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The Cult Fascist: Establishing Cultic Behavior in Proud Boys and Incels

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The Cult Fascist: Establishing Cultic Behavior in Proud Boys and Incels

by

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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Is the Alt-Right a cult? Certainly, we can see religious fervor intertwine with politics as we see in the far-right, with artwork of Trump being crucified like Jesus, pierced in his side by Nancy Pelosi analogous to Longinus (Cole, 2020), or in the golden statue of Trump at CPAC (Beauchamp, 2021). But, do we see similar, potentially cultic, behavior within Alt-Right groups? It turns out we do see this behavior. Within this study, I determine via the Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame what level of cultic behavior exists within Incels and Proud Boys. In doing so, I intend to hopefully expand our tools and methodology when extremist groups explode into violence.

Keywords: cult, fascism, Alt-Right, Incels, Proud Boys

Introduction

As someone who was raised in rural Oregon amongst a far-right, fundamentalist community and having spent much of my adolescence online gaming, thus surrounded by proponents of GamerGate, I am in the unique position to see fascist behaviors evolve, in real-time, into the Alt-Right. Similarly, I have spent most of my life within strict, evangelical Baptist and Pentecostal churches, adjacent to members of the Quiverfull movement, and have been immersed - to the point of nearly becoming a youth leader - in increasingly patriarchal, apocalyptic, and controlling dogma. I wasn't within a cult, I have witnessed abuses of power, cover ups of abuse, victim blaming of the abused and the ill, political-based oustings of pastors and members of the congregation, and have even known a church leader who annihilated his wife and children in a murder-suicide.

With all of these experiences, I witnessed a common theme amongst my friends and family within evangelical Christianity and those in the Alt-Right as the latter exploded onto the scene. They exhibited a strong, dogmatic belief in their self-fiction that fed off cynicism to their lives and society that actively provided soothing and protection for their psyche. This common theme is similar to Hannah Arendt's description of hierarchical structure of totalitarian movements; it "...could be described in terms of a curiously varying mixture of gullibility and cynicism with which each

member, depending upon his rank and standing in the movement, is expected to react to the changing lying statements of the leaders and the central unchanging ideological fiction of the movement." (Arendt, 1958, p.382) It becomes a mental shift from perceiving their inability to fit into society to instead viewing society as being unwilling to fit to them. This is distinct from a belief that society should accommodate them, for this is a belief that society needs to be violently reshaped or destroyed, by them or another, with themselves as its leaders. It is perhaps best established through Elliot Rodger - a member and "Saint" of the Incels who killed 7 and injured 14 in his 2014 spree-killing - and his manifesto. "Humanity has never accepted me among them, and now I know why. I am more than human. I am superior to them all. I am Elliot Rodger... Magnificent, glorious, supreme, eminent... Divine! I am the closest thing there is to a living god." (Rodger, 2014, p.135)

All of this, of course, mirrors infamous cults in history. For example, Charles Manson's apocalyptic Helter Skelter - which predicted the Manson family as the survivors and leaders of a world, post-cataclysmic race war, where they would lead the surviving black people - and Aum Shinrikyo's leader, Shoko Asahara, believing he was appointed by the god Shiva to build the Kingdom of Shambhala after a devastating nuclear war between the United States and Japan. Simply, my observations of the Alt-Right mirror

beliefs by some of the most dangerous of cults: the world is wicked and flawed, and it needs to be destroyed or restructured in our enlightened way.

Within this paper, I apply the Advanced Bonewits Cult Danger Evaluation Frame to analyze two Alt-Right groups: Incels and Proud Boys. What I found was that cultic behaviors are endemic within the greater Alt-Right; at the least within Proud Boys and Incels. As the Alt-Right is a wide, decentralized movement, I focus on these two separate groups as they are emblematic of the greater Alt-Right yet represent distinct manifestations of beliefs and goals. Incels and Proud Boys also exhibit sizable, representative portions of the Alt-Right with 119 official Proud Boy chapters in 46 states (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.) and 40,000 members of the subreddit r/incels before being banned in 2017 (Hoffman et al., 2020).

In addressing whether the Alt-Right is a cult, I analyze qualitative data in the form of direct quotes from Incels and Proud Boys. Be it leaders, social media personalities, lowly members, or sainted mass shooters such as Alek Minassian, the Alt-Right are remarkably open about their beliefs once you sift through layers of irony. Due to this, I examine posts on Incels.is - the largest Incel forum I have located - and several Telegram channels connected to or outright owned by Proud Boys in order to provide evidence and context. This evidence (all 638 files) is available for public usage via figshare (Ashland, 2022).

The discussion of political parties as cultic occurs periodically in academia, but there hasn't been discussion regarding the Alt-Right. In common parlance it's not uncommon to derogatorily describe opposing groups as cult-like. These are manifestations of our own biases and judgements as the term 'cult' is a deeply charged word, but I argue that it is a valid descriptor to use as it describes group behavior analogous to destructive or dysfunctional religious group expression. Further, defining a group with such a charged term represents the danger that they represent, similar to defining violent extremist groups as terrorist organizations. As Leo Pfeffer put it, when distinguishing religions and sects from cults, "...if you fear it and hate it, it is a cult." (Pfeffer, 1979, p.10) Despite past academic emphasis on branching emotions of fear, my view is that cultic behavior occurs not when it appears fearful or monstrous from the outside as much of this can be ascribed to ignorance or bigotry, similar to the Roman beliefs that early Christians were cannibals due to their consumption of Christ's body, the Eucharist (Wagemakers, 2010). Instead, a propensity towards violence, inwards or outwards, is what I base the aspersive 'cult' on.

Notwithstanding semantic definitions, there is merit to viewing the Alt-Right as a cult as it helps elucidate ways in which we may be able to contain and treat political extremism throughout the world. For if there's one thing that the past few years have shown, our existing understanding and

treatment hasn't malnourished extremist fervor. In order for us to understand and dissuade this growth, I propose that analyzing cultic behaviors provides a method of understanding political fervor and potentially rehabilitating those caught in the throes of the extreme political or social movements.

A focus on the Alt-Right is of particular importance in the current day. While defining behavior as cultic is applicable to any extremist group, we aren't witnessing the same intertwinement of God and country within far-left groups nor the same willingness to overthrow democratic government similar to the January 6th insurrection attempt. As much as I read and hear that "Antifa was bussing people in to attack the Capitol", the reality is that the 5th Terrorism Wave - which we're in - belongs to the far-right (Rapoport, 2021). If we want to understand what maintains the structure of the Alt-Right, we can't just look at the façade they designed. We have to identify all of its columns, such as cultic behavior.

What is the Alt-Right?

The Alt-Right is a subset movement of a wider Euro-American far-right - a broad, Western fascist movement - united via a fear of white extinction. (Bhatt, 2020). If we were to consider it via a taxonomic hierarchy, the Western far-right movement would be the species with the Alt-Right being

the genus. While Alt-Right beliefs and forms resemble other groups within the Euro-American far-right - such as traditionalism and far-right accelerationism - they are not the same. To take the taxonomic approach further, the Alt-Right genus is host to a wide variety of families of political beliefs, each one with its own unique characteristics, such as the groups analyzed in this paper: the Proud Boys and Incels.

While the Alt-Right are part of the overarching Euro-American far-right, which displays these fears of white extinction, they are more specific in their anxiety. Summarily, "...the alt-right is both inspired and defined by a discourse of anxiety about traditional white masculinity, which is seen as being artificially but powerfully 'degenerated', with catastrophic consequences for the nation." Kelly further states that the Alt-Right, with its different taxonomic families, "can all be broadly characterised as firmly supporting the counter-cultural rehabilitation of the white male individual through a hostile rejection of liberal-left discourse" that "...attempt[s] to discursively reconstruct an idealised model of white masculinity, based on nostalgia for a time that has never existed, and defined largely on the basis of the absence of modern, 'degenerate' influences." (Kelly, 2017, p.69)

With staggering ease, you could point out that this anxiety regarding traditional, white masculinity is a common feature of U.S. political and cultural discourse. With the *National Review* catastrophizing over the

“femininity” of Millennial men due to their lower grip strength (French, 2016), or Tucker Carlson attempting to cure the ‘total collapse of testosterone levels in American men’ by convincing men to expose their testicles to a Joovv red light therapy device (Kolata, 2022), we in the U.S. appear to have an obsession with masculinity that borders on farcical. The inherent difference between Alt-Right rhetoric is this:

“...their rhetoric is very different from traditional political discourse in that it is based on fantasizing: and their fundamentally reactionary fantasy is of the reversal, or undoing, of modernity. In these circles, modernity is conceived of as a corrupting ideological force constructed by the nation-state’s internal enemies, which have severely damaged the superior lifestyles of the past.” (Kelly, 2017, p.69)

In an Alt-Right member, their belief is that greatness was stolen and/or kept from them by Jews, feminists, communists, liberals, globalists, homosexuals, or whoever the most current target may be. It is best explained by citing Elliot Rodger’s manifesto.

“I had nothing left to live for but revenge. Women must be punished for their crimes of rejecting such a magnificent gentleman as myself. All of those popular boys must be punished for enjoying heavenly lives and having sex with all the girls while I had to suffer in lonely virginity. . . . These are crimes that cannot be unpunished” (Rodger, 2014, p.118).

Proud Boys similarly exhibit this belief in a feeling of being limited, held back, or - as explored later - “cucked”. Enrique Tarrío, leader and chairman of the Proud Boys, sharing on his Telegram an article from The Onion, “‘This Here Is Probably Our Bestselling Love Seat,’ Says Man Who Would Have Been Powerful, Reversed Warrior 4,000 Years Ago”, and saying “This is painfully true.” Both of these statements speak of the same thing: a perceived injustice has been inflicted by society upon the superior folk. Rodger flat out states it, as punishment denotes the existence of injustice. Coupled with its militia-chic and man-is-a-warrior rhetoric, Tarrío implies that folk who used to have power have been limited - *degenerated* - to a state of mediocrity.

Summarily, these beliefs - and further to be explained - mirror Umberto Eco’s portrait of fascism. Strong tradition conceived as “common sense” no matter its veracity; “rejection of modernism”; “action for action’s

sake" as "[t]hinking is a form of emasculation"; "disagreement is treason"; fear of "difference" and "intruders" resulting in being "racist by definition"; "appeal to a frustrated middle class"; "obsession with a plot" and believing the Other is conspiring against them; feeling materially and mentally humiliated by enemies who are equally "too strong and too weak"; a hatred towards pacifism as "life is permanent warfare" that builds to a final battle resulting in absolute control for the movement; "contempt for the weak" (in these cases, feminine); a culture of death predicated on an impatience to die; a transfer of "will to power to sexual matters" that exemplifies via machismo and denigrates any nonstandard/ non-heterosexual habits; a disdain for democratic rule for enabling the degeneration of the country; and an "impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning" (Eco, 1995, pp.1-8).

While Alt-Right groups all maintain their own diverse jargon (Incel Wiki's own glossary was 46 pages long), there are several common terms that flow between these disparate groups. One of importance is the term "redpill" which is used as a noun, verb, or an adjective. This term - a metaphor derived from *The Matrix* - means to "wake up to the true reality of the world" by seeing through the "lies" and beliefs that mainstream society supposedly instilled in everyone. Luke Munn describes it best, "After taking the red pill, the world is revealed to be an all-encompassing lie, a fake, a

forgery. In an instant, the individual's eyes are opened and they finally see the world around them as it really is." This isn't to suggest that it occurs only once. Rather, it is an ongoing process where one is gradually radicalized into more extremes of the ideology (Munn, 2019, p.4). The redpill stands in stark contrast to the bluepill, another metaphor from *The Matrix*, a person who takes the bluepill is choosing to maintain the illusion. More clearly, a bluepilled person is someone who hasn't accepted Alt-Right ideology and isn't attempting to. Following this color-coordinated dichotomy, posts about being bluepilled or redpilled coincide with U.S. electoral party colors with blue being the Democratic Party and red being the Republican Party (Anti-Defamation League, 2019) which further mirrors the right-wing nature of the redpill. These aren't the only pills that exist within the Alt-Right. The Rapepill, Siegepill, Purplepill, Pinkpill, Whitepill, Breadpill, Dogpill, and so on also exist, but their application is not covered within this study due to a lack of usage found.

A further term of import, one that existed prior to the Alt-Right's inception, is the term "cuck" and its many portmanteaus, such as cuckservative, i.e. an establishment Republican. Inspired by Rush Limbaugh's 2015 declaration that Donald Trump is not a "cuckolded Republican", this term exploded into right-wing spheres as a way of delineating those that were weak, passive, and would allow, or be unable to

defend against, their masculinity to be tarnished when Others would penetrate, degenerate, and corrupt their domain. Within the Alt-Right, cuck carries a further connotation of race being central to this concept of degeneration. Inside the meta-meaning of the word, it conjures images of Others - typically black, hypersexual men - having sex with white wives in the cuckolded husband's bed. Existing in this metaphor, this hypothetical cuckold is being defiled by the monstrous Other penetrating their inner-sanctum and taking his pride, masculinity, and irreparably damaging the nature of his home (Lokke, 2019).

Another matter of importance is the usage of irony. The Alt-Right invests great effort into maintaining a veneer of legitimacy and temperance in order to maintain a pipeline for the bluepilled to alt-right extremism. In public spheres, online and off, effort is made to maintain this normalcy by expressing extremist ideas under a guise of irony as "[t]his allows racist, sexist or xenophobic statements to be made, but also enables a hasty retreat when the speaker comes under fire." (Munn, 2019, p.9) Further clarified by Dr. Alice Marwick: "[I]rony has a strategic function. It allows people to disclaim a real commitment to far-right ideas while still espousing them." (Wilson, 2017) This capacity for irony is part of how the Alt-Right has been able to convert people within the mainstream. By pretending to pretend to be racist/sexist/generally bigoted, they reduce people's defenses

to the point that they don't recognize that their own beliefs are changing until they have unconsciously swallowed the redpill. Journalist, Dani Di Placido, summarized it best, "Far from a harmless joke, I've come to understand that 'ironic' racism is integral to the alt-right's indoctrination strategy" (Placido, 2019). Acting similarly, this usage of irony helps explain how satirical communities eventually find themselves becoming the community they mock. As one internet user put it, "Any community that gets its laughs by pretending to be idiots will eventually be flooded by actual idiots who mistakenly believe that they're in good company." (DarkShikari, 2009)

Who are the Proud Boys?

As Proud Boys' put it, they are a "pro-West fraternal organization" dedicated to celebrating Western chauvinism (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). They have been involved in violence against Black Lives Matter protestors, providing "security" for pro-Trump rallies and politicians (DeCook, 2018), and even joining the January 6th insurrection attempt at the U.S. Capitol (Rapoport, 2021). Originally founded by Gavin McInnes, co-founder and former member of *Vice* magazine, Proud Boys were formed as a

“bona fide men’s club with rituals, traditions, and even its own in-house court called “The Sharia”” (Proud Boy USA, 2020).

Proud Boy membership is divided between four degrees. The first degree is to publicly declare you are a Proud Boy and to never hide this pride. Second, you must name five separate breakfast cereals while being beaten by a minimum of five guys. Further, you must adhere to #NoWanks, a program that “...allows porn only once every 30 days and insists a man can only ejaculate if he is within one [other sources say ten] yard of a woman with her consent.” Third, you must get a tattoo or brand that denotes your membership as a Proud Boy. Fourth and final degree is that you must engage in a major conflict for “the cause”, i.e. engage in politically motivated violence that furthers their beliefs (Proud Boy USA, 2019).

All races, all religions, gay or straight, are allowed to join as long as you are a man (defined on their website as “born with a penis if that wasn’t clear enough for you leftists!”) and you love “the West”. McInnes even states that “[t]he Proud Boys are over race.” and even “We’re sort of like the alt-right without the racism.” (This American Life, 2017) Appearing inclusive (for a far-right group), this language disguises the fact that their Telegram channels are rife with homophobic and racist slurs, memes dog whistling white superiority, allusions to and outright statements describing monstrous Jews running the world, links to hate sites such as VDare.com, and

references to a supposed “globohomo media machine” that is perverting traditional masculinity.

Still, they do allow people of color and gay people to join. After all, the leader that McInnes appointed upon stepping down, Enrique Tarrio, is afro-cuban. Further, much ado has been made by them to highlight their supposed acceptance of gay men to the point McInnes inserted a black dildo into his anus, live on The Gavin McInnes Show to prove he doesn’t hate gay people (EDGE Media Network, 2020). This implies that the act of being penetrated, and the oft associated feminization along with it, isn’t at odds with Proud Boys ideology. So, if we take him at his word that he is not homophobic or racist, this implies that acceptance amongst them hinges on this: your behavior is only acceptable as long as you behave in a traditional, white, masculine way. You can have sex with other men, be black, be Jewish, or any other Other, as long as you don’t act like a woman or, synonymously, a snowflake or social justice warrior. These behaviors are supposedly symptomatic of a degeneration of Western society by forces such as feminists or non-Westerners trying to erode what is perceived as natural masculinity, à la *strength* (Kelly, 2017). Ergo, gay men and men of color who join are not the Other because they are furthering traditional, white masculinity by integrating into “Western civilization”.

However, discussing their inclusivity leads into recent Proud Boy events. Near the end of 2020, Kyle Chapman, leader of the paramilitary wing of the Proud Boys known as the Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights, stated - despite having never been president - that, "...it has been decided that I Kyle Chapman reassume my post as President of Proud Boys effective immediately". Additionally, they would rebrand to call themselves Proud Goys (goys being a co-opted Hebrew term for anyone who isn't Jewish). He further states, "We will no longer cuck to the left by appointing token negroes as our leaders. We will no longer allow homosexuals or other 'undesirables' into our ranks. We will confront the Zionist criminals who wish to destroy our civilization." (Palmer, 2020) This coup d'état was not constructive for Chapman, but it was certainly a "mask-off" moment revealing a deeper current of bigotry within the organization, which others in Alt-Right have recognized before. One such person was Brian Brathovd - co-host of alt-right podcast "The Daily Shoah" - who stated that "Western chauvinism" is just a "PR cuck term" invented by McInnes to gain mainstream acceptance. He further states that if Proud Boys "were pressed on the issue, I guarantee you that like 90% of them would tell you something along the lines of 'Hitler was right. Gas the Jews.'" (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.) Considering how "cuck" carries the connotation within the Alt-Right to a violation of purity in country, family, and women by

an outsider - an Other - and a failure by the cuckold to prevent what is his from being violated or degenerated, this choice by Chapman to refer to their allowance of men of color and gay men as being cuckolded infers a great deal of disingenuous or unconscious, bigoted beliefs, within the leadership at least.

Following this, even more pressure has fallen onto the Proud Boys over the last year. Towards the beginning of this thesis, the McInnes appointed leader of the Proud Boys, Enrique Tarrio, was arrested on March 8th, 2022 for alleged involvement in the January 6th insurrection attempt. What I am witnessing in Telegram discussions is deep distrust between one another and paranoia that the FBI ("the Democrat party's gestapo"), mainstream media ("the Ministry of Truth"), and academia are watching them.

Who are the Incels?

In stark contrast with the Proud Boys, Incels act less like a political group but as, in their words, "...a community for men that struggle with or are unable to get into romantic relationships with women despite trying." Incels are not an organized entity. There's no president, monarch, CEO, emperor, or generalized leader of Incels; all that is required to be one is to call yourself one.

Incel being a portmanteau of Involuntary and Celibate, the etymology of their name originates in 1997 by a female undergrad starting the website "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project" that was formed to provide an outlet, support, and rehabilitation for people who were frustrated over troubles with sexuality and dating. What was an Incel then is hardly comparable to now as an alternative form of involuntarily celibates - those now associated with the term Incel - metastasized into a group that was "becoming increasingly militant and hostile to women, expressing offensive biologically deterministic memes and openly advocating violence." (Hoffman et al, 2020, p.566) This new group, which had eventually outgrown and supplanted the original incarnation, would go on to both inspire and be inspired by several mass killers, such as Elliot Rodger, Alek Minassian, and Chris Harper-Mercer.

In their view, their ability to have sex with the opposite sex was taken from them by sub-humans known as women, usually. They will blame criminals, black men, Jews, or whomever they consider to be the "degenerate-du-jour", but their chief complaint remains with women. This belief that women took men's right to sex away from them has led to pervasive dehumanization of women through consistent clinical language, referring to them via the adjective 'female' only, or - worse - as 'femoid' (oft shortened to 'foid'), human-like. This dehumanization provides the justification of misogyny and enables the growth of racism as well. Winne

Chang, in her study of the depiction of women as monsters on the subreddit r/Braincels, said this on the subject.

"The construction of "femoids" as manipulative monsters responsible for society's problems is reminiscent of the way the Jewish community was scapegoated and dehumanised to justify the rise of Nazism. There is a notable presence of antisemitic ideology on the forum, correlating with the trend in rising antisemitism and right-wing populism across Europe and America. Women are likened to Jews regarding the idea that they secretly control the world: "girls are kinda like jews in a way. they pull the strings and then when problems arise for peasants [. . .] they smirk and ask 'whats wrong?' to the peasant." When a term like "femoid" constructs a subhuman monstrous-feminine that is secretly "pull[ing] the strings" and gleefully causing the degeneration of society, it can be utilised to justify violence against them as necessary and emancipatory, rather than a profoundly normalised act that has been protected—socially, legally, and culturally—over centuries." Chang, 2020, p.10)

In my research, I have found that Incels are less fixated than Proud Boys on race, but only at face value. They are far more so in practice. They

have several (offensive) terms for people who believe they are incels for their ethnicity or culture, such as Currycel (South Asian), Muslimcel (member of Islam), Ricecel (East or Southeast Asian), and Sandcel (Middle Eastern) (Moonshot, 2020). Within incel discussion, they will even mockingly imitate normies (non-incels) and their attempts at advice by saying "JBW", just be white, or "JBB", just be black. The implication of these phrases is that normies will never understand that sex is only available if you are white or black due to women only wanting white men, believing they're the pinnacle of attractiveness, and black men due to their "racist and fetishistic stereotype of Black men's animalistic hypersexual prowess" (Chang, 2020, p.11). Discussion on the mechanics of how non-black or non-white populations exist is, of course, non-existent. Regardless of non-supremacist posturing, Incels as a whole are predominantly white with over 80 percent of Incels with the majority being from North America or Europe (Hoffman et al., 2020), which occasionally crop up when saying they're part of "Western civilization." This sort of "acceptance" is a way of enforcing the traditional, white masculinity of the Alt-Right as Incels reinforce the idea that sex is only permitted for archetypically depicted masculine men, such as black and white men. In lieu of criticizing societal attractiveness standards, however, Incels just find this to be both a natural and an artificial manifestation created by women.

While paradoxical thinking is common in fascism (such as how Jews are *der untermenschen* while also controlling the world and owning space lasers), doublethink and dehumanization within Incel communications reaches near-absurdist levels. In their posts, they rarely show an acknowledgement of others as people, but rather their understanding of Others runs on meme-logic, where a perceived reality of the Other comes from bigoted memes that paint a mangled, dehumanized portrait of the Other's life. For example, one member on Incels.is discussed how "[he] saw a homeless foid who was young (like early 20's) and white and had clear skin holding a sign begging". This perplexed the original poster as he added that "[t]his was kinda unusual because 99% of homeless females are severely mentally ill and subhuman,". Further examples exist such as arguments that gay men "have an average sex partner count of 500" while "25% of them are over 1000"; women are not responsible for the crime of withholding sex because they are not sentient; and pictures of famous Jewish people in history with 20th century, anti-Semitic propaganda juxtaposed next to them.

These worldviews make sense inside this vacuum. Many of them live with their parents, half never attending college, and almost 70 percent of them report suffering from depression with more than a quarter identifying as autistic (Hoffman et al., 2020). Further, Hoffman et al. points out that

“Incels also display indications of mental illness or profound trauma and distress.” It’s not unsurprising to think that these people are trapped in an echo chamber that provides meaning for their mental anguish, companionship (even when abusive), and enables absolutist defense mechanisms that split people into good or bad with no in-between.

To enmesh into Inceldom, the ideological *geist* of Incels and its hyperbolic memes act as viruses to transmit and inject the DNA of this worldview into the prospective Incel until what mindset prior remains a memory (Dafaure, 2020). Just like physical diseases, our mental immune system - our defense against foreign ideologies - can only fight for so long. Once they take the Incel redpill and delve fully into Incel ideology, they perceive that greater society hates them, which reinforces this self-sabotaging belief in their own inferiority, depression, and anxiety. As one Incel described when asked if his depression and anxiety caused his inceldom, “It’s circular. One reinforces the other.” (Daly and Reed, 2022, p.27)

Finally, there is an aspect of how difficult it can be to return to the mainstream when in this echo chamber. As witnessed in another Incels.is post, a relatively new member to the forum was discussing his recent experience SEAmassing [visiting a Southeast Asian country in the belief that Southeast Asian women are easier to have sex with] and how he felt

upstaged in looks by what he thought was another SEAmxxer. He described women flirting with this other person and ignoring him, leaving him feel looksmogged [dominated/humiliated by an alpha male by being more attractive]. When posting on the forum, presumably looking for validation or mental soothing for this perceived aggression, the first person to respond says "Why do you have chad friend? Your only friends are incels like us." Presuming it's a joke, there's no follow up comfort from this fellow incel. All that exists is a joke that echoes abusers when they say "You're nothing without me." with an undercurrent that cries "I don't want to be alone."

So why do Incels join the Incel community? Natalie Wynn, known for her YouTube channel ContraPoints, gives the most compelling explanation for Incels I have found. According to her, Incels become Incels due to a pathological need for digital self-harm, such as looking for comments that strike and reinforce their insecurities in what she calls "masochistic epistemology, i.e. whatever hurts is true" (ContraPoints, 2018). As she points out, posting selfies online, in order to be belittled by fellow members, is a common form of self-abuse. In 2022, selfies are no longer allowed on Incels.is, but the same concept applies to posters looking for soothing via other incels' extreme, abusive, absolutist language - shrouded in a mimicry of "masculine" logic - that explains why they're alone. Respondents never attempt to *so/ve* the KHHV (kissless, hugless, handholdless virgin) and his

problems; they only justify. This justification is an attempt to legitimize the metaphysical Blackpill, where upon taking it - similar to the redpill - you see the world "as it truly is", biologically determined, and you fall into nihilism as you accept there's no hope and either "cope a rope" [suicide], live in agony, or lash out against a society you believe has been engineered against you.

In rare examples, people will even attempt to modify their skull structure through what they call "bone-smash theory", which involves hitting the bones they want bigger (such as cheekbones) with a hammer lightly every day so that they may heal larger. Similarly, their language mimics primarily-female pro-ana groups, digital self-harm groups having been defined as where anorexia is *the* religion (Knapton, 2013), where reasoning of worthlessness is reinforced, and death is unavoidable and maybe even idolized (Bates, 2015). Pro-ana groups even beatified the "good anorectic" as saints in the similar, self-destructive way Incels beatified the pinnacle of Inceldom (Day and Keys, 2008). While this may suggest that Incels are the masculine version of pro-ana groups, there are differences. For starters, there aren't manifestational deities of mental illness such as Ana (anorexia) and Mia (bulimia) within Incel groups; the experience of being pro-ana is more spiritual than Incels (due to how Incels conceive of masculinity and couch their language in a poor facsimile of science and logic); and there have been no reported murders occurring due to pro-ana ideology. Perhaps

most importantly, Incels place the misogynistic onus for their internalized worthlessness on others - such as normies and femoids - while pro-ana members place a misogynistic onus on themselves for their internalized worthlessness by claiming failure in their catechization of perceived perfection. In the end, it would appear that the internet replaced the whip for self-flagellation.

Finally, we get to the proposed end-game of Incels, sex with a woman. Hiring escorts does not count (and even denotes - but doesn't denigrate - them as an escortcels), but once an Incel has sex, they "ascend" from Inceldom. Evocative of ascending out of a pit or ascending to another plane of existence, this term is malleable to negating interpretations that maintain Incel membership. After all, to ascend and no longer be involuntarily celibate as defined would mean to either lie to your tribe or self-exile. So they will move the goalposts; they redefine what Incel is to them. Some particularly nihilistic individuals may even think such an ascension is impossible or nonexistent. In response to one Incel's expression of optimism that it's not impossible for Incels to ascend (after visiting a female friend alone in her house for the first time in his life), a commentator stated "Yet [ascension] is almost meaningless, there's no ascension really. Having sex won't fix me as much as people try to make me believe." In another representation of redefining Incel membership, the former moderator of r/incels stated that

“...it has been a few years since I ascended and married (although I am now divorced), but I remain equally blackpilled and sympathetic to incels.” In this former moderator’s blog post about “The Betrayal of Former Incels”, he embarks on gatekeeping the identifier of Incel by defining it as “someone for whom it’s over” and “men who cannot become conventionally attractive and who cannot hope to meet a partner barring a one in a billion miracle of the kind that happened to me” (Carkudo, 2021). Moving the goalposts to the point it’s in a completely different stadium, such as this, suggests to me that there is a persistent draw for people who identify as Incels to remain in the pit. Akin to martyrdom, some will fling themselves back into the abyssal pit of the Blackpill to justify this perception of a quirk of nature.

What is a cult?

Finally, we get to the discussion of what a cult is. To an extent, the validity of being called a cult is commonly solved by public relations. The haphazardly, accusatory way that the descriptor is thrown highlights just how important it is to have a definite definition for it. The definition we’ll be working with is one that places

“importance [on] a charismatic, living person who leads an essentially elitist group that believes in their own moral and social

superiority. Their commitment to the leader and his or her message is so strong that members may become overly dependent on the group to meet basic psychological needs. The strong bonds among members heighten their conformity to behavioral norms and their willingness to be influenced by the leader and each other” (Levine and Hogg, 2010, p.2).

This definition illustrates a problem with defining Alt-Right groups as cults; Alt-Right groups are prone to metaphorically cannibalizing their leaders when their faults - their “weaknesses” - are exposed, such as Chapman mutinying against Tarrío. Further, Alt-Right groups often don’t even have leaders, such the Incels’ lack of leadership. However, we also see evidence of cults operating once the leaders are gone, such as Heaven’s Gate members still operating a website despite their mass suicide in 1997 (Heaven’s Gate, n.d.) and Aum Shinrikyo still existing after Asahara’s execution, albeit under the offshoot groups of Aleph and Hikari no Wa (BBC, 2018). This suggests that a charismatic individual generates the animus of a cult, but the leader isn’t necessary to maintain it. In this way, it becomes a metaphysical virus, a unit of cultural expression akin to Dawkins’ conception of the meme (Dawkins, 1989). It may morphologically stay the same outside the progenitor, but it is just as likely to evolve when interacting with a new

host and going on to infect others. In this way, we may conceive Alt-Right behavior as a viral mutation from an original strain of culture that existed within conservative, Western culture. This is something that Annie Kelly even argues: the Alt-Right is the conclusion of a mainstream anxiety about traditional, white masculinity in the U.S., albeit one that's more extreme (Kelly, 2017).

Regardless, a self-generating, self-sealing animus of traditional, white masculinity is the closest entity to an actual leader of the Alt-Right. As cults are defined separately from alternative religions or New Religious Movements due to their level of danger, I will be utilizing the Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame to determine whether Alt-Right behavior is cultic or not. Going through each of the 18 elements delineated by Bonewits, I will discuss how each may or may not apply for either the Proud Boys or the Incels. The original framework contains a 1-10 rating system, but - in lieu of proper definitions of what a 1 or a 10 may mean - I will divide my observations into three results: little to no features, (represented as 0); moderate features (1); and definitive features for the group (2). Once tallied, results will be averaged to exhibit the average level of cultic behavior within Proud Boys and Incels with a score of 2.0 being the highest possible. It should be said, however, that cultic behavior does not necessarily indicate a group is a cult, as many groups will exhibit levels of

these behaviors. As Paracelsus once said, "only the dose makes the poison". Thus, we may consider that the closer to 2.0 a group gets the higher their cultic toxicity is. Similarly, for definition's sake, if a group averages more than 1.0 on this scale, we can safely assume that said group at least qualifies as being in the early range of a cult - if we consider cultic behavior to be a spectrum.

As for why I chose Bonewits' framework, it became self-evident - after weeks of searching - that there is a dearth of schema within academia for defining cults. Rick Ross (not to be confused with the rapper) and his Cult Education Institute have a framework (Cult Education Institute, n.d.), but his framework allowed little leeway for interpreting behavior. In contrast, Bonewits's frame predicated itself on the level and degree of the behavior, justifying itself through a nuance that mimics cultic behavior. For, as I've mentioned, a group isn't a cult when it's frightening or alternative. A cult becomes a cult when it is dangerous, inwards and out, to the life, rights, and welfare of people around it. Until Pastafarians start marching as an army, colanders on head, they are not a cult because of this distinction (Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, n.d.).

As for Bonewits's credentials, he was a member of Anton LaVey's Church of Satan (Guiley, 2008) the Neo-Druid founder of the non-profit religious organization *Ár nDraíocht Féin* as well as receiving a Bachelor of

Arts in Magic from University of California, Berkeley (The New York Times, 1970), being the first and only person to receive a degree from an accredited university for that major. More importantly, he has been a writer on the occult for decades, thus exhibiting the veracity of his understanding in understanding the difference between New Religious Movements and actual cults.

Finally, while not prevalent, there is some precedence within academia to merit its usage in defining a cult, such as articles on how to maneuver cults/extremist groups during child custody cases and distinguishing destructive cults (Eichel, 2016; Bohm and Alison, 2001), but its lack of usage may be attributable to the relative dearth of academic discussion with cults. Regardless, I intend to exhibit how conceptualizing behavior as cultic could expand our understanding of extremist groups, such as the Alt-Right. Available for public use on his website (Bonewits, 2011), these are the elements I will be reviewing and their definitions outlined by him.

Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame by Isaac Bonewits

1. **Internal Control:** Amount of internal political and social power exercised by leader(s) over members; lack of clearly defined organizational rights for members.
2. **External Control:** Amount of external political and social influence desired or obtained; emphasis on directing members' external political and social behavior.
3. **Wisdom/Knowledge Claimed by leader(s):** amount of infallibility declared or implied about decisions or doctrinal/scriptural interpretations; number and degree of unverified and/or unverifiable credentials claimed.
4. **Wisdom/Knowledge Credited to leader(s) by members:** amount of trust in decisions or doctrinal/scriptural interpretations made by leader(s); amount of hostility by members towards internal or external critics and/or towards verification efforts.
5. **Dogma:** Rigidity of reality concepts taught; amount of doctrinal inflexibility or "fundamentalism"; hostility towards relativism and situationalism.
6. **Recruiting:** Emphasis put on attracting new members; amount of proselytizing; requirement for all members to bring in new ones.
7. **Front Groups:** Number of subsidiary groups using different names from that of main group, especially when connections are hidden.
8. **Wealth:** Amount of money and/or property desired or obtained by group; emphasis on members' donations; economic lifestyle of leader(s) compared to ordinary members.
9. **Sexual Manipulation of members by leader(s) of non-tantric groups:** amount of control exercised over sexuality of members in terms of sexual orientation, behavior, and/or choice of partners.
10. **Sexual Favoritism:** Advancement or preferential treatment dependent upon sexual activity with the leader(s) of non-tantric groups.
11. **Censorship:** Amount of control over members' access to outside opinions on group, its doctrines or leader(s).
12. **Isolation:** Amount of effort to keep members from communicating with non-members, including family, friends and lovers.
13. **Dropout Control:** Intensity of efforts directed at preventing or returning dropouts.
14. **Violence:** Amount of approval when used by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s).
15. **Paranoia:** Amount of fear concerning real or imagined enemies; exaggeration of perceived power of opponents; prevalence of conspiracy theories.
16. **Grimness:** Amount of disapproval concerning jokes about the group, its doctrines or its leader(s).
17. **Surrender of Will:** Amount of emphasis on members not having to be responsible for personal decisions; degree of individual disempowerment created by the group, its doctrines or its leader(s).
18. **Hypocrisy:** amount of approval for actions which the group officially considers immoral or unethical, when done by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s); willingness to violate the group's declared principles for political, psychological, social, economic, military, or other gain.

Analysis via Bonewits' Framework

1. Internal Control

Amount of internal political and social power exercised by leader(s) over members; lack of clearly defined organizational rights for members.

For the Proud Boys, there is relatively little we see that fits this category. While Gavin McInnes may have threatened that "If anyone from our group showed up at Unite the Right, they were instantly booted, never spoken to again, ex-persona non-grata", there is little in the way of internal control of their members. Furthermore, disregarding attempted coups, there are well defined levels of Proud Boys due to their 4-degree system of membership defining first, second, third, or fourth degree Proud Boys. Following that, the leaders of the chapters are explicitly stated, as Enrique Tarrio was named leader early on. Altogether, there are little to no features of this cultic behavior.

For Incels, there is more internal control of its members. On the main Incel forum, Incels.is, there is a requirement of no bluepilled content, meaning conflicting opinions are not allowed unless they support Blackpill ideology; no discussion of "personal romantic or sexual experiences, even if they happened long ago"; no humble-bragging "such as by subtly praising

your own features"; and no "gay or LGBT content, unless you're criticising it." There are allowances to discuss other subjects than Inceldom, but these rules of no conflicting opinions and experiences reinforces the echo chamber mentality of it. Further, in later posts by admins of an update to the site's rules, they exhibit a deflective, noncommittal stance when asked for exacting definition, except in the most extreme of cases. Tasking the moderators to retain this echo chamber, internal control is ascertained via the ability to shape narrative and determine on a whim whether group membership is allowed or not.

For organizational rights for members, there are only two meaningful ranks: moderator and member. There may be designated moderators who police and delete content, but these are less prophets who detail Incel ideology but rather guardians of said ideology from outside forces. Still, these moderators do show a willingness to ban members from their forum. Albeit, I have not witnessed an explicit banning occurrence, but - since many banned members' posts still remain - sifting through their forum is guaranteed to find you a few banned members throughout thus showing a propensity towards guarding Incel ideology from internal forces, too. Thus, despite ranks being clear, the level of internal control exhibited by moderators and their willingness to be vague exceeds what one might consider minor. As such, definitive features of this cultic behavior exist.

2. External Control

Amount of external political and social influence desired or obtained; emphasis on directing members' external political and social behavior.

As mentioned prior, the Alt-Right, including Incels and Proud Boys, show extensive usage of ironic bigotry in order to not deter potential members from joining and provide a fallback in case of backlash. This functions as a method to desensitize and morph the subject's worldview to that of an Alt-Right view until the joke is no longer transgressive humor but a statement. As the Nazi, YouTuber propagandist E;R stated regarding whether he was redpilling others, "Pretend to joke about it until the punchline /really/ lands" (Munn, 2019, p.8). Utilizing this ironic bigotry is inherent to their attempts at controlling external views of them as well as recruitment.

In regards to Proud Boys, they place a strong emphasis on external appearances that may well bleed into their own internal view of the group. The label of Alt-Right is fiercely rejected to the point that Gavin McInnes, the original, former leader who described Proud Boys as "Alt-Right without the racism", has even sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for defamation due to the SPLC labeling them a hate group. In McInnes' words they are a "men's club that meets about once a month to drink beer" while

simultaneously being a “pro-Western fraternal organization for men who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world” (Kennedy 2019). This need to control external optics is even memed between leaders of the Proud Boys as evidenced by Tarrío posting a clip from *Peaky Blinders* where actor Cillian Murphy’s character angrily demands the members of his gang - the eponymous *Peaky Blinders* - to be on their best behavior and not do anything illegal, with text above it titling “Presidents before PB [Proud Boy] Meets.” He ominously adds “Remember boys, while in view of the public eye...”

Further, Proud Boys consciously attempt to manipulate news media into publishing fabricated events, such as the recent, successful attempt at portraying themselves as sending Proud Boys to fight alongside Russian soldiers in the first few weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Barbarossa, 2022). Throughout all of it, there’s a tinge of comedic value for them in the way of misogynist humor of “rescuing female refugees” to be sent to Proud Boys and the overall prankish nature of it, e.g. “Many women have been liberated, and are currently on their way back to our brothers back home”; “Our beer reserves are running low”; and “We breed love out of the tyranny of war.” However, playfulness aside, these attempts at manipulation achieves their attempts at creating an uber-masculine, militant atmosphere around them - as well as disparaging mainstream media. As

they said, "This ruse we conducted on the mainstream media leaves one major unanswered question... what other lies do they report as facts?" Thus, I would conclude that they exhibit definite features of this cultic behavior.

With Incels, there is a similar emphasis on appearing less extreme than they are, but I argue this is instead couched in a history of their subreddits and web forums being banned or removed from internet hosts due to illicit and extreme behavior, such as subreddits r/incels, r/braincels, r/Shortcels, and r/IncelsWithoutHate as well as the migration from a Montenegro-based web domain, Incels.me, to the current Icelandic based web domain, Incels.is (Murphy, 2018). Still, their views haven't changed but rather are couched in irony and the thinnest veneer of plausible denial. Discussions of going ER [committing an Elliot Rodger style mass killing], the justification (or admission) of rape, and spitting on people of color are occasionally suffixed with "(in video games)", "(in Minecraft)", or "(in GTA)", implying they are talking about these actions being in video games. It should be noted: rape and spitting aren't available in either of those specific games.

However, there are limits to any unified attempts in presenting as law-abiding. Some members have argued that attempts at corralling pedophilic posts are akin to being a "woke Reddit forum", despite one moderator specifying that it is still allowed to discuss 14-year-old girls as "14 year olds

are within the age of consent in various jurisdictions". The aforementioned discussion on the sentience of women; why pedophilia is "less degenerate than homosexuality"; and arguments on why attractive people should be sent to concentration camps are still prominent as well. Furthermore, in performing this research, I have come across cartoon pornography of Ralph Wiggum and Lisa Simpson, both as prepubescent children, posted 3 months before screenshot by a popular member of the forum. Despite explicitly stating "Do not sexualize pre-pubescent minors in any way, shape, or form", images such as that and comments expressing envy for Ralph remain. All of this paints an extreme picture of a group that is deeply laissez-faire about speech unless it can get the forum in legal trouble.

Important to consider is that you don't need an account to access these posts. They clearly aren't afraid to express or hide their most extreme beliefs online, even when they know they're being monitored. This specific fact expresses the fact that moderators and members don't much care about external condemnation. In fact, with some of them, it would almost appear they relish it. This lack of care for external critique is why they show moderate features - rather than definitive features - of this cultic behavior.

3. Wisdom/Knowledge Claimed by leader(s)

amount of infallibility declared or implied about decisions or doctrinal/scriptural interpretations; number and degree of unverified and/or unverifiable credentials claimed.

Despite being ill defined, Proud Boys claim the superiority of Western civilization. It is, of course, a requirement of membership to be deeply proud of Western civilization. Due to being unable to find a specific argument for why this fundamental principle of the Proud Boys is true, it would appear that this wisdom/knowledge comes from “common sense” or *argumentum ad naturam*. For example, take into account this post shared by a Proud Boys channel.

“Imagine knowing about institutional rape, pedophilia, anti-white negative-eugenics, financial terrorism, medical terrorism, degenerate anti family unit regimes and the many other sickening issues currently destroying the western world.....

Only to then complain about the ‘Far right’ who’ve no institutional power what so ever.

Imagine not only complaining about something which is a genuine solution to todays [sic] problems, but berating it whilst having no understanding of it.

Imagine complaining about something which opposes all the evils of today, who’d do something as silly as that?

I’d suggest waking up, but if at this point you’ve not got the eyes to see it, you never will.

Think for yourself [original emphasis]”

There’s no evidence stated in any of this. All there is are assumptions that confirm their righteousness, and a Franz Matsch’s painting *The Triumph*

of Achilles. To look through all of their posts is to see a lack of explanation for their beliefs. The closest to evidence for them lies in statements by Gavin McInnes, such as his article "Transphobia is Perfectly Natural" and stating that Western colonization led to roads and infrastructure but "[Indians] are still using them as toilets" and "aboriginals keep using them as a bed" (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). With a drought of explicit evidence, these beliefs appear to be built of - or potentially serves to enforce - intuitions about the world, for if they can't provide evidence outside of their own zeal, they have nothing but their feelings. Because of this ironclad belief in an unverified - or unverifiable by them - claim, they show definitive features of this cultic belief.

Incels, of course, don't have a conventional leader. They have moderators, not prophets. Thus, the doctrine and scriptural interpretations are generated via interactions within the community, typically in threads with the designator of "Blackpill" or "Theory" in their title. These contributions are then commented on by forum members where some say "very based [correct/accurate]"; "high iq post"; or others may deride the contribution. Very much so a marketplace of ideas, the proverbial facts and definition of Incels and the Blackpill change when contacting others, with other Incels' worldviews changing as well. As stated before, these beliefs act

like a virus. Still, despite the potential for drastic change, there are constants in this metaphysical, viral Blackpill: Incels are sexually (and thus societally) unwanted, this is biologically determined, and women are responsible. With these ideas forming the skeletal ribcage of the philosophy, the Blackpill molds and adapts itself to any blow or critique it encounters. Like nailing Jell-O to a wall, the Blackpill isn't destroyed if one theory is dismembered from the source; it manifests a new appendageal-theory to continue its manipulation.

Similarly, an adulterated facsimile of science exists to provide justification of the beliefs. Driven by the need to prove their 'superiority' to 'emotional' women, they intellectualize their intuited beliefs and feelings of despair and cherry pick studies or outright fabricate data to prove their points. Case in point, Incels discussed in one thread "Why killing gay 'people' should be legal" by stating with "A gay person is an organism that spreads diseases such as HIV"; "Their mechanism of spreading HIV is anal sex"; and "gays who turn themselves in however, should have their balls removed". Tangentially, this also implies a perception that women cannot be gay when taking into account rampant transphobia in the community and their belief in biological determinism driving women to copulate with "Chads". Discussions of how to deal with gay people revolve around their perceived dirtiness and pest control services, thus verminizing a group of people. Later comments

add that “it’s pretty much impossible to get AIDS without participating in a degenerate act” and that gay men “have an average sex partner count of 500, 25% of them are over 1000”, are supported by no citations, likely because it’s wrong. It doesn’t matter to them that their ideas are built upon otherworldly stereotypes; this role-playing of science provides a legitimizing insulation from criticism that could erode their own belief. As such, because of this propagation of an infallible, self-sealing worldview known as the Blackpill, they portray definitive features of this cultic behavior.

4. Wisdom/Knowledge Credited to leader(s) by members

amount of trust in decisions or doctrinal/scriptural interpretations made by leader(s);
 amount of hostility by members towards internal or external critics and/or towards
 verification efforts.

As mentioned in the prior category, Proud Boys don’t have much in the way of doctrinal evidence. Their beliefs are simple, they’re proud of Western civilization and refuse to see it degenerated, but details of what they’re proud of or even what explicitly is Western civilization, outside of renaissance paintings of the Hellenic era and Ancient Rome, are non-existent. Thus, the closest to doctrinal interpretations by leaders, that can be detected, lies in criticisms towards their opposition.

These criticisms are directed towards news media that aren't far-right. For instance, ire and obfuscation was directed at USA Today's Will Carless when writing on those in the U.S. Asian diaspora donating money to the Proud Boys. Given the chance by Carless to comment on the story (as shown by Proud Boy screenshots of the texts), Tarrío responded with vitriol, saying "I would think any story written by you about me or the ProudBoys would be tainted and biased. You should get a job with TMZ." He goes on to say

"I'm sure those 'Chinese' as you call them...because they include Vietnamese Japanese and Hong Kongese live in the states. And I am happy that Asians support the ProudBoys because of the continuous hate and the relentless assault they get from BLM supporters. So to the Asian community I'd like to say Thank You."

A few days later, they posted Will Carless' phone number on their official Telegram saying "Will is going to write a story with comments from non members" and instructing to "Give him a call and tell him this is wrong." This message was viewed over 15.6k times. This wasn't the last time Will Carless was discussed by their official Telegram as they shared a screenshot of him saying "[Trump's] favorite extremist street gang is still falling apart" with the Proud Boys laughing at the notion of them falling apart.

In regards to non-journalist critiques, they show a similar level of hostility towards people who rebuke them. In response to likely deleted comments, Proud Boys and fellow travelers direct threats of rape, accusations of fellating antifa, and anti-black slurs at the individual whose comments disappeared. Further, while a bit more understandable considering their goal of disrupting the Proud Boys, they have linked an antifa Telegram channel for Proud Boys to “raid” and flood with memes and text. Black Lives Matter activist, Shaun King, is also part of this Proud Boy ire with a picture showing his 2013 tweet talking about owning a gun and knowing MMA juxtaposed to a picture of him shirtless in an attempt to mock him. Finally, we have a screenshot of Proud Boys mocking a Twitter user where they say in chat “Hope USPS is treating you well. How’s Christopher doing? ‘Emily’ still playing dress up?”, a clear threat of doxxing.

In the end, despite a lack of explanation of what the evidence for their beliefs are, Proud Boys show a remarkable level of hostility towards people who discredit or disagree with their beliefs. Because of this, they certainly exhibit definite features of this cultic behavior.

For Incels, I have briefly mentioned the paragons, the Incel saints, who embody Inceldom. Typically these are people who have gone on mass killings due to Incel or proto-Incel beliefs, such as Seung-Hui Cho (Virginia

Tech killings), Elliot Rodger (Isla Vista killings), and Alek Minassian (Toronto killings) who himself was inspired by Rodger and deemed him the “founding forefather” of Incels (Cottee, 2021, p.93). Some even include the Columbine shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Still, not all Incel saints are murderers but rather are people whose image became a symbol of the Incel condition, such as St. Blackops2cel (Moonshot, 2020). Blackops2cel, named due to wearing a fan-shirt of the video game Call of Duty: Black Ops 2, was not connected to Incels prior to the appropriation of his selfie (Know Your Meme, n.d.), but those in the Incel community beatified due to him being proof that taking a shower and getting a haircut won’t make you sexually desirable. To Incels, he represents this biological determinism that is sisyphian to negate. Particularly appealing to blackpilled Incels, he is commonly drawn like Jesus Christ, wearing a crown of thorns around his head. Other renditions include him dropping atomic blackpill bombs out of an airplane with AWALT [All Women Are Like That] painted on its nose. In addition, one painting is of him looming over a warrior amongst a desolate landscape, stork to the right of him, and a massive noose with a golden light shining through it beckoning the warrior forward.

Still, not all Incels agree on who should be called a saint or whether their saints are bluepilled or not, and when there is disagreement between Incels on saints, or blackpill ideology, intense hostility abounds. Typically

these disagreements include ableist slurs or descriptions of statements as “autistic”, and some may argue that the original poster is “pushing normie values” which vaguely threatens a violation of the no bluepilled content rule.

Incels are most unified, however, when facing criticism from outside groups. A prime example of this is one “RageFuel” post about how Isla Vista killings’ wikipedia page lists “I.N.C.E.L. iDeOlogY [sic]” as one of Elliot Rodger’s motives. It’s claimed that the page looks “as if it was vandalized by soys [low-testosterone men]”, and claims of Elliot Rodger being fueled by misogyny are further mocked. Several responses to this are declarations that it was “based terrorism”; “everything he did was 100% justified”; and that incel ideology and an incel movement are non-existent things.

While Incels aren’t unified on their saints, this deep inclination towards hostility - inwards and outwards - vastly outweighs any limiting factor said division may bring for this category. Thus, I would argue that they exhibit definitive features of this cultic behavior.

5. Dogma

Rigidity of reality concepts taught; amount of doctrinal inflexibility or "fundamentalism"; hostility towards relativism and situationalism.

With Proud Boys, they are relatively flexible on paper, but there are examples of inflexibility in terms of unstated beliefs. As mentioned, enrollment is open to any man, gay or straight, any race, and any religion. But, this inclusive appearance comes with the caveat that you must act as a Western Chauvinist lest you be a degenerate deteriorating Western civilization. In determining non-traditional and non-white expressions of masculinity or femininity to be degenerate, they solidify their dogma and zeal by painting the Other as a cancer or sickness. Much like how you don't try to coexist with cancer, they refuse to back down from what has already been determined to be a defense, and if this defense is characterized as a defense of your way of life - which they do characterize it as - Others are conceived as attackers attempting to end your culture and life.

This fundamentalism is particularly pronounced when it comes to defending children and gun control. As stated by Tulsa Proud Boys 2.0, "Every gun law is an infringement", implying a slippery slope to the total infringement of your individual rights and freedom. When discussing trans people or LGBT+ education, they are often painted as unnatural degenerates, "its", and/or pedophiles, with a defense of children utilizing

violence almost always brought up. When Kellogg's "GLAAD Together With Pride Breakfast Cereal" was released, one Proud Boys chapter sarcastically stated "[t]otally 'not' grooming your kids". When Dr. Rachel Levine, a trans-woman, was nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary for Health under the Biden administration, accusations of insanity were directed at Biden for putting "this being/failed science experiment in charge of anything". Further continuing, the Proud Boys main channel stated "in case you don't have eyeballs or anything resembling a functional brain, both Richard [Dr. Levine's deadname/birth name] and Rachel are virgins" followed by stating that "Corruption is a way of life" for people like her. Rigidly unable to understand - or more likely unwilling to - Proud Boys remain hostile to the LGBT+ community.

They aren't impervious to shifting behavior, though. A prime example of this lies in a poll by Tarrío asking whether Proud Boys still "Back the Blue [meaning law enforcement]", and his statement that "[i]f I would have done this poll 2 years ago it would have gone the opposite way. Times are changing..." Further discussion on whether they support police officers lies in a discussion on the Ottawan response to Freedom Convoy where a member asks "Are we still backing the blue??" Tarrío cryptically comments "Revelations" while another states "Nope and haven't since the police allowed antifa to pull guns on patriots in portland and did nothing about it."

Still, this may be a case where dogma isn't necessarily changed but what has changed is their support from the government as these comments were made a year into Biden's presidency.

All considered, despite portraying themselves as libertarian-minded and uncaring about people's personal lives, they show a deep inability to consider any way of life, other than that of their Western chauvinism, as morally correct or acceptable. This inability and even hostility towards alternative lifestyles exhibits definite features of this cultic behavior.

As I've mentioned with Incels, the Blackpill is an amorphous, flexible belief that is anchored in the fundamentals of Incels being sexually unwanted, life being biologically determined, and women are responsible for the injustice of Incels' sexless lives. Thus, any flexibility that appears is utilized to justify the core, unchanging beliefs of the Blackpill. Any attempt at changing these beliefs is met with hostility. You could make the argument to an Incel that their behavior is what confines them to involuntary celibacy, but these arguments are quickly derided and ignored as whitewashing of their mental pain or useless platitudes. In one post on "Why Therapy is (Usually) a Cope [going into denial to avoid the harsh truth of the Blackpill] for Incels", the poster argues the uselessness or even danger of therapy, "The personality isn't why he is khhv, as he was khhv before and after

taking the blackpill"; "The therapist gives him bluepilled platitudes aka copes such as 'just work on your personality' or 'get some friends who are girls'"; and how "therapy only changes the way you perceive the reality around you, which is the textbook definition of a cope." The poster concedes that therapy can be useful "for one thing and one thing only; developing social skills", but otherwise declares that mental health treatment - something desperately needed by many Incels - is useless or even a danger. As one person puts it, in their mind, "People who say 'just go to therapy' is PC way of saying 'just kill yourself already I don't give a fuck about you. . . . We're already rotting in loneliness, depressed, and rejected by society yet they act like we've done something horribly wrong to them."

Further evidence to them lies in their belief in the 80/20 rule; "that 80% of women desire just 20% of men" (Anti-Defamation League, 2019) so you should just LDAR (lie down and rot). This inability to accept that, perhaps, their behavior is to blame for their sexual frustrations and absolutist language display an intensely antithetical approach to relative situations. As one comment expressed on a post made about visiting a "foids house [sic]": "gtfo faker". Rather than acknowledging the panoply of gray shades in the world, potential "ascensions" from Inceldom are treated as unreal and impossible. This 21st century rendition of Plato's allegory of the cave suggests that there are definite features of this cultic behavior.

6. Recruiting

Emphasis put on attracting new members; amount of proselytizing; requirement for all members to bring in new ones.

Proud Boys have shown a definite interest in recruiting, but this has been limited to leaders posting in their Telegram channels. Attempts, outside of their groups, to convince people to join are nonexistent, in what I have seen. Rather, it's expected that new members will come to them rather than be brought to them. Examples of recruitment lie in posters created, such as one by the Long Island Proud Boys saying "Don't believe their lies - find out for yourself. Support your local Proud Boys" along with crossed out hammer & sickle and Nazi-styled swastika. Further examples lie in a poster questioning the reader's masculinity by stating "If you have to ask your wife for permission to join then it probably isn't for you", as well as a link by the Tulsa Proud Boys 2.0 to sign up. Of course, this last example was immediately accused of being a "fed op" due to the recruitment form requiring a copy of the applicant's photo ID or passport and how the applicant's last chapter (Chicago) did everything anonymously. This accusation was immediately responded to with voice messages by the channel owner telling him "guess who gives a fuck about how Chicago does things".

Still, as mentioned, they don't require members to proselytize or bring in new members. They mostly exhibit a take-it-or-leave-it, blasé approach to new members. Thus, the Proud Boys exhibit little to none of the features of this cultic behavior.

As with Proud Boys, there is relatively little to no emphasis on attracting new members within the Incel community. There are calls for inspiring Incel rebellions by committing a mass killing, such as Alek Minassian who had

“hope[d] that they might perhaps trigger a chain reaction leading to society's recognition of either the alleged excesses of feminism (with a return to the golden age of monogamy and patriarchy) or the Incel predicament (with policies designed to force women to fulfill all men's alleged sexual entitlement)” (Baele et al., 2021, p.1683).

Despite this, I still see miniscule emphasis on recruitment. I'm personally inclined to believe that this is a result of yearning to be considered special due to the exclusionary nature of irreversible “pill taking”, for being one of the few knowers of truth is no longer possible when

everyone believes it. Either way, there is very little in the way of active recruitment of members and thus little to no features of this cultic behavior.

7. Front Groups

Number of subsidiary groups using different names from that of main group, especially when connections are hidden.

While the Alt-Right don't commonly have subsidiary groups to mask connections to themselves, they often scrupulously attempt to manipulate public appearances in an attempt to subtly shift societal morality towards their own beliefs (Harkinson, 2016) or - as mentioned before - take legal action when defined as a hate group (Kennedy, 2019). However, with Proud Boys and Incels, there is little to no evidence of front groups. There are separate groups that fall under both communities, but they are not designed as a smoke screen nor based on false representations of their beliefs. The closest the Incels have is the wiki named, quite plainly, Incel Wiki, which adopts an apologist tone for their publicly-edited articles. Thus, I would argue there are little to no features of this cultic behavior for either Proud Boys or Incels.

8. Wealth

Amount of money and/or property desired or obtained by group; emphasis on members' donations; economic lifestyle of leader(s) compared to ordinary members.

With Proud Boys, donations have been particularly emphasized for providing legal assistance to members who have recently been arrested for the January 6th Insurrection attempt. For example, Nick Ochs - Proud Boy leader of the Hawaii chapter - selling off possessions to pay for his legal fees, Nick DeCarlo's GoGetFunding fundraiser, Ethan Nordean (better known as Rufio Panman) and Joe Biggs' GiveSendGo fundraisers. Aggravation appears to have been building with these fundraisers as the main Proud Boy channel contemptuously states, in regard to Ethan Nordean's fundraiser, "If you don't share this post I don't ever want to hear y'all say you're fighting back against this oppressive government." This usage of crowdfunding has been common with Proud Boys since at least the beginning of 2021, as evidenced by Tarrío raising \$113,000 for legal expenses when he was first arrested on January 4th, 2021 and how nearly \$200,000 was raised by "self-described Proud Boys members looking for funds for 'protective gear,' travel expenses to the January protest in Washington, DC, and medical costs after a December rally in the capital turned violent" (Glover and de Puy Kamp, 2021).

Further, Tarrío operates 1776.shop, an online storefront “[l]argely focusing on charitable contributions, such as cancer research, veteran programs, disaster relief efforts, projects, and events” through custom, purchasable wristbands, which has been advertised in an inconspicuous name-drop while pretending they were fighting in Ukraine. However, attempts - on multiple browsers and days - to see what charity bands were sold led to a 404 page not found error. The marketplace was still available for perusing purchasable items.

There is some evidence of focus on a higher economic lifestyle for leaders than members, such as pictures of Tarrío on a private jet or showing off his Tesla - but this is largely miniscule. Still, because of such a high focus on fundraising (explainable through current crises) but low focus on obtaining wealth for the leaders, Proud Boys show a moderate level of this cultic behavior.

For Incels, there is very little in this aspect. You don’t see people buying shirts or stickers celebrating Inceldom, there is very little in the way of emphasizing donations by members, and the fundamentally decentralized nature of the Incel movement leaves little to define as a leader. Further, because of all the controversy associated with them, advertisement on their websites is non-existent. There is the concept of wealthmaxxing within their

community, which is earning money to maximize their chances of “ascending”, but they don’t place people with wealth on a pedestal above other Incels. Therefore, there are little to no features of this cultic behavior.

9. Sexual Manipulation of members by leader(s) of non-tantric groups

amount of control exercised over sexuality of members in terms of sexual orientation, behavior, and/or choice of partners.

As the Alt-Right is unified by an anxiety around traditional, white masculinity (Kelly, 2017), implicit thoughts and feelings on sexuality are a given. One of the most common praxes throughout the Alt-Right, and Western Fascism, is the practice of NoFap. NoFap is part of a wide list of ideas that revolve around men not masturbating. While not necessarily a far-right manifestation, we see people frequently take up NoFap challenges in the Alt-Right for various reasons. A key example of this is Proud Boys and the second degree of membership with abstention from masturbating more than once a month.

Dante Nero, the anointed pope of no-wanks, inspired the adherence to NoFap within Proud Boys. Explaining his hypothesis (watching porn too much

gives a distorted idea of intimacy which leads to men no longer dating) to Gavin McInnes, McInnes latched onto the idea with fervor. As Nero said, "Like, every day, he was talking about no-wanks." Once the Proud Boys were formed and named, no-wanks was there. What McInnes was seeking with no-wanks was that "[he] wanted the guys to stop masturbating, go out, talk to women, and then marry them, procreate, be strong American family men, help restore the natural order of things that had been knocked out of whack by feminism" (This American Life, 2017). Similar in what Umberto Eco said about fascism being inextricably linked to sexuality, sex - and procreation - is intertwined with all of Western fascism. It makes sense in this context that, if you believe that pornography is draining you of the need to procreate, your continuing anxiety around a white extinction would revolve around procreation. As Brenton Tarrant, the mass shooter who killed 51 people at a Christchurch mosque, justified his violence in his manifesto: "It's the birthrates. It's the birthrates. It's the birthrates" (Bhatt, 2021).

In connection with this belief in sexuality-to-power, NoFap members of the Alt-Right manosphere believe they are taking back power from Others by abstaining from porn and masturbation. These Others represent many different monstrous, trickster creatures that exist to control Western civilization. "Pornography is blamed on almost interchangeable villains, with liberals and feminists, socialists and Jews often constructed as being of a

piece. These men typically agree that the porn industry drains men of the 'vital fluid' - which they need for aggression and for reproducing the race..." (Burnett, 2021, p.16).

Within the Alt-Right, there are rarely overt, racial proscriptions on who to date, but, in my research, I have noticed an inordinate amount of Asian women within Alt-Righters' posts, as well as intrigue towards Japanese culture, such as a prevalence of anime pictures amongst Incels and Tarrío's Telegram name being a reference to Japanese-made video game series, Metal Gear Solid. Further examples being Andrew Anglin (founder of neo-Nazi website The Daily Stormer) sharing a video of him and a Filipina whom he called "my jailbait girlfriend"; Richard Spencer dating several Asian-American women, which was prior to his embrace of white nationalism; and the aforementioned Kyle Chapman marrying an Asian-American woman. As Audrea Lim cites from a comment on an Alt-Right forum, "'exclusively' dating Asian women is practically a 'white-nationalist rite of passage'." Seemingly unusual for white supremacists, this fetishization of Asian women comes out of a belief that "The main problem with white women. . . is they've become too feminist. By contrast, Asian women are seen as naturally inclined to serve men sexually and are also thought of as slim, light-skinned and small, in adherence to Western norms of femininity" (Lim, 2018). This seeming contradiction in white supremacists reaffirms that they focus on

culture more so than racial, much like Proud Boys' acceptance of non-white members, despite being part of the Alt-Right. Is this willingness to compromise on disbarring miscegenation going to last forever in the Alt-Right? I doubt it due to fascism's need for an Other. It mirrors what Adolf Hitler said, as quoted by Lim, "I have never regarded the Chinese or the Japanese as being inferior to ourselves. They belong to ancient civilizations, and I admit freely that their past history is superior to our own."

Lim further discusses how there's another myth that revolves around Asian women that implies they are subservient and hypersexual. Nowhere is this myth's existence more obvious than in the Incel practice of SEAmassing. As priorly mentioned, because of this persistent, memetic belief throughout Alt-Right circles that Asian women are easy to have sex with, Incels believe that they can maximize their chances of "ascension" by going to a Southeast Asian country.

To shift the focus back to groups analyzed in this paper, Proud Boys embody many of the same beliefs and presuppositions from the Alt-Right previously stated. However, they diverge greatly with Incels in one aspect: women. Unlike Incels, whose obsession lies in the degeneration of society by women, Proud Boys see women as important pillars of society - albeit on a lower rung of the social ladder - who are naturally suited for taking care of husbands and their children. Women are, of course, not allowed to join the

Proud Boys, but there are women denoted as “wives/girlfriends/cheerleaders of the Proud Boys” that assent to Proud Boy beliefs, as shown in the now-banned Twitter account Proud Boys’ Girls (Proud Boys’ Girls, n.d.). As the Southern Poverty Law Center pointed out with this group, this name is an example of how women who ascribe to their beliefs. “[L]ike all women in the eyes of the Proud Boys - are defined by their relationship to men.” Further clarified by the SPLC:

“Proud Boys believe women are happier when they stay home and have children. Women are ‘less ambitious’ than men, McInnes told a host on Fox News in 2015. ‘This is sort of God’s way - this is nature’s way - of saying women should be at home with the kids.’ Just as he believes women are ill-suited for the workplace, McInnes has argued that the world of politics is best left to men. ‘When I hear women talk about politics and so often put emotional claptrap over policy,’ he tweeted in early 2017, ‘I think, ‘Who let these bitches vote?’”
(Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.)

In all of this, they signal the importance of finding a partner who is submissive to patriarchal control. As one previously mentioned poster from

PROUD BOYS OF THE AMERICAN REDOUBT says, "If you have to ask your wife for permission to join then it probably isn't for you."

Following this, there is a constant undercurrent of pseudo-homoeroticism within the Proud Boys. Their logo being a rooster (a cock) isn't surprising, but, falling in line with ironic bigotry, it's not uncommon to encounter phallic imagery with the word "GAY" on it. Further, in the effort to trick media into believing the Proud Boys were supporting Russia, a selfie by Tarrío shows himself, doused in red light evocative of paratrooper preparing to jump, wearing light body armor and tactical rigging with a patch saying "RWDS" (Right Wing Death Squad). On his thin, metal helmet lies the stenciled slur, "FAG".

Continuing with an obsession with gender, a post that implies a fellow member of marrying a transwoman (the image posted is of Lady MAGA, a conservative drag queen) was posted by Tarrío to rib said member. Ironic (and unironic) bigotry on display, members utilize a wide variety of transphobic and homophobic slurs, saying that "it's prison rules" (implicating it's not gay), and one person saying they hate gays and need a priest because of the picture.

Finally, Proud Boys talk more about gender than any Gender Studies strawman they mock. Constant discussion about how liberals (i.e. Democrats/Gays/Jews/Others) push LGBT doctrine (or "LGBT Acceptance

[sic]”) onto kids as a way of grooming children for molestation. This is a regurgitation of right-wing propaganda that paints opposition to Florida’s “Parental Rights in Education” bill, coined by critics as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, is for the nefarious purpose of molesting children. Elsewhere, when arguments crop up between Proud Boys, the question of “how many genders are there?” is used to imply the other person is lying about being a Proud Boy or conservative. All of these behaviors and their usage of greater Alt-Right beliefs suggest to me that there are definitive characteristics of this cultic behavior within Proud Boys.

With Incels, this is the defining characteristic of the group due to their overt focus and preoccupation on sex. There is no physically coercive funneling towards ‘correct’ sexuality, but what control exercised on sexuality we see is via a normative process that labels those who deviate from the norms as degenerate subhumans. There’s a certain irony in viewing the Incel-defined deviants as subhuman when they themselves state similar things of their own physical bodies. After all, these are the same people who will label themselves Incels due to very specific features of their body, such as shortcel (short height); wristcel (small, feminine wrists); birdcel (weak chin and big nosed); baldcel (bald or balding); skullcel (too small and thus feminine of skulls); the list goes on. The difference, in their view, between

their subhumaness and Others' degenerate subhumans is that their self-perceived subhumanity is part of this belief in biological determinism. In their minds, their looks-designated place in the "sexual marketplace" is set in stone by normal mutations occurring during their conception (Incels Wiki, n.d.). Thus, they cannot procreate because they are "naturally less attractive" and - because of "degenerate influences" that corrupt the natural order - they can't get a partner like how it was done in the (fantasized) past. In a world where the strong can't take what they want and law shackles this will to power, they are left impotent - "cucked". Long past are days of vikings kidnapping women on raids or of mandated polygamy due to men being in short supply due to tribal warfare. All they have left to have sex - in their mind - is their looks. This is a large reason for why we see largely facetious, ironic, joking-unless-you're-in-to-it posts about jihadmaxxing or arguments about "Why an Islamic Caliphate is the cure for incelism". As one poster said, "foids should not have a say in who they are married off to"; "men shouldn't have to perform a series of idiotic rituals to land a foid in bed"; and "...if you weren't able to successfully climb the bs social ladder [sic] or weren't born with sufficient good looks to attract a foid in the west" then "fight[ing] for the Caliphate and you could have all the sex you want."

In the same vein of "natural order", there is the blatant undercurrent of pedophilia within a sizable portion of Incels. Ostensibly, the sexualization

of minors is prohibited on Incels.is as on March 3rd, 2022, a 6-0 vote by moderators made the rule "Do not sexualize minors in any way, shape, or form." On March 5th, 2022, they changed the rule to "better reflect what we were going for" to "Do not sexualize **pre-pubescent** [original emphasis] minors in any way, shape, or form." May 1st, 2022, the moderators expanded the rules further by banning arguments "that attraction to prepubescent minors is normal or even desirable", proclaiming that you find prepubescent minors attractive, arguing that "prepubescent minors enjoy sexual activity with adults", or saying that "pedophiles will one day be liberated in a utopian society that accommodates their desires." This rule-change led to a deluge of arguments. Comments on this new ruling were arguing over the definition of pubescence; its application to prepubescent anime characters; how "IT [r/IncelTear] spies" proclaim to be pedophiles to make Incels look worse; how pedophiles are gay because "it's pedO, not pedEphile, o = male and e = female whenever it's brought over from greek to english"; statements that the "preceding definition (ie the one I am re-popularizing)" for pedophilia was "describing homosexual men's lust for small boys"; asking "What's the youngest minor we can sexualize? Just asking"; arguing that "waketards" (politically left people) are usually the only people sexualizing prepubescent minors; and that the forum has turned into "woke reddit".

This isn't an aberrant occurrence. For example, an aforementioned, reposted argument on "Why pedophilia (korephilia technically) is less degenerate than homosexuality" argued that having sex with a prepubescent girl makes it more likely that you'll end up having sex with a girl in early puberty and thus procreate, thus being less-degenerate than homosexuality because it could lead to reproduction. Further, there is an argument by one now-banned Incel - bearing a profile picture of Josef Mengele - who had over 10k posts that "As an incel, there is literally no reason to be against pedophilia". Finally, we have a post by another prolific member of the forum about how "we should ban Ralph Wiggum from this forum" because he had sex, as evidenced by a cartoon image of Lisa Simpson having sex with Ralph Wiggum. Whether joking, wanting to shock, or intentionally sexualizing minors, there is a disturbing normalization of sexualizing behavior towards minors amongst the Incels.

This behavior is further enforced via a concept known as "The Wall". As Incels conceive it, "The Wall" is the age when women reach their "sexpiration date" and become less attractive and fertile (Incels Wiki, n.d.), which eventually leads to women drastically losing sexual value after age 25. This conception of women becoming unattractive and less fertile in their mid-twenties drive Incels - regardless of their own age - to become more attracted to younger women due to their heightened "sexual value" and

ability to remain sexually valuable over time. Further, in going after young women, they believe they can limit the chance of a girl being a “roastie”, which is a reference to a woman who has had sex with many different men, resulting in her genitals resembling roast beef (Moonshot, 2020). Naturally, this belief that sex changes the genitals only extends towards women and doesn’t explain a “roastie” who has only had one sexual partner or none at all. This elevation of the young, unsoured woman - or femoid as they may call her - is reminiscent of purity culture within the American culture where teens are taught to abstain from sex before marriage. In much the same vein, the argument is made that if you have sex outside of marriage - a perceived sin amongst many evangelicals - you become damaged, defiled, unappetizing.

There is a certain cognitive dissonance that goes on within Incels that emerges in the most cursory of study. They put women on a precarious pedestal, spotlight for faults, and then pulverize when they don’t follow their impossible ideals. They gnash over a world that doesn’t fit their impossible standards, yet they themselves don’t believe they need to change. This belief in the degradation of women (through feminism and many other Others) is most visible in Elliot Rodger’s manifesto. He finishes this manifesto in an epilogue that details his fantasy of creating a vast concentration camp to quarantine and starve the vast majority of women in

the world, with him at the center with “an enormous tower built just for myself, where I can oversee the entire concentration camp and gleefully watch them all die. *If I can't have them, no one will* [original emphasis]” (Rodger, 2014, p.136). This norming of an extreme mentality with an impossible ideal placed upon the world suggests a strong, unspoken belief amongst Incels: sexuality fits our views. If it doesn't, it is a degenerate violation of the natural order.

Yet, even the chance of connecting with the Impossible Woman - one who loves and cares about them even with their perceived flaws - won't let them leave this pit of despair. As evidenced by Kat Tenbarga's inability to find an Incel to date (Tenbarga, 2018); the belief in 2D>3D where 2D girlfriends (such as chatbots and anime/video game characters) are considered to be better partners than real-life girlfriends (Moonshot, 2020); and the countless cries for companionship by their less hardened, dedicated members, they want companionship from their idea of a woman - not a woman. Nonexistent is the gentle language of love and admiration; all that's left is a dogmatic loathing masked in appeals to nature that fuels this normative mantra of desperate hate. Because of this inability to accept sexual attraction outside of Blackpill philosophy and the self-sealing, self-harming nature of these beliefs, Incels show definite features of this cultic behavior.

10. Sexual Favoritism

Advancement or preferential treatment dependent upon sexual activity with the leader(s) of non-tantric groups.

In regards to sexual favoritism, we don't see much or any of this within Incels or Proud Boys. In the years I have kept an ear out and the last few months of research, I have not witnessed a single event of sexual abuse by Proud Boys or Incels towards their male members. In regards to women in adjacent groups, there have been accusations of sexual impropriety by far-right figures (and lower ranked members), such as Gavin McInnes, towards prominent Alt-Right activist Lauren Southern (Lombroso, 2020). Still, this has largely been relegated to outside Incel and Proud Boy circles. It does suggest to me that that sexual favoritism may perhaps be a larger factor in the greater Alt-Right, but in men-exclusive, homophobic groups - such as those studied here - there is little to none in terms of sexual favoritism.

11. Censorship

Amount of control over members' access to outside opinions on group, its doctrines or leader(s).

For Proud Boys, there is little in the way of censorship, which coincides with their libertarian leanings (DeCook, 2018). Within their Telegrams, arguments can be witnessed between presumed members and their opposition, and - quite often - between Proud Boys. Proud Boys even seem to be willing to critique their leaders or interpret events differently, as evidenced by comments on polls about whether they still "Back the Blue" or whether they are Pro-Russia or Pro-Ukraine. In response to a split between mainstream Proud Boys and separatist Proud Boys, Enrique Tarrio said this:

"Our brothers have claimed autonomy... From Oklahoma to Nevada from Alabama to Missouri. They are still my brothers. And I am my brothers [sic] keeper. We will one day share a beer and settle our differences. But to think that this can be 'splintered' by your fake news outlets is something we find joy in."

A more cynical interpretation of Proud Boys discussion could infer minor levels of censorship, but these can be explained by other factors, such as how Telegram works. These potential minor levels of censorship are that

rules are not explicitly stated; rules differing between channels; messages can be deleted by the administrator of the channel or by the user when deleting their account; and there's an ever-present chance of digital raids by opposition groups, where memes and text flood a channel. I surmise that this last factor is a key reason why the Proud Boys' official channel doesn't allow comments on posts as they themselves have called for raiding an antifa Telegram channel. In removing the ability to comment, they avoid tit-for-tat raids clogging their ability to disseminate info to the rest of the Proud Boys. Either way, a lack of evidence is not evidence, and so there is little to none in terms of this cultic behavior.

In Incels, we see vastly different levels of censorship as they explicitly state "no bluepilled content of any kind" unless disproving it and no "Women and LGBT Individuals" or "non-incels" allowed. As mentioned before, banned Incel member posts are also prevalent. Considering many of these users have thousands of posts (such as the 10,399 posts of one banned user with a Charles Manson profile picture) yet are banned, this suggests a quick and methodical team of moderators that are willing to ban users despite the time and effort put into it. Through this willingness to ban, prohibition of blackpill-curious individuals, and a blanket restriction on beliefs and opinions

perceived to be antithetical to the blackpill, Incels exhibit definite features of this cultic behavior.

12. Isolation

Amount of effort to keep members from communicating with non-members, including family, friends and lovers.

In Proud Boys, this cultic behavior is near non-existent. They don't prohibit who you associate with (although they may pester you), nor do they demand you stay within your race or creed. This is well evidenced by McInnes' wife being a Native American, "pro-choice lib who voted for Hillary" (Marcotte, 2018). The closest in isolating behavior witnessed is normative expression on who the ideal partner/friend to have would be. Thus, it is easy to state that there is little to none of this cultic behavior.

As usual, Incels show more extreme behavior. They too don't prohibit outsiders from interacting with their members (they almost certainly couldn't enforce it either way), but they exhibit extreme beliefs and behaviors in regards to interacting with society. Emphasis is placed on not interacting with the outside world by portraying discussed incidents - such as being friends with a woman - as outright fake, near-impossible, embarrassing, or an example of the Incel being "cucked". Further normative behavior lies in

Incels designating themselves as NEET (“Not in Education, Employment, or Training”) or as hikikomoris (Japanese for “pulling inward, being confined”) with the main difference being that hikikomoris rarely even leave their domicile (Incels Wiki, n.d.). This behavior or label is occasionally praised as being superior to “wagies” - people who work - due to the fact that this allows the NEET Incel the ability to do what they want. As one poem says, “Wagie trapped and wagie dies, NEET eats tendies, sauce and fries”.

This isolation from the outside world isn’t necessarily a good thing as there is generous evidence to suggest that many Incels deeply submerge themselves into Inceldom. While being logged doesn’t mean actively engaging, some members can reach astronomic levels of interaction. One member, with a profile picture of Josef Mengele, had over 10k posts as well as 135 days, 23 hours logged online from June 24th, 2020 to May 2nd, 2022. Another, hosting a profile picture of Elliot Rodger, had 13,204 posts and 12 days, 7 hours (rounded up) of time logged in from April 3rd, 2022 to May 2nd, 2022. That is 455.3 posts a day over the 29 days it lasted. This wasn’t a spam account; this user was witnessed engaging with the forum. To take from Mark Twain, “Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime” (Twain, 2004).

Finally, compounding these feelings of isolation is a generalized enmity towards bluepilled people, e.g. normies. As evidenced by one member - profile picture being an image of serial rapist and killer Edmund Kemper - who argued that misanthropy needs to be emphasized more so than misogyny. This user, having 273 days logged in, argues that the forum needs to be "reformed" to include the focus on misanthropy as "We must hate men just as much as women for harming other men to get liad [sic] or excluding us or bullying us..." A proverbial blackhole of nihilistic despair, this thread was responded to with comments such as "I hate women and men equally. Not nearly as much as I hate myself"; "I hate all men and women especially tallfags"; and arguing in all capital letters that they need to slut shame Chads as Chad's power is "a result of redpill cucks who value laycount and degeneracy over everything." These feelings of betrayal, bullying, and misanthropy are further highlighted by the wide variety of profile pictures featuring shots from the 2019 film *Joker*. This is likely due to a feeling of kinship with the eponymous Joker who feels unable to enter or thrive in society until eventually exploding into nihilistic, vengeful violence. In the *Joker*, they see themselves as the dejected, abused outsider who is tormented in every attempt at integrating with society, and - judging by the panoply of violent comments and justifications for violence - they see

something inspiring in him. At the very least, they see someone they can relate to.

Thus, in these normative, approving statements and contributions to Blackpill philosophy, it can be stated that there are definite features of this cultic behavior in Incels.

13. Dropout Control

Intensity of efforts directed at preventing or returning dropouts.

In large, the Proud Boys and Incels show little to none in dropout control. For Proud Boys, the majority of it appears to be a denouncement after the fact, such as claiming the member was kicked out rather than left (Brunswick et al., 2020). While with Incels if a member no longer logs on, it's often assumed that said member "roped himself [died by suicide]" and effort isn't made to check on them. If a prior member disparages Incels or disproves the blackpill, anger is, of course, expressed in response to critique, but effort may even be made to paint this former member as a "fakecel" (Carkudo, 2021).

What this suggests in the end is what levels of dropout control expressed by Proud Boys and Incels occurs post the departure of members. This makes sense as these aren't groups that typically have requirements to live on compounds or in barracks; members are free to walk away at any

point. When you aren't reliant on the group for food and shelter, the primary danger you face is from reprisal for leaving. As I'm unable to find any evidence of ex-members of either groups being threatened or attacked after leaving, it would appear that the primary method of dropout control are No True Scotsman fallacy arguments stating that the departed member was never a true comrade, cutting off social support from the group, or attempts at smearing their social standing. With the lack of credibility amongst mainstream society, I'm inclined to believe that mudslinging by an extremist group holds much less threat than those respected in accepted society. Thus, this would suggest little to no features of this cultic behavior in either group.

14. Violence

Amount of approval when used by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s).

When discussing the Alt-Right, violence is a given; being a part of Western Fascism, violence is a vital part of what draws them together. In their belief in defending, often violently, their world from degeneracy, their lives are conceptualized as one of death and total war. As Umberto Eco put it regarding fascism, "there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for

struggle. Thus pacifism is trafficking with the enemy. It is bad because life is permanent warfare” (Eco, 1995, p.7).

Within the Proud Boys, we see a great deal of this obsession with violence. Treading the line between roleplaying as a militia and acting as one, they wield military-style rifles and sporting civilian-grade bulletproof vests in a fascistic facsimile of a fashion catwalk. This obsession with violence is even reinforced by quoting Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, as shown by Tarrio’s statement on his Telegram:

“Everything in life can be taken away from you and generally will be at some point. Your wealth vanishes, the latest gadgetry suddenly becomes passe, your allies desert you. But if your mind is armed with the art of war, there is no power that can take that away. In the middle of a crisis, your mind will find its way to the right solution. Having superior strategies at your fingertips will give your maneuvers irresistible force. As Sun-tzu says, ‘Being unconquerable lies with yourself.’”

One member of antifa, in describing a specific member, described much of the behavior you see in the Proud Boys. They have “this ‘I’m an operator’ mindset that older right-wing men have. They get really into the

idea (that) this is like their war - and thinking through and trying to get into the mind of the opposition" (Brunswick et al., 2020). This is further developed by the requirement of engaging in a major conflict for the cause in order to become a fourth degree Proud Boy.

This obsession with violence isn't just limited to military-chic. Logo designs of helicopters with a body hanging underneath (a reference to extrajudicial killings by the Pinochet regime where political enemies were thrown from helicopters); Tarrío's patch saying RWDS (Right Wing Death Squad) is sold on his store; countless images of loading bullets into a firearm or magazine in response to Others' statements; calls to "arm yourself" and "prepare to defend yourselves" "because no one is coming to save you"; declaring that the "National Guard is now being weaponized" and that "You're being hunted"; showing a picture of a tent city and with only the word "Gas" under it; and a picture of trans professor Dr. Allyn Walker and their dissertation "Understanding Resilience Strategies Among Minor-Attracted Individuals" with a picture of bullets being loaded into a revolver. This last example further included the words "Can't expect God to do all the work", indicating their belief that Dr. Walker is a degenerate.

Lately, this violence has been focused on violently protecting children from pedophilic strangers. This is problematic in several ways but particularly as they have fully engaged in propaganda that paints Democrats

as groomers for pushing for LGBT+ education in schools. Worrisome still is a video posted on the Tulsa Proud Boys 2.0 showing a WW2 Wehrmacht soldier, head as a skull, wearing a Wehrmacht Stahlhelm with the words "The Truth Is Now Hate Speech" in the foreground. If you unmute the audio, you can hear the drum beat to "Pumped Up Kicks", a 2010 song about mass shootings (Zellner, 2019), play in the background. As there's no specifics mentioned outside of the video, it's a deniable threat, but it still highlights this excessive focus on violence within the Proud Boys.

Finally, we have Tarrio cajoling members into being more active by saying "Praying does not work. JUST GET out and fight. Riot if you have to." Seemingly misunderstanding, the conversation in the comments devolved into squabbling between members about women's rights, but this is just another of a long list of examples of their obsession with violence. With all of this considered, there are definite features of this cultic behavior.

As with the Proud Boys, Incels show a disturbing approval of violence. As three of the mainstream Incel Saints are mass-killers - Rodger, Minassian, and Lepine (Baele et al., 2021) - they glorify the act of violence to a near-spiritual level. Further discussed by Baele et al., Incel killers and rank-and-file Incels frequently evoke the need of an uprising, with Alek Minassian even posting on Facebook, before his attack, "Private (Recruit)

Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please.

C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!”

(Moonshot, 2020, p.10). This near-spiritual obsession with violent saints even extends to one person posting Elliot Rodger’s full autopsy report within the forums, acting similar to a *memento mori* relic of a dead saint.

Calls to violence are guaranteed to be witnessed by a cursory look at their forums. This can be seen in fantasizing comments such as “Imagine a world that a foid is executed for not being virgin before marriage”; approval directed towards a Chinese news video about a “Normie man” who “kidnaps, repeatedly rapes and chains woman in shed”; and aforementioned arguments that justify killing gay people. Further evidence lies in usernames being named after famous, misogynistic serial killers and profile pictures of mass shooters - such as Elliot Rodger, Seung-Hui Cho, and Dylann Roof - and other members of history linked to violence, such as Charles Manson, Adolf Hitler, and Josef Mengele.

Not limiting themselves to praising mass murder, Incels show a disturbing inclination to downplaying, justifying, and even extoling rape and threats of sexual violence. Discussions of envy towards the prior mentioned “Normie man”; protesting the total ban of sexualizing minors by arguing “we’re entitled to 10/10 giga-stacy [best described as “prime”] pussy bro”,

and one member discussing how "It's funny when you follow the foids at night and they get scared af and keep looking behind to see whether you're following them or not." This last example was followed up with the original poster saying he plans next to scream at lolis [minors] at night.

Finally, Incels exhibit a strong approval of self-violence. Statements about no hope existing for Incels and how the pain of Inceldom only ends at death are not only tolerated but seemingly encouraged. Their biological determinism - treated as all-encompassing and omnipotent - deems them to have already "lost" and been demoted to Inceldom. If you can't accept that this is how the world works, you seek out "copes" in order to survive, lest you "rope yourself" - i.e. complete suicide (Incel Wiki, n.d.). As one Incel put it:

"I hate the whole reality, I hate nature, I hate killing or being killed, I hate the law that prevails in the universe, the law of the strongest is a tragedy, death is my only consolation, knowing that one day I will die It's the only thing that motivates me to stay alive, one day with death everything will end."

This obsession with violence, both inwards and outwards, is an all-encompassing feature within Incel forums. With nearly 50 fatalities from

2014 to 2020 linked to Incels (Hoffman et al., 2020) - this fixation on violence is necessary to understand when trying to comprehend Incels. Thus, Incels show definite features of this cultic behavior.

15. Paranoia

Amount of fear concerning real or imagined enemies; exaggeration of perceived power of opponents; prevalence of conspiracy theories.

Examples of paranoia within the Proud Boys are as prevalent as their perceived enemies. Stated in their oath, "I'm a proud Western chauvinist, I refuse to apologize for creating the modern world", their defensive tone indicates a belief in "western civilization" being attacked, as well as their assumption of responsibility for it.

In response to a February 19th poll Tarrío posted on his Telegram, a user we'll call A. commented that "Biden so worried about the Ukrainian boarder he needs to worry about our southern boarders instead [sic]". To this, another user (B.) replied with "Biden is doing exactly what he wants with our southern border..... Let's not be naive boomers and pretend immigration is some oversize or policy failure ... It is the plan". Any indication of what "the plan" is, I do not know. However, I suspect this to be the case for them as well with "the plan" is just an apophenic perception of a grander, overarching narrative revolving around Russia's invasion of

Ukraine. Further indication of this perception of a global conspiracy comes when B. says to another user "Russia is like the only nationalist country left in eurasia besides Hungary and Poland..... It's very possible they will have some role in opposing new global order..... Also could be what this conflict is about" with verbal agreement from other users in the thread. Another user (C.) states "I honestly feel Russia is fighting the Globalists. What that means, not really sure, but enemy of my enemy is my freind[sic]...for that battle at least." As was admitted by B. & C., they presume that this is true in lieu of evidence ("...*could be* what this conflict is about" and "I honestly *feel*"), implying a conspiratorial intuition.

Further examples within the Proud Boy Telegrams is a comment claiming that those arrested within the Canadian Freedom Convoy protests "[are] so peaceful they probably have a dedicated 'clean-up crew' to make sure there's no trash left around anywhere"; Tarrío sharing a post from a user who claims that his mother lost her memory after a third dose of an undisclosed COVID vaccine and how the government "force[d] these experimental vaccinations upon the public"; beliefs that voting fraud was prevalent in the 2020 U.S. Presidential election; the left "push 'LGBT Acceptance' [sic] on children" for pedophilic purposes; that the city of Kyiv is a movie set with props "such as abandoned cars, blockades and checkpoints" placed "by the visual effects team for a fully immersive 4D experience"; and

the invasion of Ukraine being a “very well oiled psy-op/information war” that is “using the well established Western/globohomo media machine”.

Finally, they seem to believe that “nerds and journos” and federal agents are monitoring them. This is at least partially justified considering my own activity within their Telegram channels is proof. Regardless, inaccurate summations of enemies’ legions and power abound in their communications with the belief that they are being monitored being the only accurate prediction made. Thus, definite features of this cultic behavior exist within the Proud Boys.

Similarly with Incels, their conception of throngs of foes that conspire against them is hyper-inflated. Due to their Alt-Right membership, Jews are unsurprisingly often placed among their powerful-yet-inferior enemies. References to Jewish conspiracies are rampant with images comparing unflattering photos of famous Jewish people in history to anti-semitic propaganda from the 20th century. Though, this could be generously described as attempts at edgy humor. Peculiarly, self-identified Jewish Incels will even engage in this propaganda even when antithetical to their position, such as one user responding to a comment of “...thank god my great grandpa killed you [sic] race in ww2” with “you didn’t do shit the holocaust never happened and we know it, goy”. Naturally, the response to this was

that “Holohoax never happened” but some Jews were “vanished by my own heritage”. In the same vein, another argues that taking the blackpill

“helps you see how the world really works and who’s in charge pulling the strings. It’s not just that foids are whores for Chad and it all boils down to bone genetics – it’s also that the jews have rigged the system and have enslaved everyone using capitalism and politics. Foids are whores. The jews need to burn in ovens. These are unavoidable truths.”

Finally, evidence of an endorsement of anti-semitism is the proliferation of profile pictures of prominent Nazis amongst Incels with at least three moderators having profile pictures of Heydrich, Himmler, and Hitler.

As they believe women are to blame for all of their issues, they similarly proscribe a tremendous amount of power to an entire gender while hypocritically believing they have the upper hand with their analysis and true-sight through the red and blackpill. An almost eldritch, hive-minded consciousness, women are responsible for much of the world’s inequalities and are the source of all Inceldom’s woes, according to Incels. Their conception of the “pussy cartel” is indicative of this all-encompassing power

that women supposedly have. Believing that sex is necessary for men to thrive, it is believed that women artificially inflate the price of sex. Asexual and non-heterosexual men apparently do not exist in this rationale. As Incel Wiki puts it:

“Sex is worth maybe \$5 of women’s time and effort. But women know men will go insane without sex, so they collectively deny it to men. They force most men to invest hundreds if not thousands of hours into resource security, job security, free drinks, free transportation, free housing etc just for the *possibility* [original emphasis] that they will get sex” (Incels Wiki, n.d.).

How this supposed control manifests is such: I want to attract a girlfriend, so I am going to wealthmaxx and make money. I cannot make money because I am unable to focus my efforts while being sex deprived and thus can’t develop my own income. I can’t get a girlfriend because women artificially inflate the value of companionship and sex and thus limit oppressed groups such as me from producing enough wealth to pay for their established value. Further evidence of these beliefs are arguments that women are the most privileged in society. “We obviously don’t envy having half a brain, or not having hobbies, but we envy their privilege of being on

the throne of the social hierarchy.” The same user goes on to say that “[w]e’re rotting in complete social isolation” and that “it’s like a black person hating whites in the 1800’s, or the poor farmers hating the rich, it’s only natural to dislike them.”

Similarly, as mentioned prior, there is paranoia towards mental health practitioners which actively reinforces Incels’ resolve in their beliefs. Actively perceiving therapy as a form of brainwashing (accurate enough if one conceives it like cleaning a wound) or indoctrination, it is believed that therapists will undermine your belief and install mere coping mechanisms but never solve the key issue in your life - your inability to have sex. So it’s just a way of leeching money off of Incels and further “cucking” them by deriving them of resources. It’s unfortunate as these are people who desperately need mental health treatment. With constant suicidal ideation, allusions to suicide, and declarations of despair, Incels’ deeply unhealthy behavioral patterns will continue to ravage their community and spill into modern society.

Finally, like Proud Boys, Incels seem to think that federal law enforcement is everywhere. Again, this is largely justified as their forums are completely open to anyone who isn’t a member, there have been several high-profile bursts of violence from the Incel community, and there is a history of being monitored by r/IncelTear to the point that people who

screenshot and share their content are called ITcucks (Moonshot, 2020). It's rather common within the Incels to reference r/IncelTear when speaking into the proverbial abyss of the internet because they know that their more extreme statements will be screenshotted and shared outside of their forum. Still, justified or not, their overarching beliefs in a multitude of powerful enemies and their attribution of all of life's agony to them exhibits definite features of this cultic behavior.

16. Grimness

Amount of disapproval concerning jokes about the group, its doctrines or its leader(s).

For Proud Boys, they do live up to the conception of a boys club in this aspect: ribbing abounds. Pranks, such as stealing another chapter's flag, and joking about a member's sexual proclivities are commonplace. It is practically a requirement to be able to laugh at yourself. As a man who grew up as a rural conservative, this is all reminiscent of the culture of masculinity I was raised into and even invoked treasured memories (and some not so treasured) of my adolescence. Without the misogyny, racism, transphobia, general bigotry, and fascism of it, I can see the appeal to men who were raised like me.

This ribbing is exclusive to group members or - occasionally - fellow-travelers in the far-right. When being mocked or teased by non-members,

insults replace jokes. Fellow members will pile onto the interloper and engage in spirited, if tangential, arguments and insulting matches with them. Still, I suspect this isn't so much cultic behavior, but rather more a feature of American masculinity and/or internet culture. Either way, it is something to consider.

Consistent with the near-requirement of teasing humor, edgy, transgressive humor is not dissuaded in their channels as evidenced by a female follower (A.) of Tarrío arguing with another member (B.). A. accused this other member of being "so edgy online" after B. had told her to get back in the kitchen. In response to this, Tarrío confirmed his edgy behavior by stating "Lol he's edgy in person too. I can attest to this." B. proceeds to say a profound number of misogynistic statements, typically about how women should submit to men. He even states that infertile women should be killed as women are meant to be mothers and run homes, accompanied with a gif of a Nazi character flicking a cigarette. This is worrisome behavior even if you generously describe it as a joke. But, Tarrío's inaction when B. riled up several other women in the comments with his inaction implies an acceptance of transgressive humor being used against out-groups. Still, Bonewits perceives this in regards to jokes about in-group members, doctrine, and leaders. With everything witnessed, there are few features of grimness in this cultic behavior and thus negligible.

Incels, in contrast, do not have anything like this. This was one of the most taxing issues with sifting through their posts as there is very little expression of care or cherishment towards one another. They don't so much make jokes about one another but rather tear each other down. There's no ribbing, and there's no fondness to be found in their dynamic. All that exists is a spiteful loathing that uses wounding language to lacerate the soul. Their group interactions further implies that they barely even rise above loathing one another.

When they joke, they can barely be called jokes but rather are just allusions to beliefs about the inferiority of an out-group. In modern society, a joke might be a pun, a clearly nonsensical statement or action, be sarcastic/ironic, or cleverness, but a typical Incel "joke" is devoid of any clever wordplay. It's just "women have small brains unlike us" or "if I was God I would extinguish all life on Earth" along with laughing Pepe emojis. Without these laughing Pepe emojis, there would be no way to determine whether attempts at comedy were made or not. There's no punchline to any of their jokes; there is only the punch.

Still, they save the worst of these "jokes" for when others criticize their beliefs. As mentioned, r/IncelTear is a constant focus of ire for them. Simultaneously saying they care little about r/IncelTear, they express beliefs in how sociopathic 'IT cucks' are for mocking or being shocked by their

warped, bigoted beliefs. Occasions where Incels are criticized is perhaps one of the rare times where they don't attempt to tear each other down as they have a target that isn't a strawman to direct their ire at. Thus, while I would argue that grimness includes this inherent lack of tenderness within the group, this fomentation of hate towards those who criticize or even joke about Incels is enough to declare this as a definitive feature.

17. Surrender of Will

Amount of emphasis on members not having to be responsible for personal decisions; degree of individual disempowerment created by the group, its doctrines or its leader(s).

Proud Boys don't exhibit much in terms of surrender of will. This is unsurprising if you consider the libertarian inclination amongst their members. They may hold fascistic views such as Others being responsible for an inability to thrive, but this is off-set by beliefs of self-control and their own perceived responsibility in reverting degeneracy and returning Western civilization to a mythologized past. Beliefs in sexual self-control, such as #NoWanks, ties in further with this belief of responsibility and self-determinism. To repeat Zoe Chace's summarization, "Gavin wanted the guys to stop masturbating, go out, talk to women, and then marry them, procreate, be strong American family men, help restore the natural order of things that had been knocked out of whack by feminism" (This American

Life, 2017). Despite believing in white people and culture's superiority, the responsibility of maintaining this supposed superiority is placed on the members.

What we do see in terms of denying responsibility lies in leadership's rejecting accusations of causing violence. Despite saying "Violence doesn't feel good, justified violence feels great, and fighting solves everything" and using militant language to create the case that Western civilization is under attack, Gavin McInnes denies responsibility for inciting violence among the Proud Boys (ABC News, 2018). However, he further added in this interview with ABC that "I'm not guilt-free in this. There's culpability there. I shouldn't have said 'violence solves everything' or something like that without making the context clear and I regret saying things like that." Thus, due to the responsibility of members to maintain their bodies and Western civilization and the minor dodging of responsibility by leadership, there are little to no features of this cultic behavior.

Within Incels, surrender of will is one of the defining features of their ideology. If everything is biologically determined - with women damming the proverbial river of men to only allow a trickle of it to progress to the land of happiness and success - they don't have to believe that they are the reason they are stagnating. They don't have to believe that their actions and beliefs

are unjustified. Instead, this determinism justifies Incels to believe as Elliot Rodger did prior to his mass killing.

“All while I was suffering this lonely existence, other boys my age lived their happy lives of pleasure and sex. I can never forgive such an injustice, and it was my bid to overcompensate for it in the future. I had to make up for all the years I lost in loneliness and isolation, through no fault of my own! It was society’s fault for rejecting me. It was women’s fault for refusing to have sex with me.”
(Rodger, 2014)

As I’ve mentioned prior, almost *ad-nauseum*, this self-defeating behavior is enforced by their own community. In exhibiting a crab-bucket mentality, any attempt to “ascend” out of this pit of despair is met by other Incels dragging them back in. Even if “ascension” is achieved, they will attempt to drag them back into the self-fulfilling crab bucket they call a community. For if the Blackpill is incorrect - if not everything is biologically determined and women aren’t to blame for every injustice - all there is left to understand is their own shirkment of self-work that can bring them happiness. Sure, some have faced trauma, bullying, and ridicule that implanted the seed of misogyny. But, their absolutist language and

philosophy serves as an absolution of responsibility for their own guilt. Thus, there are definite features of this cultic behavior within the Incels.

18. Hypocrisy

amount of approval for actions which the group officially considers immoral or unethical, when done by or for the group, its doctrines or leader(s); willingness to violate the group's declared principles for political, psychological, social, economic, military, or other gain.

Despite McInnes' view that "Russia sucks, China sucks, the Middle East is not my cup of tea" (ABC News, 2018), their Telegram channels show a remarkable amount of admiration for Russia ever since their invasion of Ukraine. After all, this admiration was enough to pretend they were supporting Russia militarily. This doesn't necessarily mean that they are exhibiting hypocrisy as McInnes quit in November 2018 with these comments occurring in March 2022. Still, this admiration is tempered by disagreement between Proud Boys. In a response to a user expressing enthusiasm for potentially witnessing Russian tanks "vaporized", one user said "Russia is like the only nationalist country left in eurasia besides Hungary and Poland..... It's very possible they will have some role in opposing new global order..... Also could be what this conflict is about." Adding to this, someone else added "Russia not fren [an Alt-Right dog whistle (Know Your Meme, 2018)], but enemy of my enemy is temporarily

useful". Finally, as mentioned prior, another assents by similarly stating "enemy of my enemy is my freind [sic]...for that battle at least."

What comments like these suggest is a willingness to work with useful Others, but it's still not clear whether they actually consider Russia an Other. This conflicting opinion on Russia is evidenced further by a video posted in a Proud Boy channel where a poorly deep-faked Putin starts dancing once the question "How can you support Putin?" appears on-screen. As this deep-faked Putin dances, screenshots of news articles of Putin saying that Bill and Hillary Clinton are "the same Satan", the New World Order worships Satan, the West is controlled by Satanic pedophiles, America is godless and has turned away from Christian values, and "I'm going to defeat the Illuminati with my bare hands". These views are commonplace within the circles I monitored as references to child grooming through LGBT+ education are present in both Incel and Proud Boy communique as well as references to the West turning away from obscure, unnamed Christian values. Adding to this, a user - who stated in a different conversation that "Putin is my President . Fuck Joe Biden!" - spoke with a remarkable lack of self-awareness. This user stated that "[Putin] may poison some political enemy's [sic] but I don't see Putin running over hard working peaceful patriots with horses", which is a reference to incorrect information shared by Fox News correspondent Sara A. Carter and Sen. Ted Cruz, about a woman being

trampled to death in Ottawa during Freedom Convoy's protest (Cercone, 2022).

Further examples of hypocrisy lie in their own criticism of corporate embracement of the LGBT+ community after same-sex marriage was legalized. In one meme, it ends with "Why did we have to wait until gay marriage was legalized to support you? No more questions homosexual, just buy the products." Of course, there is valid criticism there, but this is off-set by the inundation of homophobic and transphobic behavior within their channels. Examples of further bigoted behavior lies in a screenshot of a text saying "I don't know who brought you in to this fraternity, but his judgement and sexuality is as questionable as your own."; unexplained arguments that Kellogg's "GLAAD Together With Pride Breakfast Cereal" is "grooming your kids"; a comment regarding a screenshot of a trans-woman being insulted that shows a hanging corpse with a transparent trans flag over the image and "was/were" at the bottom; and even video of a man urinating on a Pride Flag. Despite stating that gay men are allowed, they show a penchant for dehumanizing slurs in everyday conversation as well as their insults.

However, the problem with citing this as hypocrisy is that this isn't necessarily hypocritical to them. Through a utilization of doublethink, they conceive their actions as "triggering the Left" rather than bigotry. It is still bigotry, of course, but they view it as a way of making progressives,

socialists, or any other 'Leftist' upset. Utilizing the slur "fag" is commonplace in far-right circles to the point it is barely considered a slur to them.

Examples seen in my research are of Tarrio's helmet bearing the slur, Incel terms of "tallfag" or "normalfag", and countless other uses of it to the point it almost becomes background noise. So, while it may appear that they vilify the LGBT+ community while saying that gay men are allowed, they are mentally diverging certain gay men from what they deem the Left. As I said, their white supremacy isn't about being white; it's about acting and defending white behavior. When a gay man joins their group and behaves according to the Proud Boys' standards, he becomes "one of the good ones". He's not perfect, but he is acceptable.

An almost humorous example of hypocrisy lies in one post, however. Sharing a screenshot of a tweet by comedian Dave Smith, "Imagine holding the same exact views as your teachers, all of your friends, every politician, everyone in Hollywood, the entire media class, every major corporation and still honestly believing that you are opposing 'the system'", they imply that they are one of the few free-thinking groups out there despite surrounding themselves amongst like-minded individuals and declaring recent shootings, invasions, or tragedies as "psyops" by the "globohomo media".

In the end, their behavior shows examples of hypocrisy but also allows explanations outside of most of it. Their willingness to mock corporations for

supporting LGBT+ groups is hypocritical as they themselves are inimical to the LGBT+ community, but they rationalize this through an underlying distinction between the two groups as those who are acceptably gay and those who are not. Their mixed support of Russia can also be hypocritical to their beliefs, but organizations' core beliefs can change and this may be an example of begrudging support instead. Thus, I would say that they show moderate features of this cultic behavior.

With Incels, hypocrisy is similarly complicated. The most obvious conception of this complicated hypocrisy is their disapproval or attempts at proving an Incel's ascension was actually meaningless. As discussed regarding how Incels tear each other down and denigrate achievements, if an Incel claims to have ascended or made a step towards ascension, this inspires other Incels to clamp down that belief, belittle its merit, and/or argue that it's not a 'true ascension'. This may seem hypocritical, for they are obsessed with their sex-less status to the point that any form of unpurchased, heterosexual sex should be seen as an improvement. But, this defensive anger towards those who ascend by determining the act as meaningless is par for the course in their belief. An Incel ascending violates one of the core tenets of the blackpill: sex is biologically determined. To ascend - something Incels determine to be impossible or near-impossible - is

to disprove this notion of determinacy. If you ascend, your success implies they could succeed as well, which could shatter their whole belief in the blackpill. So, while one might expect joy and aplomb in a group dedicated to men who feel cut-off from sex, their angry response is not hypocritical as this is a core belief that is then threatened.

But this is not to say that hypocrisy doesn't exist within Incels. Aforementioned within sexual manipulation, attraction to minors is a place where hypocrisy lies. As a part of the far-right, discussions of how far-left/leftists/"liberals" are the real pedophiles occurs in their posts. Despite being surrounded by other users' comments asking about whether they'd be banned or punished for being attracted to girls going through puberty because "Some foids go through puberty at 9", one moderator argues "In fact it's the woke tards that are gradually now pushing for the normalization of pedophilia" while a regular member states "Woketards tend to be MAP's [minor-attracted persons] though, I don't see MAP's coming out of any other political camp." To argue that it's not your group while other Incels are normalizing pedophilia in the same thread displays a remarkable lack of self-awareness and hypocrisy.

Finally, we get to pseudoscience within Incels. As mentioned before, Incels attempt to justify everything scientifically. They will cite scientific studies to prove blackpill philosophy, such as "Beauty is objective and

measurable in the brain”, “High fWHR [facial width-to-height ratio] men express greater psychopathy, aggression, cheating, and exploitative behavior”, “62% of women have fantasies about rape and other forced sex acts”, and so on and so forth (Incel Wiki, n.d.). They cite studies on these, as shown in the Incel Wiki “Scientific Blackpill” article, but these merely provide a veneer of legitimacy. Lee Williams put it best in their dissertation.

“Within Incel discourse, there is a determination to prove that the theories and worldviews found in the Incelosphere, such as their views on women, race and biases against men, are true and based on facts and science. To accomplish this, there is a strong emphasis on genetics and biology as a means to understand and validate Incel worldviews. However, rather than engaging in a scientific approach, which strives to prove a claim by seeking evidence which may prove said claim false, a pseudoscientific approach, seeking out evidence to support a specific claim, is used. This pseudoscientific approach is evident in the discourse of Incels.Co, as any reports, studies or data that go against their worldviews are disregarded, labelled feminist propaganda or as somehow being influenced by women or others they consider to be their ‘enemies’. Data that aligns with Incel worldviews can be taken out of context” (Williams, 2020).

If Incel beliefs were justifiable, they would have scientifically proven it by now, as evidenced by their unhealthy hyperfixation with its factuality. But, they can only prove the blackpill to be true if they - consciously or unconsciously - ignore the evidence that proves it isn't. Suffice to say, this is hypocritical behavior on Incels' part as they place emphasis on being coldly logical, unlike "foids" and "normies". For, this isn't being coldly logical; this is cosplaying as a scientist.

Since scientifically proving biological determinism contributes deeply to their sense of identity, this hypocritical contradiction is an important element in determining their level of hypocrisy. Thus, with this and their hypocrisy around pedophilia, this suggests there are definite features of the cultic behavior of hypocrisy.

Conclusion

	Proud Boys	Incels
Internal Control	0	2
External Control	2	1
Wisdom/Knowledge Claimed by leader(s)	2	2
Wisdom/Knowledge Credited to leader(s) by members	2	2
Dogma	2	2
Recruiting	0	0
Front Groups	0	0
Wealth	1	0
Sexual Manipulation of members by leader(s)	2	2
Sexual Favoritism	0	0
Censorship	0	2
Isolation	0	2
Dropout Control	0	0
Violence	2	2
Paranoia	2	2
Grimness	0	2
Surrender of Will	0	2
Hypocrisy	1	2
Total:	16/36	25/36
Average (rounded to the third notation):	0.889	1.389

As evidenced above, Incels show 25% (0.5 points) more cultic behavior than Proud Boys. Meanwhile, Proud Boys operate just below a moderate level of cultic behavior, with an average 0.889, suggesting that they are not a cult. Rather, despite exhibiting extremist behaviors that are

dangerous, their behavior lies below the threshold of a cult and its resulting pseudo-religious zeal. This isn't to suggest they are not dangerous, of course, but it does explain a bit why we haven't seen a Proud Boy mass-shooter - mostly just violence committed when the group decides.

Incels, on the other hand, are definitely a cult. At the risk of hyperbole, I argue that conceptualizing them as a death cult - due to this hyperfixation on death and the indignant nihilism that fuels their rage - is necessary to understand their violence. They don't have the political power to change the world to cater to them. All they have is violence. Violence against themselves and violence against others, their ideology justifies both as it leaves no perceivable chance of meaningful change.

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