

Femcels: Are they really the female equivalent of the incel?

**by
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Abstract

There is currently little to no literature on femcels (female incels) as they are still a relatively new movement on the Internet. However, literature on incels have been well-established due to their ties to the Men's Right Movement (MRM). The current study aims to understand what the femcels movement is and how they compare with their male counterparts, incels, in order to add to the overall understanding of the involuntary celibate movement. A content analysis of known incel and femcel subreddits, r/Incels, r/FemaleDatingStrategy, and r/TruFemcels was performed using Reddit. Key results found that incels and femcels both have similar beliefs about looks and the opposite gender, however, differences varied on their beliefs in sex and relationship. Additionally, femcels were found to have similar beliefs to radical feminism. These results suggest that femcels are likely to be separate from the involuntary celibate movement due to key differences in their belief systems.

Keywords: incels; femcels; Reddit; Black Pill, Men's Right Movement, radical feminism

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents, Eunice and Phil. I was only fortunate and lucky enough to pursue and complete my Master's with their sacrifices and love. Everything I do, I do for them. Thank you, mama and baba.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Men's Rights Movements (MRM) have been growing extensively throughout the past four decades, especially as online communities and social media platforms become more instrumental in the movement's rise in popularity (Rafail & Freitas, 2019). Incels, or involuntary celibates, are said to belong to the Manosphere, a product of the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) mentioned above (Lily, 2016, as cited in Labbaf, 2020). As such, there is now extensive literature on incels, all of which provide important context and valuable information on the MRM and online communities in general. However, while incels have been and continue to be thoroughly researched, little to no literature or research has been performed on femcels, or female involuntary celibates. They are, as the name suggests, the female equivalent of the incels. As such, this thesis sets out to explore the subject of femcels with the aim to build the foundation for future literature by first comparing the group to incels, as well as radical feminists. Given the huge role that social media plays in the festering of concerning movements, an exploration into the activities of all of these movements is necessary and may hold vital information about how extreme beliefs are able to fester online. The thesis explored known incel and femcel communities or subreddits on the social media platform, Reddit. These subreddits are r/Incels, r/TruFemcels, and r/FemaleDatingStrategy.

Some background information necessary for the investigation of femcels is presented in Chapter 2. The chapter first begins by discussing the incel movement in the context of the Manosphere, a product of the anti-feminist MRM (Lily, 2016, as cited in Labbaf, 2020). Next, the Black Pill philosophy that incels heavily reference as the backbone of their ideology will be discussed. Some basic understandings and details of femcels are also examined. Finally, there is an overview of radical feminism from MacKay's (2015) understanding. This interpretation of radical feminism was used for its simplicity and was adapted to use as a comparison with femcel ideology. The current thesis is made up of two studies.

The first study, found in Chapter 3, is a foundational comparison of incels and femcels using r/Incels and r/TruFemcels. This comparison was performed first in order to review similarities and differences between the two movements. This was done because incels are arguably femcels' most closely related community, seeing as the two share

the same origins of “involuntary celibate,” and comparing the two should accordingly reveal the most about what the movement is. A qualitative content analysis was performed using 500 posts and comments, 250 from each respective subreddit. Deductive coding revealed five themes, categorized into similarities and differences. Two of the themes were similarities and three were differences between incels and femcels. Altogether, the results found that there is more that sets the groups apart than unites them together.

Next, Chapter 4 of the thesis delves deeper into the world of femcels by exploring r/TruFemcels further, with the addition of r/FemaleDatingStrategy. Just as incels are often cited as being misogynists¹ due to their ties to the MRM, femcels are associated with misandry² in a similar fashion. As such, because misandry can be found in some forms of radical feminism, it may be helpful to perform a comparison between femcels and radical feminists. With similar methods as the previous study, 250 posts and comments from each subreddit were collected and content analyses were completed. This second study utilizes the two subreddits and compared femcel ideology with tenets of radical feminism, as interpreted by MacKay (2015). The four criteria of radical feminism are: a commitment to end the patriarchy; the use of women-only spaces; a focus on male violence against women; and the inclusion of pornography and prostitution as forms of male violence (Mackay, 2015). Basing the themes off of the criteria, several more subthemes were identified, which facilitated greater understanding of femcel ideology and beliefs.

Lastly, the findings from Chapter 3 and 4 were discussed altogether in Chapter 5. The results from both studies supported that, while femcels hold similar assumptions about looks and structure of society to incels and aligned fairly closely with radical feminism, they are, all in all, their own stand-alone movement. Incels and femcels are more unlike one another than alike, making it an inaccuracy to simply refer to femcels as the “female incel.” Additionally, similar to the first study, it would be equally as incorrect to refer to femcels as radical feminists. That is because, while they aligned closely with the tenets of radical feminism and may practice radical feminist theory within the

¹ Misogyny is the “hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misogyny>).

² Misandry is “a hatred of men” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misandry>).

communities, they have different goals and reasons for practicing radical feminist theories as compared to radical feminists. Femcels can be best described as a close-knit community of women who have had negative past experiences with men and are online seeking advice and sisterhood with others who understand what they have been through. At the moment, there is little to no reason or evidence to believe that they are a danger to anyone, but research into their movement is still important in revealing the discourse of online communities.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Incels (Involuntary Celibates)

2.1.1. Origin of the Incel Community

The term incel was originally coined by a woman named “Alana” in Toronto, Canada, in 1997 (Labba, 2020). She created a website, which then developed into an online community in order to create a support network for anybody “who was lonely, never had sex or who had not been in a relationship in a long time for whatever reason,” regardless of their gender (Taylor, 2018, as cited in Labba, 2020, pg. 17). It was only after “Alana” had separated herself from the group that the involuntary celibate community transformed into an area of mostly heterosexual men filled with hate and frustrations towards the world and the opposite sex.

The incel community today is mostly known for their misogynistic views of women and what some may consider to be a sense of entitlement for a woman’s sexual affection. Incels believe that they are at the lowest tier of the social and sexual hierarchy in society, in terms of their looks and sex appeal, with more attractive people dominating them. They resent the fact that this is their reality and inherently believe that this is the core organizing principle of all social life (Baele, Brace, and Coan, 2019). Additionally, they believe that “this hierarchy is absolutely immutable; categories are impermeable, [no one] is able to move from one to another” (Baele, Brace, and Coan, 2019, pg. 9).

The structure of the incel worldview is one of the first main features that characterize their extremist worldviews (Baele, Brace, and Coan, 2019). As briefly mentioned above, incels believe that attractive women (Staceys) and men (Chads) exist at the top of the social hierarchy above all others. Collectively, they are called the alphas. Incels may organize people in a diamond-shaped structure, with the attractive and dominant alphas at the very top of the diamond. Normies, who are those average in attractiveness, exist below the alphas and make up the largest category in the population. Lastly, incels place themselves at the bottom of the structure.

Some other beliefs that incels hold include blaming “others, namely women, for the failure or, more specifically, for robbing [them] of success” in dating and sexual

interactions (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, pg. 5019). As we will see in the data later on, incels blame women for the existence of the social hierarchy and their treatment under the hierarchy because they believe women have the upper hand when it comes to sex. Incels believe that any woman may have sex whenever she wants, leaving her to have the advantage over men by holding sex above their heads.

While many of the views incels hold are most definitely misogynistic, incels also depart from most misogynists since they threaten violence against both women and men. While they believe that society has been ruined by women's freedom to choose whoever she wants to have sex with, they equally despise those who benefit from the system (Tomkinson, Harper, and Attwell, 2020). The best-case scenario for incels is to create a world under absolute patriarchy that "dehumanizes women as mere sexual commodities and quashes the empowerment of women and sexual liberation" (Tolentino, 2018, as cited in Labbaf, 2020, pg. 17). Part of this is also related to how, under such a system, they would be able to obtain sex from women whenever they want, thus solving their main problem with society. One of the biggest obstacles that stand in incels' way is the rising popularity of feminism. To understand this mentality a bit more, we must look into the Manosphere, or the network in which incels belong to.

2.1.2. Manosphere

Incels belong to a larger network of the corner of the Internet known as the Manosphere, which is a product of the anti-feminist Men's Rights Movement (MRM) (Lily, 2016, as cited in Labbaf, 2020). According to Ging (2017), the Manosphere is a product of the men's liberation movement of the 1970s, which emerged as a form of resistance against second-wave feminism (as cited in Labbaf, 2020). Incels are said to belong in the Manosphere because they share similar beliefs and sentiments towards feminism and women in general, however, incels are also distinct from them because they have developed their own language, beliefs, and ideology (Labbaf, 2020). There are many other sites and sub-units under the Manosphere, which can be better understood as "interconnected nodes in a mediated network of misogynistic discourses and practices," since they are all bound by "the idea that men and boys are victimized [and] that feminists in particular are the perpetrators of such attacks" (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, pg. 5008). Altogether, the Manosphere is a collection of mostly right-winged Conservative men who would all agree that feminism is their main enemy.

Members of the Manosphere have been relegated to different parts of the Internet through the use of social media platforms and incels, in particular, have expanded to sites such as 4Chan, Reddit, 8Chan, Gab, Incel.me, and more (Labba, 2020).

All of these online communities serve to allow members to vent their frustrations and share their voices on topics that are misogynistic, racist, and more. In other words, they have become spaces of “misogynistic frustration and hostility” (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, pg. 5017). It is important to note here that incels, and the Manosphere overall, are unlikely to exist without the Internet. Modern technology has allowed what was originally solitary and individual thoughts to flourish into online spaces and communities that build onto each other resulting in “frothing extremism” (Ricard, 2018, as cited in Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019). Whereas they had previously been individuals with sad and lonely thoughts that kept to themselves, the Internet has allowed for incels to become inspired by one another “while sharing a misogynistic core [to create] an entire misogyny media ecology” (Ging, 2017, as cited in Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, pg. 5017). At the core of incelism is the belief of the Black Pill.

2.1.3. The Black Pill

In total, incels recognize the existence of three different “pills.” They are personifications of different ways of coping with the reality they believe in. The Pill originated from the 1999 Matrix movie where the main character had to choose between swallowing the blue pill which allows him to remain in a delusional but pleasant world, while the red pill would allow him to become aware of reality. “Red-pilling” is a common theme repeated in other sub-groups in the Manosphere that is used “as a rhetorical tool to systematically challenge liberal progressive ideas or any external perspectives contrary to the beliefs of the in-group” (Aikin, 2018, as cited in Labba, 2020, pg. 20). However, incels have gone beyond the red and blue pill and have introduced a third, “black pill.” In incel discourse it is said that by symbolically swallowing the black pill you become aware of reality and accept your place in the social hierarchy, and you cannot change that. With the blue pill and red pill, you can hope to gain an advantage in knowing what society is really like so that you may change it and escape from your predicament, while the black pill “closes them and only produces nihilistic despair” (Baele, Brace & Coan, 2019, pg. 9). In other words, incels who have self-proclaimed “swallowed the black pill” have accepted a reality in which they will never be able to

“attract a willing mate of the conventionally attractive type they desire, no matter what they do, and in which trying to change this ineluctable fact makes them fools” (Palma, 2019, pg. 331). The black pill reveals to incels a “reality” in which women and society as a whole are against men with their appearances and physical characteristics, with no hopes of ever becoming attractive enough to become accepted by the rest of society even with extreme measures of plastic surgery or self-improvement (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, 2020). It is the black pill which sets them apart from other groups in the Manosphere.

According to Palma (2019), the proponent of the fairy-tale logic theory of incelism, incels swallow the pill to advance their own story of being a hero in order to “expose the villainy of the woman, any woman, all women – [and] this is not about individual women, after all, but about the function of women - and to punish her” (Palma, 2019, pg. 331). With the help of the black pill, incels have created an ideology that is used as a basis for their women hating and shaming beliefs. This, in and of itself, is already a dangerous and alarming ideology, however, it is even more so when incels decide to take matters into their own hands. Inevitably, there will be instances in which “lower-status men’s anger at their [mistreatment builds] and will come to a head, at which point women should beware” (Palma, 2019, pg. 329). Incels, worryingly, have killed a total of 50 people between 2014 and 2018 in North America alone, indicating the potential for them to become a rising threat (Tomkinson, Harper, Attwell, 2020, pg. 155-156).

2.2. Femcels (Female Involuntary Celibates)

As opposed to incels, there is currently an insufficient amount of literature on female incels, or femcels. That is because they are often concealed within incel communities. Within spaces which hold the belief that any woman can obtain sex with anyone of their choosing, it is no wonder that incels do not believe in the existence of their female counterparts. The small number of femcels in incel communities online are ignored at the very least, but more often than not, they are ridiculed and insulted. It can even be said that, above the general hate towards women that incels hold, they hold a deeper and heightened resentment towards femcels. Femcels are, in other words, the antithesis of what incels believe in. This is evidenced by the rules in the now-banned subreddit, r/Incels, where “an admin had laid out the opinion of femcels held by the

40,000-person community: ‘Those who continuously claim there are as many female incels in the same situation as male incels will receive a warning and then a ban’” (Chester, 2018). However, even with the rules of the subreddit against them, femcels continue to associate themselves with incels because, as one femcel said herself, “she gets the feeling few women would relate to her experience as a female incel, leaving her no one to relate to outside of this community” (Chester, 2018).

As some online sources point out, femcels hold some similarities and differences with incels. For one, femcels agree they are like incels in that they have trouble finding someone to have sex with, date, or even flirt with, due to their looks. According to one self-proclaimed femcel, user “canon”, “their ‘defects’ - which are arbitrary and entirely self-defined - must ‘exceed those of normal’ women and exist in a much more ‘severe form,’” which can range from anything to do with their “looks, age, disabilities, medical conditions, mental illnesses, the repressive cultures some live in or some combination thereof” (Kohn, 2020). They also believe that the only way out of their predicament is to “ascend,” or to “get hotter” (Kohn, 2020). However, when laid out, incels and femcels are more like two distinct groups with their own sets of beliefs because “they’re better thought of as a pair of phobic, incompatible fraternal twins: birthed from the same belly but raised in completely different homes, in completely different states, in completely different worlds” (Kohn, 2020). That is because most femcels would agree that, compared to someone who is conventionally thought of as attractive and beautiful, they simply do not have the same options as them. The standards for beauty, as men and society has set for them, make it so they do not have a choice in their celibacy (Kohn, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, incels’ disbelief in femcels is attributable to their belief system: that women are privileged when it comes to their sex life because they can have sex with anyone whenever they want. Caitlin, an individual who was interviewed in Cernik (2021), does not refer to herself as a femcel but has not had sex in over 8 years. She does not believe she will find another sexual partner and mentions how “not all sex is enjoyable,” that sexual partners who are not in a committed relationship with her does not make for pleasurable sexual experiences (Cernik, 2021). Additionally, she speaks about how, “as a woman, you want to be desired, not treated like a piece of meat,” which is a resounding sentiment shared by many in r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels

(Cernik, 2021). Something else that femcels share is the accusation of misandry by incels and others alike.

The belief that femcels are misandrists, similar to how incels are known to be misogynists on the Internet, may come from how the two genders view sex and relationships. While incels may place more emphasis on sexual health and relationships in their discussions online, femcels (and women) may agree that “the biggest difference between men and women seems to be that men feel entitled to sex and relationships, so it’s the fault of women when they can’t get it” (Cernik, 2021). In addition, many “women seem to internalise the issues and be more likely to blame themselves” rather than to turn outwards and blame others, which can be used to describe incels’ coping, as per the black pill philosophy (Cernik, 2021). It is worth mentioning that not all incels are alike, and not all femcels are alike. According to Hintz and Baker (2021), incelism can be explained as being unifiable through determinism, “the notion that events occur as a result of external causes, for instance, that one’s incel status is attributed to unchangeable characteristics” (as cited in Incels Wiki, 2020). In other words, membership into incelism can be explained through the belief that their negative experiences and treatment by others are explained by their genetics, physical appearance, and other static factors. However, different “factions” of incels can be separated by what is blamed for in terms of their involuntary celibacy such as [r/IncelsWithoutHate](#), a subreddit of self-proclaimed incels who “disallow blaming others for one’s incelism, making personal attacks, and advocating self-harm or suicide” (Hintz and Baker, 2021). A similar division can be observed between [r/TruFemcels](#) and [r/FemaleDatingStrategy](#), as one openly refers to themselves as femcels and the other does not, respectively. Their difference lies in the way that [r/FemaleDatingStrategy](#) focuses primarily on female experiences with men in terms of dating, compatibility, and sex, among other issues. [r/TruFemcel](#) does not have any primary focus and is available for any types of rant or tirade that suits the poster. As such, there is a little more variability in what types of posts are on [r/TruFemcels](#) than [r/FemaleDatingStrategy](#).

Femcels are not only neglected by scholars, but their existence is dismissed in general. It is only as of late that online articles about female incels have come about. The Guardian wrote an article attempting to understand why femcels are not discussed and explained that the most obvious reason may be because femcels have not gone on violent rampages like incels have (Mahdawa, 2020). Additionally, gender stereotypes

about how men “need” sex and women submit to sex is deeply ingrained in our society, leading incels to believe “femcels are just ‘entitled women who play the victim to get sympathy and attention from men but refuse to lower their standards’” (Mahdawa, 2020). More specifically, Greg, a 29-year-old incel, likens femcels to Santa Claus due to their poor visibility and says “They’re not real... Everyone knows that if something has a pussy, some man will fuck it” (Kohn, 2020). All in all, incels refuse to acknowledge the existence of femcels, leaving the small number of femcels within the community to branch out elsewhere. However, it appears that a number of incels and femcels have congregated on Reddit. Therefore, chapter 3 of the current thesis explored two known subreddits of each group, r/Incel and r/TruFemcels, as two main centres of incel and femcel activity through qualitative methods. Chapter 4 dove more into two epicentres of femcel activity on Reddit, r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels, and compares their posting history with radical feminist theory. As such, some prior knowledge about radical feminism is necessary.

2.3. Radical Feminism

Motivations for engaging in radical feminism may derive and vary from experiences of sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination in the workplace, negative experiences during pregnancy and post-childbirth, and sexual assaults or other forms of male violence (Mackay, 2015). Additionally, concerns about women’s safety in public spaces or other forms of microaggressions they faced are engaged with in discussions of radical feminism (Mackay, 2015). These types of experiences are directly associated with being a woman, which interact with radical feminist theory’s focus on the oppression of *all* women. As with other forms of radical thinking, radical feminism may take it a step further and expand these motivations into how women are unable to “walk down the street or even live in [their homes] safely without fear of violation by men” (Rowland and Klein, 1996, pg. 10). As MacKinnon (1989) described, feminist who work on forms of male violence against women “express and actualize the distinctive power of men over women in society; their effective permissibility confirms and extends it” (pg. 315). In other words, the fact that male violence continues to be such a large issue for women is due to the fact that women are treated as second class citizens under men, and the leniency given to men for their actions further confirm this point. As such, radical feminists are dedicated and determined to destroy and see an end to male dominance

over women, rather than to see reforms like what other schools of feminism would suggest instead (Dworkin, 1993).

Radical feminism has beliefs centred in women as a social group who are oppressed by men and the patriarchal system they have built (Rowland & Klein, 1996). Male oppression, as radical feminists understand it, focus on public and private spheres of women's lives to exert control over their "reproduction, marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, and motherhood," which also mean these sites are areas of focus for radical feminists to reverse patriarchal control (pg. 11). Furthermore, it is said that "structural inequalities of gender, race, class, and nation and their attending ideological justifications shape the incidence of violence, its personal and social effects, and the ways in which social, medical, cultural, and legal systems and institutions respond to violence," which again relates back to the previous assertion of the dedication in destroying the patriarchal society that creates such standards for women in the first place (Dines et al., 1998, pg. 11). These have been and continue to be common topics of concerns even whilst there is no one straight-forward definition of radical feminism. In order to better understand this school of feminism, however, Mackay's (2015) four criteria of radical feminism may be helpful, especially in our understanding of their comparisons to femcels. The four criteria as interpreted by Mackay (2015) are meant to serve as a guide towards the final themes. By all means, they are not meant to be an exhaustive or all-encompassing description of radical feminism but rather, a convenient way of organizing the key traits of radical feminism.

2.3.1. Four Criteria of Radical Feminism

According to Mackay (2015), she contends that there are four criteria to radical feminism which includes a commitment to end the patriarchy, use of women-only spaces, focus on male violence against women, and the inclusion of pornography and prostitution as forms of male violence. To begin, the first criteria is "the acceptance of the existence of patriarchy alongside a commitment to end it," which reiterates the centredness of women's experiences at the core of radical feminist beliefs (pg. 334). This criterion does not necessarily mean that radical feminists blame individual men as being actively engaged in the oppression of women, but rather how the patriarchy was created to benefit men and therefore, created a propensity for them to contribute to patriarchal values because to end the patriarchy is to end the benefits that come along

with it (Jensen, 2021). However, as radical feminists believe, the existence of the patriarchy constrains all women as the control of women's reproductive powers and sexuality are at the core of the system (Jensen, 2021). While liberal and other feminists may argue that gender equality provisions may stop the control of women by men, radical feminists take it further by asserting that structural transformations are necessary for real change to occur and that giving women "agency and rights are not enough" (Briones, 2009, as cited in Tungohan, 2017, pg. 480). This is related to the previous point about how the system of male domination, or the patriarchy, must therefore be destroyed, rather than simply reformed. This is justified because to radical feminists, "feminism is [the] opposition to woman hating in order to achieve a truly [egalitarian] society" and, as such, "there can't be any women's movement that is rooted in political defenses of woman hating" (Dworkin, 1990, pg. 39). Therefore, true feminist movements, to radical feminists, cannot justify or defend any actions of the patriarchy, which also explains why reforms are not enough. To perform these structural transformations, women-only spaces for organization are needed.

Mackay (2015) had defined the second criterion of radical feminism as "the use and promotion of women-only space as an organizing method" and it was further explained that activists in the 1970's had spent personal finances, as well as physical and emotional labour in creating these spaces (Mackay, 2015, pg. 334). Often, however, the activists were "ridiculed and stereotyped by friends and colleagues" by being labelled as the "hairy-legged, extremist, man-hating, lesbian feminist" (Scharff, 2010; Hesford, 2005; Rich, 2005, as cited in Mackay, 2015, pg. 333). As such, it is not hard to see why radical feminists may choose to make these spaces women-only to ward off these insensitive and assumptive stereotypes. Many feminists choose to avoid connections with the movement as feminism has "acquired connotations of separatism, extremism, men-avoiding lesbianism" over the years (Walby, 2011, pg. 3, as cited in Mackay, 2015, pg. 335). Even as the movement continued to the modern day, women continue to seek collectivity and were "generally positive about dedicated feminist spaces," however, "whether these were open to men in some circumstances was still up for debate" (Mackay, 2015, pg. 333). The harmful and prejudiced stereotypes of the past continue to be an issue for radical feminists of today, and the distrust of men in these dedicated spaces may contribute to a focus on male violence against women.

The third criterion describes radical feminists' focus on forms of male violence against women and how these instances of male violence contribute to the oppression of women more broadly (Mackay, 2015). Previously, motivations of radical feminists were discussed, and those same motivations can be seen here as instances of male violence. Threats and instances of sexual harassment, rape, violence in public spaces at night, and other daily microaggressions are all methods of oppression as seen by radical feminists. Specifically, violence against women is seen as a "social construction within and a symptom of patriarchy" (Mackay, 2014, pg. 99). Male violence may have contributed to women being "passive, receptive, and vulnerable" against men, but some believe that if they were freed from their roles as reproducers, that they would also be freed from these instances of violence (Firestone, 1970, p.190, as cited in Tong, 2007, pg. 27). Male violence against women, as understood by radical feminists, is permitted by the patriarchy because it has created a "state of power arrangements in which some people are on the bottom, and they are exploited and used by people who are on the top, or who are on top of them" (Dworkin, 1990, pg. 38). In other words, women are systematically born into a system (patriarchy) in which the state has already determined that men are above them and, therefore, able to exploit, use, and abuse them. Related to this and alongside the larger conversation of male violence is the analysis of pornography and prostitution as forms of male violence. It is also Mackay's (2015) fourth and last criterion of radical feminism.

The institutions of pornography and prostitution are widely debated amongst schools of feminism such as liberal and radical feminism, and even within radical feminism alone, with some separating into those who are for or against these industries. While liberal and postmodern feminists leave these choices to individual women and may even claim that women are empowered through sex work, radical feminists may argue that rejecting the sexual-exploitation industries is more about creating "conditions for meaningful sexual freedom" (Jensen, 2021, pg. 5). Also, while liberal feminists believe that pornography and prostitution are meant to provide freedom and choice for women's sexuality, radical feminists are not concerned with pornography being a "deviant form of sexual expression, but rather about a powerful mass-market industry that normalizes, sanctions, and participates in sexist, racist, anti-Semitic. and other forms of discrimination that are made into sexualized entertainment" (Dines et al., 1998, pg. 18). In other words, radical feminists are more so concerned with what the implications of

pornography and prostitution are given how it normalizes and institutionalizes the subordination of women as connected to the structural inequalities of men and women in the patriarchal society (pg. 18). Therefore, many radical feminists' critiques of pornography and prostitution is derived from and related to the claim that men in patriarchy wish to control women's sexuality, thereby associating this to yet another form of male violence (Jensen, 2021).

Radical feminists believe that "choices" made in these industries are made "under conditions of considerable constraint and reduced opportunities," and "the validation and normalization of the sexual-exploitation industries continues to reduce women and girls to objectified female bodies available to men for sexual pleasure" (Jensen, 2021, pg. 6). In other words, they reject the liberal feminist school of thinking that sex work is empowering because they do not believe that these choices are truly made with individual agency, but rather ignores the "economic and social control" that is sometimes "enforced through violence or the threat of violence, to determine the conditions and substance of pornography's production" (Dines et al., 1998, pg. 25). They believe that pornography is about men's fantasies of controlling and objectifying women's sexuality while prostitution is associated with "targeted harassment, rape, and physical abuse of women in their power" (Tong, 2007, pg. 27). It may also inadvertently "[legitimize] discrimination, mistreatment, and abuse by making it arousing and entertaining" (Dworkin, 1989; Russell, 1993, as cited in Dines et al., 1998, pg. 12). Instead, sex should be separate from men's demands and only then can women and men embrace one another as equals (Tong, 2007).

2.3.2. How Others View Radical Feminism

As mentioned earlier, connections and identification with feminism are often associated with negative stereotypes. In fact, these stereotypes are so common that they are unquestioned and may even have additional connotations of "separatism, extremism, or men-avoiding lesbianism" (Walby, 2011, pg. 3, as cited in Mackay, 2015, pg. 334-335). Because of these common associations, many young women who have compatible opinions to schools of feminism may not choose to identify with being a feminist (Budgeon, 2001, pg. 7, as cited in Rich, 2005). In other words, women may be finding themselves in positions where they are navigating and negotiating how they view gender, society, and other topics surrounding gender equality, potentially in contradicting

ways (Rich, 2005). Additionally, some potential consequences of these negative connotations and stereotypes faced by feminists are women who may have affiliating opinions to schools of feminism but choosing not to identify with them. For example, Rich (2005) found that many high-achieving young women define themselves as being separate from gendered conversations as they believe that their individual determination overcomes any social constraints of their gender (pg. 501). In fact, this type of feminist affiliation has been referred to as “popular feminism” or “do-it-yourself feminism,” where “women do not define themselves by some collective gender affiliation, but by individual or personal challenges” (Skeggs, 1997, as cited in Rich, 2005, pg. 501). Rather than affiliating themselves with a previously established school of feminism, some women choose to individualize their personal challenges and obstacles than to face the potential negative associations.

In Rich’s (2005) study, they found that the young women were balancing many subject positions all at once and were negotiating gender as a “structuring [...] dynamic in their lives whilst at the same time constructing a narrative wherein gender inequality was seen as undesirable and a thing of the past” (pg. 496). This led them to embrace individualism strongly which, in turn, also influenced the way that they recognized and resisted the gendered inequalities they experience in their life (Rich, 2005). This aversion to identify with feminist identities may lead us to better understand why groups with similar beliefs and mentalities may not identify with one another, such as femcels and radical feminists. This will be revisited later in the thesis.

Chapter 3. Methods

3.1. Introduction

Before delving into the studies, the sources of both studies must first be established. *r/Incels*, *r/TruFemcels*, and *r/FemaleDatingStrategy* will be summarized for context, then the Dark Crawler will be explained. The Dark Crawler was integral to the two studies for reasons that will be discussed later in the chapter. Lastly, sampling methods will be discussed together as the two studies utilized similar methods.

3.1.1. Source

To begin, the studies in this thesis both utilized a qualitative design, and content analyses were performed on Reddit. The subreddits, *r/Incels*, *r/TruFemcels*, and *r/FemaleDatingStrategy*, were chosen as the source of data due to their large following and concentration of self-proclaimed incels and femcels. Additionally, subreddits allow outsiders to take a glimpse into unique communities who all have their own individual sub-cultures (Anderson, 2015). Many users feel a sense of belonging and often, feel validated when their submissions or comments are upvoted within the communities (Anderson, 2015). Moreover, Reddit's feature of self-organization also lends itself as a place for "free movement, social herding, organized attacks, trolling, etc.," hence its value to social scientists (Medvedev et al., 2019, pg. 185).

r/Incels was a subreddit which had been banned from the website on November 7th, 2017, for violating Reddit's terms and conditions by "hosting violent content" (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro, 2020; Bell, 2017, as cited in Scaptura and Boyle, 2020, pg. 279). Before being banned, it had over 40,000 members and was most likely banned due to an online petition created to ask for its ban (Hauser, 2017). The choice to select this subreddit is directly related to the fact that it was banned. With Reddit being such a large and diversified website, a subreddit would require a lot of inappropriate comments or posts in order to become banned. Therefore, this was done on the assumption that *r/Incels* would hold the richest and abundant amount of information about the group at hand. Additionally, it was also intentional to have a direct comparison with a known community of femcels online, which would be *r/TruFemcels*.

The subreddit, r/TruFemcels, is described as “the current beating heart of the femcel community and the most concentrated locus of its culture,” with users such as Zoe, who came across the subreddit searching for stories that reflected her own (Kohn, 2020). It was created on April 4th, 2018, and, as of June 18th, 2020, had 25,500 members (WayBack Machine, 2020). Its community description is “a community of the truest of femcels. Vent dear sister. Chad, Stacy, and their incel friend Billy Betabuxx are never going [to] accept us. Feel free to rot now” (WayBack Machine, 2020). In late-June to early July of 2020, the moderators of the subreddit have set it to private, meaning only moderators or approved users may visit the subreddit. This is most likely due to an overwhelming and increasing amount of outsiders coming to the subreddit to insult and rant against the femcel users, which will be talked about later. It was eventually made public again, but only for a short while until the subreddit was ultimately and permanently banned from Reddit in mid-January of 2021³. The subreddit title was “no wursties allowed,” with the key word wursties deriving its name from German sausages and is a common name for men used by femcels (Moid, 2020). Another subreddit related to the femcel movement is Female Dating Strategy.

Lastly, r/FemaleDatingStrategy was created on February 27th, 2019, and, as of November 2021, the subreddit has over 206,000 members (Reddit, 2021). Although r/FemaleDatingStrategy does not refer to their members as femcels, it is often cited as being unapologetically misandrist. Their official website, The Female Dating Strategy, states that they “center [their] methods in brutal realism about men and our current cultural climate, not aspirational (but often impractical) ideology,” and their goal is to “deconstruct toxic and self sabotaging cultural narratives that inhibit women from living their best lives and entering relationships that truly benefit them” (The Female Dating Strategy, 2021). In doing so, the subreddit has garnered popularity and notoriety from other Redditors as being comparable to incels. While in its current state, r/FemaleDatingStrategy is more or less a subreddit to keep our eyes on for now, that is not to say that it may not develop into something more. Men’s rights activists and white supremacists are a cause for concerns as they gain access to power structures (Sisley,

³ A rough estimate of the date was found on the subreddit, r/redscarepod (https://www.reddit.com/r/redscarepod/comments/kxxxex/rtrufemcels_banned_misogynist_reddit_oppresses/)

2021) and there is no certainty that this will not become the case for r/FemaleDatingStrategy in the future.

With r/Incel and r/TruFemcels both banned, it was no longer feasible to do an online ethnography directly from each subreddit. Therefore, the Dark Crawler was used in order to scrape posts and comments, even after the subreddits were closed. The same process was also applied to r/FemaleDatingStrategy, despite it being up and running, in order to streamline and simplify the process.

3.1.2. Dark Crawler

The data collection was done using the Dark Crawler, which is a “customizable Web intelligence platform for cybercrime researchers, investigators, and concerned organizations” (The Dark Crawler). According to Scrivens et al. (2019), “violent extremists and those who subscribe to radical beliefs have left their digital footprints online since the inception of the World Wide Web,” which include the growing community of incels and femcels on online forums such as Reddit (pg. 180). The ever-increasing population of Internet users and ever-growing presence of online extremism has “necessitated guided data filtering methods, those that can side-step - and perhaps one day even replace – the laborious manual methods that traditionally have been used to identify relevant information online” (pg. 180).

Based in Simon Fraser University, the Dark Crawler is a “customized web-crawler that was developed at the ICCRC [International CyberCrime Research Centre] for the purpose of collecting, classifying, and interpreting extremist content online and on a large scale” (pg. 181). Reddit was one of its user-specified starting websites, and a site analysis in the form of a singular snapshot was taken of many of its subreddits. Amongst these forums were r/Incels, r/TruFemcels, and r/FemaleDatingStrategy. As a web-crawler, the program maps and navigates the Internet while collecting information about each website and webpage as it visits them (Scrivens, Gaudette, Davies, and Frank, 2019). The content retrieved by the web-crawler is usually saved onto a hard drive, or in this case, an online cloud, “essentially ‘ripping’ a webpage or website” (Scrivens, Gaudette, Davies, and Frank, 2019, pg. 182). The content of each subreddit was scraped and from there, a sample of 250 comments from each of the subreddits were imported onto an Excel spread sheet, where it was then compiled and imported into

NVivo. The result was a passive, non-participatory netnography, or a new qualitative research method that adapts ethnographic techniques to studying cultures and communities through the Internet (Costello et al., 2017).

The most advantageous part of this specific type of research was the “unobtrusive and non-influencing monitoring of the communication and interaction of community members to gain practical insights into their usage behaviour” (Pollok et al., 2014, p. 2, as cited in Costello et al., 2017). A valuable snapshot into the anonymous and unfiltered comments from a population of incels and femcels was taken, despite being a non-traditional method of qualitative research. This is especially because netnography is most suitable for research on topics that may be personally or politically sensitive or illegal activities, since it is “discussed in online communities by individuals who prefer to conceal their off-line identities and welcome the online anonymity offered” (Costello et al., 2017).

As mentioned above, the netnography that was performed was passive in nature, as opposed to participatory or active netnography. That was purposefully and ethically done to remain as unobtrusive to the communities as much as possible, as well as to avoid research bias in the data. Additionally, this type of concealment, also referred to as lurking, can serve to be an advantage that netnography has over ethnography due to fear that “mingling by the researchers might have limited in-depth information or pushed informants away” (Fisher & Smith, 2011, pg. 334, as cited in Costello et al., 2017, pg. 7). Having said that, because the current research did not involve interacting or “mingling” with members of the communities at all, one disadvantage is that there is no confirmation or feedback from the communities themselves regarding the research. While active, participatory netnography allows the researcher to assist the community pursuing community goals, such as gaining a certain reputation, the decision to use passive netnography “minimizes opportunities to ethically guide and assist cocreation” (Costello et al., 2017, pg. 8). However, the choice to maintain passive observations of the subreddits was supported by the fact that there was no other method of accessing r/Incels due to the subreddit being banned, r/TruFemcels’ distrust of outsiders (as will be mentioned in a theme later on), and also to stay consistent across all three subreddits. Another disadvantage of netnography is of the ethical dilemma of labelling groups as feminists or femcel when they resist such labels themselves. This is especially pertinent

as an outsider and researcher representing a group to which I do not belong to. As such, I acknowledge and recognize this fact throughout the course of my research.

3.1.3. Sample

As mentioned above, while the Dark Crawler had scraped close to the entirety of each subreddit's posts, for the purposes of this study, a smaller sample of the posts were taken instead. This was done mainly because r/Incels had over a million posts and comments scraped, and it was not feasible to actively go through each and every post. Instead, a manual filtration of the latest posts was taken. This was done by removing the posts without context or those that could not be deciphered without the accompanying images. In the end, 250 filtered posts from the r/Incels and r/TruFemcels subreddits were collected to be coded in NVivo 12 for the purposes of the first study. The second study was adjusted to avoid the shortcomings in manually filtering posts in the first study by using a keyword search.

The second study, as with the first, was a content analysis of posts and comments from the subreddits, r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels. As mentioned above, the sample data was gathered from the Dark Crawler due to its convenience and easier access to posts and comments for analysis. In obtaining the sample for the current study, all posts and comments from r/ FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels were first scraped using the Dark Crawler, separated into their respective subreddit of origin, and then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet. A list of 9 keywords were selected using the literature on radical feminism and a keyword search was completed in both sets of posts. The keywords were chosen due to their relevance to radical feminist theories and core beliefs in the femcel communities. The separation of posts containing the key words from the remaining posts are meant to minimize irrelevant posts and maximize what can be used for analysis in the current study. The list of keywords can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. List of keywords used to sample comments from r/TruFemcels and r/FemaleDatingStrategy

Gender	Feminism
Feminist	Patriarchy
Sex	Hate
Incel	Pill
Equality	

The frequency of results per key word were recorded. However, as there were over 100,000 posts in r/FemaleDatingStrategy and over 150,000 posts in r/TruFemcels, a smaller sample was necessary to perform the current study and content analysis. In other words, the amount of “hits” per keyword were recorded. In r/FemaleDatingStrategy, 12,876 posts were captured containing any of the key words, while r/TruFemcels had 22,752. This will be referred to as the “target population,” as these are the posts and comments most relevant to the current study. Following this, a proportionate and representative sample of the keywords were taken from the target population, resulting in 250 posts and comments from each subreddit or a total of 500 posts for analysis. This was done by recording the proportion of a key word result to the target population and then applying it to the sample (see figure 1). For example, the key word “gender” had appeared in the r/TruFemcels subreddit 1063 times in total, which translates into 4.8% of the target population and can further be used to create the proportionate amount of 12 posts out of 250 in the sample containing “gender.” Table 2 and 3 demonstrates the process performed in r/TruFemcels and r/FemaleDatingStrategy. In doing so, the proportion of keywords was maintained from the population to the target population and, subsequently, into the final sample. Although this may seem complicated, this was done to create a more manageable sample size while preserving the proportionate number of posts in order to maintain reliability and generalizability in the study.

Table 2. Number of results per key word and proportion of r/TruFemcels posts in the final sample

Keyword	r/TruFemcels	Proportion of r/TF posts in sample	Percentage of keyword in sample (%)
Gender	1063	12	4.8
Feminism	373	4	1.6
Feminist	399	4	1.6
Patriarchy	100	1	0.4
Sex	7461	82	32.8
Hate	5718	63	25.2
Incel	5905	65	26.0
Pill	1658	18	7.2
Equality	75	1	0.4
Total	158,081	250	100

Table 3. Number of results per key word and proportion of r/FemaleDatingStrategy posts in the final sample

Keyword	r/FemaleDatingStrategy	Proportion of r/FDS posts in sample	Percentage of keyword in sample (%)
Gender	520	10	4.0
Feminism	346	7	2.8
Feminist	507	10	4.0
Patriarchy	227	4	1.6
Sex	6886	134	53.6
Hate	2632	51	20.4
Incel	741	14	5.6
Pill	855	17	6.8
Equality	162	3	1.2
Total	12,876	250	100

3.1.4. Coding Process

The coding process began once the posts and comments from the subreddits were scraped using the Dark Crawler. They were transformed and formatted into data on Excel. At this stage, a preliminary overview of the data took place. With the first study, concerning r/Incels and r/TruFemcels, this overview served to filter out irrelevant or unusable posts and comments. For example, posts that referenced an image had to be removed as the images that were integral to the understanding and context were unretrievable, even with the help of the Dark Crawler. For the r/TruFemcel and r/FemaleDatingStrategy data, because the sampling method was different from the first study, preliminary jottings were performed alongside the sampling technique explained previously. These notes served as reminders or ideas to keep track of as the study progressed and were as simple as highlighting especially interesting quotes or keeping notes in a separate document of patterns that emerged at that point.

The first round of coding on NVivo 12 began after this stage. Because the posts and comments could range from a short sentence to long paragraphs, organizing parts of each quote according to a topic was especially helpful in organizing the data. Additionally, one helpful guide to knowing what to code and not to code in the data would be to ask, “what assumptions are they making?” (Emerson et al., 2011, as cited in Saldana 2016). This was especially applicable for the femcel subreddits in connection to

radical feminism because connections between their assumptions are most telling in comparing the belief systems of two groups.

Lastly, the second round of coding served to discover the major themes. The second round of coding ultimately funneled the codes into the themes included in each study. However, because coding is researcher-dependent and in many ways, “an interpretive act,” some questions that were used to guide the process included asking what was surprising, what was intriguing, and what was disturbing (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, as cited in Saldana, 2016). Acknowledgements must be made about this, however, as coding may result in different interpretations depending on the coder. What is surprising, intriguing, or disturbing to one researcher may not be the same to another. Therefore, in order to maintain consistency and reliability, the assumptions that were eventually made into themes were compared to key traits or main assumptions of incels and radical feminism.

Some of the key traits of incels that were used to compare with the assumptions of femcels included the ways in which incels weaponized misogyny, the language they used, how they felt towards outsiders, and their black pill philosophy. These traits helped to determine what types of assumptions from the data would facilitate the greatest understanding of femcels. For example, because there is a well-researched understanding of incels’ black pill philosophy on sex and relationships, it was used as the basis to compare whether femcels also hold the same beliefs. Therefore, the traits and understandings of incels led to the discovery of themes for femcels in the first study.

As for the second study, some of the key traits of radical feminism that were used to compare with femcels are summarized by MacKay (2015), which was why it was used for this study. As such, some of the main topics that were focused on were opinions about the patriarchy, the community as a women-only space, male violence, and pornography and prostitution. The traits were used to explore whether femcels confirm these beliefs and guide the coding process better. Additionally, the subthemes that were discovered were derived from these traits as well. For instance, the subthemes “sense of community” and “supporting other women” were developed in the first round of coding and the major theme of “women-only spaces” was then fully developed using these two subthemes.

Chapter 4. Incels and Femcels

4.1. Results

Five main themes were developed from the 500 total posts and comments. They were, more specifically, separated into two similarities and three differences between the two groups. Similarities between the two groups include the use of unflattering and borderline offensive names for the opposite sex in each subreddit and having the same in-group/out-group mentality to separate themselves from those who are not members of the community. Themes that showcase some points of disagreement between the groups are that *r/incels* have a tendency to dehumanize females, how incels and femcels approach incelhood and femcelhood, and lastly, the issue of outsiders and trolls in *r/TruFemcels*.

4.1.1. Similarities

Language and Terminology

Incels are somewhat well-known for their distinctive and off-putting language. In fact, incels most likely purposefully developed their own codes and specialized language in order to use it to communicate in online forums and spread their ideology (Moonshot, 2020). This could have been done to help further separate themselves from the rest of the Manosphere and stand out, or even to have a gatekeeping device to keep track of “real” incels and those who are impostors. Femcels, technically a derivative of incels, have also followed through with using the same language. According to their respective ideologies, however, incels and femcels tend to most often use derogatory and degrading names to talk about the opposite sex. While they are consistent and satisfactory in calling the “alphas of looks” of society Stacies and Chads and average women Becky, they have different names for men and women depending on the group. For *r/incels*, one of the most popular terms for the average woman is roastie. Roasties, in particular, indicate not only that a woman is sexually active (as specified in their belief system), but that “a women’s genitals change shape after having sex, sometimes to resemble roast beef” (Moonshot, 2020). This is a callous and vulgar description of women that is used to degrade them, and also to demonstrate their hatred towards women who have sex, but most importantly, those who are having sex but not with them.

As Baele, Brace, and Coan (2019) found in their study, the adjectives most likely to appear in sentences containing roasties is ugly, white, average, fucking, attractive, old, least, many, good, and fat (pg. 10). A comment that demonstrates this is when one user commented while pretending to be speaking from the voice of a woman and saying *“I’ve been a complete whore up until age 40, why can’t I find a beta male to settle down with and provide for my stretched out roast beef flaps?”* (/u/PerfectCel, /r/Incels, posted on October 24, 2017). This comment, while not explicitly using the phrase roasties, uses the same definition of a woman’s genitals and makes an example of exactly what incels imagine women to be like. Not only does this user justify the fact that a woman may not be able to find a man to settle down with due to being sexually active, but he phrased it to appear as if the woman is also oblivious and ignorant of her actions. Additionally, the use of this word could be in part used to draw further attention into the differences between males and females by directly referencing a woman’s genitals. For instance, another user commented *“If we wanted to fuck 10/10 Super Stacey (IF we could) while Becky’s kept trying to spoil our shit by talking to us we’d bitch too. We can’t relate to roasties and they can’t relate to us”* (/u/OrangeblueSmurf, /r/Incels, posted on October 31, 2017). Though the context for this comment is a little complex and convoluted, the core of it is that there is supposedly an inherent difference between incels and roasties and coming to an understanding between the two groups is next to impossible. Together, these two comments both show that “the expression of terminologies such as ‘roastie,’ ‘femoid,’ or ‘holes’ is correctly used not only as derogatory expressions against women but also as a rhetorical force that strengthens the interconnectedness of an ingroup and ostracizes those who are deemed unwelcome” (Marwick & Caplan, 2018, as cited in Labbaf, 2020, pg. 19). This description and interpretation of the usage of roasties can also be translated over to the usage of wurstie by femcels.

Wursties is most likely a new addition to the incel terminology by femcels. According to Incel Inside, an incel Wikipedia page, wurstie is an anti-male term that can be used interchangeably with moid⁴, which is a product of femoids (female humanoid). Similar to roastie, wurstie has the same linguistic function of being offensive and drawing attention to them as an out-group. An example of the usage of this word in r/TruFemcel is *“That’s because you only talk to Stacie wurstie scum”* (/u/Put_A_Boob_on_it,

⁴ <https://incels.wiki/w/Moid>

/r/TruFemcels, n.d.⁵) and “*Wursties like you are so far away from the reality of femcels that you just laugh at it*” (*/u/Windiigo*, */r/TruFemcels*, n.d.). Both of these comments indicate very similar sentiments as with the roastie comments, in that they both show a refusal or unlikelihood in understanding the other group. While the first comment offered an explanation for potential miscommunication due to men only talking to Stacy and not femcels, the second comment is very similar in tone and effect as the earlier comment about incels not being able to relate to roasties above.

In-Group/Out-Group Mentality

Rather than a mentality about incels versus femcels, this theme is about how each group had expressed the fact that they are different from the society around them in posts and comments on their respective subreddits. The out-group in this mentality refers to the Stacys, Chads, Beckys, and more generally, the normies. Referring back to the red pill and blue pill debate, incels “claim that most people whom they refer to as ‘normies’ have [taken] the blue pill, which has subjected them to remain ignorant of what they claim to be an oppressive feminist system,” while femcels would more or less also agree with that definition, as will be seen later (Labba, 2020, pg. 20). Normies may also refer to anybody who is not a part of the incel community (Moonshot, 2020, pg. 16). Some of these comments about them point towards incels and femcels believing that normies will never be able to understand their position in life and are those who have swallowed the blissful blue pill, leaving them ignorant of the ‘fact’ that society discriminates against incels (Moonshot, 2020, pg. 13). In *r/Incels*, one user appears to have been addressing a normie in their subreddit by commenting the following:

Here's the thing: you can't help us. You're a teenager normie trying to tell 25+ yo incels that \There's hope!! Gotta keep trying!\”. If you don't see how retardedly condescending you sound, I'm sorry. We are ugly. Through life, people made it very clear that, because we were ugly, we didn't deserve happiness. Not \“some people\”. All of them. And then we isolated ourselves and found on this sub a place to vent off our frustrations with people who understand our plight. So you, a teenager on the internet, can't do shit about helping us. I understand that the thought of being the savior of some virgin no-lives makes you feel all giddy inside, but it just annoys and humiliates us. So go away and get back to your normie life. Or go to that bluepilld incels without hate sub.” What in the fuck kind of brain backflips do they have to do to take a lack

⁵ Dark Crawler was unable to scrape the posting dates for *r/TruFemcels* during the first study.

of empathy away from that post? (/u/all_is_vain_vanity, /r/Incels, posted on October 12, 2017)

In this comment, the incel expressed his feelings of frustration against the normie who attempts to help the incel change his way of thinking. However, the user is adamant that there is nothing that can help them, nor do they want to be helped by a normie. It is an excellent example of the black pill mentality of incels, which is why it was selected as an example for this theme. They would rather continue to be miserable and incels, rather than have a normie outsider come in and be the “saviour.” Many lines are drawn there by the incel user about the immense and irreversible differences and challenges between him and the other user he is referring to. According to Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro (2020), incels purposefully separate themselves from normies not only because of their perceived difference in looks, but also because they believe normies do not have the black-pill insight that incels have: “that most women are attracted only to Chads, and that if one did not ‘win’ the genetic lottery, they are destined for mediocrity, social isolation, and abject loneliness” (pg. 567). Another commentor supports this notion by writing directly after the last comment that “*Normies *won't* ever know what that feels like hell I'm an \involuntary celibate*” now but once upon a time I was a failed normie so even I won't ever really know what **zero attention ever** feels like either. *Pointing out false equivalence isn't a lack of empathy it's called being intellectually honest*” (/u/itsabsolutelyover, /r/Incels, posted on October 31, 2017). In this, he not only perceives that normies will never understand incels, but that he himself was once a normie before becoming an incel. As an ex-normie, he understands both sides of the situation by acknowledging the difference between the “zero attention” that incels experienced and also the minimal-to-none that he felt as a “failed normie.” It is an important quote to use, especially under this theme, as it brings in the perspective of both incels and normies. Similarly, femcels also have the same mentality against normies on their own subreddit.

On r/TruFemcels, one user was explaining to others why normies may find femcel belief systems incomprehensible and irrational by explaining that that is simply the way that normies “cope”:

It is just normie cope. Some people refuse to believe that nature could be so cruel as to damn an entire segment of the population to lifelong loneliness through no fault of their own. So normies will tell you it is your

own fault rather than face that unpleasant truth about nature (/u/ht44c, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

In this, the femcel is demonstrating her femceldom by explaining how she personally feels having to go through life lonely through no fault of her own and also how she believes normies view femceldom. The quote is also useful in demonstrating how normie mindsets are vastly different to femcel beliefs, which was seen earlier with incels as well. She described her truth as being unpleasant and normies blaming them for their situations, which is directly supported by the notion that “incels believe mainstream society ignores or actively represses information about the genetic factors and evolutionary traits that impact their ability to access sexual relationships” (Moonshot, 2020, pg. 4). In this case, not only did normies ignore and repress “the truth,” but they also blame the incels and femcels for what they believed to be their own “reality.”

4.1.2. Differences

Upon describing the similarities between incels and femcels, it is no surprise to learn that there are also differences that separate them. In this section, some themes that illustrates this point are findings that show how incels dehumanize femcels, their differences in black-pilled beliefs, and the issue of having outsiders trolling in r/TruFemcels.

Dehumanization of Females in r/Incels

This theme was developed after seeing consistent and continuous comments dehumanizing and reducing females to only their body parts in r/Incels. As established in the literature review, it is no surprise that incels are misogynistic and are hateful towards women. However, the way they go about doing this is to continuously refer to their female genitalia and base their significance and importance off of it. The use of the name “roasties” implies this. Beyond the rather typical and, sometimes, misogynistic comments in incel communities about how “*women are only needed for their vaginas*” (/u/CantThinkOfOne, /r/Incels, posted on October 18, 2017) and, more vulgarly, “*she’s a Chad fuck towel at best then*” (/u/fuck-your-world, /r/Incels, posted on October 12, 2017), other comments go more in-depth into exactly why they believe women are less than men. One user appeared to be communicating to a female in the subreddit:

That's where you're wrong. You're a typical modern women. All women are the same. You even admit it yourself in some of your other posts. Girls are pathetic children that just need men to do everything for them. Yet they are treated like queens because they have a hole between their legs You don't deserve my hostility personally, but you are a prime example of why women today are trash as relationship material. Sorry, I'd stay away from the incel sub for your own mental well being (/u/GotMogged23, /r/Incels, posted on October 18, 2017)

In an arguably repressed and civil voice, the user tells the woman that they are only treated well by others because “they have a hole between their legs” and that they are “trash as relationship material.” To this user, all women are only useful and prized for their sexual anatomy and they are incapable of being an equal and contributing partner in relationships. They are pathetic, like children, and need everything done for them. This particular quote was chosen because it exemplifies how these types of comments exist when incels see women who do not prescribe to their hetero-patriarchal ideals and only hold erotic capital (Menzie, 2020), which correspond with incels’ desire for their sexual needs to be fulfilled.

A different user referred to women as femoids and as being primitive:

What femoid semen demons consider hate is nothing more than the male recognition that femoids are primitive creatures that suffer from gross solipsism; that they are unable to see the world beyond their vagina tingles. They're not team players and their contributions to humanity are very few and far between (/u/incelicious, /r/Incels, posted on October 24, 2017)

The word femoid’s main purpose is, first and foremost, to upset women and secondly, to conflate women to a being that is “less evolved, less intelligent, and less human than men” (Chang, 2020, pg. 13). Also, the user showed that he believes women are “unable to see the world beyond their vagina tingles,” to reduce them to only their genitals and perhaps to symbolize how that their decisions and worldview is inherently based off of their sexual desires. Beyond this, the description of women as poor contributors to humanity is particularly telling of the ways incels dehumanize them.

On the other hand, there were no references in posts or comments on r/TruFemcels applying the same logic and comparisons of men to their genitalia apart from the use of the name “wurstie”. While this is merely a speculation, this may be due to the differences in desires between incels and femcels, with incels craving sex and

femcels companionship, which is, at its core, related to their differences in beliefs about the black pill theory.

Black Pill in Femceldom

Because the understanding of incel's version of the black pill is more thoroughly researched and there is more literature out there over femcels, this part of the study will exclusively talk about femcels' version of the black pill. There are two main differences that were discovered through r/TruFemcels: that femceldom may occur to a woman at any point in their life and that femcels' main concerns are not always about sex. To begin, the first difference is directly opposed to the incel belief that inceldom is inescapable and genetically determined at birth. As one user in r/TruFemcel explains,

femceldom can strike at any point in womans life. Motherhood alone lands so many in femceldom it's staggering. As a woman, any life change can make you invisible to men. Hell, even good things like getting a higher paying job can scatter men like roaches when the lights turn on (/u/FederalCatastrophe, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

This quote was especially telling of the first part of the current theme: that femceldom is not concrete or consistent across life. To her and most likely many other femcels, femceldom is different than inceldom in that it may be interspersed in a woman's life and life changes such as motherhood or career changes can turn a woman into a femcel. While looks are ultimately what matters most, other smaller factors such as life events can also affect the chances of women becoming involuntarily celibate. This is supported by many other comments about how self-proclaimed femcels have dated men before, been married, and more, while such scenarios are unheard of in r/Incels. Moreover, the goals that femcels have also differed from that of incels. While incels ultimately want attention and sex from women, femcels are more focused on companionship and being with someone who cares for them:

If I've understod this sub correctly then their version of celibacy is focused on relationships rather than the actual intimacy as some seems to have had intimate moments of some kind before. Hence the focus on forever alone rather than forever a virgin (as incels seem to focus on). It's mostly speculation though (/u/EnSvenskLider, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

Here, the user interpreted the involuntary celibacy of femcels to refer to the lack of a genuine connection with men. It is an important differentiation to make because, instead of an incel's focus on their eternal virginity, femcels are more worried about never being

able to find a partner and experiencing emotional intimacy. Therefore, while femcels do think that looks control one's life journey, they are more likely to find that "conventional 'hotness' is everything [because] it's what finds you partners, helps you make friends, lands you a job and allows you to function normally in society," rather than purely to help you have sex (Kohn, 2020). Another comment explains this further by stating that

femcels is a bit different because I think most of us can find someone to have sex with us but we struggle to secure commitment or love. For the average roastie/stacy it isn't that hard to enter into relationships. So speaking for myself, Im more like volcel [voluntary celibate] because I don't want to be used up by men who hate and resent me (/u/IsraeliteBarbie, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

The idea of being "used up" by men was a reoccurring sentiment in r/TruFemcels. There were comments upon comments about being "pumped-and-dumped" by men and having men leave them for better looking women. This comment may only be referring to a few out of the many, but still contributed to a greater understanding to femceldom. There appeared to be greater variety and diversity in what constitutes as femceldom, and femcels also appear to be fine with that.

Incels or Outsiders in r/TruFemcels

The last theme also solely concerned r/TruFemcels. For this subreddit, there appeared to be a prominent problem of incels or normies entering discussions to question them and to troll them. Trolling is the act of using "ostensibly harmless 'memes,' internet-generated comedic images" to downplay and point out contradictory ideas in something (Chang, 2020, pg. 3). It is usually characterized by "brazen obscenity" and is "situated within and fuelled by culturally sanctioned inclinations" (Chang, 2020, pg. 3). In other words, it is often an extreme version of something that is otherwise an internalized thought but portrayed by memes on the Internet. Most of these appear to be the actions of normies. This problem persisted and was so prevalent in the femcel subreddit that it led to eventually making the subreddit private. Before this, there were many posts and comments that called attention to this issue, such as "*we need more aggressive anti wurstie policies, even in this thread they come in and question us*" (/u/Windiigo, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.), and

wurstie trolls can't even resist trying to gatekeep femcels from their own subreddit. The first incel community was created by a woman:

<https://www.elle.com/culture/news/a34512/woman-who-started-incel-movement/> And even when we accept that we've been kicked out and go elsewhere, you also have to follow us here and try to kick us out of here too. Of course you do. (deleted user, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

These two comments illustrate how femcels had always faced the same problem in incel communities. By virtue of being female, they were insulted, trolled, and mocked into oblivion and even after establishing their own community, the outsiders and incels continued to follow suit. To get a better idea of what these comments are like, one example is: "Well if I look around in this sub it's just insane women ranting about things that are not real and about how sad they are" (/u/BN0_1996, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.). Not only did this comment referred to femcels as being insane, but also that their problems are not real. While this is only one out of many, the sentiments are repeatedly the same. Outsiders come into the subreddit to reduce femcel beliefs and issues into nothing, question their membership as involuntary celibates, and talk over anything the femcels have to say. It is unclear why exactly this happens, but one hypothesis is that incels feel insulted by the existence of femcels and feel that it directly challenged their beliefs. Instead of leaving them alone, incels refuse this contradiction and take matters into their own hands. One incel in particular took it as far as to write this on r/TruFemcels:

There's only 2 explanations for this shit- Either I, therefore, other male hermit volcels are just THAT unattractive, basically lost all interest in real women and only recently rediscovered having standards like: \"workplace is for work, married women are off limits, these 2 are hanging, so I'll let them.\" while still not putting in any effort to even finding ANY girl to chat or even for 9 years straight. I mean, imagine. I'm actually the youngest male on mother's side of the family. Everyone else is dead. One drunk driver, and that's it. Mother is in menopause. I have no brothers or sisters. It's a dead end for this strain. Everyone on every fringe social media thinks I'm weird af. If i don't do this. It's over. I'm the disappointment of my nation, my tribe, my extended family, who are also thinning out. For my first 24 hours, i haven't gotten a chick to acknowledge my existence by replying on tinder with literally anything. 9 years of no activity. It does things. OR There's femcels. (/u/Zandonus, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

Not only is the comment above an example of an actual outsider entering the community, but the passionate feelings the outsider has about femcels also allow an insight into why this issue exists in the first place. For this user, he has an entire history and factors that back up his reasons for being an incel. All of these circumstances have led him to have the understanding and beliefs that he holds today, but the existence of femcels would directly sabotage and oppose his worldview. Therefore, by commenting

on the femcel subreddit, he is effectively answering his own question and refusing to believe in them. Most femcels would agree that “the complexity of the femcel condition or the personal inability to understand does not disprove or nullify it” (Kohn, 2020). As poetically described in Mel Magazine, “in a digital universe where using the word ‘female’ and ‘celibacy’ seems about as believable to people as ‘Bigfoot,’ femcels like Mary must struggle not only with the very real pain of being forever alone, but also the assumption that they don’t even exist” (Kohn, 2020). I would argue that this is one of the key characteristics that is specific to femcels. They are constantly debating with others over their own existence, even when they have already been effectively chased out of the incel subreddit.

4.2. Discussion

This study took an unusual stance from other literature on incels by exploring incels in comparison with femcels. Due to incels’ black pill philosophy and beliefs, there were instances in which their comments took more sinister turns in the form of threats and intimidation. While most men are most definitely not incels, and most incels are not violent or physically dangerous (Acaptura and Boyle, 2020), there is still reason to believe that they are a cause for concern for authorities due to their extreme worldviews. Additionally, this chapter also introduced the female counterpart to the incel, femcels. By performing a qualitative netnography on r/Incels and r/TruFemcels using the Dark Crawler, this study found five themes outlining some similarities and differences that can be drawn between the two groups. For one, the language used by incels and femcels to describe the opposite sex are complementary in that they both serve to create membership for the in-group and lines for the out-group. Likewise, the two groups also show the same mentality of us (incels/femcels) against the world (normies). In terms of what separates them, one theme found that r/Incels members consistently dehumanize and reduce females into descriptions of their genitalia or only being useful to society because of their genitals. Also, femcels are unique to the incel community in the sense that they hold slightly different beliefs about the black pill. Specifically, they seek companionship and relationships over sex, unlike incels, and also believe femceldom is a status that fluctuates over the course of a woman’s life. Lastly, r/TruFemcels are constantly ridiculed in their own subreddit by incels or outsiders in general. This appears to only be evident in the femcel community, making it their own

distinctive issue. For convenience, a summary of the results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *Incels and Femcels Results Summary*

Themes	r/Incels	r/TruFemcels
Language and Terminology		“Roasties” and “Femoid” “Wursties” and “Moid”
In-Group/Out-Group Mentality		Out-group - Stacys, Chads, Beckys, normies In-group – r/Incels and r/TruFemcel
Dehumanization of Females in r/Incels	Misogyny towards women, focus on dehumanizing women using genitalia	Focus on relationship and companionship
Black Pill in Femceldom	“Eternal virginity,” focus on involuntary celibacy from sex, inescapable and genetically determined at birth	“...femceldom can strike at any point in womans life...” (/u/FederalCatastrophe, /r/TruFemcels, n.d.), emotional intimacy, commitment, love
Incels or Outsiders in r/TruFemcels	Lack of outsider trolling in the sample	“Trolling” problem, denial of their existence on subreddits

Overall, the goal of this study was to explore and help better define incelism and femceldom. With the main research question being what the similarities and difference between incels are and femcels are, the current study effectively found its answer through Reddit. However, there continues to be much more to be learned from the two groups, especially if authorities and scholars are aiming to build a

comprehensive understanding on extremist worldviews and its relationship to online communities. One major limitation to the study is the lack of context and accompanying imagery to the posts and comments. Most of the information on Reddit relies purely on text, but many of the discussions on r/Incels and r/TruFemcels involve imagery because of their constant references to looks and lookism, and what the theory of objective beauty stands for (Moonshot, 2020). However, because the posts were scraped using the Dark Crawler, the images could not be retained and they can only be viewed when links were provided in the post. Many of the posts that were manually filtered were clearly having discussions over a particular image, but without the actual image and the context it brings with it, a comprehensive understanding of the comments could not be obtained.

Besides that, another limitation of the current study included the lack of literature on female involuntary celibates. Most of the sources that explore femceldom are news outlets and magazine websites. Having little to no academic sources on femcels leaves a gap in a comprehensive understanding of the entirety of the incel community. However, by drawing more attention to the phenomenon and existence of femcels, it would only be a matter of time before literature begins to pick up on femcels.

Lastly, because the circumstances surrounding each subreddit have changed, the subsequent conversations and discussions within each group may have also changed. For example, because r/TruFemcels had become a private subreddit at the time of this study, with moderators purposefully banning members who are not true femcels, the conversations in that subreddit may effectively become more about the essence of true femceldom and about their experiences of being a femcel. In other words, without the judgement and observation by others on their conversations, femcels may have changed the subject matter and their demeanor. Similarly, r/incels have since been banned from Reddit. Most of its members have most likely moved onto a different platform. Perhaps the change in platform will also change their disposition.

Chapter 5. Femcels and Radical Feminists

5.1. Results

The second study bases its themes on the four criteria of radical feminism: a commitment to end the patriarchy; use of women-only spaces; focus on male violence against women; and the inclusion of pornography and prostitution as forms of male violence (Mackay, 2015). This was done not because Mackay (2015) provides an all-encompassing and overarching explanation of radical feminism, but rather due to its convenience in summarizing core contending issues and characteristics of the radical feminist movement. Additional sub-themes were discovered under each of these themes. Mackay (2015)'s four criteria was used to compare how accurately a definition of radical feminism applied to femcels, while the sub-themes had developed organically from the sample itself.

5.1.1. Commitment to End the Patriarchy

To begin, the first theme of the existence of a patriarchy, alongside a commitment to end it was found to exist in both r/TruFemcels and r/FemaleDatingStrategy. More specifically, the study found that the posts and comments in the sample resulted in sentiments about how the patriarchy created a sense of entitlement to women's bodies by men and how it also created a system where men's hate towards women were warranted and, in some cases, encouraged. Out of the 22 quotes that were coded in the development of this theme, all of the quotes presented a negative outlook and sentiment towards the patriarchy. They were mainly concerned with the detrimental effects of the patriarchy on women and their choices (or lack thereof).

Many posts and comments in both subreddits had reiterated similar sentiments about the patriarchy. For one, most posts have no doubt in the existence of the patriarchy. More specifically, the posts and comments all point towards a negative opinion of the patriarchy, with emphasis placed on how the male-dominated system oppresses women in many ways. One user stated in r/FemaleDatingStrategy:

First of all, I cannot comprehend how a guy denying women basic human rights like reproductive rights and equal wage can be "cool". Regardless of political party. I'll assume you're young and that you don't exactly know how politics, oppressive power structures and men in power have destroyed and keep on destroying women through sexualization of women and girls, restricting their reproductive rights and making the female perspective not the default, but secondary and of lower importance [...] I cannot afford to be apolitical because I don't want to risk my human rights like voting which men denied women through history and keep denying them in some parts of the world. Sleeping with a man who actively denies some of human rights to women would then mean I'm a hypocrite too, a hypocrite who doesn't think women are humans. And I don't like being called a hypocrite (deleted user⁶, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.⁷)

The above post described the patriarchy as an "oppressive power structure" where oppression of women occurs through their sexualization, denial of reproductive rights, and othering of the female body and perspective by using male as the default. It was selected as a quote due to its well-explained and thorough description of what the patriarchy means to the user. To her, the patriarchy is essentially denying women human rights. The user also explained that, while this is a political issue, associating and having relationships with men who believe and support the patriarchy would indicate her as a hypocrite. These strong feelings against the patriarchy align with the first criteria of radical feminism as there are clearly negative feelings directed towards it and high support for its eradication. Additionally, in the same subreddit, a different user not only supported the sentiment above but also believed that the patriarchy is a gateway to the abuse of women:

Lol at the idea that the patriarchy put women and children first, Ever actually read a history book? The patriarchy was a shit show for women and was the breeding ground for men controlling women and abusing them. Trying to dictate their lives and tell them what to do because most men are weak useless idiots that can't function without dictating to women. Thank god feminism destroyed all of that (/u/rainisthelife, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted May 12, 2017)

In this second comment, the user is amused at the thought of the patriarchy benefitting women or children as she believed that the system created the circumstances for the control and abuse of women. The use of the phrase "breeding ground" indicates that the

⁶ Users who have deleted their accounts will have their usernames shown as [deleted] on Reddit.

⁷ Not all posts and comments on the Dark Crawler had the date of posting scraped.

user believed that men are socialized into treating women in this way because they are “weak useless idiots.” This comment is particularly telling of the attitudes that members of r/FemaleDatingStrategy have towards men and the patriarchy, which is distrust and hostility. There is no doubt in this user’s mind that the patriarchy only benefits men and that feminism would be the key in abolishing the system. Again, this reiterates that both radical feminists and femcels have mutual feelings towards the patriarchy and the commitment to see its end. In addition, some subthemes that derived from this study also indicated that there is a sense of entitlement that comes from the patriarchy.

Entitlement Due to the Patriarchy

Besides the control and abuse of women, many members of r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels also believe that men act entitled to certain women or treatment by women. For example, a user in r/TruFemcels writes:

Men get mad at the system they created. More men, now than ever, live nowhere in reality, so all the Stacie's they've seen, men think they are supposed to get. I can see chads all my life and not feel like I'd still have the chance to even touch. Men on the other hand- what they want, they have to have. Delusionn and vanity 101! (/u/AustisticWinchester, /r/TruFemcels, posted August 21, 2018)

One of the assumptions that is inferred from the comment above is that femcels believe that men are experiencing the consequences of their own actions in creating the patriarchy. These consequences include becoming delusional to how the real world is like when it comes to relationships and sex. The comment is also very telling as it offers a comparison between femcel community members and men. The user specified an example about how most men believe they are all entitled to a “Stacy” of their own when, in reality, most women are unable to get a “Chad” of their own. In other words, the user described how men feel more entitled to women than the other way around, which the user attributed to entitlement and vanity. This is not a contentious opinion to hold within these subreddits, as each of the 22 quotes that were coded in developing this theme held the same negative outlook as the quote above. Next, another subtheme that was discovered is that of the patriarchy’s role in encouraging and permitting hate against women.

Patriarchy’s Role in Hate Towards Women

Experiencing hate from men is not a foreign experience for femcels. In fact, this feeling is most likely understood as being derived from the belief in the patriarchy as a system of male power and also a system of male hate against women. As mentioned in the first theme, socialization plays a role in the perpetuation of the patriarchy. For example, a user on r/FemaleDatingStrategy commented that “*men learn to hate and despise women from other men, [...] while women learn to hate and despise men from ****personal experience*****” (/u/whycantweallgetalong, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.). The user believed that male hate towards women is a learned behaviour and continues to be perpetuated because it is relatively socially acceptable amongst men. At the same time, hate towards men is a result of how they have been treated by them and appears to be used as a justification for hating them back. It can also be observed from this comment that this user feels that men have no reason for hating women, while at the very least, femcels (and perhaps some women) have been mistreated by men before developing contempt towards them. This quote was therefore selected because of its controversial stance and insight into how femcels justify why they believe men hate them. All of the quotes under this theme appear to agree with this quote above, with many citing language used to describe women (e.g., “thots”⁸) as enforcing hateful attitudes towards women. A similar sentiment is also supported in a separate comment on r/TruFemcels:

Yea. Like I understand men preferring to be friends with other men and relating to men more, but I dont understand the complaining about women when they've done basically nothing wrong besides exist or do their jobs. It is sad to think about that women are so hated when they haven't even done anything wrong. And even when a women does something slightly wrong, it's blown up and men exaggerate it. I think a lot of it is because they're mentally ill, but very few men ever get treatment for mental illness or try to control it because they think nothing is wrong with them. (/u/bloobird08, /r/TruFemcels, posted February 24, 2018)

The above user maintained the same opinion as before, that women are hated by men for simply living their life. This is a resounding idea in both subreddits, as well as in the femcel community, that there is unfair treatment towards them by men simply because of their gender. Even for the slightest mistakes, femcels feel that these mistakes are then “blown up” and “exaggerated,” while men usually do not suffer from the same treatment. This comment also brought up the idea that this behaviour is then excused or ignored

⁸ Thot: “a woman considered to be sexually provocative or promiscuous; a slut or whore.” (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/thot>)

because most men believe that there is “nothing [...] wrong with them,” and the behaviour continues. Men’s hate of women is a big topic in both subreddits, and the last two comments were exemplary in showing how it is a core belief within femcel communities.

Many members of the two subreddits often reiterate these opinions and many of the posts become rants due to overwhelming frustration. On the far end of the spectrum, one comment stands out as being the epitome of how femcels feel they are being treated and thought of:

Men hate women. Every facet of society drips with female hate. There’s is [no way] to ignore it, avoid it, or not deal with it. You hate us for fucking too much, you hate us for not fucking you enough, you hate us when we have your children, you hate us when we forgo that and live single, you hate us for being attractive, you hate us for being ugly, and you hate us for getting old, and you hate us when we’re young unless you think you can have sex with us, but then you hate us for that too because easy women disgust you. There is no stage in a woman’s life where you don’t hate us for existing. Are we about done here? (/u/Garbageaccount21045, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.)

Due to extreme opinions like the one above, it does not come as a surprise that femcels are compared to incels and other extremist hate groups. The above quote can be helpful in establishing how much frustration is pent up and released in these subreddits concerning the hate that femcels perceive women receive from men. At the same time, rants like this also allow us to make direct comparisons to similarities between femcels and radical feminists. Radical feminists believe that in a patriarchal society, men claim to own and control women’s sexuality and reproductive powers, while in modern liberal societies, male dominance may take on more subtle forms (Jensen, 2021). Additionally, this hate against women is not only well-established by radical feminists, but they would also agree that men play a role in perpetuating a “hatred of women, in creating prejudice against women, in using the culture to support, promote, advocate, celebrate aggression against women” (Dworkin, 1993, pg. 10). Through this first theme, it is apparent that both radical feminists and femcels agree that both forms of male dominance and control continue to be present. Next, to further the comparison, the women-only spaces that is characteristic of radical feminists can also be seen in femcel communities.

5.1.2. Women-only Spaces for Organization

To begin, both of the subreddits being studied are dedicated women-only spaces as seen through r/FemaleDatingStrategy's community description being "the only dating subreddit exclusively for women" and r/TruFemcels' subreddit description as "a community of the truest of femcels" before it was banned. Additionally, there were strict rules in r/TruFemcels to not allow men into the subreddit, as seen through one user's comment: "*moids are not allowed on this sub. Goodbye*" (/u/gigababejfl, /r/TruFemcels, posted July 10, 2018). These are established rules in both subreddits in order to ward off hate from non-members, majority of which are men, and to maximize the amount of relatability and support between members in the community. 16 quotes were coded under this theme, with each comment defending the subreddit from outsiders in one way or another. Some comments are from non-femcel women who also agree in some way about the subreddits' philosophies.

Two subthemes that derived from the original criteria was that within each subreddit, there were many instances of genuine support for women and a sense of community being established because of hate. The first subtheme, support for each other, reinforces in-group mentality and creates reliance on the subreddit as a source of support in members' lives.

Supporting Other Women

The support that is craved for and sought out by the members of both subreddits may come in the form of relatability to others' stories or honest advice to better oneself. In one instance, a user shares her life-long battle to learn self-respect and overcome trauma from previous abusive relationships:

For me, it was a slow process of getting rid of libfem [liberal feminism] values and learning about radical feminism. I used to throw myself at any man that wasn't super ugly and showed an ounce of interest in me and I was proud of how open and sexual I was. But I felt used and empty and couldn't understand why, because I did everything an 'empowered' woman was supposed to do. Why didn't they pick me? And when I was eventually picked, why weren't the relationships fulfilling? [...] Then I took a long, hard look at my love life. I began to ask myself what I wanted in a relationship and where I went wrong. I realized I've always settled for men who were beneath me in almost every aspect - looks, intelligence, income, just because they were interested in me, and at the time, it

seemed good enough. I told myself I deserved better. One day I stumbled into FDS [Female Dating Strategy] and everything clicked. It felt as if I had an incomplete puzzle in front of me and I found the missing pieces on this sub. I'm not really sure if I would have believed FDS advice before. I think it would [depended] of how old I was. If I had been taught about it very early, say when I was 13-15 years old, AND learned to love myself more, I think I'd be accepting. But 20-25 year old me, I don't think so." (/u/mysticaldancer, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted August 8, 2018)

This comment not only described this user's process of learning radical feminist values to better herself and improve her quality of life, but also how the path to discovering r/FemaleDatingStrategy reinforced her beliefs in radical feminism. It was also an excellent connection to the previous study's theme of how the status of femceldom may change across different life stages. She expressed that finding the subreddit was like finding the missing piece of herself and that the advice on the subreddits would have been immensely beneficial to her as a teenager. This comment then becomes yet another story of a member that others can read and relate to, thus creating a cycle of sharing and supporting between one another.

The support that members of r/FemaleDatingStrategy receive are similar to that of r/TruFemcels. It is observed by one user that "*this community and r/incels are not mirror images of one another and [she] will not give incel opinions any weight in this sub where women ACTUALLY listen to each others' problems and offer solutions rather than spiraling downward*" (/u/sn0wflaker, /r/TruFemcels, posted December 23, 2016). In other words, this comment reinforced the "no men allowed" mentality, but also supported this study's claim that encouragement and guidance that is shared amongst members heighten camaraderie and fellowship. Furthermore, the tone and emphasis placed on the word "ACTUALLY" may indicate that the user feels like her femcel community is superior to the incel subreddits because they uplift their members instead of pushing them down, as she observed. This is further supported by a comment in r/TruFemcels:

I'm curious and browsing various incel subs and [I'm] actually so pleased at how positive and kind all/most the femcel posts are lmao. Seriously, this is why you gals will find love. Wish I could say [I'm] surprised by finding this but I'm really not (/u/PalmtopLaura, /r/TruFemcels, posted July 30, 2018)

Whilst this comment may be coming from a non-member given the way they were simply "curious" and "browsing" different subreddits, it was selected as a quote to use under this theme because their observations still spoke volumes. Femcel subreddit posts

appear to be much more positive than what this user previously believed, most likely because their only point of reference had been incel subreddits. In addition to the positive and productive environment inside the subreddits, femcels are also united and brought together due to the hate they receive from men outside the subreddits. This us-against-them mentality served to create a tight-knit community, so much so that even an outsider such as the user above has observed it while passing by the subreddit, offering some extra confirmation of this theme. The 50 quotes that contributed to this theme are all in some way directly supporting other members with admiration, compliments, or support for a decision they have made in their relationships or life. Some of these quotes are also defending members from hate comments from outsiders, thus reinforcing the tight-knit quality of these subreddits as further explored in the upcoming theme.

Sense of Community

Aside from obvious comments indicating a sense of community due to having the same purpose and goal, such as when one user wrote “*Yes, this is my community. Rebelling against the patriarchy my way!*” (/u/ FluffandRainclouds, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.), there are also instances where a sense of community was created due to the hate the subreddits receive from others. This hate can transform itself into posts and comments from members where they vent and rant about the injustices of being a femcel, and it can also become a motivating factor for them to achieve certain collective goals. In the first case, many members feel like the subreddits were a safe place to rant about men and incels, as revealed by one user saying how they use the subreddit to “*vent about the life of being a femcel and the [bullshittery] that is incels*” (/u/Cinna_Bunny, /r/TruFemcels, posted on August 8, 2015). This is also where a lot of the support from the last subtheme is most evident. Many commentors leave constructive messages and advice on how to become better versions of themselves, such as how to make more friends, looksmaxx⁹, and more.

As mentioned above, the hate that these subreddits receive can be converted into motivation for members to stick together and achieve goals as a movement. These goals can vary from female-centred dating advice like in r/FemaleDatingStrategy, to

⁹ “Looksmaxxing or looksmaxing or looksmaxx is any attempt at improving one's appearance.” (<https://incels.wiki/w/Looksmaxxing>)

rebelling against the patriarchy” as a previous comment specified. In one example, the negative experiences that are collectively experienced by the subreddit are turned into a positive one as it is used as motivation to band together. One user wrote “*We KNOW how moids really are. The hatred, the mockery, the misuse, the humiliation they put us through, will always be present with us. We KNOW them and that is our strongest weapon*” (/u/Witchyko, /r/TruFemcels, posted March 1, 2019). She explained how femcels should be taking the negative experiences that they have been put through by men and incels and turning it around into an advantage against them. The comment is great at demonstrating how motivating and uplifting the subreddits can be, with a majority of the 50 quotes under this theme being made up of comments citing female empowerment or advocating for the respect that women deserve. Instead of staying in a slump over past bad experiences, the subreddit is a support system for members to process, move on, and even take action once again. If anything, some may even believe that the existence of femcel and feminist subreddits are already a retaliation in and of itself. As one comment described,

It's truly ridiculous. Men have dozens (probably hundreds) of subs where they make fun of women aging, make fun of women getting punched by men, call women all kinds of names, post their pictures from dating sites and make fun of their looks and they have the nerve to complain about this sub. How long has the PUA [pick up artist] stuff been around? Over a decade? [...] The men of reddit can dish out misogyny but they cannot handle women who aren't sucking up to them. They're always whining about subs like GenderCritical or even 2xchromosomes. It's just an example of how the males of Reddit think they can insult and demean women at every chance and we just have to put up with it but we'd better not say anything about them. They have 100 subs crapping on us and we can't even have 2 or 3 without them whining. I've seen misogynistic incels and mgtows¹⁰ saying this sub and feminist subs should be shut down. Really? You first. (/u/starburst411, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted on April 21, 2018)

Dedicated spaces for misogyny and anti-feminism are all over Reddit. While it is common advice for women to “suck it up” and ignore them, this user feels that it is an unfair reality for women. The hypocrisy of men, as the comment does an excellent job of describing, can be all the more motivating to members of the subreddit to stick together

¹⁰ Men Going Their Own Way is another group who are part of the Manosphere (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/aug/26/men-going-their-own-way-the-toxic-male-separatist-movement-that-is-now-mainstream>)

and creating the collective “us.” While men have “100 subs crapping on” women, the 2 or 3 subreddits that do the opposite are chastised for existing. This double-standard has led many members of each subreddit to reinforce their in-group mentality to fight a common enemy. Within these women-only spaces, femcels and radical feminists alike organize themselves to freely speak about poor experiences they have been through and how to overcome and avoid being in them again. Many of these experiences derive from a belief that male violence against women are intentional acts meant to hinder their ability to gain power and to further oppress them.

5.1.3. Male Violence Against Women Leading to Women’s Oppression

This section will discuss instances of traditional forms of male violence which radical feminists have described as being used to oppress women (Mackay, 2015). Additionally, this theme also led to subthemes of viewing women as objects and casual sex, both of which femcels have discussed within their communities as being additional forms of male violence against women.

Direct reference to male violence

This subtheme delves into the more traditional examples of male violence that radical feminists have explored before, such as harassment, abuse, sexual assault, coercion, and more. One thing to note is that many posts also link male violence directly with misogyny; men commit violence against women due to misogyny and wanting to control them. For instance, one user in r/FemaleDatingStrategy writes that “*the uprising of violence and misogyny as a reaction to the uprising of feminism throughout history is no coincidence*” (/u/Cocksmasher69, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.). This comment established a link between violence and misogyny because, to this user, the two go hand-in-hand, especially because both are threatened by the existence and continual rise of feminism. 106 of the 545 quotes cited in this study spoke, in some way, about male violence towards women. While not all 106 quotes were concerning the poster’s individual experiences with male violence, they were all in some way making assumptions about how men’s violence is a part of being a woman and these experiences does not come off as a surprise to them.

Additionally, users like to point out how drastically more violent men can be towards women than towards other men. Even though women can say hurtful and detrimental things to men, users of the subreddits believe that misogyny is much more harmful because it may cost women's lives. That is because, as one user described, while *"\sexism\¹¹ from women hurts men's precious feelings [,] misogyny gets women killed, and then degraded even after death"* (/u/JupiterThunderCrash, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted on October 10, 2018). Again, this quote established a link between misogyny and violence against women, even going as far as to state that women are killed due to misogyny. The degradation after death is most likely referring to instances of victim blaming where men blame women for their deaths, rape, and more. Specifically with sexual assault, users don't necessarily believe that it is entirely about sex, but rather more so about power. This belief is similar to how "Radical Feminism has been unafraid to look at the violence done to women by men [because] it has shown that this violence to women's bodies and women's selves has been so intrinsic to patriarchal culture as to appear 'normal' and therefore justifiable" (Rowland and Klein, 1990, pg. 287). As interpreted by a user in r/TruFemcels,

This is why you always hear feminists talking about how rape is not about attraction, but power and violence. The three female judges in this case didn't understand that, and quite a few people, especially people old enough to be judges, don't understand it either. Fortunately, I think the perception is changing such that people are realizing that rape isn't just about sexual desire for a person's body, but violent desire to have control over them. (/u/CrystalCrittter, /r/TruFemcels, posted August 20, 2016)

The core of what r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels fixate on in terms of male violence is that it is directly related to retaining power for themselves and taking away power from women. That is, male violence is purposefully performed to oppress women, which the commentator above did a great job of explaining. Another way that men take power away from women is to view them as objects.

Viewing women as objects

The objectification of women is an experience where "women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others" (Fredrickson &

¹¹ Back slashes (\) are often times used in incel communities to represent sarcasm or to act as air quotes.

Roberts, 1997, as cited in Szymanski et al., 2011, pg. 7). More specifically, this occurs when a woman “is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire” (Bartky, 1990, as cited in Szymanski et al., 2011, pg. 7-8). This is often used as examples of why not to trust men in dating and relationship settings in both subreddits. Some extreme examples include users stating that men are completely incapable of loving a woman without objectifying them:

I feel like a man can only have pure selfless love for woman if its their sister or their daughter. Other than that they see us as objects. You wonder why older brothers and dad's talk about how men are trash and to avoid them and keep yourself safe? They know. Men's sexuality is dangerous to women. It only takes looking at places where men rule, like an Islamic country where girls that havent even had their first period are married off to 40 year olds. (/u/oppositetechnician3, /r/TruFemcels, posted September 11, 2018)

Not only is this user arguing that she knows that all men objectify women, but that men also know that other men do the same. This is related to the theme earlier of patriarchy and entitlement. Furthermore, this user also explained that men’s sexuality is inherently harmful to women due to the fact that the patriarchy can protect them and, in the extreme example above, encourage and enforce this type of sexual objectification. This quote was chosen because of its extreme and controversial stance, as well as its explanation leading up to why the user believed male sexuality is dangerous to women. Many of the 99 quotes contributing to this theme describe how men often use women for their own sexual and emotional needs, oftentimes at the expense of women’s emotions and feelings.

For members of these subreddits, objectifying women does not stop at sexual objectification. It can also apply to viewing women as objects of desire to men for reproductive, emotional, and physical purposes. For members in r/TruFemcels specifically, a popular opinion is that “[men] don't even view women as human beings with feelings etc., to them, we are just mindless fuck-pieces (and also housemaids and baby machines, if that is wanted) and nothing else” (/u/Witchyko, /r/TruFemcels, posted on March 1, 2019). This comment illustrated how these women feel that men only want them for selfish purposes like sex, housework, and to carry a child for, rather than an equal partner in a relationship. It also summarized what other quotes in the dataset have reiterated very well. Another comment that supported this is the following from a user in r/FemaleDatingStrategy:

I would suggest use this knowledge to always remind yourself of why to never get too attached to any man. If they can not stop seeing women as objects, you start seeing them as objects too. Not sex objects necessarily. Money objects maybe. Or just someone to amuse yourself with on fancy dates. But do not have human empathy towards them. (/u/Barbie-girl, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted on October 3, 2012)

This comment shows that much of the advice for others when dealing with objectification is to retaliate and doing the same in return. If the common consensus within the community is that women are being used for sex, reproduction, and housework, then femcels feel that they are justified in viewing them as a “money object.” This quote is also unique as it demonstrates how being objectified is such a common occurrence for them that many users have essentially lost empathy towards men. Lastly, another subtheme that will be explored is that causal sex is considered a form of male violence in the eyes of femcels, which is similar to sentiments raised by radical feminists.

Casual Sex as a Form of Male Violence

This theme is especially important in the context of this study, as radical feminists believe that “no matter how much educational, political, and economic equality women achieve, nothing fundamental will change for women so long as women’s reproductive role remains the same” (Tong, 2007, pg. 26). More specifically, radical feminists believe that participating in natural reproduction is not in women’s best interests if they ever want to be seen as more than just reproducers (Tong, 2007). Casual sex is viewed as just another way for men to use women’s bodies and sexuality for their own selfish desires. While it is not physically violence in nature, casual sex is thought to often leave women feeling abandoned, disrespected, and unfulfilled within the subreddits. For example, many women admitted to being “pumped-and-dumped” when speaking up on past dating experiences:

WAKE UP CALL LADIES! This right here! Guys want to use you and throw you away, that is their one reason for living these days. Their entire self worth depends on pumping and dumping us! DO NOT give them casual sex! Do not give these pieces of shit access to your body for NOTHING in return! You are worth more then being used as a warm hole on a cold night. I dont care how hot he is, make those fuckers work for it! If we keep fucking them for nothing they win, we lose. I've said it before, I'll say it again, casual sex is a fools game we cant win. There is an incredible selection of fabulous vibrators and dildos that stay hard and hit all the right spots, you don't need any limp porn dick. Dont cave, it will

pass! (/u/abicus4343, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted on August 12, 2014)

The comment above served as a warning and piece of advice for others to stay away from casual sex with men as it provides women with “nothing in return.” The quote is fitting for the current theme as it described what community members believe the consequences of casual sex is for women. It is considered destructive to women because casual sex is meaningless and senseless, as suggested by the user above calling it a “fool’s game they can’t win.” Because casual sex is considered as opportunistic for men but devaluing to women, this advice is also suggesting that if women were to take away any opportunity for casual sex from men, then they can take back power and regain self-worth. This idea is further established by a user in r/TruFemcels as she writes:

SEX IS GOOD FOR MEN AND BAD FOR WOMEN. MEN ARE TAKERS, WOMEN ARE GIVERS. If you have something that people want it is easy to find takers. If you want something that people have it is hard to find someone nice enough to give it to you. Pro-tip: instead of asking women to give you what you want, try to give women what they want, oh that's right you'll never do that because men are selfish and calculating (/u/pinkgoldrose, r/TruFemcels, n.d.)

The first two sentences of this quote alone speak volumes about their assumptions about sex. The commenter reiterated the idea that casual sex is inherently bad for women or, at the very least, they have nothing to gain from casual sex. She also likens sex to a transaction between genders where women are at the “whim of men.” Additionally, she echoed the same “solution” as the previous commenter about taking away what men want. The last part of the comment illustrated exasperation at men, given their lack of effort and respect to what women want, as she described them as being “selfish and calculating.”

This notion about casual sex being pleasurable to men but unsatisfying for women is also related to risk. As one user remarked, “*it is clear that men don't see having sex as a risk and that women do,*” and “*that sex is no more scary than a handshake for them*” (/u/greensilvermoss, /r/TruFemcels, posted on June 7, 2018). Both of these quotes are following the same assumption of women having more to lose than men or, that is to say, men do not associate sex with risk or danger, while women have to assess risk every time they engage in casual sex. Combined with what was previously

said about how casual sex is unfulfilling and unsatisfying, it is no wonder that the femcel community disapprove of this behaviour and warn members not to engage in it. It is considered yet another type of male violence, creating entitlement to women's bodies. It is also insinuated that by engaging in "hook-ups", it sends messages to men those women are fine with this treatment when they are not. Additionally, 111 out of 545 of all quotes in the sample were used in the development of this theme, making it the most popular topic of conversation within this sample. This is predictable, however, as r/FemaleDatingStrategy often discussed the implications of sex in and outside of a relationship in influencing how men will treat them. As such, the community stands united against casual sex. Another opinion that the community is collectively against is pornography and prostitution, specifically that they are harmful for women.

5.1.4. Pornography and Prostitution as Forms of Male Violence

While liberal and modern feminism believe the issue is contingent on women's choice and that sex work may even be empowering for women, radical feminism rejects both pornography and prostitution and refers to them as "sexual-exploitation industries" (Jensen, 2021, pg. 5). They regard the two as "part of the struggle to create the conditions for meaningful sexual freedom" (pg. 5). While this is certainly not a definite factor in distinguishing between liberal and radical feminists, it is one of radical feminism's most contentious and dividing belief, with a "persistent though modern separation of those for or against the industries of prostitution and pornography" within the movement (Mackay, 2015, pg. 333). Furthermore, some radical feminists resent the liberal state for protecting pornographers and male consumers of porn while harming the interests of women and, in effect, sustaining the patriarchy (Thornton, 1986). As such, feminist critics of pornography feel they are "justified in calling for intervention against pornography, at the very least for non-legal intervention and perhaps also for legal regulation" (Thornton, 1986, pg. 34). A long-standing hate and disdain for prostitution and pornography is also very apparent within both femcel communities, and it is especially evident in r/FemaleDatingStrategy. This is because of the automated message that is posted as a comment under any post on the subreddit with mentions of pornography:

****NOTE****: This sub does ****NOT**** support the commercial porn industry, as it is an institution that promotes and normalizes sexual aggression, incest, pedophilia, violence, racism, degradation, low sexual satisfaction, and objectification of women and girls, many of whom have been

drugged, raped, misled, trafficked and otherwise coerced to appear on film. & That being said, we understand that although they are few and far between, porn **can** be produced in a way that emphasizes respect, consent, appreciation, and focused on the true sexual satisfaction of women. We encourage sub users who watch porn to use it responsibly. *I am a bot, and this action was performed automatically. Please contact the moderators of this subreddit if you have any questions or concerns.* (/u/AutoModerator, r/FemaleDatingStrategy, posted on January 4, 2012)

While this message was not commented by a real member per se, it does speak volumes about the beliefs of the subreddit considering this is a message that was made to post with the assistance of an automated script (bot). The note very clearly stated the subreddit's stance on pornography and the reasons for its condemnation, which are all related in some way to violence against women. Something to mention from the message is that the subreddit is certain that most (if not all) pornography are created under degrading circumstances for women and that true sexually satisfying porn for women are "few and far between." Ultimately, this message was meant to warn other members about the pornography industry and to leave people to make their own informed decisions.

In terms of real members' opinions on pornography and sex work, it is safe to infer that most members agreed with the note above. For instance, one user referred to the subreddit's ideology as being "*steeped in radical feminist theory[,] which is very against porn, prostitution[,] and all other forms of female sexual exploitation*" (/u/tiltmaxx, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.). This quote also states that this distain of porn and prostitution is at least in part derived from radical feminist theory, which is especially relevant to the current study. Another user further supported how pornography is a form of female sexual exploitation by stating that while "*having sex on film is not problematic in and of itself[, ...] the issue is that porn as an industry is permeated with misogyny, racism, pedophilia and abuse,*" which echoed the same sentiment as the automated message from earlier (/u/TheOGJammies, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.). Based on these comments, the members of the subreddit can be observed as being heavily opposed to pornography. Another comment explained how pornography is not only detrimental to women in terms of the circumstances in which it is created, but also in what it does to relationships:

My God, if men only would realize how much better their relationships would be if they cut the porn out....but unfortunately most of them feel

entitled to sexualize anything with a hole and don't give a shit about poisoning their brains and their relationships. They don't give a shit about how it changes the way they see women and how it dehumanizes women. It's all about the cheapest, fastest thrill. So much easier than putting in actual work into a real life person and relationship. (/u/shellshocked8, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.)

This quote is pertinent to the theme as it applied the community's beliefs of pornography onto men, as it explains how porn is equally as detrimental to women and men. The mindset in the comment is that men are ruining their own relationships due to their propensity to sexualize "anything with a hole," and that pornography are "poisoning their brains and their relationships." This "poisoning" occurs because pornography presents a distorted view of how sex and relationships are like and, as the user pointed out, because pornography show women in vulnerable positions and treated in dehumanizing ways, men end up mirroring the same behavior in their relationships. The "cheap and fast thrill" of pornography allow men to skip the hard work that is necessary in maintaining a healthy relationship.

Finally, while most of the current theme has been encompassed by r/FemaleDatingStrategy, that is not to say that r/TruFemcels do not reflect the same beliefs. Not only does r/TruFemcels hold similar if not identical beliefs to r/FemaleDatingStrategy, but some even view pornography as a retaliation from men against women's rights and freedom:

Yes like women used to pose nude for magazines and that's how men masturbated. Men have always objectified women because of their sex drives but it wasn't as dehumanizing. I almost feel like violent porn is a backlash to feminism and women being allowed more freedom and life choices. They hate that we have choices and don't need them as much. (/u/bloobird08, /r/TruFemcels, posted on February 24, 2018)

In the above comment, the objectification of women resonated with the commenter, and she felt that modern-day pornography is more dehumanizing and objectifying than before. The comment also brought up an interesting belief as the user described how she felt that pornography is a backlash to feminism because men are unhappy with how woman are obtaining more freedom and choice in modern society than ever before. She insinuated that men are acting out their dissatisfaction with this with aggression by producing violent pornography. This opinion suggests that those in support of pornography are essentially in opposition of women's rights due to what pornography

inadvertently supports. 28 quotes contributed to this theme, with each denouncing the effects of pornography and prostitution on men and society as a whole.

Beyond comparisons with Mackay's (2015) four criteria of radical feminism, an additional theme that indicated similarities between femcels and radical feminism is a distain for liberal feminism.

5.1.5. **Anti-Liberal Feminism**

While the direct disapproval of one does not necessarily mean an identification with the other, radical and liberal feminism do hold some dividing opinions that help with identifying alignment with either school of feminism. The two schools' most dramatic divergence lies in their beliefs about pornography and sex work, and goals in transforming the patriarchy. While liberal and post-modern feminism believe that the right to choose sex work as a valid and socially acceptable career is a 'win' for women's rights, radical feminists contend that that is more of a "libertarian illusion" due to pornographic content being "overtly cruel and degrading to women" and "promoting corrosive sexual practices" in young people (Jensen, 2021, pg. 5-6). In terms of the patriarchy, radical feminism's ultimate goal is to end patriarchal gender systems, as opposed to liberal feminism's continuing work to expand women's rights and choices in the public sphere (Jensen, 2021). That is because radical feminists believe that the end of the patriarchy is necessary in order for women to be truly liberated (Jensen, 2021). The current theme discusses examples of comments that disapprove of and, in some cases, even blame liberal feminism for hindering "real" progress for women.

To begin, members of r/FemaleDatingStrategy are more outspoken about the detriments of pornography than r/TruFemcels are due to their focus on its effects on dating and relationships. For example, one of the subreddit's commonly used flairs¹² is "PORN SICK, LIMP DICK," which is reserved for conversations about the adverse effects that pornography has on women in relationships. One conversation that took place on the subreddit deliberated on

¹² "User flair is a special tagging system that [...can be enabled] for [a] community... It can be used to distinguish trusted community members or highlight specialized areas of knowledge someone may have." (<https://mods.reddithelp.com/hc/en-us/articles/360010541651-User-Flair>)

why liberal feminists support or even participate in pornography despite its treatment of women:

Since porn is catered to the *male gaze* I find it odd most liberal feminists don't stop to reflect how their eagerness to perform these (often degrading) acts may not be truly about their own sexuality/power, but instead further submitting and catering to the *male gaze of porn* *for the gratification of men* which brings those women more sexual admiration but not always respect. To me violent BDSM is women saying HOW HIGH when men say jump, I don't see that trend ending well for a lot of women (especially younger working class women/those in care etc) . Your 'personal choices' don't exist outside of power structures such as the patriarchy I'm afraid & that's where most of you BDSM guys lose me. (/u/modernmedusaa, /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.)

Rather than a deep hatred for liberal feminism, this comment shows confusion and an inability to understand the other. This user argued that, while pornography may help in offering women sexual liberation, the purpose for which it is made continue to be for men and the male gaze. There is inherently nothing to gain for women in supporting the creation and usage of pornography, to this user. Since liberal feminism maintain that sex work is meant to be empowering to women, this user also argued back that these “personal choices” are made under the confines of the patriarchal power structure and that they are, in fact, not real choices made by women with full agency.

While the previous commenter disagreed and was unable to comprehend liberal feminist beliefs, others took a more critical stance and denounced liberal feminism for worsening the treatment of women by men:

Liberal feminists gave [men] the opportunity of a lifetime, constant accessibility of sex through pornography, sex without commitment, lessened their financial burdens by women stepping up in the workforce, ability to express their emotions more honestly, and much more. And Instead of recognizing it as a gift and rising to the occasion, they grew weaker, whinier, more childish, more entitled, and increasingly hateful of us. They refuse to hold each other accountable and instead gleefully exploit and disrespect us for things better men in the past have had to work a lot harder for. (/u/TheOGJammies, r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.)

This comment claims that liberal feminism played a role in worsening the behavior of men due to its contributions in supporting sex work, casual sex, advocacy of women's rights in the public sphere, and discussions in toxic masculinity. Rather than accepting these societal changes and reaping in the benefits that came with them, this user

claimed that it had in fact exacerbated entitlement and hate towards women. They are, instead, using liberal feminism to their advantage by exploiting and disrespecting women in the process. It is apparent that this user not only showed disdain for liberal feminism, but she also found it blameworthy for some men's toxic behavior. This can inadvertently encourage the user and other members of the subreddit to continue being "anti-liberal feminism" and indirectly support and align with radical feminist beliefs.

Lastly, on the far end of the spectrum, some users in r/FemaleDatingStrategy are not shy in showing their intense hatred for liberal feminism. One comment specifically remarked that "*liberal feminism is a cancer for women,*" and that she "*[hopes] libfems are in [the subreddit] reading this, and this sub (and others, of course), help them find the path to true female power and strength*" (deleted user, r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.). This strongly worded comment about liberal feminism being "cancer" was written as a warning against the movement as it does not advance towards goals of "true female power and strength." To this user, this subreddit and others like it are a testament to how liberal feminism is not the means to true empowerment and advancement of women. 29 quotes led to the establishments of this theme with users reiterating many popular criticisms of liberal feminism with an emphasis on sex. While most, if not all, of the quotes are indicating the same opinions as above, one quote in particular held a neutral, non-feminist opinion. The user stated that "*I think you're mistaking this sub with being feminist. We are about using dating strategies that benefit females. We believe that all men, hot or not, should be paying on dates*" (u/understatedalways, r/FemaleDatingStrategy, n.d.). Aside from this one outlier, this theme is heavily represented in the current sample.

5.2. Discussion

This study explored four tenets of radical feminism as interpreted by Mackay (2015) in comparison to female involuntary celibate groups on Reddit. The four criteria of radical feminism, in her interpretation, were a commitment to end the patriarchy, the use of women-only spaces, a focus on male violence against women, and the inclusion of pornography and prostitution as forms of male violence (Mackay, 2015). The two sample groups, r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels, were found to hold similar attitudes and outlooks as radical feminists and the study discovered additional information on the mentality of femcels as a result. This is summarized in Table 5 below as well. Despite

the connections that were made between radical feminism and femcel ideology, it would be a mistake to assume they are the essentially the same group but holding different names and labels. For one, femcels are hesitant in defining themselves as radical feminists, aside from a few instances in which they were quoted to say that they practice or are guided by radical feminist theory.

Table 5. Femcels and Radical Feminism Results Summary

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Femcels	Radical Feminists
Commitment to End the Patriarchy (focus on detrimental effects of the patriarchy on women and their choices; system controls and abuse women)	Entitlement Due to the Patriarchy	Men act entitled to certain women or treatment by women	
	Patriarchy's Role in Hate Towards Women	Male hate towards women is a learned behavior; patriarchy leads to this being socially acceptable among men	
Women-only Spaces for Organization	Supporting Other Women	Encouragement and guidance; camaraderie and fellowship; positivity	
	Sense of Community	Support system for members to process, move on, and act	
Male Violence Against Women Leading to Women's Oppression	Direct reference to male violence	Men commit violence against women due to misogyny and wanting to control them	
	Viewing women as objects	Woman "[are] viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire" (Bartky, 1990, as cited in Szymanski et al., 2011, pg. 7-8); or for reproductive, emotional, and physical purposes	
	Casual Sex as a Form of Male Violence	Casual sex is viewed as another way for men to control women; it often leaves women feeling abandoned, disrespected, and unfulfilled	

Pornography and Prostitution as Forms of Male Violence		Views them as “sexual-exploitation industries”; met with hate and distain; detrimental to women; some view pornography as a retaliation from men against women’s rights and freedom
Anti-Liberal Feminism		Confusion and an inability to understand the other; believes that “personal choices” are made under the confines of the patriarchal power structure and that they are, in fact, not real choices made by women with full agency

Femcels prefer to define themselves as femcels, a new label that has ties to the involuntary celibate movement, than as radical feminists. It can be argued that this is due to some similarities in beliefs about lookism that is shared between incels and femcels, but another possible reason behind this is due to the negative stigma that is associated with a radical feminist identification. These associations to feminism and specifically, radical feminism, include being called “shrill, overly aggressive, man-hating, ball-busting, selfish, hairy extremists, deliberately unattractive women with absolutely no sense of humor who see sexism at every turn” (Douglas, 1994, pg. 7, as cited in Hesford, 2005, pg. 227-228). It would not come as a surprise if femcels, who face regular hate and trolling from non-members and men, do not want to be associated with the detrimental labelling that comes alongside radical feminism. It is also worth mentioning that feminist stereotyping creates the “notion that there is something wrong with identifying as a ... radical feminist [, and] every time this happens, the feminist choices, activist choices and arguably the sexual choices of a new generation of feminists are limited and policed” (Mackay, 2015, pg. 335). Of course, the entire aim of these stereotypes is to discourage women from identifying with a feminist label and, even more so, a radical feminist identity (Mackay, 2015). This may help us better understand femcels’ hesitancy in defining themselves as radical feminists, despite the overwhelming evidence showing consistencies in their thinking. However, it is worth mentioning that the ultimate goal or purpose for radical feminist thinking may not be shared between the two groups.

Furthermore, another reason that supports a separation between femcels and radical feminists is that femcels are, in general, seeking safe spaces to gather together, support one another, and vent about their frustrations. This was evidenced in the theme explaining the subreddits as women-only spaces that are meant to be used as support groups and to connect with each other as a community. Having had history with being unwelcomed in incel spaces, it also makes sense that femcels would rather create a new community aimed at discussing women's issues than to join other groups. While "radical feminists believed that it was essential to challenge male domination in all its forms, within all social institutions, cultural belief systems, and particularly in sexuality, family relations, and personal identities," the results from this study showed that this goal of transforming and recreating gender relations is not as apparent in femcel groups (Branaman, 2019, pg. 48). The subreddits may hold some troubling and pessimistic views about relationships and modern dating, but there are no real or palpable evidence that points toward femcels sharing the same ultimate goal as radical feminism.

As exemplified in *r/FemaleDatingStrategy* and *r/TruFemcels*, aside from being frustrated and angry at modern relationships and men, even to the point of going on vulgar rants, femcels have not created much cause for concern in terms of threats, plans for actions, or any other warning signs that we have seen in incel groups. While an argument could be made connecting misogyny in incel groups in inciting the violent attacks we have seen in the past and some cases of misandry in femcel groups, "misogyny is an ideology which dictates that women should be seen as objects, without the same rights as men [, while] misandry is mostly a reaction to misogyny and informed by evidence" (Cernik, 2021). In other words, instances of misandry in femcel communities usually do not occur unless it is instigated or informed by an experience. Although I do agree that staying in an echo chamber of negative thoughts and experiences involving men may not be the healthiest way to release frustrations and overcome trauma, it is also not dangerous to outsiders and in particular, to men, at this moment. However, due to their connections and origins in the incel community, keeping an eye on femcel groups would be the best precautionary option for now.

This study and the discussion that are disclosed from it allowed us a look into the world of femcels and a better gauge as to who they are as a movement. A goal of this study was to add to the limited literature about femcels, in hopes that it better informs the involuntary celibate movement altogether. While I believe that this goal was achieved, an

unexpected consequence was how it also informed research on gender studies with examples and instances of misogyny. Studying femcel subreddits has inadvertently produced results exemplifying experiences of hidden misogyny in modern dating, relationships, and within the public sphere as a whole. For example, whilst this was not thoroughly explored in the current study, the subreddits served as a gateway into the first-hand experiences of women into the detriments of online dating apps and services like Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, etc. with the many experiences and stories that are posted daily. In other words, even though “femcels might struggle more than most to have fulfilling sexual and romantic relationships, but their no-holds-barred assessments of the sexual marketplace reveal a lot about the misogyny-laden obstacles to female pleasure” (Aronowitz, 2021).

Overall, the goals of the current study were achieved. Despite this, a study is not without its limitations. The first major limitation is the confinement of the study sample using the keywords as specified in the methods section. To reiterate, a series of keywords were used to filter all available posts and comments on both r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels. These keywords, while effective for managing irrelevant and unrelated comments, also caused a limitation to other potential conversations and posts that may have been helpful to the current study. For instance, threads are added daily to the subreddit about the users’ experiences on online dating apps and sites and, while they do not mention any of the keywords directly, they may still be contributing useful and important details about the subreddit’s views on instances of male harassment and violence. This limitation is mainly concerned with the posts and comments that were excluded by the filter simply because a post or comment did not contain the specific keyword. Next, the second limitation of the study is that the posts and comments were unable to be traced back to their original threads and thus, a comprehensive context behind each comment was not obtainable. This means that the original source or image of the post is unavailable, leaving some comments difficult to decipher what exactly they are talking about. Dark Crawler is only able to scrape comments from each subreddit and while r/FemaleDatingStrategy is still up and running at the time of writing, r/TruFemcels has been banned from Reddit. This made it considerably difficult to trace comments back to the original posts, as they have all since been deleted. Despite these limitations, the study was mostly successful in gaining a

more comprehensive understanding of femcels where previously literature was lacking or unavailable.

Many femcels congregate on these subreddits and communities as a stepping-stone to recovering from traumatic experiences in dating and relationships. The advice that is often found on these subreddits are meant to help them recover, recuperate, and move on. Ultimately, it is about realizing and recognizing self-respect for the members. This may begin by recognizing and refusing poor treatment by men in relationships which is an act, in and of itself, of self-love, and “despite the sadness and anger [femcels] may feel, many operate on the premise that they are entitled to respect” (Aronowitz, 2021).

Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis' research goals were to investigate and explore the phenomenon of female involuntary celibates. This was done using two different studies that compared femcels with other better-known groups in order to better assess who they are as a movement. In the first study, a comparison between femcels and their (assumed) exact male counterpart was performed by studying r/Incels and r/TruFemcels. This comparison resulted in 5 themes, which were separated into similarities and differences between the groups. In terms of similarities, the study found that both incels and femcels had insulting names and language to refer to the other gender and they both hold the same in-group vs. out-group mentality towards outsiders of the movement. Some differences that separated the two groups were that incels tend to dehumanize and minimize the humanity from women, differences in their black pill beliefs, and specifically in r/TruFemcels, it was found that they had an issue with outsiders and trolls in their community. These results informed the literature that the two groups hold similar beliefs about looks (coined lookism) and negative views about the opposite gender, they were unlike one another in more ways than alike. Additionally, while they share the same name (involuntary celibate), it would be inaccurate to simply refer to one as the opposite gendered version of the other.

The second study in this thesis performed a comparison between femcels and radical feminists. This comparison came about due to some resemblance between femcel ideology in r/TruFemcels and r/FemaleDatingStrategy and radical feminist theories. Using an interpretation of radical feminism by Mackay (2015), comments from the femcel subreddit were examined to see if they held similar ideologies. Some sub-themes were included under the four criteria of radical feminism (MacKay, 2015). A commitment to end the patriarchy was a theme derived from Mackay (2015), and the subthemes included a sense of entitlement by men and the patriarchy's role in creating hate towards women. Next, under women-only spaces for organization, it was found that these spaces resulted in a space where women were able to support one another and also create a sense of community. The theme, male violence against women, not only included direct references to traditional forms of male violence within each subreddit, but also viewing women as objects and casual sex as forms of male violence. The last criteria and major theme included pornography and prostitution as

forms of male violence. Lastly, unrelated to Mackay (2015), it was also found that femcels held anti-Liberal feminist sentiments. Altogether, this study found overwhelming evidence that femcel ideology aligned greatly with radical feminist ideology. However, as with the first study, it would be equally incorrect to conflate radical feminists and femcels despite this. While they certainly hold similar ideologies, they have separate goals and reasons for aligning with each movement.

While it would be simple and easy to refer to femcels as the female version of the incel, this thesis hopefully helped shine some light onto the movement as something more than that. That is to say, femcels' differences from incels are just as important as their similarities. This is also the case with radical feminists and femcels. My hopes are that this thesis created the foundation for future femcel research and also contributed to the literature on online growing extremist communities and movements. The studies compared femcels with better researched and studied movements, such as incels and radical feminists, in order to place femcels on a spectrum of understanding. As a result, there is now a better insight into femcels' relationships with incels, their version of black-pilled philosophy, their overall ideology, as well as their relationship with one another. It was through these two studies that it can be observed that, as of this moment, femcels are not threatening nor dangerous, like incels have proven they can be. That is to say, incel terrorist attacks such as Alek Minassian's "Incel Rebellion" in Toronto are unlikely to be recreated or become an issue with femcels (Olheiser, 2018, as cited in Labbaf, 2020). This is because, while some posts and comments on these communities are off-putting and impolite to say the least, they are not cause for concern as no real threats are being made or organized. However, the previous epicentre of self-proclaimed femcels, r/TruFemcels, was banned from Reddit in mid-January of 2021¹³, which may give reason to the development of future subreddits or communities. As of right now, the new potential main community of femcel activity is not on Reddit at all, possibly due to fear of being banned again. Instead, a new website called ThePinkPill¹⁴ has replaced r/TruFemcels and was even created by a previous mod of r/TruFemcels, Giga (Aronowitz, 2021).

¹³ See footnote 3.

¹⁴ <https://thepinkpill.co/>

In future studies, the objective would be to study the ThePinkPill as it is the current base of femcel activity since r/TruFemcels' ban from Reddit and, as such, would be the best place to be when conducting future research on the topic. While similar content analyses can certainly be performed again in ThePinkPill, there is no better source than from the source itself. It would be insightful if interviews with members of ThePinkPill can take place in future studies, with content analyses as supplementary materials. This would also reduce the limitations given the text-only content as provided by the Dark Crawler. Additionally, as mentioned under the discussion for the second study, both r/FemaleDatingStrategy and r/TruFemcels were unexpectedly eye-opening in terms of revealing hidden instances of misogyny and violence over online dating apps. This could also be a new area of research for women's or gender studies.

The significance of the claims made in the current thesis lie in what they tell us about online extremist movements. While it would be simple to assume any extreme beliefs online can be considered dangerous and a threat, the current research into femcels demonstrate that not all online communities with extreme opinions are prone to attempting dangerous tactics like incels have done in the past. Additionally, the research enriches researchers' understanding in terms of how femcels are relegating to online support systems and how there are different methods of coping for individuals online. Specifically, the studies performed in this thesis illustrated that, while incels and femcels both utilized Reddit as a vehicle for their frustrations, the end results are quite different. While incels have performed terrorist attacks before, femcels have been satisfied within their own communities, coping alongside others who feel the same as they do, and without a cause to become a threat to others.

Overall, the current work on femcels has contributed to a wider overall knowledge about femcels. It utilized content analyses of three subreddits: r/Incels, r/FemaleDatingStrategy, and r/TruFemcels. The goals of the thesis were to create an extensive first look into the movement and create foundation for future research on the female involuntary celibate movement, especially since there had been little to no known peer-reviewed literature. It is crucial to note that as online communities begin to take advantage of the overall growing online population, more and more movements will begin to arise. While they may not all present themselves as threats, it continues to be important and vital to assess each new movement in order to prevent radicalization, such as with the incel movement, and formation of new threats.

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