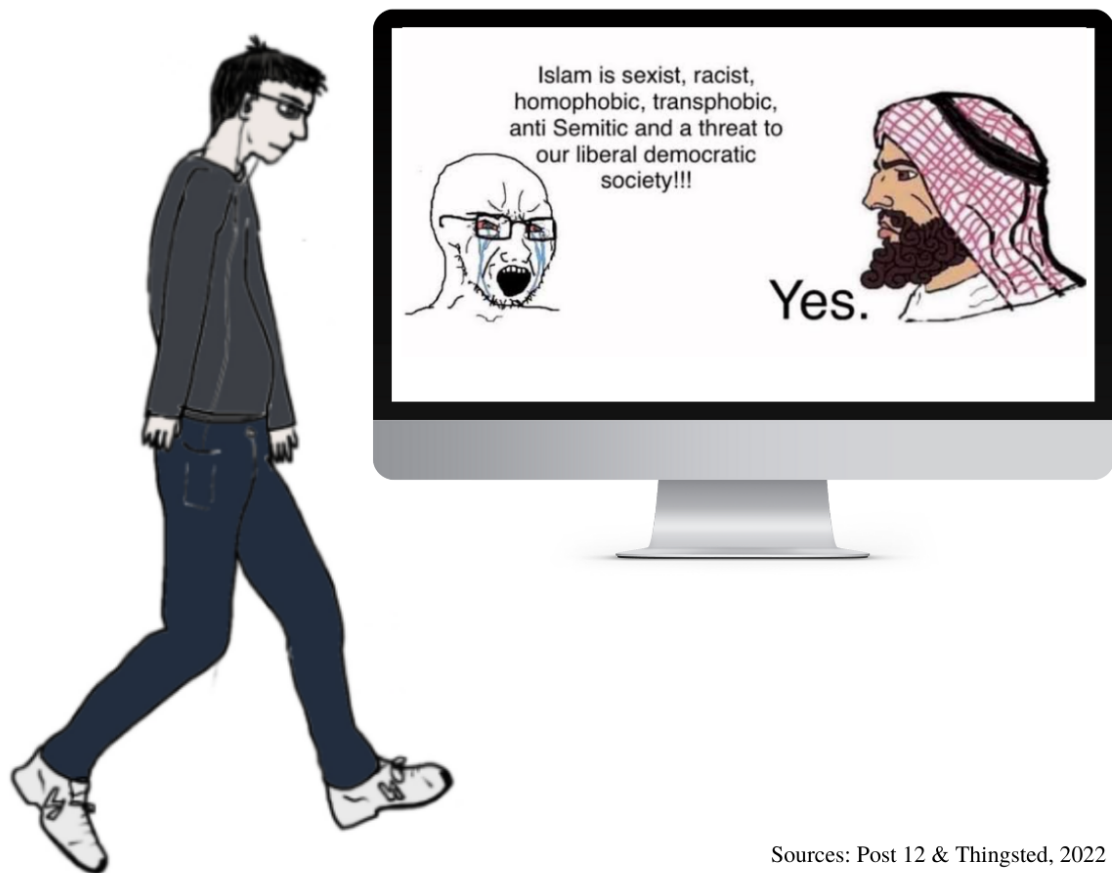


The Antifeminist Nexus between Incels and the Taliban

A netnographic study of how the Taliban appear within the community and collective identity of Incels



Sources: Post 12 & Thingsted, 2022

Thesis - Development and International Relations - Global Gender Studies
10th semester, Aalborg University

By Amalie Winther Andersen, 20201258

Supervision: Sif Lehman Jensen

Date: 31.05.2022

Characters: 127.587

Table of Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND RELEVANT INCEL TERMINOLOGY.....	2
ABSTRACT	3
1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1 PROBLEM FORMULATION AND OUTLINE OF PROBLEM FIELD	6
1.2 PROBLEM FIELD DELIMITATION	7
2. STATE OF ART.....	9
3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	11
3.1 COLLECTIVE IDENTITY	12
3.2 MASCULINITY.....	13
3.2.1 <i>Hegemonic Masculinity</i>	14
3.2.2 <i>Hyperconformity</i>	15
3.2.3 <i>Hybrid Masculinities</i>	16
3.3 DISENGAGEMENT.....	17
3.4 MY CONTRIBUTION.....	18
4. METHOD & METHODOLOGY.....	19
4.1 NETNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK ON INCELS.NET AND INCELS.ME	19
4.1.1 <i>Data Selection and Collection</i>	21
4.2 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGY AND PROCESSING OF THE POSTS	24
4.2.1 <i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i>	24
4.3 CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THEORY OF SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION.....	26
4.3.1 <i>The Approach of the Study</i>	26
4.3.2 <i>My Role as the Researcher</i>	28
4.3.3 <i>Ethical Considerations</i>	29
4.4 EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGICAL STEPS.....	30
5. ANALYSIS	31
5.1 THE GLOBOHOMO SYSTEM.....	32
5.1.1 <i>Western Women and Chads – The Enemies of Incels</i>	33
5.1.2 <i>Incels as Victims of the Globohomo System</i>	34
5.2 BASED TALICHADS – AMBIGUOUS MASCULINE MODELS OF TALIBAN	35
5.2.1 <i>The Ideal Hegemonic Masculine Model of Taliban</i>	36
5.2.2 <i>Hyperconforming to Taliban</i>	38
5.2.3 <i>The Hybrid Masculinity of Taliban and Chads</i>	40
5.3 A CUCKED TALIBAN	43
5.3.1 <i>Disengaging from a Religious Taliban</i>	43
5.3.2 <i>Feminized Taliban - Disengagement Due to Taliban's Lack of Violence</i>	44
5.4 POLYCENTRIC COLLECTIVE IDENTITY OF INCELS	46
6. DISCUSSION	48
7. CONCLUSION.....	51
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	54

List of Abbreviations and Relevant Incel Terminology

Alpha: “highest ranking (male)” (Sugiura, 2021: 20).

Based: as explained by a user: “Based is the ultimate representation of the redpill: Based: When someone is concerned with spreading the truth, unconcerned with any potential reaction.” (post 11).

Beta: “below alpha – lacking in social skills and attractiveness to be an alpha – some incels, who do not consider themselves to be that ugly/have some redeeming qualities such as money/good job, etc., refer to themselves as redeeming qualities such as money/good job, etc., refer to themselves as betas” (Sugiura, 2021: 20-21).

Chads: “the antithesis of incel, a man who is sexually successful with women. Incels have a complicated relationship with Chads; on the one hand, they despise them for being alpha and winning the ‘genetic lottery’, while on the other hand, they idolise them for their ability to access and use women” (Sugiura, 2021: 21-22).

Cuck: “a man whose wife/girlfriend is cheating on him with another man (usually a Chad). There are also racial connotations as the word is often used in relation to a white woman cheating with a black man” (Sugiura, 2021: 22).

Foid/femoid: Female humanoid, female android “...used to describe women, demonstrating they are subhuman, necessary of dehumanisation” (Sugiura, 2021: 23).

Incels: Involuntary Celibate

MGTOW: Men going their own way

MRAs: Men’s Rights Activists

PUs: Pick-up artists

SIMP: “Suckas Idolising Mediocre Pussy, guy overly desperate for women, puts women before men in order to obtain sex, does way too much for women who don’t deserve it” (Sugiura, 2021: 26).

Stacys/Stacies: “the most attractive of women, has sex with lots of men (usually Chads) on account of their looks, is stereotypically an unintelligent bimbo” (Sugiura, 2021: 26).

Truecel: “true incel, purity of the incel ideology – have never kissed/touched a woman and genuinely are unable to have sex despite having tried” (Sugiura, 2021: 26).

Abstract

Investigating the antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban as fostered in the Incel community, this study has set out to investigate how the Taliban appear within the Incel community and what that tells us about the Incel collective identity. Based on a netnographic approach, non-participatory observation was carried out on two Incel forums; incels.net and incels.is. 821 comments were manually collected and analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis. Based on the data analysis and a theoretical analysis exploring the hegemonic masculine ideal model of the Taliban, hyperconforming to the masculine traits of the Taliban, the contradictory contour of the hybrid masculinity of Talichads, and disengagement due to religious and extremist differences, the study has shown the polycentric characteristic of Incel collective identity. In connection with this, a discussion regarding Incel collective action in light of Incels Taliban aspiration further demonstrates the need for more research within this field

1. Introduction

The feminist project is under threat and it is cultivated in the online sphere (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018: 7). We live in a globalized world, with technological developments and the option to communicate across time and space which foster the emergence and mobilization of online communities to engage actively in the radical backlash against feminism (Ging, 2019: 644-645). The web has created the opportunity for antifeminist mobilization and for online communities to foster hatred towards women and condemn feminist progress in terms of moving towards equality and securing women's rights (Ging, 2019: 643). The rise of online spaces where men's rights are perpetrated has come to the light of day and is known as the manosphere (Sugiura, 2021: 32). The manosphere is a transnational movement that is comprised of different groups such as Incels, MGTOW, PUAs, and MRAs with antifeminist ideological similarities (Bates, 2020: 5; Sugiura, 2021: 33). The contemporary men's movements are seen as part of a gender-political conjecture made up of the institutionalization of feminism and the rhetoric of equality, which creates ground for this antifeminist movement (Ging, 2019: 639).

As the manosphere is mobilizing against gender ideology and women's rights it can be understood as a symptom of a bigger crisis of backlash against feminism that is reflected in the growing populism as "these mobilizations are rather the throes of a contest for redefining liberal democracy where 'gender ideology' embodies numerous deficits of the so-called progressive actors, and the adversaries of the concept react to these by re-politicizing certain issues in a polarized language" (Kováts, 2018: 535; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018: 7; Rothermel, 2020: 1375; Sugiura, 2021: 32). Especially focusing on the online antifeminism of Incels as a manifestation of misogyny that is interwoven within this wider socio-political climate which fosters extreme behavior of Incels, cannot be dismissed (Sugiura, 2021: 30, 36, 40, 41).

The Incel community started as a project known as "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project" which aimed at offering the opportunity for individuals to come together to express and share their frustration about dating, relationships, and sexuality (Hoffman et al., 2020: 566). However, Incel has been appropriated into a diverse online community of primary men that is solidified in hatred towards women (Hoffman et al., 2020: 566; Sugiura, 2021: 38-40). Grounded in male supremacy and white supremacy, the corrosive political ideology of Incels relies on "...misogynistic notions of traditional gender roles" (Zimmerman et al., 2018: 1, 2), which are (re)produced in metaphors of the red pill and black pill. Taking the red pill is understood as waking up from "feminisms gynocentric and misandrist

regime” (Ging, 2019(b): 47) and argues that women are unfairly advantaged (Sugiura, 2021: 130; Zimmerman et al., 2018: 1, 2). Whereas the black pill is a perception confined to "Despite holding a degree of privilege within society as (typically white) males, incels perceive themselves as an oppressed and marginalised minority in comparison to the mainstream” (Lindsay, 2022: 213). Rooted in polarized narratives about sexual rejection and self-positioning as victims Incels then create an ideological foundation that calls for a virtual war that has harmful offline consequences (Ging, 2019(b): 64; Ging, 2019: 651; Sugiura, 2021: 37).

Incels are not an unproblematic and isolated community in the online space. Rather, the boundaries and division between the online and the offline have become blurred and worrying (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019: 22). It has not been without consequences that these online groups have the platform to cultivate hate and antifeminism, as violence and murder has happened in the name of being an Incel (Baele et al., 2021: 1667; Harmer & Lumsden, 2019: 22). The troubling aspect of the Incel community’s promotion and perpetuation of violence is further underlined as they share resentment against the idea of gender equity with the Islamic fundamentalist political group Taliban (Moghissi, 2018: 87; Wheeler & Nooristani, 2018: 1009).

The suppression of women's rights in Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover in 2021 has been seen as a cause for celebration within the Incel community, showing support for the militant Islamist group (Norris, 2021). With the Taliban's complex polycentric organizational apparatus, the Taliban impose sharia law and “...rejected the idea of centralisation of power and authority as an evil import from the West...” (Giustozzi, 2019: 3-5; Wheeler & Nooristani, 2018: 1009). The multiplicity of the authoritative regime of the Taliban goes beyond politics regarding women, but Incels' support for the Taliban's war against modern, liberal and democratic values lies within the war against feminism and has constructed the antifeminist nexus between Incels and the Taliban (Wheeler & Nooristani, 2018: 1010).

Taliban’s misogynist political acts of repression of women and violation of rights “...are not merely part of their repertoire of violence or accessories to their political project, but rather central to it, and that control over women’s bodies is just as important to these groups as controlling territory or defeating their enemies.” (Díaz & Valji: 2019: 46-47). Recently making face-covering mandatory, coercing women to wear hijab, and banning girls and women from schools the Taliban holds an authoritarian rule over women that serve as a source of aspiration among Incels (Hadid, 2022; Kumar & Noori, 2022; Moghissi, 2018: 78; Norris, 2021). Thus, it is here argued for the need

to investigate this antifeminist nexus of Incels and the Taliban that Incels foster in their online community in the interest of public safety (Witt, 2020: 687).

1.1 Problem Formulation and Outline of Problem Field

This thesis aims at examining and understanding how Incels relate to the Taliban. It presents itself as a puzzle to me that part of the Incel community relates to and honors the Taliban, especially as this is not an aspect that has been explored previously in studies concerning Incels. Thus, I am interested in exploring aspects surrounding this, specifically in terms of how this reflects Incel's collective identity and ideological standpoints, which adds to a more nuanced understanding of the Incel community. Therefore, I am interested in answering the following problem formulation:

How does the Taliban appear within the community and collective identity of Incels?

To answer the problem formulation, the following research questions are presented to structure focus. However, as the thesis primarily adopts an inductive and data-driven approach to the field of study, the questions remain somewhat open to being guided by the data rather than theory. Thus, to create a framework for the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

Research questions:

1. How does Incels relate to the Taliban?
 - a. What does that tell us about Incels' collective identity?
2. Does the antifeminist nexus intensify the threat of Incels?

The thesis will tackle the field of study by carrying out a netnographic study by doing non-participant observations (Bernard, 2011: 306; Kozinets, 2015: 98). It will analyze the data consisting of 37 posts and related comments collected from two Incel forums, namely incels.is and incels.net via a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Specifically, the first research question will be answered by focusing on discourses surrounding the Taliban in collaboration with theoretical aspects of collective identity, masculinity, and disengagement. The second question will be discussed based on the answers to question one in collaboration with research presented in the state of art.

The thesis will not dive into the Taliban's organization and overall political action, but rather explore the Incel community's understanding of the Taliban and their interpretation of the Taliban's view on and political actions towards women. I recognize that the political identity of Incels and the Taliban have distinct basis with different objectives and are located geographically differently (Wheeler & Nooristani, 2018: 1009). However, the focus will rather be on the ideological similarities and differences between the two as perceived by Incels. Thus, when referencing to Taliban and how the Taliban appear within the Incel community, it is based on the Taliban as a representation created discursively by Incels (Fairclough et al., 2011: 370).

I wish to add a disclaimer to some of the content and data that will be shared in this thesis. Some of it can be unpleasant, create discomfort and be hard to read, as it is opinions that oppose the very existents of women and dehumanizes women. However, I argue that even though it is an uncomfortable reality to engage with, it is a reality that is highly relevant and needs to be explored further (Bates, 2020: 8-9). Following Laura Bates's argument for avoiding censorship and advocating for looking the problem directly in the eyes as "this is the world we live in" (Bates, 2020: 9), this thesis emphasizes the need to confront this aspect of reality to dismantle and tackle the related problems.

This thesis will try to adopt a gender-neutral language and thus make use of they/them pronoun when referring to authors and other actors where the pronouns and/or gender identity is not known to be more inclusive in the use of language and avoid (re)producing gender discrimination and biases (Akingbade et al, 2022: 130). This is not to assume gender neutrality like traditional IR and the thesis will therefore still “make gender (the socially constructed femininity/masculinity distinction) a central category of analysis” (Wibben, 2016: 86) in regards to Incels.

1.2 Problem Field Delimitation

I set out to explore the nexus between Incels and the Taliban that are (re)produced in the Incel community. To investigate this nexus, the field of research has been delimited to create a research framework and key concepts have been defined, which will be presented here.

To understand how Incels in the chosen forums discursively frames a model of the Taliban and how this lets us explore the collective identity of the community, Incels will be the center of the study.

This entails that the nexus will be explored one-sided and be based on how Incels relate, interpret and connect with the Taliban as well as their ideological and political standpoint. Understanding ideology

“...or a group’s “beliefs, values, principles, and objectives,” are the means “by which a group defines its distinctive political identity and aims.” Importantly, a group’s “political concerns do provide a rationale for their actions” and “a group’s ideology is extremely important in determining target selection because it defines how the group’s members see the world around them. The ideology of a terrorist group identifies the ‘enemies’ of the group”” (quoting Drake (1998) Gentry, 2022: 214).

The focus will therefrom be on how the Incel community's discursive engagement with the Taliban to help comprehend the Incel community “... as a discursive system or network of systems and in seeking to determine the extent of the ideological, psychological, and material power it exerts” (Ging, 2019: 653). The focus will therefore be on Incels' language and how they rhetorically position themselves and/or relate to the Taliban. The thesis does not aim to compare or evaluate Incels' interpretation of the Taliban against how the Taliban operates and/or positions themselves. But rather focus on the Incel community construction of the Taliban and what that let us know about the Incels' antifeminist identity. Refereeing to antifeminism “...as a position that is explicitly against gender equality.” (Siapera, 2019: 21), which is understood to be fostered within a patriarchal ideological foundation of Incels, understanding that “... a patriarchal system is a sociopolitical order that places men in a superior position to women...” (Gentry, 2022: 214) in which misogyny is “...the policing force that upholds patriarchy, ensuring that (particular) women and girls conform to the normative order.” (Gentry, 2022: 209).

Those who are considered to be Incels and a part of the Incel community are individuals who gather in online Incel forums to share Incel ideas, engage in written interaction via posts and comments, and/or identify as an Incel. There are different views on whether the online gathering of Incels is a community, movement, or cult (Sugiura, 2021: 38-39). This thesis will use community as the primary way of interpreting and understanding the foundation and frame of Incels as “incels are a form of social aggregation that has emerged online from sufficient amounts of people interacting and conducting public discussions, sharing alliances and forming bonds, which are also grounded in their everyday physical worlds.” (Sugiura, 2021: 39-40). I acknowledge that this community is highly diverse and thus is not understood as one coherent and homogenous entity, but rather a complex network of many different people (Sugiura, 2021: 38-40). Furthermore, the Incel community operates on but not limited to the online sphere which is situated in a larger context and the individual user of

the community is situated in a specific socio-political location which impacts the foundation and (re)production of ideas (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019: 22; Rothermel, 2020: 1367; Sugiura, 2021: 41). This is a highly complex field to navigate within and contemplate due to political, social, power, and cultural aspects that influence this community and their viewpoints being (re)produced and conformed to. However, I will zoom in on the online context of the social world of Incels and the online social reality of the antifeminist identity they discursively construct online while engaging with the Taliban (Rothermel, 2020: 1367).

2. State of Art

This section reviews the existing research and literature, in which this study is situated. Based on a research strategy to review existing research using primary search words of Incels, Taliban, Women, Women's rights, Manosphere, Gender, online far-right, far-right groups, the manosphere, Incels have been explored previously within different fields of study (Jørgensen & Rienecker, 2016: 209; Rienecker & Jørgensen, 2014: 150). However, as this is a newer phenomenon "... literature and scholarly research about incels and the threat that the community might pose is scarce" (Hoffman et al., 2020: 565). Thus, a need to further explore this community presents itself to be desirable to contribute to the existing body of literature. How this thesis positions itself to this existing research and its specific contribution will be elaborated on after the presentation of the conceptual framework.

Several authors have researched the subculture and universe of the Incel community. Bates (2020) offers elaborate insight into the dynamics of the online social reality of the manosphere, specifically PUAs, Incels, MGTOW, and MRAs. Based on a year of online participant observations within the different groups, Bates uncovers ideological and rhetorical similarities as well as how they differentiate (Bates, 2020: 5, 13).

Lisa Sugiura (2021) highlights the complexity of the countercultural Incel community as a diverse ecosystem (Sugiura, 2021: 37, 39, 40). Based on netnographic approach and interviews Sugiura points to the toxic technoculture of Incels and introduces us to the nihilistic ideology and overarching philosophy of Incels called the black pill (Sugiura, 2021: 39, 46). In line with this Angus Lindsay (2022) has explored the black pill discourse in-depth. Drawing on counter-public theory, Lindsay points to the essentiality of common social identity for Incel to mobilize and effect counterdiscourses to represent the militant misogyny of Incels (Lindsay, 2022: 211, 214, 222).

Focus on identity among online communities, has been explored by Ann-Kathrin Rothermel (2020) who contributes to the existing literature on antifeminist collective identity and mobilization in online communities by exploring the local-global dynamics of the manosphere. Specifically, focusing on Russia, India, and the United States, they explore nation-state boundaries in online forums of antifeminism to understand the interplay of global-local in antifeminist identities and identity construction (Rothermel, 2020: 1375-1377).

Following a focus on discourse Shannon Zimmerman, Luisa Ryan, and David Duriesmith (2018) based on the red pill metaphor highlight how the overall Incel political ideology is grounded in male supremacy as well as white supremacy. This corrosive political ideology, as Zimmerman et al. define it, relies on "...misogynistic notions of traditional gender roles" (Zimmerman et al., 2018: 1, 2) and is determined as an extreme form of violent ideological masculinity.

Masculinity among Incels has been explored by several authors. Taisto Witt (2020) focuses on hegemonic masculinity in terms of sexuality and violence (Witt, 2020: 678). They scrutinize the role of Elliott Rodger and what his violent "legacy" hold in terms of reclaiming masculinity focusing on hegemonic masculinity explored in terms of sexuality and violence (Witt, 2020: 678, 685).

Debbie Ging (2019(a)) dives into the general discursive practice of the Manosphere and masculinity, exploring the conundrum of alpha and beta masculinities that exists within the red pill-blue pill metaphor (Ging, 2019(a): 640, 643-644). Categorizing Incels as hybrid masculinities, in line with the black pill understanding (Sugiura, 2021; Lindsay, 2022), Ging uncovers the positioning of Incels as marginalized victims of feminism while compounding hierarchies of power in terms of existing hegemonic masculinity (Ging, 2019(a): 651).

Maria N. Scaptura and Kaitlin M. Boyle (2020) uncover predispositions for men to enact mass violence based on threats to group membership (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 282). Unfolding the process of responding to a threat, they focus on hyperconformity to masculine traits as a reaction that is seen among Incels, and find "...that men with greater gender role stress, more hostile attitudes toward women, and "incel" traits report more frequent fantasies about mass murder and rape." (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 281, 293).

The threat of Incels has been studied especially in light of terror. Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware & Ezra Shapiro (2020) analyze the rise of Incel violence and the tactics used, by classifying the violence into

four different categories (Hoffman et al., 2020: 565). By arguing Incels as a loosely organized virtual community that is not “obviously political” the authors note that the Incel movement is determined as a new kind of danger that should nonetheless be dismissed, however, they highlight that it is not on the level of ISIS (Hoffman et al., 2020: 568, 581). Criticized by Caron E. Gentry for minimizing the misogyny of Incels and downplaying the political agenda of the community, Gentry (2022) aligns misogyny and terror studies to understand Incel violence as political by recognizing their political agenda to uphold the patriarchy (Gentry, 2022: 212, 213, 214). While criticizing a gendered IR, Gentry uncovers misogynistic violence, categorizing violence by Incels as a form of misogynistic terrorism that is politically and ideologically driven violence (Gentry, 2022: 212).

Stephane J. Baele, Lewys Brace & Travis G. Coan (2021) explore the advocacy of violence in the echo chamber of Incels and the effect of offline cases of physical violence (Baele et al., 2021: 1667). Focusing on cognitive-linguistic mechanisms their research shows how a one-sided worldview is produced, as evident through the simple and narrow language of the community, which narrow the way Incels understands the social reality and world that we live in which is make it conducive to political violence and is an evident structure in extremist groups and terrorist-based groups (Baele et al., 2021: 1668, 1686).

Overall, the Incel community has been scrutinized by various scholars. However, it is clear among the researcher that there still is a need to explore this online community further (Baele et al., 2021: 1686; Ging, 2019(a): 253; Lindsay, 2022: 222; Witt, 2020: 687). Thus, this thesis, therefore, wishes to contribute to and expand on the existing body of research within this field theoretically, specifically expanding on aspects of collective identity and masculinity while adding a theoretical aspect of disengagement.

3. Conceptual Framework

Taking partly inspiration from previous research theoretical point of departure, here the tools for the theoretical interpretation of the data will primarily be based on concepts of collective identity, masculinity, and disengagement. The relevant aspects of the frameworks will briefly be summarized and operationalized in this section.

3.1 Collective Identity

An overall and general theoretical focus of this study is collective identity. Focusing on the collective identity of Incels in light of the representation and positioning of Taliban in the online space allows for a further and more in-depth understanding of the antifeminist mobilization of Incels. In the online Incel forums, Incels discuss ideas, thoughts, and opinions regarding the Taliban, and thus, “These spaces therefore offer a rare glimpse into the process of collective identity formation and presentation among the in-group.” (Rothermel, 2020: 1376) of Incels.

Collective identity is fluid, dynamic, and relational and is associated with recognition and connectedness (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Polletta & Jasper, 2001: 298). Collective identity is essential in social movements as "It brings with it a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause, which enables single activist and/or organizations to regard themselves as inextricably linked to other actors, nor necessarily identical but surely compatible, in a broader collective mobilization." (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21). Looking into how Incels internally are linked as well as how Incels regards itself as linked to the Taliban, provides an understanding of the collective identity of Incels. Drawing on Rothermel's relational discursive perspective on collective identity allows the analysis to move beyond "real life" locations to read interpretations of antifeminism online and investigate the positioning of the "self" and the "other" (Rothermel, 2020: 1373). Thus, operating in the online sphere on writing-based forums collective identities are framed as

“...being forged by the drawing of discursive and emotional boundary that distinguishes between member of a collective (self) and outsiders (others). The social process of developing an identity by articulating such boundary is considered essential to connect diverse beliefs into a coherent agenda and thereby fulfil the precondition for mobilization in collective action” (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371).

Initially, the mobilization of Incels in relation to the Taliban was deemed (and still is) a noteworthy and relevant aspect to analyze. However, as Rothermel highlights, collective identity is a precondition for mobilization, thus this theoretical frame will focus on uncovering Incels' identity discursive construction through Taliban references on the online forums (Rothermel, 2020: 1368). It is specifically the boundaries between the Incel “self” and “others” in the online context of discussing Taliban that will be explored to provide insight into the agenda and beliefs of Incels. I thus seek to explore the Incel “self” in relation to how the Taliban are discursively located in the online context of a dichotomy between an Incel “self” and a feminist “other”.

Focusing on Incel's distinction of self and others and how the Taliban enter into this, I acknowledge that the self-positioning of Incels to Taliban is not necessarily intentional. However, I still see it as part of an ongoing, contradictory process of continuous negotiation and forging of identity (Rothermel, 2020: 1375). So, this theoretical focus allows us to uncover aspects of how Incel identity is actively negotiated and presented through references and discursive representations of the Taliban (Rothermel, 2020: 1368). Aiming to understand the interpretation of antifeminism in the nexus Incels holds of Taliban to understand dynamics of collective identity I will draw from theoretical aspects of masculinity and disengagement to explore the masculine identity of Taliban some Incels relate to and unravel factors that other Incels distance from.

3.2 Masculinity

Masculinity is a much-debated concept that has multiple meanings and theorizing it within the Incel community in relation to the Taliban is "... complicated by the transnational nature of this space and its attendant overlaps between local, regional, and global configurations of practice" (Ging, 2019(a): 642). While acknowledging the local and transnational influence on masculinity comprehension and practices of the Incel community, here masculinity will be understood within the online context. Thus, masculinity here is representing "...not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices." (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 841) and "...is defined as a configuration of practice organized in relation to the structure of gender relations." (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 843). Insight into gender identification of Incels concerning the Taliban will then focus on interpersonal creation of meanings as a way to gain insight into the bigger picture of Incels' identity (Willer et al., 2013: 986).

I will focus on three distinct but somewhat interrelated concepts of masculinity which offer a foundation to understand how Incels discursively position, represent, and relate to the Taliban to understand elements of masculine Incel identity. Specifically, I will focus on hegemonic masculinity, hyperconforming to masculinity, and hybrid masculinity.

Due to the focus and data, it is essential to highlight that much of masculinity research and theoretical frames focus on practices of masculinity (Ging, 2019(a): 642). In this regard, this study focuses more on written practices as presented in the rhetoric and discourses, and not based on how these forms of masculinity are enacted in 'real life' as behavioral action. Furthermore, when Incels refer to the Taliban, Incels do not necessarily refer to them as a political group, but rather as a group of men who have come to power, which reason for the choice of theory.

3.2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

To identify and understand patterns of the construction of the ideal masculine model of Taliban in the online setting of Incels, hegemonic masculinity is understood as a socially constructed status that is context dependable (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 846; Witt, 2020: 677). Recognizing that Incels comprehend the existing model of hegemonic masculinity as tied up on the construction of Chads, positioning Incels as Incels in which "...although they are [largely] white, male and possess significant cultural capital, they perceive themselves as marginalized" (Ging, 2019(a): 642). Thus, this theoretical focus allows for investigating a discursively constructed ideal of masculinity based on the Taliban.

Hegemonic masculinity has multiple meanings and has a relational, dynamic foundation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 841). As multiple masculinity exists within a hierarchy the complex system in which hegemonic masculinity exists is described as

"...a social system of masculinities wherein men are separated and fragmented into a collection of competing hierarchies. This hierarchical model is topped by the hegemonic masculine subject, an ideal man whose identity and social location are composed of all of the attributes that accrue privilege (white, upper-class, able-bodied, etc.); below it lies groupings of increasingly compromised body-subjects, who carry such attributes or signifiers as disability, homosexuality, and race (whiteness being an absence of race)" (Witt, 2020: 677).

The specific system that is central to this analysis is Incels' understanding of gender hierarchy and the attributes they determine do and should accrue privilege. The focus will therefore be on the complex relational hierarchal dynamics and positioning of hegemonic and subordinated masculinity between Incels, Taliban, and Chads. The subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities is relevant as they influence hegemony as a way of producing exemplars of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 846). As a starting point, it can be identified that Incels consider themselves a subordinated group also understood as "protest masculinity" in the sense that patterns of masculinity are constructed within a narrative of marginalized men within the "local" level of Incels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 847-848; Ging, 2019(a): 642). I argue that the online forums of Incels operate on what Raewyn Connell & James W. Messerschmidt (2005) would classify as the local level which is highly interrelated to a global level in the construction of masculinities within the Incel community (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 849-850). Within the positioning of Incels, we get to understand

the hegemonic masculine ideals and models as a hierarchal construct that is simultaneously interrelated to regional and global levels within and out of the online sphere as seen by the interrelation of Taliban. Bringing focus to the context of the online space of Incels and different constructions of masculinity, the study then still recognizes that these constructions are not isolated to the online sphere of Incels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 847).

The construction of masculine hierarchies and gender relations are connected to the subordination of women as well as the compromised body-subjects understood as marginalized, subordinated men (Connell, 2016: 303). Women are central to the construction of masculinity and a relevant concept of emphasized femininity is offered to understand women's compliance with patriarchy as an important element in the constitution of these hierarchies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 848).

Thus, looking into the agency and power held by the group of Incels in terms of hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinity, the theoretical tool offers insight into how a Taliban masculine model is constructed and to what degree it “provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 838) of Incels.

3.2.2 Hyperconformity

Incels' engagement with the Taliban and how they relate to them can be understood partly in light of hyperconformity (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 279). When men's masculinity is threatened they tend to express more masculine attributes and report greater support for war (Willer et al., 2013: 993). Scaptura & Boyle (2020) offers an understanding of men hyperconforming to masculine traits as “...men who feel threatened by the social progress of women, and men who feel threatened by women in their lives and workplaces, are more likely to hyper-conform to masculine identity traits and exhibit anger and aggression toward women” (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 279). They have explored hyperconformity in light of the physically violent behavior of Incels (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 279). However, I suggest that this theoretical lens can also partly help comprehend aspects of Incels relating and identifying with the Taliban as an extreme reaction to the threat of feminism, thus Incel exhibits hyperconforming masculine traits of the Taliban.

Hyperconformity takes inspiration from the masculine overcompensation thesis and is explained as

“When individuals feel their group as a whole is threatened, they may respond by emphasizing their status as members. Willer et al. (2013) test the masculine

overcompensation thesis, which asserts that men who hold the belief that the status or position of men in society is under threat will react with extreme displays of masculinity.” (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 281).

Founded in feelings of inferiority and insecurity, the overcompensation thesis shows that men will exhibit extreme demonstrations of masculinity to recover masculine status (Willer et al., 2013: 981). Hyperconforming to masculine traits is thus seen as an extreme reaction when one's group is threatened. In the context of Incels, there exists a narrow understanding of acceptable masculinity, as well as masculinity in general, to which masculine overcompensation and hyperconformity have a foundation to be more pronounced (Willer et al., 2013: 1012). Thus, this theoretical lens gives insight into which identity- and gender traits Incels conform to concerning the Taliban when feminism is presented as a threat (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 279).

3.2.3 Hybrid Masculinities

Hybrid masculinities will be used as a frame to understand contradictory aspects of how the Taliban are understood as Talichads as well as the contradictory nature of Incel masculinity. To make sense of the contradiction between Incels' position and their narrative Ging (2019(a)) describe Incels as “...hybrid masculinities, whose self-positioning as victims of feminism and political correctness enables them to strategically distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity, while simultaneously compounding existing hierarchies of power and inequality online” (Ging, 2019(a): 651).

Understanding hybrid masculinities as refereeing “...to the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities” (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 246). The theory will help understand how some users create a hybrid masculine understanding of Taliban which is incorporated into the Incel identity project and adds to an understanding of Incels as hybrid masculinities.

Drawing on the ‘strategic borrowing’ aspect of this theoretical framework as presented by Tristan Bridges & C. J. Pascoe (2014), I set out to explore how “...these hybrid masculinities symbolically distance men [Incels] from hegemonic masculinity, while simultaneously compounding existing social and symbolic boundaries.” (Ging, 2019(a): 642). Appropriating Taliban masculinity by constructing Talichads and incorporating it into Incels' identity project to further foster and

hopefully enable a system of privilege for Incels on one side but on the other side presents itself as further victimizing Incels (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 246, 250).

This concept offers an understanding of how some Incels distance themselves from the hegemonic masculinity of Chads. Combining the Taliban as a marginalized other with the hegemonic masculinity of Chads in an effort that "...borrows aspects of other masculinities that are strategically useful for continued domination" (Ging, 2019(a): 642), this aspect helps illuminate the contradictory aspect of Incels positioning.

3.3 Disengagement

Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) provides a disengagement framework that offers two thematically constructed clusters of attitude changes to understand "... why people turn their back on violent extremism" (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 100). Having a theoretical point of departure within radicalization and deradicalization, Dalgaard-Nielsen engages with disengagement focusing on understanding aspects of why individuals stop engaging with extremism and exit extremist groups (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 101). However, I will take a spin on this theory as I wish to understand how some Incels disengage with the Taliban.

Disengagement entails having been engaged before disengaging. As to Incels and Taliban, I do not presume that they have been engaged on a similar, concrete level and/or within the same group before pointing out aspects of disengagement. However, I point to the fact that "... parallels between far-right extremism and Muslim religious extremism... naturally exist" (Bakali, 2019: 100) and argue that due to the antifeminist nature of both groups, these parallels and overlaps create a somewhat similar ideological engagement and mobilization. Thus, not saying that they have been radicalized into the same group, community, and/or movement, but rather radicalized into similar populist anti-gender ideas that create a foundation to discuss disengagement between the groups (Moghissi, 2018: 79). Consequently, this theory will be used to understand aspects of Incels disengaging and why they are turning their back on the violent extremism of the Taliban (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 100). Furthermore, Dalgaard-Nielsen focuses on turning away from terrorism overall (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 101). This study will however apply the theory to understand how and why some Incels specifically and rhetorically turn away from Taliban terrorism and not terrorism/violence in general.

The focus of this analysis will be on the individual level of voluntary disengagement within themes of (1) ideological reasoning for disengagement (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 102). (2) Personal and practical reasoning for disengagement (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 105). These themes are overall clusters that somewhat overlap and will primarily illuminate ideological reasoned disengagement in terms of the religious element of the Taliban and highlight practical arguments of disengaging with the Taliban due to them not being radical and extreme enough in their political incentive to control women.

3.4 My Contribution

So far research has not been carried out that investigates the link between Incels and the Taliban. This research then contributes by illuminating unexplored dimensions of the Incel community and the collective identity thus contributing to understanding and comprehending the community from a new angle. Specifically, the research contributes by exploring which aspects Incels relate to and why they admire the Taliban as well as which they condemn, by reapplying previously applied theoretical aspects as well as including a new theoretical aspect to the field.

By exploring this antifeminist nexus in light of the collective identity of Incels I contribute with a more nuanced understanding of Incels and its non-homogenous ideological standpoint, in terms of how they relate to the Taliban, which has been argued for the need to pay more attention to (Ging, 2019(a): 653). Specifically, aspects regarding contextualizing ideal hegemonic masculine models to the Taliban, exploring hyperconformity in terms of Incels relating and identifying with the Taliban as an extreme reaction to the threat of feminism, and studying the construction of Talichads with a hybrid masculinity lense. Furthermore, I argue that I contribute by examining how some Incels distance themselves from the Taliban and disengage based on ideological and practical reasons, by which the research contributes with a new theoretical framework to further comprehend the ideological limits as well as internal conflicting perceptions of the Incel community. All this is explored within the frame of Globohomo which is the constructed context of Incels in which they are victims of feminism. As this worldview has not been explored explicitly yet, I argue that I contribute by broadly mapping the Globohomo system.

Methodologically this is carried out similar to previous research via netnography, data from Incel forums, and analyzing the data with a CDA (Rothermel, 2020; Sugiura, 2021).

4. Method & Methodology

The study will carry out online fieldwork consisting of observing opinions and comments posted on Incels.is and Incels.net. The data material will be analyzed through a CDA, which creates the foundation for the theoretical analysis. Thus, this chapter will elaborate on the methodological steps of the study. The netnographic fieldwork of online observations on the websites as well as the selection and collection of data will be presented. Hereafter, the process of analyzing the data using CDA will be elaborated. From there, considerations concerning the nature of the social phenomena of Incels, and my role as a researcher are presented and ethical reflections will be outlined (Bryman, 2016: 4). Lastly, a short evaluation of the methodological steps will be considered.

4.1 Netnographic Fieldwork on Incels.net and Incels.me

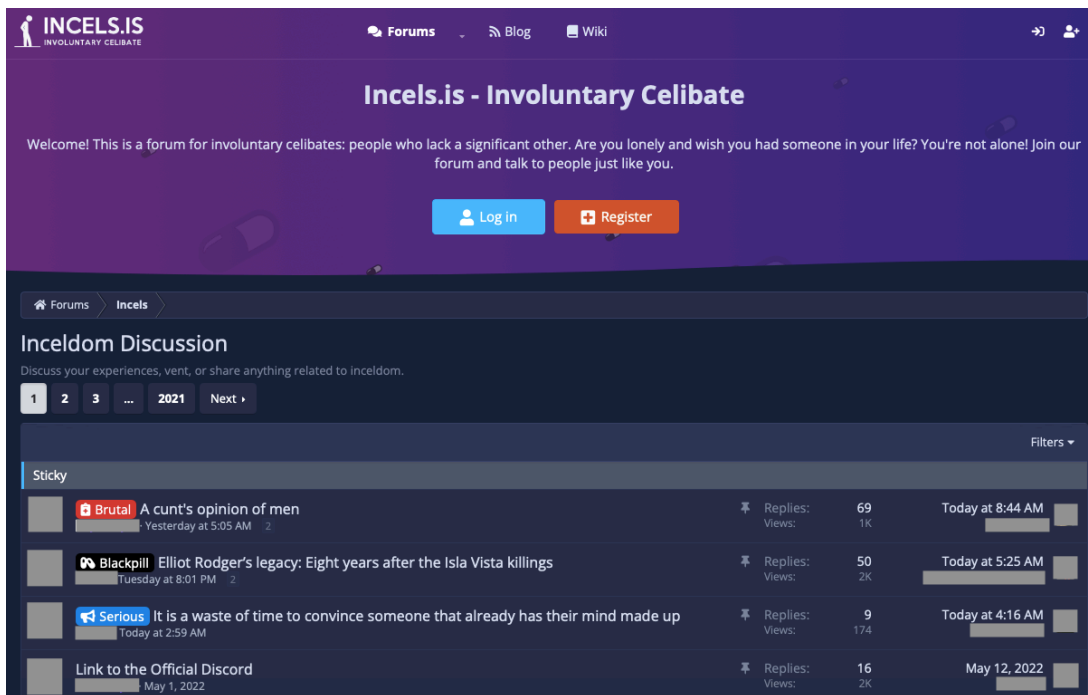
As the Incel community operates mostly online, netnography was chosen as an approach to investigate and engage with Incel forums to map and dismantle Incel's internal interaction with the topic of Taliban (Kozinets et al., 2014: 262; Kozinets, 2015: 98). Netnography is "... an approach dedicated to intersubjective mappings of our social media interconnections with one another" (Kozinets, 2015: 97). So, "To access the discursive context in which anti-feminist collective identities are constructed" (Rothermel, 2020: 1375) I focused on observing and mapping opinions regarding Taliban from two public Incel forums, namely Incels.net and Incels.is.

Based on the iterative process, the choice of sites to collect data from was based on an initial phase of fieldwork in which I engaged with different sites related to the manosphere found via Google such as YouTube, Reddit, and additional sites. Based on this process I selected two Incel websites, Incels.is and Incels.net. The choice of websites to carry out the qualitative method of netnography was based on them that they provided sufficient discussion threads and rich data concerning Taliban as well as between-member interactions (Kozinets et al., 2014: 266; Kozinets, 2015: 98). Furthermore, they were selected as they are publicly available and easily accessible since limitations regarding the accessibility to Incels and the community is present, and "studies focusing on Incels have been notoriously difficult to conduct, due to the evasive and hostile nature of those who are involuntarily celibate" (Sugiura, 2021: 31; Kozinets et al., 2014: 265). Thus, as they are public it allowed me to enter them and observe without needing to create a profile.

As a first step to carry out an observation I got familiar with the online context in which Incels interact as “it is the netnography’s job to study the lifeway and lifeworlds of regular people and groups while still minding and modelling the institutional roles of this impossibly interconnected tangle of knots and invisible mendings which needs our considerations, thought, cogitation, and solution finding” (Kozinets, 2015: 98). Thus, engaging with the Incel community, I had to carry out comprehensive research to be able to understand the specific language that is used (Riis, 2004: 64-65). The Incel community uses a specific vocabulary to which Sugiura (2020) provides a comprehensive dictionary based on their research and fieldwork within the Incel community. Drawing on this guide, I have been able to understand the terminology and thus able to understand observations in the self-created social world of Incels (Sugiura, 2020: 21). Furthermore, I had to get familiar with the websites, how they operate, the rules, and so on by familiarizing myself with the social and technological interactions to gain an accurate insight into the atmospheric (Kozinets, 2015: 164). This led me to discover the content of the posts is to a certain degree regulated, as there on each forum are restrictions on what the users are allowed to post. The rules of the sites can be found in the appendix.

The two websites operate as online discussion forums, where a user can post threads that are open for other users to engage with. You have to be a user to post and/or comment, but anyone can see and read the threads as visitors not needing to create an account. To give a feel of the setup of the forum see the example from Incels.is below.

Picture 1: Incels.is discussion board



Source: screenshot from Incels.is

I have made use of discrete non-participatory observations, as I have not actively engaged in commenting or conversations on the chosen forums, but rather made use of what Alan Bryman specifies as given data as the post and associated comments existed in advance (Bernard, 2011: 306; Bryman, 2016: 300). Observations, in this case, entail a focus on the language and semiotic usage and written interaction happening among the users (Riis, 2004: 61).

During the online fieldwork of doing observations, I simultaneously wrote fieldnotes to note relevant problems and interactions among the users to document the journey and record tendencies seen while observing (Riis, 2004: 70-71; Kozinets et al., 2014: 268). The fieldnotes have not been produced as data, but rather as a tool for internal reflections (Kozinets et al., 2014: 266, 268).

4.1.1 Data Selection and Collection

In selecting data from the two forums, posts were selected when deemed "...important in constructing the object of analysis" (Bryman, 2016: 540). Specifically, as the focus of the study is the nexus between Incels and the Taliban, the selected posts encompassed opinions and/or discussions about the Taliban.

A data collection strategy has been employed to ensure "... that an adequate but not overwhelming amount of data is collected..." to "... carefully selects lesser amount of very high quality data that are then used to reveal and highlight meaningful aspects of the particular" (Kozinets, 2015: 99). Posts were manually selected and collected based on them being about or containing information, opinions, and/or pictures that related to the Taliban. The data can be classified as archival data, as it existed before my observations (Kozinets, 2015: 165). The data, therefore, do not "... bear the imprint of the researcher as creator or director" but are nevertheless "... shaped by selection biases and observer effects..." (Kozinets, 2015: 165). This is what Robert V. Kozinets categorizes as the methodological true nature of observations and reflections regarding my role in this will be presented in section 4.3.2. An example of a post is presented below.

Picture 2: An example of a post and related comments on Incels.is



Source: a screenshot of anonymized post 3: "Taliban mayor of Kabul: only job femoids can do in government is clean female bathrooms" (Incels.is, September 22nd, 2021).

The Incels.net website offered a search tool in which I searched "Taliban" and collected all relevant posts that contained discussion and/or comment concerning Taliban. Incels.is did not offer an option of searching through all of the available posts on the site. So, instead, I glanced through several pages of posts overview while using the browser search bar searching "Taliban". To avoid "data overload"

I stopped selecting posts from Incels.is after collecting 24 posts as the data started to not present remarkable new aspects (Kozinets et al., 2014: 265). The posts were individually saved as PDFs and a total of 37 posts, with a total of 821 comments from an estimation of 500 different users have been collected dating from September 28th, 2019 to April 6, 2022. An overview of the collected material and the respective sites is presented below.

Table 1: Overview of data material and website traffic statics

Site	User amount (date)	Amount of selected posts	Location of visitors	Demography of visitors
Incels.net	Unknown	13	USA: 18.92% Canada: 10.46% UK: 10.27% Turkey: 9.68% Saint Lucia: 8.13% Others: 42.54%	Female: 39.87% Male: 60.13% Largest age group of visitors: 25-34-year-olds
Incels.is	16,570 (27.05.2022)	24	USA: 43.30% Poland: 6.92% UK: 5.66% Spain: 4.05% India: 2.94% Others: 37.12%	Female: 37.38% Male: 62.62% Largest age group of visitors: 25-34-year-olds

Using the web-database Similarweb has given insight into visitor statics of the two websites such as the location of visitors at Incels.is and Incels.net as well as demographic characteristics (date of statics: 27.05.2022). Recognizing that the visitors not necessarily are users that engage in the discussions and that the statics, therefore, are not representative of the users who have engaged in the collected posts, the statics nonetheless provide information regarding the individuals behind the posts. Acknowledging that the ethnicity of the visitors is not specified Sugiura points out that “A misconception of incels is that they are predominantly all angry white Western young men. In a survey conducted of incels by incels on the incel.co site around half of the members stated that they were white.” (Sugiura, 2021: 44). Thus, the statistics and research suggest that the users and visitors of Incels.is and Incels.net are primarily located in the West, predominately men between 25 and 34 years not exclusively white. Furthermore, the database shows that Incels.is have had more than 2 million visits whereas Incels.net has had more than 31.000 visitors, showing the reach of the sites (Similarweb, n.d.(a); Similarweb, n.d(b)).

4.2 Data Analysis Strategy and Processing of the Posts

After selecting and collecting the data next step was to analyze it. Here, CDA was chosen as the method to analyze the data. The choice and steps of the CDA will be illustrated in the following section.

4.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

I decided to carry out the data analysis using tools from CDA as it allows me to understand rhetorical and ideological aspects of how the Taliban appear within the forums (Fairclough, 2011: 368). Understanding that discourse is “...a term that denoted that way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object” (Bryman, 2016: 531), the analysis set out to understand how Incels in the forums comprehend Taliban. By “...recognizing that discourse and society/culture are mutually constitutive” (Fairclough, 2011: 370), CDA as a qualitative method is appropriate to understand the online social reality of Incels in light of discourses concerning Taliban and how these unfold in the community. Thus, CDA contributes to the analysis of the antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban by encompassing the “...mediation between language and society” (Fairclough et al., 2011: 368; Meyer, 2001: 15-16).

As the analysis will look into the social struggle of sexism and gender-based violence which is predominant within the Incel community, a critical approach was deemed appropriate (Fairclough et al., 2011: 374). An aspect of CDA is to take an explicit standpoint as the goal of the approach is to address social wrongs (Fairclough, 2010: 231). Thus, the research is critical to the sexism, violence, and racism that is being (re)produced in these forums and therefore seeks to illuminate it by researching it. However, the study still aims to be somewhat open and explorative towards the community while I am critical of the antifeminism and violence Incels perpetrate (Fairclough et al., 2011: 374). Thus, the aim of carrying out the CDA is to create further awareness of this problem and reflect critically on its everyday activities, by “... addressing social ‘wrongs’ of the day... by analyzing their source” (Fairclough, 2010: 231; Fairclough et al., 2011: 373-374).

Taking inspiration from Norman Fairclough's dialectical reasoning CDA version, I set out to gain insight into the antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban, with an awareness of the relationships between discourse and other elements of social life, by acknowledging that global politics, the backlash against women's rights, and the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan are not without

influence within the Incel community (Fairclough, 2018: 35; Norris, 2021; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018: 7). However, as different CDA approaches are to some degree overlapping, I have not been limited to this approach as well as not all aspects will be included (Fairclough et al., 2011: 362). As the approach allows for flexibility around which linguistics devices will be the center of the analysis, here the analysis has primarily focused on the contrast as well as the resemblance of self-and other-representation within discourses concerning Taliban (Fairclough, 2018: 43; Meyer, 2001: 25). As “It is useful to distinguish three broad domains of social life that may be discursively constituted: *representations* of the world, *social relations* between people, and people's social and personal *identities*.” (Fairclough et al., 2011: 370), I focused on representation, social relations, and identity as constituted via rhetoric, argumentation, and linguistic strategies within the selected posts as a way to understand the online social reality of Incels (Fairclough et al., 2011: 370). The discourses then gave insight into the construction of the social identity of Incels, and the social relationships between them and the Taliban based on the representation of the Taliban that Incels creates in the forums and led to the theoretical focus (Fairclough, 2010: 231; Fairclough et al., 2011: 370).

Analyzing the data using CDA

Fairclough prescribes methodological steps for doing a CDA but emphasizes that the research might not unfold in the sequential order (Fairclough, 2010: 234). Thus, taking inspiration from the prescribed steps, the CDA in this research has overall been carried out as outlined in the below steps. However, this process has been highly dynamic and iterative and thus is presented more rigid than how it unfolded.

Step one

The first step consisted of getting familiar with the data. This was an iterative and hermeneutics-inspired process that entailed reading the data sentence by sentence and then word for word (Meyer, 2001: 16; Huckin, 1997: 81-84). This was a manual and lengthy process that led to recognizing that issues of representation would be at the center of the analysis. Representation of Taliban in the "us" vs "them" distinction to understand how Incels relate to the Taliban and how Incels construct a social identity became the primary focus. This led to identifying the overall theme and discourses relating to the construction of a matriarchal regime called the Globohomo system, a positive framing of Taliban, contradicting aspects within the term Talichads and a negative representation of Taliban (Fairclough, 2018: 43).

Step two

After identifying the focus of the analysis, the next step entailed diving into the data again with this in mind. Looking into the linguistic devices and content that constitute these discourses a hermeneutic process of interpretation took place that led to dismantling the identified themes further by mapping aspects and overall categories within the themes (Meyer, 2001: 16). As the online data was recorded by saving the forum posts it allowed to code directly in the posts, however, the data analysis was primarily handled in word by sorting the data into categories and themes (Kozinets et al., 2014: 267). After the systematic analysis of the data, the most prevalent aspects were selected to be analyzed and the conceptual framework was chosen to help understand these aspects.

Step three

Moving on to the interdisciplinary aspect of the CDA which unfolded by engaging in a dialogue between theory and methodology, which will be presented in section 5 (Fairclough, 2010: 231).

4.3 Considerations Regarding Theory of Science and Knowledge Production

An essential part of the research process has been to consider the relationship between the object of research and the researcher. Thus, this section will dive into consideration the study's theory of sciences, my role in conducting the research as well as ethical considerations.

4.3.1 The Approach of the Study

The study was initiated puzzled by the connection and glorification Incels had to the Taliban. Following CDA a problem-oriented approach this research process did not begin with a fixed theoretical (Fairclough et al., 2011: 358). Since “CDA is a form of critical social science geared to a better understanding of the nature and sources of social wrongs, the obstacles to addressing them and possible ways of overcoming those obstacles.” (Fairclough, 2010: 235) the study approached the Incel community with a focus on interpersonal construction of meaning in these forums exploring communication between people (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 406). From this standpoint, the study has been interested in exploring the nexus of Incels and the Taliban in which the Incel community discursively frames the Taliban and how that reflects on the antifeminist identity of Incels.

Incels are interpreted as a social group that actively constructs a social reality within its online context. This social reality is understood as "... a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation" (Bryman, 2016: 33) that is highly influenced by language, discourses, and technology (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 406; Lindsay, 2022: 215). The study thus accepts a social constructivist ontology in which it accepts that "... meaning is constructed in and through interaction" (Bryman, 2016: 30). The interaction is understood as online written interaction on the forums and the meanings that are discursively constructed are at focus (Bryman, 2016: 30; Fairclough, 2010: 231). To investigate the social processes of constructing meaning in the Incel community the study adopts a critical methodology that understands that "discourse is ideological in so far as it contributes to sustaining particular relations of power and domination" (Fairclough, 2010: 239).

Hereto, the challenge of only conducting online research that does not actively engage with the online and local aspects of the community is recognized as "If a researcher (...) download a descriptive posting on a web forum and thought that this posting "told the whole story," that researcher would be sadly mistaken" (Kozinets et al., 2014: 264). However, it has not been possible to gain insight into Incels' reality outside of the online sphere, for example via interviews or finding an Incel forum that is only based in one specific geographical location. I acknowledge that the Incel community does not exist in a vacuum, is part of a bigger picture, and consists of individuals that are localized in different contexts (Rothermel, 2020: 1367). Thus, I find it important to highlight that I realize that the meaning and reality of the Incel community and the individual users in these forums are constructed and are social products that vary both in time and place, thus this study is a momentary insight into the Incels constructed nexus to the Taliban (Bryman, 2016: 30).

To gain more knowledge about the nexus between Incels and the Taliban, the field of study was approached openly and exploratively (Bryman, 2016: 394). Specifically, it has aimed at having an inductive approach to the field of research which corresponds with and has been supported by CDA (Fairclough et al., 2011: 358). I was guided primarily by my curiosity about this (for me) newly discovered nexus that had not received any academic attention, which led me to do qualitative research by observing Incel forums to gain insight into the social reality of Incels. The process has been highly iterative in correlation with doing netnography and CDA (Fairclough, 2010: 234; Kozinets, 2015: 97). Specifically, I have continuously been seeking insight and interpreting in a dynamic process of reciprocating between data and literature as "... answers resolve from our close encounters with the data, literature, imagination, and site, we begin to build the representations that we will use to carry it to the research world" (Kozinets, 2015: 99). Thus, the study accepts a

hermeneutic epistemological point of departure, as the focus is on interpretation (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 108). The process of interpretation is to create an understanding of what is observed in the forums, as the meaning behind the linguistic forms of expression is not given as humans make their own experiences by which their own rules are established and (re)produced through action (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 108-109). This is part of the study of humans in the hermeneutic sense, which this study embraces, as it adopts the central aim of interpreting the meaning behind and effect of the utterance of Incels, thus accepting that the social world of Incels as an interpretation is uncertain (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 110). Methodical, this is accepted as the epistemological principle of the hermeneutic circle (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 145). This has been visible in the iterative process of pending a holistic and partly understanding of the problem field as part of the process of interpretation of the nexus between Incels and the Taliban (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 111). This practically unfolded in the process of fieldwork that has been in separate phases as well as the data analysis process.

4.3.2 My Role as the Researcher

As netnographic data emerges as the researcher participates or observes online, the researcher actively engages in data production (Kozinets et al., 2014: 263). In correlation with the hermeneutic circle, I accept my role in this social reality and acknowledge my interpreting role as

“interpretation is per definitions unsure and is not first and foremost based on precise empirical observations or measurements, but most of all based on the researcher’s ability to exceed the offhand available material (a text, a social act or the products hereof) and interpret the meaning that hides within it” (Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 109, 145, own translation).

I have had a less intrusive role in regards to the non-participatory observations by collecting online written posts and related comments which are considered “... 'given' data and as such are not influenced by an interviewer” (Bryman, 2016: 300; Bernard, 2011: 306; Kozinets et al., 2014: 263). However, concerning selecting data and analyzing it I have had a central role in constructing and interpreting the data following the critical framework of CDA (Fairclough, 2010: 231; Juul & Pedersen, 2012: 108-109).

As a female researcher engaged in this highly hateful community where explicit, extreme, and violent opinions about women, LGBTQ, and so on are shared, considerations regarding my wellbeing in the research process have been prioritized. It was not without hesitation entering this online reality and was not without a plan to shield myself personally. Based on the preliminary research, I knew to some

extent how elaborate and explicit the rhetoric could be and I was aware of what I was in for. To this Tristram Hooley, John Marriott, and Jane Wellens (2012) suggest considering in advance how to deal with distressing information, thus days and times of engaging with the forums were chosen carefully and I have engaged in self-reflection to guard myself (Hooley et al., 2012: 37; Sugiura, 2021: 54). Entering the forums and reading the different content was to a certain degree a challenge for me, however, the interest in exploring and bringing this contemporary problem to light fed my motivation and kept me going. Sharing Ging's way of putting it: "Those of us concerned about the future of feminism and gender politics must therefore acknowledge the scale and complexity of the joint structures that enable this gender-political toxicity to flourish, and figure out ways of dismantling, transforming or circumventing them" (Ging, 2019(b): 61).

4.3.3 Ethical Considerations

When initiating and conducting this research I regularly reflected upon ethics and related issue in carrying out the online fieldwork. When doing online research one "... have to consider and negotiate the intersection of legal and ethical frameworks... Such as privacy, consent, and confidentiality" (Hooley et al., 2012: 38). This intersection between legal and ethical pluralism which presented itself within this problem and research agenda entailed especially avoiding legal issues as well as ensuring anonymity for the Incel users.

When doing online research, the boundaries between private and public tend to become blurred, however, there is not a mutual understanding of how to navigate this (Hooley et al., 2012: 31-32). To maneuver this, I chose to observe on public forums, in the sense that a user account was not needed to enter the sites. As the observation was carried out in open online forums that are publicly available for everyone and as the research material is the written communication in the forums of comments, rather than the individuals engaging in these discussions, I have not seen it as necessary to gain the consent of the users (Bryman, 2016: 139). However, the username of the commentators will not be used to ensure some degree of anonymity and confidentiality. There is always the risk of it being traced back through the website via the posts to which the forums consist of an already anonyms setting (Bryman, 2016: 140). Nonetheless, all posts that will be referenced in the analysis will be anonymized and placed in the appendix to ensure transparency.

Furthermore, to prepare for engaging in these online communities, I read up on the Danish Penal Code to ensure the research is within the legislative framework, as well as to secure that I did not break the law in any way when getting involved with the Incel community (Justitsministeriet, 2021).

4.4 Evaluation of the Methodological Steps

Reflecting upon the methodological steps, I deem that I have been true to the chosen approaches. Nevertheless, there are some critical aspects and pitfalls of the processes to contemplate.

There is a risk of filtering out impressions and other relevant aspects as the observer (Riis, 2004: 62). Due to the inductive aim of the study, I have had the ambition of avoiding that. Furthermore, being new to this field I argue has its pros and its cons as it entails a lack of tacit knowledge thus seeing aspects I perhaps would not have if I was integrated within the community before the research. On the other side, due to the in-house nature of the Incel social reality, not being a part of the community might result in missing aspects that are hidden in the language even after careful research about it (Sugiura, 2021: 190; Riis, 2004: 64-65). Especially as the language usage of Incels is based a lot on humor, the tone in writing can be hard to make out, which is a general critical aspect of only engaging with text as data material and not achieving methodical triangulation (Sugiura, 2021: 190; Kozinets et al., 2014: 266). Acknowledging that “Because social worlds cut across complex networks of face-to-face and technologically mediated communications, the use of netnography, as with the use of any single method or focus, offers an incomplete view.” (Kozinets et al., 2014: 264). To this Kozinets encourage active participation as “Participation in a netnography allows researchers to experience what it feels like to be a community member” (Kozinets et al., 2014: 266). I would have been able to go undercover as Bates (2020) did, but I argue that I would not be able to get the participant experience as Kozinets encourages, as I am a woman and would never get to feel what it is like to be an Incel member.

Lastly, the chosen posts are based on selective Incel engagement, meaning that the users who have engaged in discussions regarding the Taliban have actively clicked on the threads. Thus, it cannot be determined to what extent the opinions are shared within the Incel community. Nonetheless, I argue that it provides solid insight into the antifeminist nexus between Incels and the Taliban.

5. Analysis

The data demonstrated several relevant aspects of the antifeminist nexus between Incels and the Taliban. Based on the online fieldwork and data analysis I have come to discover and scrutinize discursive aspects of the Incel community which will be present and analyzed here in tandem with the theoretical concepts of collective identity, masculinity, and disengagement, to answer the research question: How does Incels relate to the Taliban?

The data presented an interesting and complex reality of how Incels interact and frame understandings of the Taliban. Thus, I want to emphasize that this study aims to highlight as many nuances as possible while having to be selective to present the most prevalent and interesting tendencies to this antifeminist nexus of Incels and the Taliban, so not to say that what is presented is a complete picture of the nexus.

Based on the data analysis it soon became clear that there is not a discursive consensus or hegemonic discourse regarding the Taliban. Rather, within the Incel community, Incels comprehends the Taliban differently and non-consensually. Specifically, masculinity and disengagement proved to be relevant aspects in understanding how Incels relate to the Taliban. So, the overall elements this analysis will focus on are: first contextualizing concerning what Incels call the Globohomo system, thereafter the multiple masculine dynamics by regarding Taliban as being “based” and lastly a hesitant disengaged relation to the Taliban as they are seen as “cucked” and religiously not aligned with some Incels.

The analysis provides an overall picture of identified aspects of the online antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban within the Incel community, which offers a broad understanding of how, to what extent, and with what effect Incels position themselves to Taliban to gain perspective on how Taliban appear in the (re)production of Incel identity (Rothermel, 2020: 1373). This antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban as understood from the Incel perspective, thus provide comprehension of the antifeminist extremist identity existing in the Incel community.

In the following section, original quotes from the two forums will be presented and may contain explicit, discriminating and hateful language. I would like to highlight that following CDA I position myself as critical of the language as it holds power and perpetrates violence (Fairclough et al., 2011: 374). Nonetheless, to understand the relevant rhetoric and to be true to the data, the quotes will stay

intact (Bates, 2020: 8-9). I argue that to understand the Incel community it is important to not censor any of the quotes.

5.1 The Globohomo System

To understand in which context Incels relate to the Taliban and in what way, we need to understand one of the central causes Incels collectively gather around and base their belief system on (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371). To go into all the specifics with this would take more space and time than I have. So instead, I will present the overall findings concerning the construction of the Globohomo system within the framework of collective identity, by focusing on the overall ideological understanding of the Globohomo system, the construction of the enemy "other" of women and Chads, and how this position the Incel "self" as victims.

The Globohomo system is an expression that is used often within the Incel community and has been prevalent within the selected posts and their subsequent comments about the Taliban. This gave cause to further investigate the concept and look into the discursive frame of the Globohomo system. An understanding of the social reality of Incels help contextualize how this "regime" gives rise to Incels to discuss the Taliban. Thus, this section seeks to contextualize the setting which fosters the opinions and discourses Incels (re) produces about the Taliban. To my knowledge, besides being referred to in a few non-academic articles, the Globohomo system has not explicitly been explored in-depth, however, the basic understanding of it has been touched upon in previous research.

The Globohomo system is referred to as a system, society, machine, and/or world they live in and it is primarily used as a noun in the forums. It is based on a critique of liberal, democratic, and egalitarian values, wherein feminism is perceived as the primary ideological characteristic of the system, as visible in the following comments "Talichads just took over Afghanistan, no more feminism or Globohomo... Globohomo is losing its power." (post 1). The Globohomo system is presented as a system that is powerful and dominant in the West, while simultaneously a system that can be contested, resisted, and overpowered. The origin of this critique is based in Western societies, as a user writes about a "Degenerate Western Society." (post 2) to which another user refers to the degenerate western society as "...the globohomo cuckoldry". Thus, the understanding of this system is geographically located in the West and for some users more specifically US and UK, as stated in the following comment: "The GloboHomo machine of the U.N/U.S.A/U.K have my country of origin

(Somalia) by the balls and are pushing all sorts of “uplift women and end FGM¹” initiatives which could be disastrous for us. FGM was instituted to eliminate the temptation of whoredom.” (post 3).

These descriptions and linguistic categories which are tied up on critical and negative rhetoric show the Incels' critique of the Globohomo systems as a product of the West based on feelings of injustice. As initiatives by institutions within the Globohomo framework are perceived to marginalize Incels, the Globohomo is what brings a sense of sameness, and recognition and connects Incels (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Polletta & Jasper, 2001: 298). In the “us” vs “them” rhetoric, Incels expresses a disconnection from the system they live within and create a boundary between themselves and the Globohomo system (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371). Thus, there is a clear distinction between the Incel and the Globohomo system which highlights an ideological dichotomy between feminism and patriarchy within the Incel community and causes for a “self” understanding of Incels in opposition to especially women as “others” (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371).

5.1.1. Western Women and Chads – The Enemies of Incels

The threatening outcome of the Globohomo system for Incels is, among others, autonomous women. The misandry understanding of feminized women gives cause for an ideologically-driven concept of women from the West within the Globohomo system as the enemy and oppressors of Incels (Marwick & Caplan, 2018: 554; Meiering et al., 2020: 6).

There is clear rhetoric of “us” vs “them” regarding women in the forums. Western women, or more specifically feminism which empowers women, are the enemy “other” of Incels (Rothermel, 2020: 1378). A user shared screenshots from Reddit of Western women expressing opinions and sympathy for women in Afghanistan after the Taliban came to power on August 15th, 2021 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). To this post another user commented the following:

“They're terrified because they're realizing just how fragile this “civilization” really is, and that if it collapses we return to iron-fist patriarchy (which has always been the natural order throughout human history)
They are truly pathetic and weak and they know it
Without this massive globohomo system & simp cucks, they will become baby-making machines and property overnight” (post 4)

This quote indicates the social relations held by Incels between Incels and women. By basing the argumentation on biological determinism, the user indicates an unnatural outcome of the Globohomo

¹ FGM is short for Female Genital Mutilation (World Health Organization, 2022).

system is women having autonomy and power, pointing out that it is the system that fosters this relation. This comment further shows attributes to the "we" vs "they" dichotomy which fosters a dehumanized view of women by referring to them as "baby-making machines and property". The usage of objects as reference points for women is a normal language practice within the Incel community, calling women for foids, toilets, dishwashers, and more, as seen in earlier research (Sugiura, 2021: 275, 276).

Adding to the complexity of the enemy-victim dichotic understanding among Incels, Chads are also perceived as an "other" that contributes to how Incels regard and victimize themselves. Portraying the out groups of women and Chads as negative and themselves as somewhat positive create boundaries between the two, showing that the ideological foundation of the Globohomo system is tied up on matriarchal values and thus represents women and Chads as the benefiter of the Globohomo system and Incels as the victim of it (Lindsay, 2022: 218; Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371).

5.1.2 Incels as Victims of the Globohomo System

As shown above, there is a broad and somewhat mutual understanding of what the Globohomo system is and the boundary between the Incel "self" and the "other" within the feminized, liberal-democratic Globohomo system. By creating this other representation of the system, they simultaneously position themselves against feminism and liberal developments that ensure women's bodily autonomy, rights, and security. To this, they constitute themselves as victims restricted by the Globohomo system, and a need to escape and/or fight it becomes a central element to understanding why Incels relate to the Taliban.

It is however different from how Incels position themselves concerning their victimization (Rothermel, 2020: 1379). A large group of the Incels in the Taliban posts are keen to take action and see this system as faulty and achievable to overcome it, as evident in the following comment: "We can't work within the Globohomo system. We have to destroy it and replace it with one based on solid, righteous values." (post 3). It here becomes a matter of "us" vs the system, which is common rhetoric within the community. In this argument the Globohomo system is grasped as not being righteous, highlighting the injustice interpretation of the system, which gives justification for Incels to take measures to escape it. Noting that using future tense as an encouraging strategy adds to the claim of overturning the Globohomo, construct an understanding of Incel identity as wanting to employ resistance and retaliation (Fairclough et al., 2011: 371). However, not all the users share this "optimism" as apparent by this user's comment: "Globohomo always wins" (post 6). This shows a

historical component and despondent emotion to the understanding of the system by emphasizing that it will always win (Fairclough et al., 2011: 372).

So, the Globohomo system, as understood by the Incels, is one of power that is based on an unnatural, uncivilized order as it is based on matriarchal values in which a polarized understanding of the Incel "self" in relation to others is created (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371). The belief in achieving an "optimal" world order is understood as the opposite of the Globohomo system as based on a biological and patriarchal order between the two sexes. This shows Incels' antifeminist, right-winged, conservative nature in how they constitute their relationship to the Globohomo system and constitute a collective "self" based on victimhood (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Fairclough et al., 2011: 370). Acknowledging that Incels position themselves as a victim of a Globohomo, feminized "other" I thus seek to explore how Taliban are discursively situated within this dichotomy of "self" and "other" within the Incel community (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371).

5.2 Based Talichads – Ambiguous Masculine Models of Taliban

In the victimhood-based Incel "self" as presented above, the argumentation is based on the feminine and masculine dichotomy in which Incels express the loss of masculinity. Seeing a spike of posts and comments regarding the Taliban in mid-August, September, and October 2021 shows the dialectical aspects of discourses regarding the Taliban and the event of the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan (Fairclough, 2018: 35). This pivotal event in Afghanistan's history gave cause for internal discussions on the Incel forum concerning the Taliban and how the users individually relate to them. Relating to the power of Taliban men, a story of combatting the enemy of women is prevalent among some Incel users in the forums. Thus, theoretical concepts regarding masculinity were deemed appropriate to help understand aspects of how Incels relate to the Taliban all while considering how Incel's position.

How users in the forums construct representations of different models of a masculine Taliban and how they position themselves will be presented here. Especially, this section will focus on the argumentation that depicts the Taliban as a somewhat positive unit that simultaneously highlights ambiguity within the community. Within the conceptual framework of masculinity, three different masculine constructions of Taliban and how Incels relate to these have been identified. Specifically,

(1) Incels depict Taliban as an ideal hegemonic masculinity figure, (2) hyperconforming to beta Taliban, (3) lastly, hybrid masculinity of Taliban and Chad (Talichads).

The three distinct theoretical frameworks of hegemonic masculinity, hyperconformity, and hybrid masculinity offer insight into three constructions of masculinity. However, these are to some degree interrelated and overlapping. Nonetheless, they will be analyzed separately all while recognizing that there is not always a clear division of opinions and positioning among Incels.

5.2.1 The Ideal Hegemonic Masculine Model of Taliban

As touched upon and presented above, there is a hegemonic masculine understanding among Incels, in which they are positioned at the bottom as subordinated masculine figures concerning Chads and feminism in the hierarchy produced by the Globohomo system (Witt, 2020: 685). In relation to this, it is observed in the online forums that some of the users discursively understand the Taliban as ideal hegemonic masculinity based on positive narrative and discourses of heroism as a response to the oppressive gender relations of the Globohomo system that victimizes Incels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 841).

Taliban for some is argued to be a hope for the future. Seeing Taliban as heroes, several comments hold positive adjectives about the Taliban. A large number of the users claim that the Taliban is “based”, as they have gained patriarchal-centered power over women by not letting women go to school, not letting women have sexual autonomy, reproductive rights, and so on.

An internal poll created by a user asked their fellow users on Incels.is: “where would you love to live... Taliban styled Shaira society [or] Degenerate Western society” (post 2). In total 83 users voted: 64 users (77.1%) voted for a Taliban society and 19 users (22.9%) voted for Western society. Recognizing that this poll cannot with be considered representative of the Incel community nor this forum, this poll, nonetheless, gives insight into the weight of discourses (re)produced concerning the Taliban. Here, a Taliban-styled society becomes framed as a better place than the West, aka living within the Globohomo system. This is argued to be due to the gender relations and the perceived masculine order of the Taliban as evident in the comments to the poll. As a solution or a way of escaping the Globohomo system a part of the Incel community sees a “Taliban styled sharia society” as a better place which can be argued is due to the Taliban is seen as ideal hegemonic masculinity by accruing power and control over women within the context (Witt, 2020: 678). Admiring the control of the Taliban and its masculine power in enforcing emphasized femininity, the

Taliban masculine model becomes a model that offers hope for some Incels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 848).

For some, it is not good enough to move to Afghanistan but rather “The goal should be to fix this degenerate unequal matriarchal society.” (post 2). Wanting to fix the West, Taliban ideologies and values of patriarchy and subordination of women become an ideal to be recontextualized to Western contexts. Arguing for Taliban ruling in the West is prevalent in the comments, as evident in the following comments: “Say what you want about Muslims we need their values in the west. It would be better for all incels” (post 22) and "Dangerously based. Allah bless this man's soul. The Taliban can't take over the West soon enough" (post 5). Thus, the users position themselves as somewhat dependent on the Taliban masculinity, depending on the Taliban to overturn the existing hegemonic masculine hierarchy that is predominated by Chads.

Taliban's ability to access power and practice violence becomes central to the construction of the ideal masculine subject within the Incel community (Witt, 2020: 677-678). It is further fostered in the idea that the dominant pattern of Chads is open to challenge, thus, Incel users call forth new strategies in gender relations by emphasizing reconstructing existing aspects of hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 846). This underlined possibility of change and criticism of existing hegemonic masculinity offers insight into masculinity redefinitions that some Incels would like.

Whereas critical to the existing hegemonic masculine hierarchy that Incels perceive themselves as subordinate masculine subjects to the hegemonic masculine figure of Chads, the Taliban become the representation of an ideal, powerful, hegemonic masculine figure that can save Incels from the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinity in the Globohomo system (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 846; Witt, 2020: 685). The hegemonic masculinity of the Taliban offers insight into the construction of Incel's "self" that idealizes Taliban masculinity. These users see the benefit of existing in a "Taliban-styled society" as complicit masculinity meaning that Incel would receive “...the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance...” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). Thus, the Taliban becomes not just ideal hegemonic masculinity for some Incels, but also a concrete masculine model based on a patriarchal heteronormative ideology that offers a solution to problems of gender relations by providing confirmation that emphasized femininity is possible (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 838, 848).

5.2.2 Hyperconforming to Taliban

In addition to idolizing the hegemonic masculine ideal type of Taliban, there is another positive relational perspective to touch upon in which some users include Taliban in their self-representation. There is an element in how Incels relate to Taliban in which some users identify with the Taliban by positioning Taliban as Incels, producing a frame in which the struggle and fight of Incels against feminism are comparable to Taliban, comprehending that Incels and Taliban are fighting the same fight. It can thus be argued that some Incels hyperconform to masculine identity traits of the Taliban (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 279).

A user commented: "I haven't heard 1 point from the Taliban my entire life that I disagree with. And I'm supposed to hate them?" where to another user commented, "No, you're supposed to join them. We all are." (post 7). The usage of strong obligational modalities in this quote claims political authority regarding Incels collective identity and who is part of the community, emphasizing that joining forces with the Taliban is the way to go (Fairclough et al., 2011: 371). We thus see users actively incorporating the Taliban into their collective self-understanding. The post to which this comment belongs is:

Picture 3: post title: [Dogpill²] "60 % of women over 40 in the West marry their pets" - Taliban



Source: post 7

² Dogpill suggests "...that human females prefer to have sex with dogs over human male (virgins)" (Sugiura, 2021: 22).

This post indicates that the Taliban has the same understanding of women by bridging the social reality of Incels to statements of the Taliban indicating they share an understanding of women in the West as being more interested in marrying their pets than being with men, also known as the dogpill in the Incel community. Whether the Taliban has made the statement that they are referring to, I do not know, but this being shared and the reactions to it, make it clear that some Incels are connected and committed to the Taliban. This further becomes evident by a user's comment: "THE BETA UPRISING IS HAPPENING" (post 8) to the Taliban have "won" in Afghanistan. This comment indicates a representation of the Taliban as initiating a beta uprising. It implies that the Taliban is part of the Incel community, that they are betas like Incels which connect the Taliban to an Incel understanding and positioning of victimhood and aggrieved entitlement (Ging, 2019(a): 650). The beta understanding is a key feature in the foundation of Incels and bridging this frame and rhetoric to the events in Afghanistan highlights a connection some users experience to the Taliban. Taliban discursively becomes a part of the constructed identity of Incels by considering Taliban as Incels: "ISIS, Taliban... are the only based incels nowadays" (post 9) (Fairclough et al., 2011: 370).

The representation of the Taliban is based on a present tense language that celebrates the progress of the Taliban but also carries a future element in terms of what political influence this uprising will have. A user commented on the beta uprising post that he "can't wait till the next president of the USA is a truecel" (post 8). For this user it is not a matter of if but when Incels will be the ruling USA, adding to an understanding of the social identity of Incels as having political objectives ideologically grounded in antifeminism that is legitimized and realistic because of the Taliban. This comment also aligns well with the idea held by several users that collectively Incels and Taliban can overcome the Globohomo system and come to power in the West, thus constructing particular framing of Incels and Taliban as a collective political community sharing similar struggles and threats of status (Fairclough et al., 2011: 372; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 280).

Hereof, I would argue that identifying with the Taliban is an extreme demonstration of masculinity, thus, these users are hyperconforming as a response to the threat of feminism (Willer et al., 2013: 980). Taliban is an extreme display of masculinity that is perceived as successfully challenging the authority of feminism and holding a position of dominance over women (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 281). By claiming the Taliban as betas, I argue that Incels hyperconform to the beta trait. Seeing the Taliban as betas the users project masculine traits of the Taliban to the Incel community while emphasizing their Incel status as members of a broader movement by incorporating the narrative of

the Taliban, their achievements, and masculine traits into the Incel community (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 281, 291). Thus, this hyperconformity seems to contain a way for Incels to transfer the "victory", power, and dominance of the Taliban to the Incel community, as a way to be in a position of power themselves rather than just "enjoying" the antifeminism of Taliban (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 279). However, whether it can be qualified to be an overcompensation or just conforming to already existing violent masculine traits, can the data not answer (Willer et al., 2013: 980). Nonetheless, as a response to the threat of the Globohomo system, the Taliban is then perceived as Incels and part of a bigger revolution in which they together will overpower the system. Some Incels thus hyperconform to beta masculinity that encompasses the extreme masculinity of the Taliban as a response to feminism.

Emphasizing that betas are coming to power, the ambiguity of masculine understanding within the Incel community is highlighted. This opens up for understanding the dynamics of Incel subordination and their (re)production of existing hierarchies of power, which will further be analyzed in light of Talichads below (Ging, 2019(a): 651).

5.2.3 The Hybrid Masculinity of Taliban and Chads

Talichads is a prevalent term used among users when discussing the Taliban. It is a discursive construction combined of Taliban and Chads which encompasses a conundrum between alpha and beta masculinities and different opinions as to how Incels are positioned in relation to it. As an expression of Incels' perceived gender and sexual inequality, they identify themselves as Talichads, which are noteworthy to analyze to understand aspects of the collective self of Incels (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 247). This concept holds contradictory aspects to it, which will be explored in light of hybrid masculinity to understand the clashing opinions to it.

By appropriating the Taliban masculinity into the hierarchal understanding of alpha and beta masculinities and Chads, the hybrid construction of Talichads then holds understandings of Taliban gender performance that causes different opinions and concerns among the users which will be uncovered here (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 246, 250). Specifically, how Talichads are perceived as being advantageous for Incels and on the contrary, opinions regarding how Talichads would (re)produce Incels' subordinate masculine position. Thus, it is not so much the hybrid masculine subject of Talichads in itself that will be the center of analysis here, even though it in itself are noteworthy, but rather how the user position themselves to Talichads.

In Incels' framing of the Taliban, they specifically focus on the power men hold regarding political rulings that target and disempower women. For instance, a user calls it a "Chadiban moment" (post 20) that the Taliban in Afghanistan has banned solo traveling for women. Several users refer to Taliban members as being Talichads as a way of honoring them. However, this term in itself has a contradictory foundation which gives insight into the contradictory identity of Incels.

Chads in the Incel community are viewed as good-looking men that can get with women and are seen as one of the reasons why Incels are Incels. Thus, in the word Chad, there is a hierarchical understanding that positions Chads above Incels as a determining factor and argumentative model for why Incels are involuntary celibate (Lindsay, 2022: 215). However, an interesting component of understanding the power dynamics within this hierarchal understanding is the intersection of ethnicity, which will be elaborated on below.

Talichads – Advantageous for Incels

The concept of Talichads fosters a contradiction to it, by emphasizing that Talichads are beneficial to Incels' fight against the Globohomo system, whereas Chads in the West are (re)producing the system. The intersection of race seems to be the reason for the differing positions of the Chads, where being a white Chads is a bigger threat, thus highlighting the white supremacy ideology of Incels (Sugiura, 2021: 130). For instance, a user writes: "compared to this taliban dude I'm a chad..." (post 10).

Some users by empathizing with Talichads position themselves as standing with the Taliban and distancing themselves from the oppressors of white Chads and women (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 250). Seeing the empowering aspect of Talichads entail an understanding in which "Hybrid masculine practices often work in ways that create some discursive distance between White, straight men and "hegemonic masculinity." However, as men are distanced from hegemonic masculinity, they also (often more subtly) align themselves with it." (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 250). Thus, Incels' positioning to the hybrid masculinity of Talichads shows the hybrid masculinity of Incels as they distance themselves from the existing hegemonic masculinity of white Chads, while subtly aligning with it by embracing the concept of Talichad. Thus, emphasizing that in the context of Talichads instead of regular Chads, Incels would reap the benefit of hegemonic masculinity, as they would be in a position to do so, showing how some Incels position themselves as more privileged concerning Taliban in terms of race.

The hybridity of Taliban masculinities, as well as the white supremacist corrosive ideology of Incels then, can be understood as a strategy for Incels to gain external hegemony to “...perpetuate existing systems of power and inequality in historically new ways” (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 246; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 844; Zimmerman et al., 2018: 1). This all underlines the hybrid masculinity of Incels “...whose self-positioning as victims of feminism and political correctness enables them to strategically distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity, while simultaneously compounding existing hierarchies of power and inequality online” (Ging, 2019(a): 651). Thus, distance from Chads, while (re)producing existing mechanisms of power in terms of white supremacy and perpetuating social hierarchies in a new way, the hybrid masculinity of Incels in relation to the hybrid masculinity of Talichads here, serves as a perspective to gain an advantage not just over women but over Chads as well (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 247).

Talichads – (re)production of Incels victimhood

On the other side, some express worries about Talichads, as Incels will just be Incels in a different geographical context if they were to move to Afghanistan or be an Incel in a different political context of Taliban and/or Taliban values coming to power in the West. Talichads would just result in the recontextualization of the alpha-beta based hierarchy and the victimization of Incels to a Taliban-based context, as shown in the following comment “It is, and I respect their achievements and intelligence. But it is only for THEM and their men. They kick out the unlucky loser men to the west as “refugees”, laughing whilst doing so”, an answer to: “Middle East is an Incel’s dream” (post 3). This emphasis on them creates “us” vs “them” rhetoric that shows that the Incel community for some users indicates their presuppose marginalization within the Taliban context, as it would not provide a structure that would disrupt their position as Incels. The contradiction in the concept in itself and the ambiguity it reflects among Incels' collective identity become clear as the Taliban instead becomes interpreted as the oppressing masculinity that steals women. Thus, a narrative of dominance that exists in the construction of Chads is recontextualized to that of the Taliban, to which some who previously saw themselves as subordinated to Western Chads, now see the risk of being a subordination man to Talichads (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 846). Thus, where some see an empowering aspect to Talichads other Incels see a (re)production of subordination to a potential new hegemonic masculine order, positioning themselves as victims of the Taliban instead (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 846; Ging, 2019(a): 651).

Thus, the idea of Talichads vs. the white Chads becomes a matter of two situations where both are not optimal for Incels. However, the representation of the Globohomo system as matriarchal and based on women's autonomy is argued to be the worse side of an unideal dichotomy between the Taliban and the Globohomo system. The social relation between Incels and Taliban by some users is constructed around an idea that Incels would not fit within a Taliban governed framework nor stay positioned at the bottom of a matriarchal but also hegemonic masculinity-based hierarchy that they believe they are victims of (Lindsay), highlighted in following quote which indicates that...

“Taliban was a different story. they were crazies.. 9/11 was a very bad thing.. but it will be wrong to blame all Muslims for that.. also not all muslims are good...what concerns us directly is how successfully the Islamic govts are able to give us peace of mind. I don't mind coming home to my 2/10 wife every night, if there are no 9/10 stacies getting fucked on every street corner. Out of sight, out of mind..” (post 11)

The hybrid masculinity of Incels then becomes all about negotiating the loss of patriarchy due to the Globohomo system all while holding constellations of power in the context of Talichads as based on white supremacy othering of Taliban (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014: 255-256). This does not just point to the contradictory nature of Incel masculinity but also contradiction and ambiguity in how masculinity is internally understood among Incels.

5.3 A Cucked Taliban

The above have highlighted oscillations of Incels collective identity in terms of celebrating similarities to and beneficial positioning related to Taliban. It is the majority of the users who have engaged in a discussion regarding the Taliban in the two forums that consider the Taliban in a positive light. However, there is an aspect of users disengaging from the Taliban. Thus, this section will dive into the more resistant comments to the Taliban and negative discourses (re)produced about the Taliban.

5.3.1 Disengaging from a Religious Taliban

There is disengagement with Taliban among some Incels that consist of the users being critical towards the religious elements of Taliban. Some Incel users are hesitant as to how ideal the Taliban ideological foundation is and to what degree their way of and on which grounds their mobilizing is positive. Violence based on a militant and Islamist ideological understanding of the Taliban makes some disengage with the Taliban (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 102).

As evident in the following comments, Islam and Muslims do not hold the most positive image among some users:

“Muslims struggle to keep their children in their religion and culture here. However, I have been in the muslim world... What I saw there was amazing. I mean the one thing I liked was that men were CLEARLY in control and there has to be next to no adultery there either. Theres other aspects of the Islamic religion and culture that get under my skin though and I just don't agree with.” (post 11)

Acknowledging the idolizing of a predominantly patriarchal system in Muslim countries in the quote, the aspect of interest is that the Islamic Taliban is not glorified, but rather criticized. This is not an isolated opinion within the forums. Another user comments on the Taliban: “I just find their religion too barbaric.” (post 12). There is an understanding among some users that the Taliban is too extreme in terms of the religious foundation of Islam for Incels to align with it. There is pointed out that there are too many rules within a Taliban-ruled context for the Incels to thrive within. Thus, a commonly shared worry among some users, as to gaining a patriarchal system that is based on Islamic populism would include losing “modern” rights and material matters, such as access to porn. Furthermore, the banning of women from school in Afghanistan is news that most of the Incel were happy to hear. There were, however, a few who pointed out that they do not want “dumb foids” (post 13).

The political operations of the Taliban grounded in Islam is for some Incels, not something they wish to engage in. This ideological reasoned doubt towards Taliban in terms of Islam that some Incels holds, is rational for the user's disengagement (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 102). "... as the incel community is, ostensibly, areligious, and not overtly connected to or invested in any other religious themes or narratives." (Witt, 2020: 683), this makes a relevant argument for why some Incels cannot align with an Islamic fundamentalist group such as Taliban. Thus, some Incels do not condone the Taliban's extremist violent action in the pursuit to control women as well as their religious regulated lifestyle (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 100). However, as the first quote also indicated, some users might disengage with the Taliban in terms of Islam, but still, find the Taliban "based" on how they treat women, whereas others do not find it regulating enough.

5.3.2 Feminized Taliban - Disengagement Due to Taliban's Lack of Violence

There is also a disengagement element among some Incels that consist of them turning their back on the violent extremism of the Taliban because it is not extreme enough. There is an antifeminist aspect

to the Incel community in which users do not find the Taliban's political action extreme enough to combat feminism but rather have been cucked by it. Reasoned by practical details the disengagement is due to the Taliban's antifeminism not being perceived as radical enough to align with the antifeminism of Incels (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 105).

For some users, the understanding of the Taliban's action is represented as not aligning with Incels' encouraged violent measures to achieve their political aims. As a primary factor for the congregation of Incels is the anti-Globohomo system, thus discourses surrounding the Taliban as being compromised are (re)produced as they are seen as having women work as news presenters, in general at work and, at the time of data collection, still allowing women education. To this, the Taliban is seen as being compromised by feminism, as evident in the following comment: "Oh no, feminism is already infecting the Taliban. It's over again." (post 14). The Taliban is consequently presented as a lost hope to overcome feminism as the user emphasizes that it is over again - over for Incels and over for the patriarchal ideology to gain power. Concerning this, some users in the forums present the Taliban as not extreme or radical enough to overcome the Globohomo system, as seen in the following comment:

“People here [in the forums] keep talking as if the Taliban are Based because of their Anti-Feminist Ideology, but even they are "allowing" women to work in high positions such as in Medicine and still get some education... It seems as if the Taliban are just as Cucked as any Western Government. Isis is more based, as at least they would not have tolerated Women Protests, they would've just rounded the women up and shot them execution style. Man, Fuck the Taliban Cucks.” (post 6).

Comparing the Taliban to the "tolerant" West, a part of the Incel community does not consider the Taliban as antifeminist enough and thus categorizes them as being "cucked" instead of being "based". These comments further underline how gender-based violence, repression, and social control are imperative and sought to be a strategy to target women for some Incels. As representing the Taliban as not achieving the preferred amount of regulations and punishment for women, the Taliban does not comply with the form of antifeminism some Incels wish to see, which creates a gap or rather a disconnected social relation to Incels (Fairclough et al., 2011: 370). Thus, some users do not connect the Incel identity with the Taliban representation as they do not find them radical enough to tackle the Globohomo system and feminism (Fairclough et al., 2011: 370). The impact of Taliban violence and its degree of extremism is not extreme enough for carrying out the practical aspects of challenging the Globohomo system and in general controlling women (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 105). Thus, a

part of the Incel community disengages with the Taliban, turning their back on the Taliban's not-violent-enough violent actions to combat feminism (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013: 100).

5.4 Polycentric Collective Identity of Incels

Based on how some Incels represent and relate to the Taliban in terms of masculinity as well as others who disengaged provide insight into the collective identity of Incels. Reading Incels' interpretation of the Taliban's antifeminism provides multiple understandings of a highly fragmented collective identity of Incels (Rothermel, 2020: 1373). So, exactly what does the antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban tell us about Incels' collective identity?

When researching Incels identity in light of the Taliban the answer is not straightforward. Looking into Incels group dynamic and ideological resonance to Taliban the analysis shows that there is a somewhat coherent understanding of feminism as the enemy and the commitment against the Globohomo system, but how the agenda to mobilize against it and who is considered members is not a shared understanding (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371). With the specific focus on masculinity and disengagement, the analysis has helped uncover the highly complex and dichotomized relations Incels holds with the Taliban. In the context of the fundamental dichotomous boundary between Incels and the Globohomo system, the Taliban are positioned differently among Incels. Overall, among the different users, the Taliban is seen as an ideal hegemonic masculine model, regarding the Taliban as betas and thus hyperconforming to their extreme misogynist dynamics constituting them as a part of the Incel community, as well as seeing Talichads as hybrid masculinity which could be advantageous for Incels. However, on the other side are the users who see Talichads as a threat, some who disengage with the religious foundation of the Taliban, and others who do not find the Taliban extreme enough. This all highlights an antifeminist Incel ideology that is interconnected to as well as disengaged with Taliban on different levels and shows that even though they are constructed to have the common enemy of women and westernized feminism, Incels in the online forums organize around a different understanding of the Incel "self" (Rothermel, 2020: 1373).

Some see themselves linked to the Taliban where others do not, which shows an incomplete inextricably linked Incel community (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21). This is not to suggest that there is not a collective identity among Incels, but rather to show the multiplicity of how boundaries between "self" and "other" are differently drawn discursively internally (Polletta & Jasper,

2001: 299; Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371). Showing the incoherence in the masculine identity among Incels and in the ideological engagement with antifeminism online in the community, the antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban shows a more polycentric characterized Incel identity (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 98). Showing that the Incel identity is not homogenous, I recognize that collective identity "... does not always presuppose a strong "collective we"" (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 98). Thus, the identity of Incels is not necessarily a coherent strong "we" but rather in forms of multiple identities (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 98).

Not only does the Incels' diverse engagement and interpersonal construction of meaning point to different forms and degrees of connectedness among the users (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Polletta & Jasper, 2001: 298). As these online discussions regarding the Taliban show an internally diverse Incel community, they also show the effect of holding different understandings of purpose and commitment (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21). "Collective identity... involves a positive affect toward other group members" (Polletta & Jasper, 2001: 299), however, internal disagreement and conflict between Incels discussing antifeminism and means to combat the Globohomo system are prevalent. The differences in discourse concerning the Taliban are seen to cause internal tension, as the ideological foundation of the community is highly different depending on whom you ask, as evident in the following comment:

"Those boys [other Incels who are against Taliban] are so naive. They don't realize the Taliban is actually saving their futures! The Taliban's restrictions on females are far more than anything we have in the West so I'm not complaining. They are fostering a society where foids must be subservient. Don't let perfect be the enemy of good." (post 6).

Internal conflicts and tensions seem to arise due to differences in expectation as Incels individually engage from diverse self-interested concerns (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 98). While some Incels are against the Taliban's antifeminist effort as based on Islam others see the Taliban as a means to get to a patriarchal society, idolizing and incorporating different masculine understandings of Taliban into their identity. As different discursive and emotional boundaries are drawn between Incels and Taliban, the mutual understanding of Incels' ideological foundation is questioned internally creating tension as there are conflicting opinions (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371).

The process of (re)producing a collective identity of Incels without a coherent agenda, gives cause to reflect upon the Taliban's influence on Incel mobilization. Recognizing that “Identifying with a movement does not necessarily mean sharing a systematic and coherent vision of the world...” (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 98) collective action can still unfold. It is no secret that my reaction regarding this nexus even existing was one of surprise. Initially, it gave cause for worry (and still does) regarding Incels' mobilization, especially towards the escalation of perpetrating not just rhetorical violence but also physical violence. However, Taliban intersecting within the Incel community has shown a highly diverse and split dynamic between group members. With various degrees of radicalization, the collective identity of Incels can be classified as vastly fragmented and polycentric (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 98). With this bearing in mind, the glorification of a terror organization such as the Taliban is still not with apprehension, thus I wish to shortly discuss Incels’ potential mobilization of collective action.

6. Discussion

As the data does not allow me to say anything about activities outside the online sphere, I here wish to generally discuss and contribute to existing perspectives regarding Incel violence in hindsight of the relationship they have established with the Taliban. This is not about determining whether Incel is going to establish collective action or not, but rather adding to the discussion concerning the threat of Incels, by incorporating aspects of the antifeminist nexus of Incel and Taliban. This is however not to indicate any form of alliance between Incels and Taliban, as I acknowledge this is one-sided connection from Incels and that “... attempts to forge alliances between the extreme-right and Islamists have been unidirectional, originating with the extreme-right, and largely unsuccessful. Moreover, they have tended to occur during (and thus reflect) periods of movement realignment or crisis, when the extreme-right is seeking political direction and relevance.” (Winter, 2014: 36). Thus, I rather discuss whether the nexus might serve as a political direction/blueprint for Incels and what potential the polycentric collective identity might hold (Norris, 2021). Thus, answering the question: does the antifeminist nexus intensify the threat of Incels?

The degree that which Incels relate to the Taliban is worrisome as it partly contextualizes their right-wing populism and antifeminism as an offline case of robbing women of their rights (McAuliffe, 2022). It indicates that the Incel community are seeking political direction and the intersection with

a fundamentalist Islamism group such as the Taliban is not without concern when a large part of the Incel community glorifies the gender-discriminatory and violent efforts of the Taliban (McAuliffe, 2022: Winter, 2014: 36)). However, as the analysis has showed, the Incel community is highly fragmented, so it is hard, nearly impossible, to say anything about the entire Incel community within this regard. With that considered, understanding that the Incel community which unfolds in online forums is the "...backstage' area for anti-feminist (on- and offline) mobilizations..." (Rothermel, 2020: 1376) the connection between right-wing and Islamic populism of Incels and Taliban seems to partly foster the narrow worldview of Incels which are conducive to political violence (Baele et al., 2021: 1668, 1686). Reinforcing women as the enemy and the Incel struggle against the Globohomo system, by further normalizing misogynistic feelings and actions beyond the Incel online sphere (Moghissi, 2018: 78-79; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 282). As misogyny serves as "...the precursor and early warning sign of further political violence and terrorism." (Díaz & Valji: 2019: 49) the misogynist and patriarchal appropriation of the Taliban might serve as a warning sign regarding some Incels, as it "...hold the potential for violence" (Witt, 2020: 678). Specifically, the analysis indicate that some Incels experience a high degree of gender role stress with hostile attitudes towards women resulting in hyperconforming to the Taliban, which is a predisposition for violent acts (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 293). As some Incels embrace the Taliban by including them into the Incel narrative as betas and idolizing their violent acts, the masculine model present theoretically likelihood of violent actions (Gentry, 2022: 214; Moghissi, 2018: 78). As the data cannot say anything about this, this antifeminist nexus consisting of violent ideological masculinity and militant misogyny is nonetheless without concern (Zimmerman et al., 2018: 2).

However, the Taliban rather seem to spilt the community than collect them around political actions and bring a common purpose that will create a coherent agenda that could lead to collective action (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 21; Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371). Based on the diverse discursive boundaries that are being drawn between Incel and the Taliban the heterogenic and somewhat conflicting collective identity of Incels become clear (Rothermel, 2020: 1370-1371).

The radical element of establishing a collective identity is as argued by Lindsay, "...the formation and enactment of a common social identity is the core way that incel groups utilize digital counter-publics to 'radicalise' new users." (Lindsay, 2022: 214). Thus, as somewhat coherent "...collective identities are a precondition for the emergence of collective action." (Meiering et al., 2020: 7), the ideological internal inconsistency gives cause to question risk of Incels mobilizing collective action. The loose organization of Incels has been questioned before but stochastic and misogynist

violence has still been carried out by Incels (Hoffman et al., 2020: 568, 581; Lindsay, 2022: 214). However, it has primarily been lone-wolf misogynistic terror attacks as some authors would categorize it, pointing to individual violent actions by Incels (Zimmerman et al., 2018: 1). If reasons for individually political and violent actions rather than collective mobilization toward political action are due to the multiple identities and polycentric characters of Incel identity and/or other factors is not something I can determine here. However, just because a community is polycentric does not necessarily mean that a movement is not prone to or able to constitute violent collective action as is the case with the Taliban (Giustozzi, 2019: 4). Nonetheless, the internal conflict created around the Taliban might suggest that preconditions of collective action are not fulfilled by having an incoherent agenda (Rothermel, 1370-1371). This is not to say that the political aspect of Incels is not of concern, but rather that perhaps the polycentric collective identity of Incels that encompass dichotomized opinions among Incel might be an element to understand why stochastic terror has been prevalent and not collective action, as opposed to an extremist group such as the Taliban (Lindsay, 2022: 214; Hoffmann et al., 2020: 574).

So, whether the Taliban's interference in the Incels community adds to the threat of Incels, is honestly not something that can be determined here and would require further research. I can however argue that traits of Incels way of relating to the Taliban contains predisposing to violent acts (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 293). Further, that the incoherence in the collective identity of Incels theoretically serve as an explanatory model as to why Incels has been more prone to misogynistic stochastic terror rather than collective measures (Ging, 2019(b): 64). But, it is still not without worry as the power of normalizing violence in the Incel community lets us know that the threat of Incels is real (Baele et al., 2021: 1684). This is however not to say all Incels are prone to violence or would commit mass murder (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020: 289). Nevertheless, with comments like: "Based men should start an army and cut off western rostie³ cunts who are responsible for feminism and anti male laws that take away right from non chads" (post 4), power dynamics are clear and (re)production of a patriarchal system that seeks to subordinate women are the motivational factors for some Incels to go beyond the written and take active measures to overcome their perceived "victimhood" (Fairclough et al., 2011: 239; Lindsay, 2022: 214). Consequently, the gendered values, rhetoric, and discourses should not just be taken as words that are limited to the online sphere, but rather perpetuate violence and legitimize extreme antifeminist measures and thus contribute to existing right-wing populist

³ Rostie implies "a woman whose labia has stretched to replicate a roast beef sandwich from having sex with lots of men" (Sugiura, 2021: 23).

power relations that serve as a threat to the feminist project (Fairclough et al., 2011: 239; Moghissi, 2018: 87; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018: 7).

I argue that my discoveries are in concordance with Ging (2019(b)) in terms of incoherence among Incels, to which Ging offers a glimpse of hope. While acknowledging that Incels mobilization is not non-threatening, "...this "movement" is incoherent and unconnected and, perhaps most importantly, tends not to mobilize publicly in the way that feminist marches and protests do." (Ging, 2019(b): 64). Similar does Moghissi points to groups such as Incels mobilization "...should move us beyond alarm and fear" (Moghissi, 2018: 90), especially in correlation with an aspirational source such as Taliban but that hope lies in the creativity for the transnational force of resistance and social change mobilization (Norris, 2021).

7. Conclusion

This thesis has aimed at investigating the unexplored antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban there exists within the online community of Incels. Focusing on how Incels relate to the Taliban, the research has aspired to illuminate unmapped aspects of the Incel community and thus adding to the existing body of research. Specifically, the thesis has sat out to answer: How does the Taliban appear within the community and the collective identity of Incels?

Based on an inductive and netnographic approach consisting of online non-intrusive observations on Incels.net and Incels.is, I carried out a CDA based on 37 posts and related comments. The data shows many nuances to how Incels relate, position, and interpret the Taliban. To illuminate a broad scope of different aspects of the nexus, collective identity was the combining theoretical focus. Focusing on collective identity assists in understanding the positioning and boundaries that are drawn between Incels and the Taliban internally and individually within the Incel community. Specifically, these interpersonal constructions of boundaries are understood using the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, hyperconformity to masculinity, hybrid masculinity, and disengagement to understand how, why and to what degree Incels relate to the Taliban.

Based on the analysis the antifeminist nexus consists (not exclusively) of a creation of an ideal hegemonic masculine model of Taliban, which is a savior masculine project that offers hope for some Incels as Taliban are perceived as successfully employing a patriarchal system. Furthermore, as an extreme demonstration of masculinity in response to the perceived threat of the Globohomo

system, some Incels include Taliban in the beta understanding of their Incel identity and rhetorically hyperconform to Taliban traits. Moreover, the concept of Talichads has contradictory aspects to it with the twofold positioning of Incels. The constructed hybrid masculinity of Talichads is understood by some as being beneficial for Incels, thus, underlining the hybrid masculine nature of Incels. For others the victimhood narrative exists within the Talichad, indicating a belief that the Taliban at power in their context will be a (re)production of the marginalization of the subordinated masculine model of Incels. Other Incels display caution towards the Taliban differently. Some disengage due to religion, as they perceive the Islamic fundamentalism of Taliban does not align with some Incels who either find it too extreme and/or too restrictive mainly regarding men's rights but also to some degree concerning women. Thus, disengaging with the religious violence and political ideology of the Taliban. Where to others disengage due to the lack of extremism as Taliban is perceived as being compromised by feminism for letting women have jobs, thus not matching the level of antifeminism some Incels would like to see, as a result, they disengage with Taliban, turning their back on their not-violent-enough violent actions to combat feminism.

Compiling these answers gives insight into how Incels relate to the Taliban on multiple levels and with various degrees of ideological interpretation of antifeminism. The Taliban appear as a reference point that gives rise to many different opinions and thus performs as a somewhat internal dividing factor made up of different drawn boundaries between Incels and the Taliban, which indicates a polycentric characterized collective identity of Incels, that give cause for internal conflicts.

The effect of the antifeminist nexus between Incels and Taliban and what it indicates concerning Incels' collective identity has been up for discussion and is something that needs further research. However, the threat of Incels is still real, further exacerbating existing within the global socio-political context of rising right-wing populism, and backlash against women's rights and equality that is in recession in the Western world (Kantola & Verloo, 2018). The Incel community is a symptom of structural misogyny and a backlash against the feminist project which is further fostered in the antifeminist nexus between Incels and the Taliban that in its mobilization gives cause for attentiveness.

Then as “Mobilizing online adherents present several advantages to extremist groups: most notably, it makes incels more accessible to curious minds across the globe, who now only need an internet connection to be radicalized.” (Hoffman et al., 2020: 575), seeing that these forums are

gaining traction by increasing Incel user numbers, the need for further research and understanding of this community is considered to be pertinent. On the Incels.is from when I started observations and to the end of my thesis writing, almost 1000 new users have joined the forum. Thus, I suggest future research going more in-depth with the Taliban-Incel dynamics that I have identified. In that regard, investigating these dynamics with a focus on global-local dynamics and north-south dynamics seems relevant to uncover the localized specifics that take part in these transnational dynamics (Rothermel, 2020: 1375-1377).

8. Bibliography

- Akingbade, R., Mayungbo, O. A., & Osamika, B. E. (2022). Gender neutral language use among university lectures: gender differences in insitutions with and without gender mainstreaming policies. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, vol 7 no 3, 129-147.
- Baele, S. J., Brace, L., & Coan, T. G. (2021). From “Incel” to “Saint”: Analyzing the violent worldview behind the 2018 Toronto attack. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol 33 no 8, 1667-1691.
- Bakali, N. (2019). Challenging Terrorism as a Form of “Otherness”: Exploring the Parallels between Far-right and Muslim Religious Extremism. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol 5 no 1, 99-115.
- Bates, L. (2020). *Men Who Hate Women: The Extremism Nobody is Talking About*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Bernard, H. R. (2011). Direct and Indirect Observation. In *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (pp. 306-336). Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Bridges, T., & Pascoe, C. J. (2014). Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities. *Sociology Compass*, vol 8 no 3, 246–258.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Connell, R. (2016). Masculinities in global perspective: hegemony, contestation, and changing structures of power. *Theor Soc*, vol 45, 303–318.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity - Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, vol 19 no 6, 829-859.
- Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2013). Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol 36 no 2, 99-115.
- della Porta, D., & Diani, M. (2006). *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Díaz, P. C., & Valji, N. (2019). Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism: New Understanding and Policy Implicaitions. *Journal of International Affairs*, vol 72 no 2, 37-56.
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Harlow: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (2018). CDA as dialectical reasoning. In J. Flowerdew, & J. E. Richardson, *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 35-51). New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (2011). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. A. van Dijk, *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (pp. 357-378). London: SAGE.

- Gentry, C. E. (2022). Misogynistic terrorism: it has always been here. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol 15 no 1, 209-224.
- Ging, D. (2019(a)). Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, vol 22 no 4, 638-657.
- Ging, D. (2019(b)). Bros v. Hos: Postfeminism, Anti-feminism and the Toxic Turn in Digital Gender Politics. In D. Ging, & E. Siaper, *Gender Hate Online Understanding the New Anti-Feminism* (pp. 45-68). Dublin: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giustozzi, A. (2019). Introduction. In *The Taliban at War: 2001 - 2018* (pp. 1-16). London: C. Hurst & Co.
- Hadid, D. (2022, March 23). *Taliban reverses decision, barring Afghan girls from attending school beyond 6th grade*. Retrieved from npr: <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/23/1088202759/taliban-afghanistan-girls-school?t=1653903161436> (accessed: 30.05.2022)
- Harmer, E., & Lumsden, K. (2019). Online Othering: An Introduction. In *Online Othering: Exploring Violence and Discrimination on the Web* (pp. 1-39). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hoffman, B., Ware, J., & Shapiro, E. (2020). Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol 43 no 7, 565-587.
- Hooley, T., Marriott, J., & Wellens, J. (2012). Dealing with ethical issues in online research. In *What is Online Research?: Using the Internet for Social Science Research* (pp. 25-38). London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Huckin, T. N. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. Miller, *Functional Approaches to Written Text: Classroom Applications* (pp. 78-92). Washington: ERIC.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021). *Afghanistan - Events of 2021*. Retrieved from hrw.org: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/afghanistan> (accessed: 30.05.2022)
- Jørgensen, P. S., & Rienecker, L. (2016). *Studiehåndbogen - for studerende på videregående uddannelser*. Samfundslitteratur.
- Justitsministeriet. (2021, September 20). *Bekendtgørelse af straffeloven*. Retrieved from Retsinformationen: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2021/1851?id=202516> (accessed: 10.03.2022)
- Juul, S., & Pedersen, K. B. (2012). *Samfundsvidenskabernes Videnskabsteori*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Kantola, J., & Verloo, M. (2018). Revisiting gender equality at times of recession: a discussion of the strategies of gender and politics scholarship for dealing with equality. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, vol 1 no 1-2, 205-222.

- Kováts, E. (2018). Questioning Consensuses: Right-Wing Populism, Anti-Populism, and the Threat of 'Gender Ideology'. *Sociological Research Online*, vol 23 no 2, 528–538.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. London: Sage.
- Kozinets, R. V., Dolbec, P.-Y., & Earley, A. (2014). Netnographic Analysis: Understanding Culture through Social Media Data. In U. Flick, *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 262-275). London: Sage.
- Kumar, R., & Noori, H. (2022, May 8). *Afghan women deplore Taliban's new order to cover faces in public*. Retrieved from Aljazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/8/taliban-make-burqa-mandatory-for-afghan-women> (accessed: 30.05.2022)
- Lindsay, A. (2022). Swallowing the black pill: Involuntary celibates' (Incels) anti-feminism within digital society. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, vol 11 no 1, 210-224.
- Marwick, A. E., & Caplan, R. (2018). Drinking male tears: language, the manosphere, and networked harassment. *Feminist Media Studies*, vol 18 no 4, 543-559.
- McAuliffe, M. (2022, February 23). *Struggling to Survive: Gender, Displacement, and Migration in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan*. Retrieved from Center for strategic & international studies: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/struggling-survive-gender-displacement-and-migration-taliban-controlled-afghanistan> (accessed: 30.05.2022)
- Meiering, D., Dziri, A., & Foroutan, N. (2020). Connecting Structures: Resistance, Heroic Masculinity and Anti-Feminism as Bridging Narratives within Group Radicalization. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol 14 no 2, 1-19.
- Meyer, M. (2001). Between Theory, Method, and Politics: Positioning of the Approaches to Cda. In R. Wodak, & M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 14-31). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Moghissi, H. (2018). Right-wing Western and Islamic populism - Reconsidering justice, democracy and equity. In G. Fitzi, J. Mackert, & B. S. Turner, *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy* (pp. 78-93). London: Routledge.
- Norris, S. (2021, August 25). *'TALICHAD' The Far-Right Takes Inspiration from the Taliban Takeover*. Retrieved from Byline Times: <https://bylinetimes.com/2021/08/25/talichad-the-far-right-takes-inspiration-from-the-taliban-takeover/> (accessed: 30.05.2022)
- Paternotte, D., & Kuhar, R. (2018). Disentangling and Locating the "Global Right": Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. *Politics and Governance*, 6–19.
- Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. M. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 283-305.

- Rienecker, L., & Jørgensen, P. S. (2014). Litteratur- og informationssøgning til opgaven. In *Den gode opgave* (pp. 141-161). Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
- Riis, O. (2004). *Sociologiske metoder i praksis*. Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.
- Rothermel, A.-K. (2020). Global–local dynamics in anti-feminist discourses: an analysis of Indian, Russian and US online communities. *International Affairs*, vol 96 no 5, 1367-1385.
- Scaptura, M. N., & Boyle, K. M. (2020). Masculinity Threat, “Incel” Traits, and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States. *Feminist Criminology*, vol 15 no 3, 278-298.
- Siapera, E. (2019). Online Misogyny as Witch Hunt: Primitive Accumulation in the Age of Techno-capitalism. In D. Ging, & E. Siapera, *Gender Hate Online - Understanding the New Anti-Feminism* (pp. 21-44). Dublin: Palgrave macmillan.
- Similarweb. (n.d.(a)). *incels.is*. Retrieved from similarweb.com:
<https://www.similarweb.com/website/incels.is/#overview> (accessed: 27.05.2022)
- Similarweb. (n.d.(b)). *incels.net*. Retrieved from similarweb.com:
<https://www.similarweb.com/website/incels.net/#overview> (accessed: 27.05.2022)
- Sugiura, L. (2021). *The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Thingsted, A. (2022, February 9). *Incels: Hvorfor spredde ensomme danske mænd kvindehad i internettets dunkle afkroge?* Retrieved from Videnskab.dk: <https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/incels-hvorfor-spredde-ensomme-danske-maend-kvindehad-i-internettets-dunkle-afkroge> (accessed: 30.05.2022)
- Wheeler, D. A., & Nooristani, N. (2018). Taliban. In B. A. Arrigo, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Surveillance, Security, and Privacy* (pp. 1009-1011). SAGE Publications.
- Wibben, A. T. (2016). Debates in Feminist Security Studies. In M. D. Cavelty, & T. Balzacq, *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies* (pp. 85-94). London: Routledge.
- Willer, R., Rogalin, C. L., Conlon, B., & Wojnowicz, M. T. (2013). Overdoing Gender: A Test of the Masculine Overcompensation Thesis. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol 118 no 4, 980-1022.
- Winter, A. (2014). My Enemies Must Be Friends: The American Extreme-Right, Conspiracy Theory, Islam, and the Middle East. In M. Reinkowski, & M. Butter, *Conspiracy Theories in the Middle East and the United States* (pp. 35-58). Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Witt, T. (2020). ‘If i cannot have it, i will do everything i can to destroy it.’ the canonization of Elliot Rodger: ‘Incel’ masculinities, secular sainthood, and justifications of ideological violence. *Social Identities*, vol 26 no 5, 675-689.

- World Health Organization. (2022, January 21). *Female genital mutilation*. Retrieved from who.int: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>
- Zimmerman, S., Ryan, L., & Duriesmith, D. (2018). Recognizing the Violent Extremist Ideology of 'Incels'. *Women in International Security Policy Brief*, 1-5.