**Age: 30s**

**Ethnicity: white**

**Country of Birth: rather not say**

**country of residence: rather not say, but I'm in a former Soviet country (I think it's relevant to my lived experience)**

**highest level of education: high school**

**occupation: rather not say**

**What does incel mean to you?**

Ok, so for me, today, I would describe "inceldom" as a hyper cynical delusion. If I were to guess, I would say that this delusion manifests from factors such as excessive isolation, childhood abuse/neglect, school bullying, possibly being somewhere on the autism spectrum, poverty(in the sense of feeling like one can never live up to what a man is "supposed to" be), lack of opportunities to form networks, etc

I think all of this pretty much funnelled a lot of young men and teenage boys into unhealthy online places where they could find that dumb redacted alpha wolf study and other psuedo-scientific garbage that would further send them spiralling. form networks, etc.

I'm not exactly sure where it started for me, but I remember so many years ago, I was still in highschool. I found the r/redpill subreddit, which I just checked, is quarantined, but it seems that there are a few other splinter subs, with not that many members.

From my point of view, all of the "hard truths" on that sub seemed to confirm all of my biggest fears and insecurities in regards to girls, dating and my value(or lack of thereof) as a partner. - quote

I think the decline of available third places inadvertently also contributed to this phenomenon. I remember throughout my 20's I had no place to actually exist except at home on my computer and it was like this for at least a decade. The only places around me were dive bars filled with horrible people.

If you were to ask me what "incel" meant to me when I identified as one, all those years ago, then I would have told you something along the lines of "it's simply how it is, how I was born and my caste in society. I am unlovable and it is what it is."

**Can you tell me what you think a man is “supposed to” be and where you think that develops from?**

I think these kinds of toxic male gender norms really just come from bullying dressed up in different ways. I think it's better if I speak from my own personal experience as a child of the 90's. What a man was "supposed to" be was pretty clear to me back then. I had a caricature in my mind, something like a G.I. Joe action figure in a business suit. For a period in my early teens I didn't care. Looking back, while I definitely identify as a man now, back then I really didn't feel like one, if anything I felt kind of like a girl and I was frequently mistaken for one. I remember reading something about gender being fluid but to be honest, I'm not that interested if my gender is or was fluid, solid or gas, I just was what I was. Being like this did make me the main target for bullied and I was bullied out of school twice.

By the time I had become an incel, I was way more concerned with conforming to cis-hetero-masculinity. I would have definitely been an Andrew Tate fan back then, insecure teen guy's are probably Tate's bread and butter.

By that time I wanted to be the caricature. I wanted to be the square-jawed, thick-wristed, 6-pack having alpha bro. I remember googling, in futility, "exercises for increasing the size of wrists"(common silly incel insecurity, but I was certain at the time that was possibly the reason women were leaving me on read).

So in the context of traditional Western patriarchy, from what I experienced and know, I'd say a man was "supposed to" not really be a human at all. More like an ogre to be honest. Patrick Bateman.

I'm not sure where the ground zero was for these toxic male gender norms and expectations, but I suspect the ruthless and competitive nature of Capitalism combined with homophobia, misogyny and narcissism play a part.

**Did you experience any of the things you think the hyper delusion of inceldom results from that you mentioned in the first answer?**

I experienced almost all of these delusions. I think a lot of it is just body dysmorphia. The small wrists thing I mentioned earlier was my biggest insecurity and now just thinking about it is so absolutely ridiculous to me to the point where I almost find it funny. I think it's a good sign that I've grown past this**.**

I had also convinced myself that my very soul was deformed, and that's why I was unlovable. This one I don't find funny, it's just sad. I want to be kind to my younger self.

Of course, the truth is that I was indeed very unattractive to women. But it's because I was an alcoholic incel, among other things. I was a racist too(shouldn't be a surprise) and homophobe. It wasn't because of my wrists, it was because I was, well, a horrible person. A deeply sad person, but pretty awful.

**How did you go from r/redpill to more niche incel spaces, what did that journey look like?**

Youtube funnelled me down a really dark pipeline. It happened very slowly. Bitter anonymous losers posting online is one thing, but these were high production videos with "experts" who seemed, at least to me at the time, to know what they were talking about. Jordan Peterson, etc

I think it's very important to note, that these incel spaces, often eventually turned into racist spaces and sometimes even neo-nazi spaces. I think there is a large overlap between incels and nazis that needs to be studied more. Actually from my understanding of history, it was kind of always like that. Deep, sexual insecurity seems to be an ubiquitous motivating force in fascist and fascist-adjacent movements. When the unlovables find each other. Isolation, people aren't meant to be like that. It warps people.

**What about incel ideology appealed to you?**

What appealed to me? I think there is a perverse comfort in being a fatalist. If you are 100% certain that there is no hope and that nothing will ever get better no matter how often or what you try, then you can just be nothing and nobody. You can be a non-entity, drinking hard alcohol behind at your computer. No reason to do anything. Just wait until the liver gives out.

Or maybe it wasn't really an "appeal", so much as simply "the truth". I accepted it like how I accepted that the sky was blue. I think this comes from extremely low self-esteem. I remember reading online in these incel spaces, a phrase that popped up a few times, "if it hurts then it's true". It's nonsense, but imagine believing that, imagine believing that 100%. That's the worldview. If it hurts then it's true*.* I did have extremely low self-esteem at that time, bullying at school, abuse and neglect at home. It wasn't good

**What did the incel identity provide you?**

I suppose, at most, at the time, I thought that being an incel at least gave me some identity, a community that I was a part of? Sad self-pitying crab bucket society. I can't think of anything good about it. The best kind of person you could maybe find would be some fatalistic, self-hater that kept to himself but that's not really good at all. It's truly one of the worst mentalities a person can possibly have. At best, what is it? Insufferable self-pitying and a weird myopic view of women and creepy obsession with porn and having a girlfriend? Ugh.

**Would you say that your masculine presentation having developed or the way you understand a man can present himself is causal in how you now see yourself as a man?**

I'm not sure if I understood your first question correctly. I think I was essentially brute forced into being a man. When I was in highschool, I became the victim of a violent hate crime while walking home from a friend's house. I was "gay". I wasn't. But I was considered effeminate. I went to school the next day with a swollen mouth. I looked like a Francis Bacon painting. It wasn't a good vibe. I was mistreated by both the boys and girls. More than once I heard from girls that "I wasn't a real man" and dating me was considered a joke. I wasn't treated any better after being beaten. The hate crime was definitely the start of a massive shift. I don't remember when it happened but at some point I started "trying on" masculinity. Before that though I was already falling into alcoholism. At one point I was on a two bottles of vodka a day diet. It was outrageous insanity. But I was hurting and alcohol made me feel "normal". After more than a decade of that, I quit alcohol completely after an especially bad breakup. "I wasn't a real man" is what that ex said too so I decided to try and become one. I eventually found my niche and it amazes me all the time how differently people treat me. Despite everything, I love myself nowadays. I like being a man, but I still don't like patriarchy. I read somewhere that patriarchy abuses boys until they become men and I think it's absolutely true.

**When you say "I [...] convinced myself that my very soul was deformed" Can you speculate on the process (i.e. external factors/influences interacting with personal dispositions/perceptions) that led to this state?**

I grew up around conservative Christianity, in retrospect, of course I did. So I had some odd spiritual beliefs. I figured that if I wasn't physically deformed then something inside must be. I am certainly warped, there's no question about it. I'm better now, I have friends and a community I regularly interact with. It's made me healthier, before it was just me and it was just me for a long time.

**Other than Jordan Peterson, can you remember any other YT channels/personalities that you encountered that were significant?**

Steven Crowder was a big one for me. What an absolute loser creep. O don't think I remember others. There were so many of these grifter channels back then. Oh yeah, Stefan Molyneux. Arrogant fascist idiot. But at the time I thought he was compelling. What he was saying seemed to make sense considering my lived experience.

**When you say funnelling happened slowly, what sort of time frame are we talking?**

How slow? Hard to say. There are some gaps in my memory, largely due to the alcoholism I suppose but also because every day was exactly the same. Part-time job, get drunk, listen to hate speech on youtube, go to sleep. Nothing happened in my life for years and the only "community" here was a dive bar full of scum similar to the drunk hockey hooligan who punched me in the mouth. It was harrowing to live here. Nowadays there's been a lot of urban development so it's better but the trauma of poverty and abuse like that doesn't go away just because now I can go to a cute cat cafe.

**What were the main themes/points of the high production YT videos you remember being salient/influential to you?**

Anti-Feminism. Mostly. I hated a lot of groups but there were none I hated more than women. I grew up around my mother and grandmother who were both physically and emotionally abusive. I hated them and I hated the girls in highschool who belittled me too. Also great replacement nonsense.

**Can you reflect on your attitude towards women/feminism prior to during and following your incel identity, if it changed how so?**

During the covid lockdown, I decided to do some deep research into Feminism and I subscribed to women's subreddits so I could spend my free time learning about women's lived experiences. After all that, I decided to identify as a Feminist. I will be honest with you, if the only women were the ones I knew and was mostly surrounded by growing up, I absolutely wouldn't be. But I thought thay the next generation of girls deserved a better chance. I was already getting "old" I wasn't a teenager anymore. There were a lot of young faces around me when before I was the young face. I didn't want them to have a bad life. Also, maybe the women and girls who were so cruel to me, wouldn't have been so horrible if they didn't live under patriarchy. I don't know if that's true but I think it's reasonable.

**How far did you engage with the blackpill? What was bout it that you thought/on reflection think now makes it so effective as a central tenet to incel identity?**

In regards to the black pill, I was there from day one, even if I didn't know it. I never had any hope. I really think it's only appeal is that perverse comfort in fatalism I mentioned earlier.

**Did you actively engage in incel specific forums/subreddits? If so which ones and what can you remember about the environment itself and how if made you feel being in them?**

Yes, I actually had to think about it because I forgot. I'm not sure if I posted but I definitely lurked a lot. I'm trying to remember the feeling, it was weird. I remember some incels described these posts on those subs as "addicting" and yeah, it kind of was? Digital self-harm.

**Did social media have any impact on the way you saw yourself as a man and also incel identity when younger? If so, how?**

Facebook's algorithm at the time definitely had a massive impact. That site was/is a mental illness agitator. I think Mark Zuckerberg is directly responsible for radicalizing a bunch of people into horrible ideologies. I understand personal accountability, but this was all I knew. This was the world as far as I was concerned and beyond the edges of the map there be only dragons.

One other important note. I experimented a lot with magic mushrooms and they definitely helped me to break out of old bad ways of thinking while also allowing me experience my grief more fully. I would not tell people to just go take them but they definitely should be studied more. I decided that I was either going to kill myself or something was going to change. Change happened.

**You gave a couple of examples of the way women/girls communicated masculine expectations to you, are you able to elaborate on a) how it made you feel from an identity and self-worth perspective when you received those comments, and b) what you think their idea of a ’real man’ was?**

I felt absolutely dehumanized by these girls and later women and they treated me as such. I hope this does not come across as "See, it actually was women all along that were the problem" but I think it's critically important and necessary that people understand that women frequently do plenty of harm in regards to enforcing patriarchal expectations. When I was in high school a "real man" was probably as close to Zac Efron in High School Musical as possible. In my 20's I got the impression that you just had to be tall and conventionally attractive. Dating in my 20's and 30's just felt like nightmare job interviews with insanely entitled women who had absolutely nothing to offer in regards to, well anything. I don't date anymore.

**Do you think there was any overlap with the rejection, isolation, or the physical abuse experienced with your perceptions of yourself as a man?**

Absolutely yes. At a certain point it's like falling down a tall flight of stairs, the momentum starts and there's no stopping the descent.

**Can you reflect on how your feelings about yourself shifted once you had built a peer community?**

I feel much better and more established now that I have a large network of real humans that I see at least once a week or more. I feel like I have a place I'm actually supposed to be in. I don't feel so lonely.

**Can you give more detail on what Stefan Molyneux (or Steven Crowder and Jordan Peterson) said specifically that resonated with you? How was it framed, what nerves did it touch, what positive benefit did you gain from it?**

Bitter men that hate women. Simple as. I was a bitter man that hated women. Men wanting to "reclaim their status" as the loser king wife abusers of the world.

**When you mention perverse comfort in fatalism, can you describe what the comfort felt like, what did it answer, what did it erase, what did it provide from an identity perspective?**

When there's no hope for tomorrow, when there's no hope for anything, it's can be perceived a as a lot off your shoulders. A person can just stay in bed all day because why not? A person can drink themselves to death because why not? I definitely wouldn't associate it with much of an identity, I think in a way, "incel" is a strange non-identity. Irrelevancy, a ghost. Never existed.

**Can you give me an example of a typical ‘digital day’ when you were an incel, that is, the way you interacted with different platforms, rough estimates of time spent in each, did links from one send you to another, do you have multiple tabs open and simultaneously change with many? Feel free to map it however is easiest.**

Sure, I'd wake up at around 11:00 in the morning(although there was no set time, I was either unemployed or underemployed during that time, awake and asleep at all hours, no real schedule), I'd get drunk, I'd watch videos on youtube, I'd post memes, I'd get drunk again, I'd be insane on Facebook, I was a troll, a loser, a maniac. I was glued to my computer.

**Did you ever engage with the scientific blackpill (the studies and data that support the theory)?**

I had no idea there was such a thing but from my understanding there is no empirical evidence for absolute fatalism like that.

**You offered a very powerful phrase earlier: “*I read somewhere that patriarchy abuses boys until they become men and I think it's absolutely true*”,** **can you elaborate on how you think patriarchy abused you?**

When I was growing up, if a boy like myself didn't perform masculinity properly, there were harsh consequences in the form of violent social policing. Or in simpler terms, if they thought you were queer, you were getting assaulted and degraded.

**When you were an incel, did it coincide with Elliot Roger’s or Alek Minassian’s attacks? If so did you have particular views about them at the time?**

I don't know anything about Alex Minassian but I always thought Elliot Rodger was a ridiculous and shameful person.

**What was it about digital platforms that made you feel you could act the way you did on them, such as Facebook, that you might not have done in real life?**

I think it's a similar psychology to road rage. If a person is online 100% of the time, are they even human? For how long? How long until they stop engaging with others like a human should? People are supposed to be with people and if they aren't, they eventually go insane.

**What were your views on mental health therapy when an incel, why do you think you had these? Have since changed?**

I had no interest in mental health or therapy during those time. I didn't believe anything would change or help me. Nowadays I am a firm believer in the absolute necessity for easy access to therapy. People are doing BADLY nowadays. Everyone seems like they're totally insane

**Did incel forums/ideology have any impact on your attitude towards therapy, if so how?**

I already had no hope for therapy or self-improvement long before even identifying as an incel.

**Were you familiar with various ‘maxxing’ techniques/theories, what were your views on them as an incel?**

When I heard about the "maxxing" techniques I was kind of already on my way out of that mentality. To be honest I don't think I had much of an opinion, most of those strategies seemed highly questionable. I wasn't sold. I did hope to increase my wrist circumference but that was before I was aware of that phase of inceldom if I recall correctly.

**You mentioned a weight off your shoulders but also fatalism as elements of your incel identity, how would you describe the way incel identity affected your already existing mental health state?**

I would say that point was when I was also at my most dangerous in terms of mental health. I was trying to get as close to death as possible by mixing sleeping pills with hard alcohol. I remember my blood going absolutely ice cold and being barely able to feel my body or stand or walk. I liked the feeling of being so close to death.

**What were the main aspects of your deep research into feminism that led to you identifying as a feminist?**

After reading as much as I did, especially in regards to personal anecdotes from who knows how many women on Reddit, I had a better understanding of their lived experience. Maybe it's cliche but the truth is that I started listening to women. Actually listening. And after that being much more considerate. I learned a lot about the horrible ways so many women and girls are treated both in the past and the present and I didn't like it. That treatment is offensive to me. In the battle between my misogyny and my sense of decency, the sense of decency won. I want women and girls to have decent lives.

**If you had to compare your life now to when you were an incel, what would be the three most salient things about your a) identity**

In regards to my identity, first of all, I feel like I have one. I am a real character now engaged with the real world. I'm part of a community where I am a regular and people recognise and appreciate me. I feel real. I am a real human being now. I am frequently happy despite my harrowing past and trauma.

**and b) ways of coping that represented now and then?**

In regards to coping, as I mentioned earlier, I no longer drink alcohol, but I do consume a little bit of cannabis and shrooms. They both helped me to process a lot of trauma that I definitely wasn't going to process on my own. I have had to relearn how to just relax on the couch or in bed, it's hard to explain but for at least two decades I never relaxed, ever. I would sit there, lay down there, but I was never truly relaxed, I was always "on". I am still learning how to relax but it's a challenge. I have gotten better at it though. Life was too turbulent and unstable for too long, I could never rest.