

Platforming Hate:
An Analysis of Incel Ideology on
Reddit's r/Braincels

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Jeffrey Millar, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Research) in Humanities and Social Sciences, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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The following research is structured as a conventional thesis, containing six chapters. Sources are cited in the Harvard-UTS style. It contains 49,869 words, excluding the preface, tables, appendices, and reference list.

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Abstract

Involuntary celibates, or ‘incels’, are a community of antifeminist extremists who have recently risen to prominence within the Manosphere (Ribeiro et al. 2020), which is defined as a loose coalition of websites, blogs, and social media groups where men congregate to air their grievances with feminism and contemporary politics (Farrell et al. 2019). The incel belief system imagines a “sexual marketplace” which divides men and women into rigidly differentiated social categories according to their relative value as a sexual partner (Baele, Brace & Coan 2019). Incels believe that their “sexual market value” is so low that they are prejudged by women and marginalised within the sexual marketplace. I performed an ideological analysis on Reddit’s r/Brincels, which amassed more than 80,000 subscribers before being banned in 2019.

Data was collected in the form of 183 webpages retrieved from the internet archival tool *archive.today*, which saves offline copies of webpages that are liable to be deleted. This yielded three distinct types of data that could be analysed: 4 webpages authored by the subreddit’s moderators regarding the purpose, administration, and management of r/Brincels, 179 user submissions, upon which nearly 10,000 comments were left, and the account information of the users who made those submissions. I applied critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) to each of these data subsets to determine how incel discourses expressed users’ underlying ideology. The results of data analysis show that Reddit’s structure and affordances allow incel ideology to be expressed in several ways. First, the documents authored by the moderation team facilitate the development of a community because in defining involuntary celibacy and setting parameters for in-group membership, they provide its geographically dispersed subscribers with commonality of purpose and identity (Caliandro 2018). Second, the users of r/Brincels form a networked public when they use Reddit’s participatory and connective affordances to exchange personal opinions over shared media content, through which an imagined collective emerges through the interactions of people, technology, and practices (boyd 2010). Third, its members combined Reddit’s username and flair features to create pseudonymous accounts which revealed and performed elements of their incel identity to an audience of their peers, indicating that Reddit affords its users the ability to construct complex pseudonymous identities (van der Nagel 2017). This thesis contributes to the study of the misogynistic ideologies which comprise the Manosphere, as well as how Reddit’s affordances and governance structure enable toxic technocultures on its platform.

Key words: Reddit, incel, Manosphere, ideological analysis, discourse, affordances, toxic technocultures