour which leads to their unattractive psychological traits (*Mentalcel*). Moreover, Incels' psychological unattractiveness leads to a lack of socioeconomic possession. In this case, Incels are displayed as asocial men based on their predominant lifestyle in the internet spheres, such as geek culture and gaming community. In this case, Incels community is frequently displayed or even displayed as a geek on a gaming community considered a socioeconomically unattractive male. Following the depiction of Incels as an asocial basement dweller which put their lifestyle predominantly in a gaming community instead of fulfilling the heteronormative masculinity to be socioeconomically plentiful, thus becoming attractive in women's judgments or valuations. Therefore, correlating all Incels' factors of celibacy, this phenomenon has indicated the hegemonical power of masculine domination manifests in heteronormative masculinity which dictates men's masculinity to be socially acceptable and masculinely attractive towards women.

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