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# Unveiling "ex-incels": identity dynamics and juxtaposed hegemonic masculinity.

SMITH, D.S. and ADAMS, N.

2024

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# Unveiling 'ex-Incels': identity dynamics and juxtaposed hegemonic masculinity

Dr. David S. Smith & Dr Nick Adams

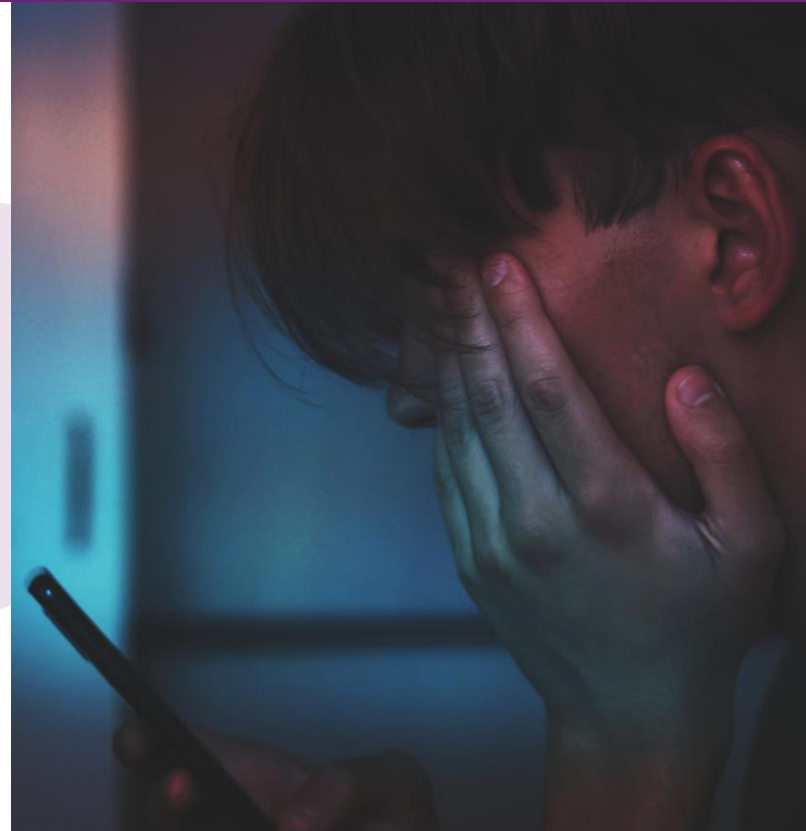
# Adult virginity

## Virginity loss

- Milestone to adulthood? (Lucas et al., 2024)
- Inexperience: negative, e.g., sadness, shame, insecurity, arrested state (Leroux & Boislard, 2023)
  - Stigma as partners (Gesselman et al., 2017)
- Virgin shaming: young men (Fleming & Davis, 2018)
- Manosphere taxonomies: sexual conquest as a meritocratic measure of manhood (Smith, 2023)

## Incels

- Outsource developmental maturity (Sharkey, 2022)
- Inadequacy, alienation, less value (Maryn et al., 2024) Chad = totem of failure (Fowler, 2022)
- Forums: safe spaces – sexual inexperience, mental health (Smith et al., 2024)
  - Increasingly hostile: explanatory value of red pill?
  - “I didn’t leave incelism – incelism left me”



# Incels

## Who are the incels? (Blake & Brooks, 2023; Costello et al., 2022)

- 60-100k members
  - Ages 18-30
  - Diverse: 55% white
  - Economically underprivileged, 50% at home, link to regional inequality (Brooks et al., 2022)
  - Mental health: 70% depression, 40% anxiety, 40% consider committing suicide every day

Linked to feelings of failing as men (Daly & Laskovtsov, 2021)

Subordinated?

## Hegemonic masculinity

- Culturally dominant masculinity (Connell, 2020)
  - Authority, toughness, sexual prowess, heterosexuality
  - Subjugates/subordinates other masculinities and femininities
  - Hybrid masculinity: blend masculinity typologies (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014)
- Incel weaponised subordination (Halpin et al., 2024)
  - Demean own feminine traits: victim/resistors of hegemonic masculinity
  - Legitimise misogyny/gender-based violence – reclaim lost masculinity *within* norms

# Adams & Smith (in revision)

## Adams & Smith (in revision)

- Many studies of radicalisation: distanced analysis
  - Cannot ask follow-ups/clarify meaning/develop inquiry into perspectives, sense-making and meaning
- Interviews with ex-incels
  - How did masculinity identification influence membership?
  - How was their masculine subordination reinforced?
  - How are masculinities reconstructed after exiting?



## Method

- 11 members of ex-incel forums (50-150 mins)
- Life before, what they got from membership, changes since
- Deductive analysis via hegemonic masculinity framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021)
  - Transcription, reading/familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining/naming themes, finalising analysis

**Ethical concerns with interviewing? (Carian et al., 2023)**



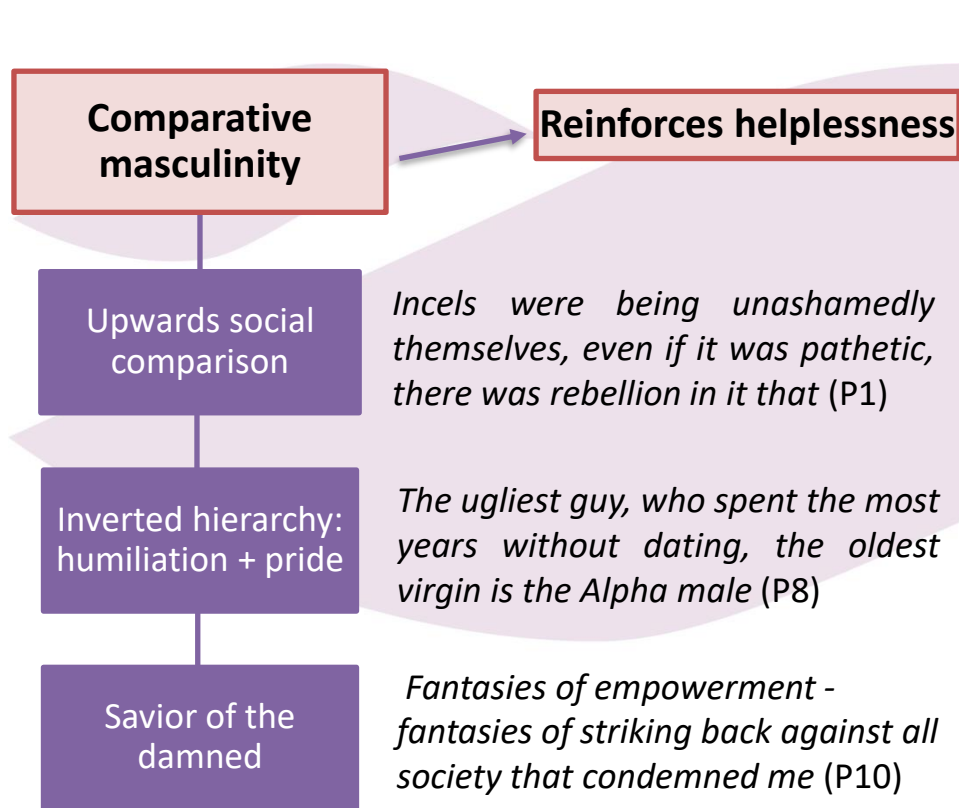
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# Adams & Smith (in revision)

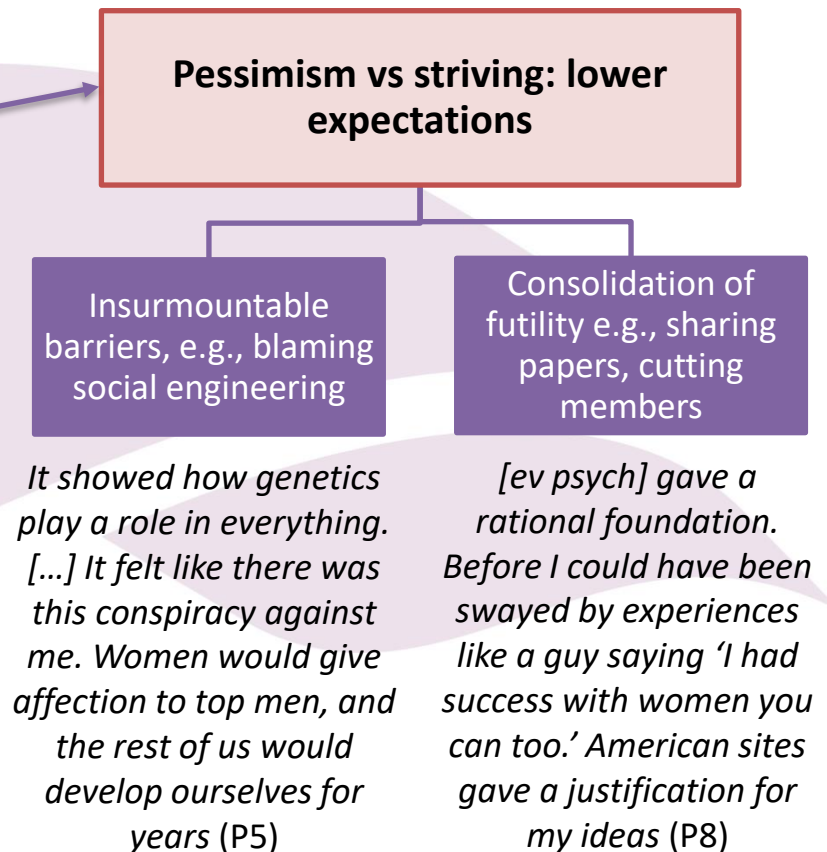
Participant	Age	Region	Incel from	Incel until	Dominant pill
1	23	United Kingdom	2016	2018	Black
2	21	Central Europe	2017	2020	Black
3	23	USA	2018	2020	Black then red
4	28	Eastern Europe	2016	2018	Red
5	29	Canada	2016	2019	Black then red
6	28	USA	2017	2021	Black
7	33	Canada	2010	2011	Black
8	25	Italy	2010	2021	Mixed
9	29	Brazil	2011	2018	Red
10	32	USA	2009	2011	Red
11	40	Canada	1996	2014	Red

# Adams & Smith (in revision)

## From shyness to radicalisation



## Resistance to “masculine” autonomy



**Reject pursuit of hegemonic: all aspects unobtainable**



# Adams & Smith (in revision)

## Juxtaposed masculinities

### Support for Hegemonic masculinity after incelism

Changed mindset:  
gaining autonomy

*I got introduced to the red pill and became serious about working out, improving my financial net worth, being more social, putting myself out there and making connections (P5)*

Complicit HM support:  
integrating with it

*I still believe that discussing emotional matters or showing too much weakness as a man can be detrimental. It is what it is, and it's useless trying to change it. (P9)*

Juxtaposing HM with  
incel identity

Subordinating  
remaining incels

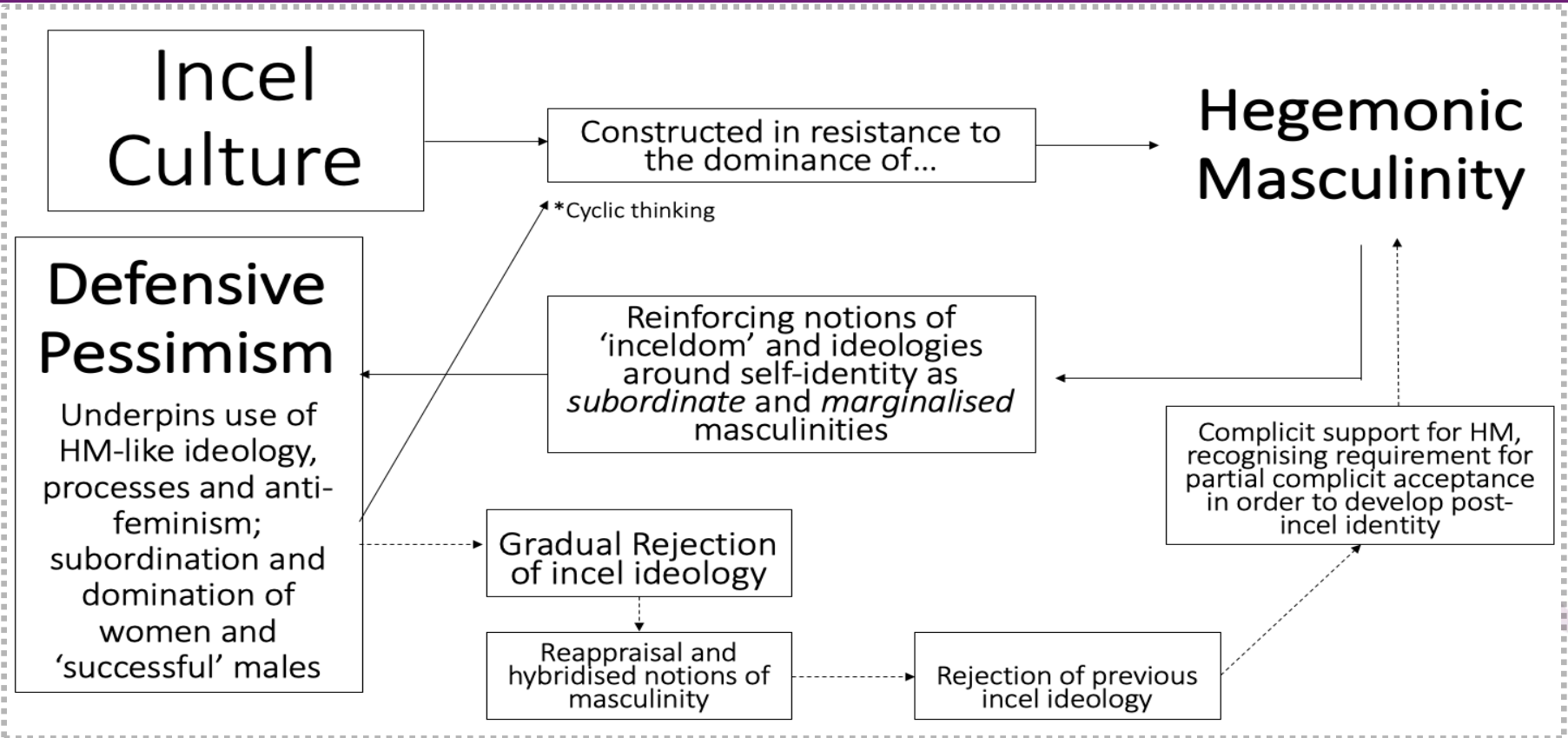
*The most visible ones are living with their mom when they're 32, playing video games 18 hours a day, have anime body pillows are overweight and have body odour (P3)*

Recognition of own  
positioning

*They're right in a lot of ways - it's not just about being yourself and being a cool guy and being nice person: you need to exhibit proper status demonstrators (P10)*



# Adams & Smith (in revision)



## Concluding remarks

Incels hybrid identities: subordinate/delegitimise non-HM identities (Halpin et al., 2022)  
Ex-incels: renewed focus on societal integration/competition: entrepreneurial (Smith., 2024)  
Leaving: strict adherence to incel ideologies/resistance towards HM via masculine praxis

The end

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