

Gentlemen in Oppression

Exploring the Myth of Sex in Elliot Rodger's *My Twisted World*

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The misogynistic subculture known as *incels* (involuntarily celibate), has gained notoriety for their extremely misogynistic belief system, in which women are the culprit for the incel’s virginity. While incels often reside on online platforms, this ideology has resulted in cases of real-life violence, the most notorious being the case of Elliot Rodger. Prior to murdering six people, himself, and injuring 14 on the Isla Vista college campus in 2014, Rodger released a personal manifesto titled *My Twisted World*, where his chauvinistic world view is unveiled.

This thesis utilized Roland Barthes’ (1972) semiotic notion of myth in exploring how Rodger constructs the myth of sex in ‘*My Twisted World*’, or, sex as a *second-order* system. Defined by the connotative meanings added to the denotative, linguistic sign, myth proves a viable tool in uncovering the hidden meanings especially central in the construction of ideologies. The thesis aimed to identify how the myth of sex is constructed, and how the myth is naturalized via rhetoric tools.

The results of the thesis showed that Rodger portrays the myth of sex as a tool of power used solely by women. In this, the connotations of competition and inequality were deemed prominent, stemming especially from the implied, animalistic and vicious nature of women. To achieve this, the rhetoric tools of contrast, hyperbole, and metaphor were the most prominent in the manifesto. The results were in accordance with the already established, misogynistic incel ideology in which women are equated to animals posited as the enemy. Further this thesis emphasizes how misogynistic language can, at worst, lead to real-life mass-violence, if left unrecognized.

Key words: incels, misogyny, hate speech, mass violence, ideology, myth, meaning, connotation, naturalization

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1 Introduction

On May 20th 2025, Finnish news outlets were saturated with articles and reports of an incident of mass violence, where a 16-year-old boy brought a knife to school, stabbing three girls under the age of 15 in Pirkkala, Finland. The incident gained great media popularity, yielding discussion and news articles on the chain of events, victims, and the suspect's motives. The motives have been of special interest to many outlets reporting on the event, as the suspect released a manifesto detailing not only his plan, but his personal background and reasoning for the act. In an effort to prevent the suspect and incident gaining additional notoriety, the manifesto is not accessible online, however many news sources have discussed aspects of the document. For example, the perpetrator stated that he did not have many friends and his motive behind the act was to achieve something noteworthy (Happonen 2025).

However, the most peculiar and noteworthy aspect of the manifesto was his dedication to the chosen victims of the crime, who were all girls. Manifested in the outcome of the act, the suspect had explained that he intended to target mainly girls, since he imagined them as easier targets to boys.

Even though the manifesto lacked explicit linguistic indications of ideological bases for the crime, this incident represents a larger, growing problem of misogyny and mass violence. In an article published in *Helsingin Sanomat* (Salmela 2025), the connection between such events and the growing trend of misogyny and misogynist language is deemed undeniable, accompanied by the speculated connection between the perpetrator and the infamous internet subculture of *incels*. The term is derived from the words *involuntarily* and *celibate*: celibate references to the lack of sexual encounters, however, involuntarily, as incels struggle to find female companionship (Sugiura 2021, 35). Important to explaining the incel mindset is that they blame their celibacy on women. Indeed, incels have gained infamy for their increasingly hostile views towards women that have, at worst, led to cases of real-life violence, even mass murder. Some perpetrators associated with the incel movement have gained notoriety both culturally and within the incel community itself, the most notorious being the case of Elliot Rodger.

In 2014, on the Isla Vista campus, California, the 22-year-old college student Elliot Rodger embarked on a mission of a mass shooting, which was the culmination of his frustration towards women and his virginity. The incident took the lives of seven people, including Rodger himself, and placed another 14 in the hospital. Rodger's actions were clearly ideologically motivated, as explained in a 137-page document that he had written, and subsequently sent to several people prior to the incident. In the document titled *My Twisted World*, Rodger chronologically narrates the most formative events of his life, how they modified his world view, and how these events led him to the conclusion that mass murder would be the only solution out of what he characterized as pure suffering that was his life. The document is peculiar in its extremely nihilistic tone, both in how Rodger describes the world order,

painting a picture of a heavily segregated society where only certain individuals have a chance at social success, and in which Rodger's virginity was the culmination of his oppression. According to Rodger, the main culprit behind Rodger's oppression, and most importantly, virginity, were women (Rodger 2014, 101).

Elliot Rodger has been a target of interest for many scholars and media outlets since the incident, due to his high kill count and the disturbing world views he had acquired. But perhaps the most concerning, thus most important aspect of this case is the praise and glorification he has amassed in the broader community of incels, where some denote Rodger as a saint, or a king. Many other murderers have since followed the footsteps of Rodger, some writing manifestos where they explicitly thank and praise Rodger for leading the way, others having connections to hateful incel-forums, where misogynistic views are circulated and shared. Outsiders to the group have, however, criticized Rodger and other incel perpetrators, as well as the publicity they have garnered; some have argued that giving these incidents too much publicity raises ethical questions on bringing fame to these perpetrators, possibly enabling a rise in similar actions in the future. Since Rodger's writing is especially violent by nature, My Twisted World (henceforth MTW) has been denoted as an extreme case, thus not representative of the issue of misogynistic language as a whole. These claims are very short-sighted and dangerous, as leaving hate-filled language and ideology unattended allows their reinforcement and wider distribution. The recent incident in Pirkkala is only one example among many, of what such ideologies are capable of producing.

Related to its violent nature, MTW has been under scrutiny especially within the field of social studies with the aim in violence-prevention. A smaller portion of these studies are linguistic by nature, such as Melo Lopes (2023) and Witt (2020), leaving a research gap for new studies focusing on the language of MTW. Thus, the purpose of this study is to further our understanding in how hateful ideologies embedded in language are constructed and contextualized within the genre of manifesto, of which MTW is an example of. The methodology of this study is constructed on Barthes' (1972) semiotic theory of connotative, *second-order* semiotic signs, *myths*, containing not only the denotative meaning of a word, but representing a wider, socially shared implied meaning added to the sign. This is rendered possible via *naturalization*, characterized as the process through which ideologically charged meaning and "knowledge" is diminished, making it more digestible to a wider audience (Barthes 1972, 130; Fairclough 1989, 91–92). A lexical analysis enables a closer look into how this process is manifested in MTW, with additional focus placed on distinguishing the central rhetorical tools used in the text.

Being a defining factor in the incel identity, this study aims to explore the hidden, implied meanings behind sex via the notion of the *myth of sex*, i.e. sex as a second-order system. As briefly discussed

above, the core ideology of the incel identity is based on the distress that these men face from the lack of female attention, blaming women for their virginity. Thus, sex is of great value in the construction of the violently misogynistic ideology that outlines the community, and a better understanding of the *added* meanings associated with it may improve our understanding of the misogynistic ideologies behind incel communities. Related to meaning-making, this thesis aims to answer the questions of 1.) *what implied meanings are used in constructing the myth of sex*, and 2.) *what linguistic tools are used in naturalizing the myth*.

The paper will continue with an introduction to the underlying incel community and the misogynistic violence that it has carried out, followed by a synopsis of theories on both manifestos and ideologies, and the semiotic methodology relevant to the study. The analysis will follow the methodology outlined by Barthes, beginning with the simple, denotive signs, followed by identifying the implied connotations, as well as the tools through which these meanings are naturalized. The discussion section will aim to relate the findings to notions of ideology, as well as the belief system of the broader incel community.

2 Background – From the Manosphere to Mass Murder

Though previous research literature exists on both Elliot Rodger and incels as a broader phenomenon, the majority of the body of research is based in sociology, aiming to understand the mindset behind incels committing violent acts, or feminist research focusing on how masculinity and women are constricted by incels. While the significance of his manifesto in understanding and interpreting the worldview of mass-shooters has been established (Langman 2014, 6), there exists relatively few linguistic studies on MTW (see Vink et al. 2024; Witt 2020). Thus, a more in-depth linguistic analysis on MTW is in place, as the results can help better our understanding of both how incels legitimize violence, and the underlying ideology behind the community. To further explore both the topic of incels and Rodger's relation to the group, this section will introduce some of the key-elements related to the issue, starting with *the manosphere* and its hostile world views.

2.1 The Manosphere – Father of Incel Ideology

The manosphere refers to a heterogenous group compiled of different MRA (Men's Rights Activists) subgroups, such as incels. These groups are often characterized by the use of humor and memes as a community-building tool, as well as perpetuating shared ideologies colored by misogyny and extremist values, such as white supremacy (Sugiura 2021, 70; O'Donnell 2020, 655). Ideologically, there exists a link between the ideologies of the manosphere and far-right movements (Hoffman et al. 2020, 573; O'Donnell 2020, 655), especially apparent in the underlying notion of *male* supremacy within the subgroups of the manosphere (Vink et al. 2024, 727). The significant role that male supremacy plays in these communities has led to the increased interest of scholars on the interrelated link between the construction of masculinity and violence, especially towards women. In relation to the rise of male supremacist groups in North America, two factors have been established as central components. The first is characterized by Kimmel (2017, 21) as *aggrieved entitlement*, the (mis)perceived state of group victimhood based in the sense of *retraction* of rights, whereas Vink et al. (2024, 727) emphasize the role of "mainstreaming of political intolerance" in enabling the growth of these movements.

The underlying hostile views towards women render this ideology dependent on opposing men to women, in which the community seems to favor a sort of "scientific" discourse. Some examples of this are the uses of *biological essentialism* in conceptualizing the difference between men and women as inherently biological (Sugiura 2021, 58), and evolutionary psychology in attempting to explain the sexual behaviour of women (Ging 2019, 648–49; Van Valkenburgh 2021, 91–92). Such arguments point towards the focus placed on *scientific* facts in the community, where intellectualism

seems to juxtapose feminism, which is associated with opinions, emotions and subjectivity (Van Valkenburgh 2021, 90). The term *scientific* is used very loosely here, as, for example, Wasniewska's (2020, 72) study on the use and coinage of incel slang points out that much of the incel terminology falls under pseudoscience, masked by terms such as 'law' and 'theory'. These facts are, however, often either based in pseudoscience, or they have been skewed and manipulated to fit the ideology of the community.

Attempting to construct an alternative world view of how the society functions, the manosphere and incels have constructed the notion of the *sexual marketplace*, where one's biological nature becomes a key-component. In this, one's sexual market value is evaluated through *biological determinism*, where genetic factors determine your success with women (Baele et al. 2021, 1675; 1679), who are the gatekeepers of certain goods – namely sex, intimacy and social currency (Van Valkenburgh 2021, 98). The focus on genetic factors has been further established an important factor in portraying women as animalistic beings ruled only by their biology (Chang 2020, 263; Lindsay 2021, 43; O'Malley et al. 2022, NP4991), whose only objective is reproduction (Van Valkenburgh 2021, 89). The metaphorical value of the *sexual marketplace* is also notable, as it reflects on the perceived transactional nature of sex, related to the objectification of women (Wasniewska 2020, 76), who are perceived as both the provider *and* the product. The tendency of characterizing women via their biology has been subject of many previous research as well, often focusing especially on the gendered aspects of the incel ideology. The animalistic behavior of women has been also been established a key aspect in determining one's sexual market *value* (Lindsay 2021, 44) further aligning with the tenets of biological determinism (Baele et al. 2021, 1675; 1679), where genetic makeup determines women's mating rituals. In addition to being equated to animals, women are often attributed with low intellect (Chang 2020, 261), madness (Chang 2020, 262), maliciousness, and manipulateness (Melo Lopes 2023, 147; O'Malley et al. 2022, NP4993) in these communities.

Present in the idea of a *sexual marketplace*, one's sexual market value is often attributed to both physical attractiveness, e.g. muscles and height (Chang 2020, 262; Van Valkenburgh 2021, 94; O'Malley et al. 2022, NP4991), and socioeconomic status and wealth (Chang 2020, 262; Van Valkenburgh 2021, 94; O'Malley et al. 2022, NP4991). Incels themselves believe to have a low sexual market value, as low attractiveness and self-loathing have been identified as thresholds to the incel identity (K. M. O'Donnell 2021, 72.; O'Malley, Holt, and Holt 2022, NP4992). The *sexual marketplace* is connected to incels' low self-esteem, as the rhetoric has been established an important tool for incels in alleviating their anxieties about their desirability, as it helps explain the rejection incels have faced at the hands of women (Lindsay 2021, 43). While low attractiveness is essential to inceldom, the group tends to position themselves superior to others on the account of intellect; the analyses of O'Donnell (2021, 72) and Vito et al. (2018, 94) attest to incels' tendency to self-identify

with higher intellectualism, “sophistication and gentlemanly qualities”, the latter referencing to Rodger and MTW, where he calls himself a gentleman on numerous occasions.

While attributing themselves as gentlemen or intellects helps incels distinguish themselves from other men, the group has a tendency towards distancing themselves from women as well. For example, the studies of Lindsay (2021) and Chang (2020) examined incels’ means of *Othering* women to their biological difference through the idea of the *monstrous* feminine, where it is the *bodies* of women that mark the difference. Both studies stem from the notion of women as non-humans, as Chang (2020, 259) approaches the issue through the use of the term *femoid* (female humanoid) used on the r/Braincel subreddit, while Lindsay considers of the use of terms such as *whore* or *hole* in dehumanizing women (Lindsay 2021, 43). Focusing on Rodger specifically, Melo Lopes (2023) discusses women as Other from the perspective of his masculinity in the context of MTW. In her study, women gain the status of *mythical*, where their agency allows men to fulfil a type of *sovereign* subjectivity, where avoiding rejection becomes the main goal (Melo Lopes 2023, 145-146). Moreover, a significant factor connecting Rodger and other incels has been established by O’Donnell (2021, 66), where her analysis unveiled the common tendency of blaming women in the writings of Rodger and other mass murderers following in his footsteps. The role of shifted blame has been characterized by Kimmel (2017, 24) in the notion of *the scapegoat*. This becomes central to his concept of aggrieved entitlement, where the misdirected anger of enraged mobs seeking a culprit to their oppression manifests itself as a scapegoat. In the case of the manosphere, the scapegoat happens to be women, which may help explain why women are chosen as the primary targets of violent incel-based attacks.

This bleak-natured ideology pictured above is also known as the *black pill*. The name is derived from the movie Matrix, where the protagonist must choose between a red and a blue pill, the red pill unveiling the bleak truth of the world (Hoffman et al. 2020, 568; Sugiura 2021, 44; Ging 2019, 640). Taking the *black pill*, however, entails a much more nihilistic worldview, where unattractiveness and the status of social outcast are inescapable facts of life (Hoffman et al. 2020, 568; Sugiura 2021, 42–43; Ging 2019, 640). Thus, whereas the black pill characterizes the ideology of the manosphere as a whole, for incels a major component of this view is the inescapable nature of incel-dom: suffering is essential to incel-dom, something one must simply come to terms with (Baele et al. 2021, 1675; Hoffman et al. 2020, 568; Sugiura 2021, 107; Witt 2020, 681). When further elaborated, these ideologies echo the general belief shared by the manosphere, deeming feminism and female empowerment as the culprit behind the demise of a democratic society (Vink et al. 2024, 726; Sugiura 2021, 42; Lindsay 2021, 39), where individuals are truly *equal*. Thus, the skewed biological ‘facts’ which uphold the basic principles of incel ideologies have driven these men to believe that one’s faith and success in the society is somehow ominously determined *for* them. In this process, biology both

rules women, the gatekeepers of sex, and determines one's the sexual marketplace value, mainly through their physical appearance.

2.2 Incels as Perpetrators of Mass Murder

There exists an evident link between the incel ideologies and violence, which has attracted attention from previous research on incels, including typologies of incel-based violence. Hoffman et al. (2020, 569) distinguished four categories of incel-based violence: clear incel-motivated terrorist attacks; attacks with mixed motives that evidence incel ideological influences; acts of violence perpetrated by self-professed involuntary celibates; and ex post-facto inceldom. Conversely, Lindsay (2021, 36) identifies three levels of violence within the community: against themselves; against each other and women in the digital space; and against general society. Having their roots in different areas, with Hoffman et al. focusing on defining incel-based violence as *terrorism*, Lindsay leaning more heavily into feminist research tradition, there are some key differences in these categorizations. The categories established by Hoffman et al. are distinguished by the level of explicitness by which the perpetrators subscribe to the incel-ideologies, while Lindsay's typology focuses on the target of violence, also arguing for the role of violence in repairing their masculinity. Additionally, Lindsay's categories take into consideration violence affecting not only *the enemy*, i.e. women and feminism, but also the individuals within the community itself. The most prolific means of *intrapersonal* violence (i.e. against self) is suicide (as in the case of Rodger), also reflected on the level of *interpersonal* violence (i.e. against others), where users may encourage others to commit suicide (Lindsay 2021, 36–37). The most prominent and concerning form of incel violence is, however, illustrated by Lindsay's conceptualization of violence against the general society, i.e. mass murder. The findings of the study by Byerly (2020, 298) highlight the connection between incels and mass violence, as the analysis of stances taken by journalists reporting on incel violence revealed that the term *mass murder* was used in almost all of the articles within the data.

A debated issue on the topic of incel-based violence relates to terrorism and extremism, as there are differing opinions on whether the violence perpetrated by incels can be considered terrorism. According to some, these mass shootings clearly fulfill the definition of terrorism, as Zimmerman et al. (2018, 1) compare incel attacks to the definition outlined by the U.S. State department: “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.” However, acknowledging the concerns and risks associated with incel-based violence, many other scholars have previously failed to recognize misogyny-driven violence as a form of terrorism (Vink et al. 2024, 724), partially due to not being obviously political (ibid.: Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020, 568). An example of this is presented by another notorious incel-

murderer, Alek Minassian, who drove a van into a busy street in 2018 in Toronto, Canada, killing ten and injuring 16 (Cecco 2019). Canadian police, however, refused to call the attack terrorism (Zimmerman et al. 2018, 2), despite his previous posts online indicating his ideological justification of the act, and him explicitly identifying with the incel-community during a discussion with a police-officer (Cecco 2019). Many reports of incel violence have disregarded the role of misogyny in justifying the acts, emphasizing other variants, such as mental health issues (Zimmerman et al. 2018, 1; Melo Lopes 2023, 135; Sugiura 2021, 107), or general loneliness (Melo Lopes 2023, 136). In the case of Minassian, for example, his diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) – something he shared with Rodger (Blum and Jaworski 2016, 410; Vink et al. 2024, 728) – was used in his defense, arguing that the lack of emotional skills prevented him from properly evaluating the heinousness of his acts (Sugiura 2021, 109). Diminishing these acts as mere by-products of mental illness disregards the sociocultural variables related to these crimes, with gender being the most significant one. Reflected in the facts that most perpetrators of shootings in the United States are men, and that the targets of violence can be based on gender (Myketiak 2016, 292), Rodger’s case is also clearly gendered.

Disregarding the extremist and terroristic aspects of incels reflects the normalization of violence against women (Lindsay 2021, 45). Emphasizing personal reasons behind these incidents leaves unread the social implications behind ideological violence (Blum and Jaworski 2016, 411). Following the broader feminist tradition, incel violence should be considered “a *systemic* and *gendered* phenomenon” (Melo Lopes 2023, 135; italics in the original), not mere sporadic incidents. Previous studies on the topic have, indeed, concluded that incels bear many similarities to other extremist groups. O’Malley et al. (2022, NP4982, NP4984) associates these similarities with general features, such as showcasing a risk of violence and sharing an ideological belief system that arose as a reaction to societal norms. Similarly, in a content analysis of forum discussions found on Incels.com, Baele et al. (2021, 1683) explore the connection between the ideological attributes of extremist groups to those of incels, establishing three major components shared by both: rigid group boundaries, fixed social hierarchy and “a crisis narrative pointing unambiguously to a nefarious group and reaching its crisis end-point”. In the case of incels, the crisis narrative is almost synonymous to the threat of feminism and the overrule of women, whereas rigid group boundaries and the perceived social hierarchy are intertwined. This will be elaborated in the following chapters.

The previously mentioned aggrieved entitlement, as defined by Kimmel (2017), has been cited by numerous studies focusing on the intertwining of gender, masculinity, and violence. His definition of the term rises from a sense of entitlement, especially of something that has been taken away (Kimmel 2017, 21), e.g. sex, in the case of incels. Aggrieved entitlement has been helpful in examining both the character of the contemporary, angry, American man, and how the targets of violence are chosen. The ideologically charged standpoint of incels has become especially apparent when the targets of the

attacks are considered, as they are not only places usually inhabited by women (Hoffman et al. 2020, 570), but associated with hyperfemininity, e.g. “hot sororities” and yoga studios (Melo Lopes 2023, 138), as was the target of Beierle, another incel murderer, who opened fire in a hot yoga studio in 2018 Tallahassee, killing himself and two others (Williams 2022). Women were the primary target for Rodger as well, presented, e.g. in a YouTube video titled *Retribution*, posted by Rodger prior to the Isla Vista shooting. In the video he explicitly states that he aims to “slaughter every single spoiled, stuck-up, blonde slut” he encounters (Rodger 2014). The focus on women as the target of violence is also highlighted in the analysis of two incel forums, where O’Malley et al. (2022, NP4998) found that, even though not all members found on the board supported mass violence in the general sense, violence targeting women appeared as the most accepted form of violence.

2.2.1 Radicalization and the Internet

The digitalized space has created new opportunities for the spread of violent ideologies, such as those represented by incels and Rodger, as Byerly (2020, 294) emphasizes the role of social media not as the root cause for misogyny, but rather as both grounds for forming communities united by misogynistic views, and as a tool for legitimizing violence. In her discussion of the manosphere, Massanari (2017, 333) uses the concept of *toxic technocultures*, defined as cultures located in online platforms, where circulating ideologies denying progressive values and diversity is the norm. Sites as Reddit.com and 4/chan are among the most notorious in housing toxic technocultures such as the manosphere and the anonymous nature of both is considered a key-component of the websites (Massanari 2017, 334). Anonymity on its own facilitates discourses that exhibit extremist values, as the lack of identity helps free the interlocutors from tending to emotional needs of recipients, rather placing more emphasis on the intellectual, argumentative aspect of communication (Mortensen 2018, 794).

Related to endorsing a ideological beliefs, toxic technocultures, such as the manosphere, are closely related to *echo chambers*, especially prevalent in the digital era, where it has become much easier to find information conforming to one’s own interests and ideas (von Behr et al. 2013, 17–18). Echo chambers can be characterized as communities where agreeing and further promoting ideological beliefs becomes a central defining factor, possibly leading to both group polarization and increased risk of radicalized action (O’Donnell 2021, 65). The 2013 RAND Europe (Radicalization in the digital era) report found a correlation between radicalization and the Internet (von Behr et al. 2013, 17), as it allows for easier access to information, with no pre-requisite for physical contact, thus reaching a wider audience at a much faster pace than before (von Behr et al. 2013, 19–20).

Digital spaces have been established an operative function for extremist groups, as they are commonly used to both circulate radicalized beliefs and endorse violence (Byerly 2020, 305; O'Malley et al. 2022, NP4985; Gillett and Suzor 2022, 3). For example, in the case of the manosphere, humor and irony have been established central tools in “diluting their ideas into ostensibly harmless memes” (Chang 2020, 256), and as a community building tool in the form of memes (Massanari 2017, 334), protecting the individuals from criticism (Chang 2020, 262; Witt 2020, 677). Indeed, being easily camouflaged as simply humor and fun, memes have been equated to propaganda, specifically targeting men who may already feel discontent and ostracized by society (Cockerill 2019, 89). The anonymity granted by technology-based platforms, the salience of humor used as propaganda, and the subsequent echo chamber effect have made the covert process of radicalization of the manosphere possible.

2.3 Elliot Rodger – The Ideal Incel

An increasingly concerning attribute of being an incel is the expectation to harness the frustration and hatred they amassed to seek revenge (Hoffman et al. 2020, 566). The most notorious, well-reported and well-studied case of such an act of retribution is that of Elliot Rodger, whose case is briefly summarized in the introduction of the current study. Rodger's case has not only amassed great media attention, but notoriety, praise, and respect from the incel community. The explanations behind his infamy are various, some relating to his pioneer-esque status in incel mass violence, some to his high kill count, and some to the disturbing, ideologically driven opinions visible in MTW and the YouTube video '*Retribution*'.

It is not uncommon for media outlets to minimize the role of misogyny in incel-driven violence and place emphasis on other motivations, such as mental health issues of the perpetrators. Indeed, discussions of the cases receiving most media attention have especially stressed psychological reasons, attributing the perpetrators as “crazy people” (Blum and Jaworski 2016, 408), which is present in the case of Rodger as well. His mental health background has been examined by Langman (2014, 6), who carried out a psychological analysis of Rodger based on MTW, describing him as a “Psychopathic/Psychotic” type. The psychotic features included avoidant personality disorder, “withdrawal from the real world”, and as a consequence, creation of their own realities (ibid.); the psychopathic traits included entitlement, lack of empathy, and inability to take responsibility for his personal failures (Langman 2014, 9; 11). The latter correlates to Kimmel's concept of aggrieved entitlement, where the anger is attributed to stem from the sense of entitlement, perhaps explaining Rodger's world views further.

Denoted as the first case of incel mass murder, Rodger has garnered much sympathy and idolization by other incels, which becomes transparent in analyzing writings of other established incel mass murderers. For example, Harper-Mercer, who opened fire on a college campus in Oregon in 2015, killing nine people and himself (CBS News, 2015), referenced to Rodger as a god (Hoffman et al. 2020, 571; O'Donnell 2021, 67) whereas Alek Minassian posted on Facebook prior to the incident: "The Incel Rebellion has already begun! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!" (Gismondi 2018; Kini 2018). Of these, the case of Minassian is the most notorious, as his attack is deemed as one of the three cases of "clear incel-motivated terrorist attacks", as defined by Hoffman et al. (2020, 569), with Minassian having the highest mortality rate. The other two attacks were carried out by Rodger in 2014, and Scott Beierle in 2018. Minassian's infamy is highlighted by the significant media attention he garnered due to the incident; he is often compared to Rodger, however never accumulating the prestige Rodger has. Some incels have criticized him for, e.g. not releasing a manifesto on YouTube, or taking his own life akin to Rodger (Baele et al. 2021, 1684; Witt 2020, 683). Indeed, by taking his own life as the final act of retribution, Rodger can be accounted as a sort of martyr (Hoffman et al. 2020, 575), a hero who sacrificed himself for a greater cause, and for his community.

Then numerous nicknames dedicated to Rodger on incel platforms further illustrate the symbolic value he has amassed. Some of examples of such linguistic labels include *saint Rodger*, *king Elliot*, and the use of the acronym *ER*, derived from his initials is widely used in reference to him (Baele et al. 2021, 1683; O'Malley et al. 2022, NP4997; Witt 2020, 676). For example, after Nikolas Cruz committed a mass shooting on Valentine's Day in 2018, posts on Incels.Me were found congratulating him, while making reference to Rodger: "A hERo rises on this day of incel exclusion" (O'Donnell 2021, 68). Previous research acknowledging the significance of Rodger's presence in the wider incel community has supported Rodger's position as the "king of incels". Witt's (2020, 683) analysis recognizes Rodger's denotation as a saint equivalent to a semiotic, religiously coded affective object within the community, even conceptualizing him as *the idealized incel*. In their content analysis of an incel forum, Baele et al. (2021, 1684) provide further reflections on constructions of sainthood and its connection to previous perpetrators, including Rodger and Minassian. The mixed-methods analysis revealed the quantitative significance of Rodger in the discourses found on the forum, where his name is often found in association with, e.g. the expression "to go (or to do an) Elliot Rodger", referencing mass violence as an act of retribution (ibid.) This is notable for the incel identity, as such linguistic practice can be considered a way to endorse group boundaries. Encoding the capitalized initials ER into conversation may seem arbitrary to an outsider, but to a group member it signifies an identity that informs other users of their ingroup status.

3 Manifesting Ideology in Language

Diving into the deeply misogynistic and disturbed beliefs of Rodger, MTW is undoubtedly a text embedded with ideology, a key term in understanding the text. While placing emphasis on the role of ideologies in the construction and maintenance of power, Fairclough (1989, 2). defines ideologies as “common sense assumptions” that are embedded in language. van Dijk, on the other hand stresses both the shared social structures, and the cognitively shared component of ideology. In this definition, van Dijk (1998, 8) defines ideology as “the social representations shared by members of a group” that are constructed and upheld by a certain in-group. This is often done via language and discourse, since language is not only an inherently social process (Fairclough 1989, 22-23), but the most explicit form of human expression that allows community members to share their more abstract beliefs amongst each other (van Dijk 1998, 192). These two definitions for ideology prove useful in understanding the significance and connection between ideology and the language used to construct it. Fairclough’s focus on power highlights the role ideology plays in maintaining power, while van Dijk’s emphasis on both the social and cognitive is fruitful in conceptualizing ideology as sort of intrinsically shared, phenomenon akin to echo chambers. In tandem, these definitions prove useful in approaching Rodger’s, personal beliefs in connection to the incel community, as well as situating the incel phenomenon into the wider discourse of hateful speech and mass-violence.

3.1 A Take on Rhetoric

The central role language has in constructing and conveying ideology makes it fruitful to ponder on what does the toolbox of a writer of an ideological text consist of. The tools referenced here are embedded in rhetorics, a well-established and -studied aspect of language, often characterized as persuasive speaking and writing. Defining rhetoric as a set of linguistic tools with persuasive functions, van Dijk (1998, 208; 272) examines their role in ideologically persuasive texts as “means to emphasize or de-emphasize meanings as a function of ideological opinions”, by managing the way the recipients evaluate these opinions. In the vein of this definition of ideology, van Dijk discusses conveying ideological messages in through their cognitive and social aspects. Cognitively, in order for ideological persuasion to take place, there may exist a lack of both political and social knowledge, and alternative options for the individual (van Dijk 1998, 246). In the social realm, the internalization of an ideology contains a pre-requisite of accepting a certain group identity by the recipient, as opposed to an “I” identity (van Dijk 1998, 248). Dismissing the “I” correlates with the well-established and researched *Us vs. Them* group self-schema, central to all ideologies (van Dijk 1998, 129), where the in-group (Self) is associated with positive attributes, opposed to the out-group (Other) that is portrayed

via negative attributes (van Dijk 1998, 273). To achieve persuasion and convincing the reader to accept, for example, the Us vs. Them -schema, rhetoric tools become handy.

van Dijk (1998, 208) refers to such rhetoric tools as *rhetoric structures*. Burgers et al. focused especially on three rhetoric tools: *irony*, *hyperbole*, and *metaphor*, the last two being relevant for the current study as well. In addition, the tool of *comparison* is to be mentioned in relation to this thesis. A brief introduction to these three tools is mandatory. Hyperbole and comparison are the more self-explanatory of the bunch: hyperbole refers to an exaggeration of an issue, inflating its meaning (Burgers et al. 2016, 415); comparison is used to examine the similarities or differences between two things (Corbert 1990, 102). Of these, *difference* proves relevant for the current study. Indeed, comparison is sometimes used in tandem with *contrast*, the former referring to identifying similarities, the latter identifying differences (Corbert 1990, 106), perhaps being more useful in *distinguishing* two entities from each other. Focusing on difference, i.e. contrast, rather than similarities, i.e. comparison, is also central to the Us vs. Them -rhetoric, where group membership is often built through associating different attributes to the in- and out-groups in question.

Metaphor is the perhaps more complicated to define, due to its more complex nature. Charteris-Black and Musolff (2003, 155) approach the issue by proposing a flexible definition of the term, where a meaning shift happens when an expression is taken from its context and applied in a new one, caused by “a change in the conceptual system.” Notable about the role of metaphor is its implicit nature (Corbert 1990, 444), as it lacks the explicit linguistic matter used in comparison, e.g. words *like* and *as*. To present an example, the metaphoric expression “she broke my heart”, then implies a connection between love and emotion being fragile, also symbolized by the word *heart*. As discussed in the following subsections, implied meaning-making has been established important in constructing ideologies, making metaphor especially useful in conveying ideological messages. The effectiveness of metaphor, for example, has been studied. by Kalmoe (2014), who conducted a survey-based study on the effect of mild violent metaphors in increasing support for political violence in individuals. The study yielded results that “mild violent metaphors” did, in fact, “increase public support for political violence” and such support in individuals with “aggressive personality traits” was doubled, when faced with violent metaphors in political messages (Kalmoe 2014, 556). Moreso, the study posed the question on the effect of stronger violent metaphors in individuals (Kalmoe 2014, 557), further highlighting the debated issue of whether extremist language is a serious threat, or a mere characteristic of innocuous cases of outliers not to be too concerned with.

3.2 Manifesto as a Genre

Representative of Rodger's personal ideological belief system, MTW is an example of a personal manifesto. In the light of the previous literature, there exists certain differences between MTW, and the generally accepted genre of manifesto, the nature of which has been a debated issue by previous scholars. Thus, a brief overview into manifestos as a genre is in place, to better place MTW in this genre of ideological texts.

To begin understanding manifestos, Yanoshevsky's (2009) review of different authors and studies focusing on manifesto as a genre is a viable starting point. In her paper, Yanoshevsky both surveys the characterization made on manifestos by previous scholars, and discusses the role of the academic field in defining the genre as a whole. Yanoshevsky highlights that defining manifesto as a genre has been rendered a gruesome task, since scholars often emphasize different characteristics via comparison to other genres, such as polemic discourse or political writing (Yanoshevsky 2009, 263). However, certain themes were found common for many definitions of the genre. These included, for example, multiformity and versatility (Yanoshevsky 2009, 261), the violent nature (Yanoshevsky 2009, 263; 266), and its performative aspect, related to a type of *call for action* directed to the reader (Yanoshevsky 2009, 261). The violent and performative, call-for-violence intention of the manifesto is further established by the analysis of Ebner et al. (2022, 16), where eight out of nine of the analyzed manifestos included an explicit call-for-action of violence directed towards the out-group. Such call-for-action highlights the generally accepted purpose of the genre, which is initiating a type of political and social change.

In association with the violent nature of manifestos, many authors of the genre have succumbed to real-life acts of violence. This helps explain why many studies focusing on the language used by perpetrators of mass violence have had their aims especially in preventing violence and identifying linguistic cues relative to violent acts. For example, Ebner et al. (2022) examine whether linguistic markers in manifestos are accurate predictors of extremist, violent acts in their comparative analysis of: "violent self-sacrificial manifestos" (such as Rodger's), "ideologically extreme (nonviolent) manifestos" (such as Marx and Engel's Communist Party Manifesto), and "moderate (nonviolent) manifestos" (such as Greta Thunberg's) (Ebner et al. 2022, 8). This is done via the *fusion-plus-threat model*, used to make predictions about how "in-group identity *fusion* and out-group *threat* perception" play a role in realizations of violent extremism (Ebner et al. 2022, 2; emphasis added). The results of the study noted that high levels of fusion within the in-group of the actor, often manifested in language as indicators kinship and familial ties, were attributed as predictors of violence (Ebner et al. 2022, 18). In practice, this refers to a correlation between acts of violence and language: a trend was found of language that represents both kinship, and the rhetoric of endangerment of the in-group while

villainizing of the out-group. These findings are in accordance with the previously discussed Us vs. Them -schema, where the out-group (Other) is associated with negative qualities, while the in-group (Self) is presented in positive light.

While the studies mentioned above have concerned manifestos as a larger entity, especially from a social viewpoint, some linguistic analyses of manifestos have also been conducted. An example of such is the study of Alhumaid (2024), where the manifesto *Industrial Society and Its Future*, written by the infamous Unabomber Ted Kaczynski was analyzed using Halliday's model of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Focusing on the theme-rheme constructions of the manifesto, the analysis unveiled patterns in Kaczynski's writing reflecting the broader genre of academic writing, through which he attempted to both legitimize his actions and differentiate himself from other extremists by appearing as "less extreme" (Alhumaid 2024, 110). In another linguistic study, using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) tool, Cohen et al. (2016) identified linguistic indicators of violence in written texts produced by "lone offenders" prior to their attacks, including Rodger, comparing them to a baseline of blog posts. In the study of Cohen et al., these writings are referred to as leakage, defined as "communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target" (Cohen et al. 2016). The findings included higher use of "big words" (longer than six letters) and third person pronouns, as well as "a higher rate of negative emotion words" in comparison to positive emotion words (ibid.). Additionally, words relating to friends were used less, and words belonging to the category of "certainty" were used more, which was hypothesized to stem from the common trait of "low cognitive flexibility and low tolerance for ambiguity" (ibid.) Particularly interesting in the case of Rodger was the exceptionally high use of first person pronouns, such as *me* and *I*, when compared to the other manifestos analyzed (ibid.)

A common theme in many of the previous studies mentioned here aim to endorse violence-prevention through gaining better understanding of the phenomenon of ideology-driven violence. This is reflective of the sociology-based background that many of these studies have, such as Vink et al. (2024), leaving a viable research gap for purely linguistic studies, such as Alhumaid (2024). This is also true of the many studies focusing on Rodger and MTW, many being based in social sciences, especially focusing on understanding and preventing violence and terrorism. While linguistic analyses of manifestos as a genre are more frequent, the scarcity of linguistic studies on MTW unveil a research gap in the field, especially crucial in understanding how Rodger has constructed his own ideology, later capitalized by the broader incel community.

3.3 A Take on Semiotics: Myth

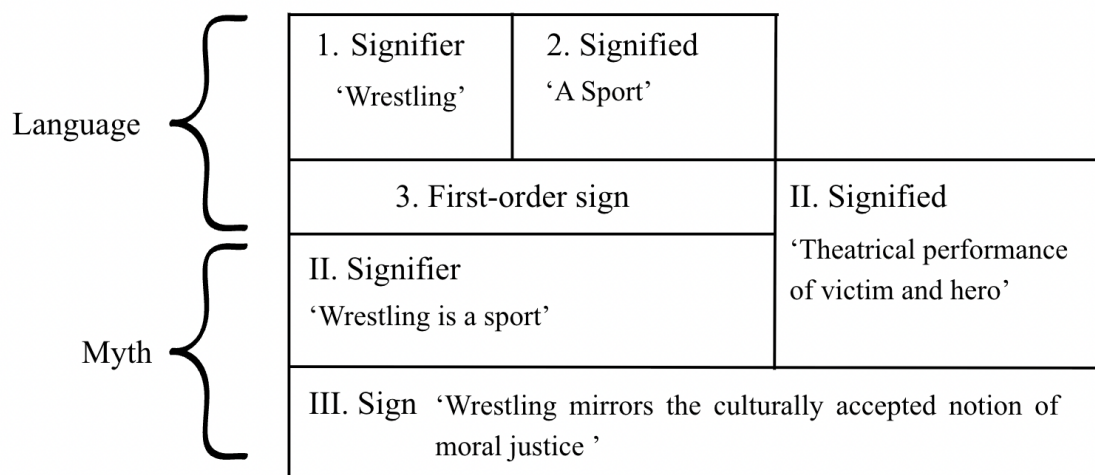
Ideologies can be constructed via multiple different linguistic means, the most central for this study being *implicit* meaning-making. As implicit meaning is an established tool in constructing ideologies via concealing the reality of social or political domains (van Dijk 1998, 207), implicit propositions, such as *implicatures*, become an important focal point for understanding how ideologies are built and reconstructed. In her work on pragmatics, Christie (2000, 132) defines implication in the vein of Grice, who, rather than focusing on purely linguistic material, highlighted the role of shared *assumptions* in creating meaning. Subsequently, implication can be characterized as unspoken, covert information, specifically in cases where the information is not within the realm of socially shared knowledge (van Dijk 1998, 269). Because the truth value in implied meaning is assumed rather than explicit, contesting their content becomes a difficult task for the reader (Christie 2000, 88). Examining implied material, then, may help explain why some statements are more difficult to scrutinize, and why this type of linguistic material is favorable in the formation and spread of ideologies.

Implicatures can further be realized as *connotations*, as opposed to denotations that signify the most commonly shared and salient “dictionary meanings” of words. Denotative meanings can be characterized in Saussure’s (Saussure [1916] 1998, 67) terms as *simple linguistic signs*, consisting of form (signifier) and meaning (signified). In this concept, signifier is reference to the actual orthographic or phonetic realization of the word, e.g. the spelled-out word *cat*. The signified, then references to the real-life phenomenon it is associated with, i.e. a feline house pet. Additionally, Saussure’s notion of a sign can be referred to as a *simple* linguistic sign, as it exists on a sole one-dimensional plane, consisting of a single unit of signifier and signified. This definition of the (simple) sign can be further elaborated and manufactured into a whole new system by introducing additional meanings.

Such is the work of Barthes (1967), who expanded on the notion of meaning in his own take on semiotics that placed emphasis especially on added, connotative meanings. In *Elements of Semiology* (1967, 91), Barthes elaborated the contrast between denotation and connotation in his conceptualization of a sign, by characterizing connotations as *second-order significant systems* that “are made up of signs of the denoted system”. Here, the denoted system refers to the traditional, Saussure’s concept of sign, consisting of a signifier (form) and the signified (meaning), which, as a unit, is now reduced as a mere signifier. More importantly, Barthes emphasizes the global, cultural, and ideological aspects inherent to connotations, as they are produced and maintained in communication (ibid.)

Following this concept of second-order systems, Barthes refined his idea of connotations to include shared meanings that are embedded especially in culture and ideology, thus developing the concept of *Myth* in his later work, *Mythologies* (1972). Similar to connotations as a second-order systems, myth is constructed with a previously established sign, consisting of a signifier and a signified, that now acts as the signifier of the myth (Barthes 1972, 113). To draw an example from Barthes himself, in his essay “The World of Wrestling” (1972, 13) Barthes looks beyond the denotative meaning of wrestling as a mere *sport* and examines the added meanings that both the theatrical, and social aspects of the sport evoke. In his analysis of the myth, the theatrical character of wrestling is associated with the roles of victim and hero, through which the audience seeks to validate the culturally accepted and supported notion of moral justice. Thus, the denotative meaning of “wrestling is a sport” is expanded to include the meaning of justice and morality. Figure 1 presented below illustrates the structure of Barthes’ myth via this example of wrestling, where an additional layer of meaning modifies the simple linguistic sign.

Figure 1 Diagram of the construction of *myth*, using the example of *wrestling*



This example displays how the status of Myth as a *second-order* system is based on an already established, commonly accepted relation of form-and-meaning (“wrestling is a sport”), to which a second meaning is added (“spectacle of moral justice”). Further, being a simple system, the relationship between meaning and form in linguistic Saussurean signs cannot be obscured, whereas the meaning and history of myth can be distorted and deformed (Barthes 1972, 121). This explains the arbitrary nature of Saussure’s signs: the linguistic form is rarely reflective of its meaning, rather, chosen via mere chance (Saussure 1998, 69). For example, the three-letter orthographic construction that is the word *cat* (*signifier*), is in no way inherently representative of the animal that purrs on your lap (*signified*). The relationship between the signifier and signified in Saussure’s notion of sign is, thus an empty one.

To better understand the work of Barthes, a brief excursion into the study of mythologies is in place, as in speaking of mythologies, the works of Lévi-Strauss become central. Preceding the work of Barthes, his conceptualization of mythologies and myth is summarized in the article ‘The Structural Study of Myth’ (Lévi-Strauss 1955), providing a structuralist dissection on the logic of myth and mythologies. Focusing on opposing forces such as the life-death dichotomy, Lévi-Strauss’ analysis is by nature comparative, as it looks for similarities in different mythologies established in different cultures, at different times. Notable for our analysis is his critique towards linguists of the era, and their pursuit of looking for *meaning in context*: Lévi-Strauss (1955, 434) argues that it is Myth itself that provides context. Similar to Barthes, he emphasizes that alongside the signifier and signified, Myth includes a third referent, which, in his analysis, is related to time, describing “events alleged to have taken place in time” (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 430). The key difference between Barthes and Lévi-Strauss lies in the foci of their research: Barthes focuses on Myth as a semiotic act, embedded with hidden, cultural meanings, whereas Lévi-Strauss conceptualizes Myth as an innate human mode of thought, used to understand opposite forces of life. However, both definitions agree on the communal, shared aspect of Myth, as well as the presence of added meaning beyond the first-order, denotative meaning ascribed by Saussure. This aspect of Myth is emphasized by Lévi-Strauss (1955, 430) in his example of the difficulty of translation: poetry cannot be translated without obscuring the original message, whereas the meaning of Myth is preserved even in the most abhorrent of translations. This points towards the heart of Myth being in its value of meaning and *story*, rather than form.

To showcase what Barthes concretely meant by Myth and how it can be used methodologically, examining previous studies using the definition may prove useful. Indeed, Barthes’ ideas have been utilized in many different areas of study, both linguistic, and cultural and media studies. Gold’s (1987) reading of Esther Tusquet’s novel *El amor es un juego solitario*, is an example of how Myth can be utilized in the realm of literature. Following the Barthesian method, Gold’s analysis both scrutinizes the Myth of love, and emphasizes the reader’s position in the construction of the Myth. In other words, it is through the process of *naturalization* that the reader can fully embrace and accept the Myth constructed by the writer, as opposed to the previously accepted, corresponding version of the Myth possessed by the reader (Gold 1987, 340). In their literary study, Makarim et al. (2023) utilized Myth in order to unveil the kinds of implied, hidden meanings associated with the Arabic word *Haram* in the Quran. Starting with comparing different sources and their denotative meanings of *haram*, then moving onto the mythological system, the study revealed the denotative meaning of prohibition being closely tied to its relation to food (Makarim et al. 2023, 341). In addition to the general, widely accepted and attested meanings of ‘something forbidden or prohibited’ and ‘the opposite of Halal’, the study found another meaning of ‘chastity and out of place’, characterized as the myth (Makarim et al. 2023, 342).

Barthes himself has utilized myths in examining a plethora of different cultural phenomena, as in the previously discussed example of his essay “The World of Wrestling” (Barthes 1972, 13). Indeed, myth is a multipurpose methodological tool, as it can be used to study both how meaning is created both linguistically, culturally, as well as visually. An example of such visual analysis is found in the study of Hawai’ian destination marketing conducted by Lemarié (2024). In his study, he examines how the myth of paradise has developed from the early to mid-20th century in Hawai’ian tourism advertising. The analysis unveiled that notions of gender and dualism appeared as important factors in determining a change in the myth of paradise, as the sign of a hula girl gained popularity (Lemarié 2024, 19).

The studies presented above also demonstrate various different uses for Myth as a methodological tool. The analysis of Makarim et al. highlight especially the roles of denotative and connotative meanings that intertwine in the construction of Myth, whereas those of Barthes and Lemarié focus on explicitly showcasing what the cultural, shared aspect of Myth represents. The process of *naturalization* mentioned in relation to the study of Gold will be discussed further in the following section, as it is crucial in utilizing Myth in the study of hidden meanings and ideologies.

3.3.1 Naturalization of Ideologies

In order for ideologies to become used in a wide-spread manner across communities and societies, they must appear sensible enough to be generally accepted by the masses. In the conceptualization of Barthes’ Myth, this is done via the process of *naturalization*. Barthes (1972, 130) argues that it is through naturalization that the viewer of a message reads the relation between the signifier and the signified as *factual*, thus, *natural*. This becomes possible due to the analogous nature of the myth that separates it from Saussure’s simple, linguistic sign; whereas linguistic signs are *arbitrary*, myths are always somehow motivated, constructed on the analogy that is meaning and form (Barthes 1972, 124). Analogy is visible, e.g. in Barthes’ example of a picture of “the saluting negro” wearing a French uniform. Associated with the image, Barthes (1972, 115) identified the added meaning of the greatness of the French flag, to which loyalty is shown by all, regardless of skin color or background. The motivation in this sign, then, is built upon the analogy found in “the saluting negro” and the identity of *a French soldier*.

In the same vein, Fairclough (1989, 91–92) describes naturalization as a process that renders the discourse type of a dominating institution, thus the one in control, to be seen as natural rather than arbitrary; naturalization will both enable its shared nature, and construct it as self-evident. Fairclough further argues for the importance of *common sense*, the end-product of successful naturalization, in the establishment of ideologies. Common sense can be described as shared, implicit assumptions that

affect our interpretations and actions in the society we live in (Fairclough 1989, 72). This is a key-component especially in institutional practices, where certain present assumptions reinforce existing power-relations – a process which often takes place in discourse (Fairclough 1989, 33). The shared, communal aspect of common sense is crucial in defining the term, as noted by van Dijk in his cognitive examination of common sense. In his definition, in addition to the general shared, taken-for-granted knowledge, common sense must also include other types of shared, taken-for-granted beliefs, e.g. those pertaining to social prejudices (van Dijk 1998, 104).

In harnessing common sense to the distribution of ideologies, implied meanings are more effective in comparison to those made explicit (Fairclough 1989, 85), as they are more digestible of the two. When compared to common sense, ideologies are not as marketable to the masses, as they are often much more explicitly taught and reinforced, hence, less taken-for-granted (van Dijk 1998, 107). However, naturalization allows assumptions to become more generally accepted, losing their explicit ideological value, thus appearing more neutral (Fairclough 1989, 92). This is exactly what makes the process of naturalization dangerous and worthy of attention, as it facilitates wider distribution of ideologically-driven ideas and discourse as assumed knowledge that is accepted at face value. Faster and wider spread of these beliefs is harmful to minority-groups especially, as the most hateful ideologies often target them.

Thus, being heavily relied on such hidden meanings, manifesto is a genre whose analysis greatly benefits from focusing not only on the implied meanings themselves, but also on the processes through which these meanings are realized. This is where Barthes' notion of Myth becomes a viable tool of analysis, as it includes both the notion of implicatures and assumptions, and the shared, social aspect also associated with ideologies.

4 Materials and Methods

4.1 Primary Material – Elliot Rodger’s ‘*My Twisted World*’

Elliot Rodger’s *My Twisted World* is an autobiographical manifesto written in effort to explain his reasoning behind the 2014 Isla Vista mass shooting. While the document has been described as a manifesto (Witt 2020; Vink et al. 2024; Melo Lopes 2023), MTW differs from the more traditional definition of a manifesto, as there are no explicit indications of political or mobilizing intentions of the audience. Rather, as Rodger laments in the second paragraph of the manifesto:

This tragedy did not need to happen. I didn’t want things to turn out this way, but humanity forced my hand, *and this story will explain why.* (MTW, 1; emphasis added)

Indeed, MTW is a testament to how the most formative and crucial moments of Rodger’s life molded his world-view and ideology, resulting in him murdering six people. In its entirety, the 137-page document is a narrative detailing the most crucial moments shaping Rodger’s life, as perceived by himself. The manifesto is divided in six subsections by age, with each era having their own specific name, e.g. *A Blissful Beginning*, *The Last Period of Contentment*, and *Santa Barbara: Endgame*. There is some variation in the length of the subchapters: the first (*A Blissful Beginning*) is the shortest, consisting of only four pages, whereas the longest one, chapter six (*Santa Barbara Endgame*) contains a 52 pages, with the rest being approximately 20 pages in length. This is in accordance with the development of Rodger’s world views in MTW, as his the style and content of his writing becomes increasingly violent and extreme as the manifesto proceeds. For example, in describing the last years of his life, right up to the Isla Vista incident, Rodger begins to describe explicitly on how he would like to assert revenge and retribution towards those who have harmed him.

I can only imagine how sweet it will be to ram the SUV into all of those groups of popular young people who I’ve always witnessed walking right in the middle of the road as if they are better than everyone else. When they are writhing in pain, their bodies broken and dying after I splatter them, they will fully realize their crimes. (MTW, 132)

Arising from the first close-reading of the manifesto, the following themes became apparent: 1.) *how Rodger describes others* (subsections of men and women); 2.) *how Roger describes himself* (subsections of superiority and inferiority); 3.) *class*; 4.) *race/ethnicity*; 5.) *ideology*; 6.) *other notes* (subsections of e.g. sex and loneliness). Indeed, Rodger spends a lot of time in both describing others and subsequently comparing himself to others. In this, superiority and inferiority, as well as class and ethnicity become central tools. The ideological message of MTW is also, at times, made very explicit, where Rodger describes his belief system on how the society functions. Additionally, other aspects such as sex and the loneliness arising from its lack proved quite interesting and eye-catching.

As the manifesto is a retelling of Rodger's life story, a lion's share of the narrative is told in past tense. However, the latter parts, also visible in the example above, begin to be written in either present or future tense, explicating both the timeline of the writing of the manifesto in relation to the shooting, as well as the urgency of Rodger's suffering. Indeed, the manifesto was finished relatively close to him finally undertaking what he referred to as *the Day of Retribution*, before which he emailed the document to his parents, therapist, and life-coach (Springer, n.d.). Alongside distributing MTW, Rodger (2014) published a YouTube video prior the incident, titled *Retribution*, whose message is essentially a summarized version of MTW; Rodger explains that women's refusal to have sex with him and only showing affection towards other men has caused him such pain and injustice that he must punish them (Rodger 2014). The video has since been deleted and banned from YouTube, but a reupload is provided online by The New York Times and many other sources provide a transcript of the video.

As mentioned in the sections above, MTW has slight differences to the generally accepted character of a manifesto. First, unlike a typical manifesto, MTW lacks an explicit call to action that relates to the common purpose of political or social change of many manifestos. Rather, MTW had its intentions in explaining Rodger's reasoning behind the Isla Vista incident, illustrated in the example presented above. Second, Rodger's writing style takes a heavy first-person standpoint, rather than the accumulative, ingroup-standpoint many other manifestos utilize. This was evident, for example, in the study by Cohen et al. (2016), where Rodger's heavy usage of the pronouns *me* and *I* were examined in relation to other manifestos and their authors. What MTW does, however, share with other works in the genre of manifesto, is the ideological, distorted world views that it contains. More specifically, the manifesto is colored and underlined by a vibrant, *misogyny*-driven ideology akin to that shared by the communities of the manosphere. The ideological basis is often made explicit by Rodger himself, as he states that he has begun to form beliefs on the intrinsic nature of the world and society, most having very ominous undertones:

I told him about all of my newfound philosophical views regarding women, and how I believe they are mentally flawed and need to be contained. (MTW, 127)

I began building on all of my philosophical views and theories about the world. (MTW, 117)

With respect to this thesis, the manifesto was accessed online on School Shooters .info (School Shooters.info, n.d.), where additional information and documents related to various different school shooters can be found. The site was created by Peter Langman in order to aid violence prevention, provide information on such large-scale actors of mass-violence, and make such documents publicly

available (School Shooters.info, n.d.). The public availability of MTW does not raise major ethical issues concerning the collection of the data, however, some critique on the ethics of discussing such manifestos has been made public, as discussed in the previous sections as well. Similar arguments can be made on MTW representing a kind of carnivalization and exaggeration of the potential outcomes of untreated mental health issues of *extraordinary* individuals. In other words, some may view Rodger as an outlier, placed at the end of the spectrum of violence, thus not properly representing the spectrum as a whole. Public issuers, such as news outlets, are sometimes criticized for reporting on violent attacks like Rodger's, some arguing that these reports go beyond informing the public, rather placing attention and even fame to these incidents. However, such critique is very short-sighted.

This critique may stem from the fear of others wanting to pursue attention and follow in the footsteps of the previous actors, thus creating a cycle of violence. Unfortunately, some cases have proved this fear rational, e.g. the 2025 stabbings of Pirkanmaa, whose perpetrator stated the need to achieve something great as one of his motives (Salmela 2025). One could also argue that the same critique can be directed towards scholars focusing on the topic of ideological mass murder, placing this thesis under scrutiny as well. I would argue, however, that minimizing the public spotlight placed upon ideological violence concurrently minimizes the gravity of these acts. Ideological violence is often especially dangerous to minorities, present also in the mass violence of Rodger and the Pirkanmaa perpetrator, who were both motivated by misogynistic world views, targeting women in particular. Disregarding such horrible acts as mere acts of lunatics can, then, function in reinforcing minority statuses and the consequent oppression they face. Focusing merely on not giving the perpetrators too much fame is extremely harmful with regard to the hateful ideologies discourse that these incidents represent: staying quiet correlates to quiet acceptance of both the kind of violent language found in these manifestos, and the oppressive values they represent.

4.2 Methods

While much of the existing research on Rodger and MTW are based in the realm social sciences, the established role language and discourse play in both constructing and distributing ideologies creates bases for further linguistic research. Analyzing the lexicon used in texts is an especially fruitful methodological approach to ideological texts, as these shared beliefs are often codified in the different meanings associated with words (van Dijk 1998, 205). Additionally, approaching linguistic analysis from a semiotic point of view, especially that outlined by Barthes (1972), helps us in unveiling not only the language used, but the ideologies embedded into it. By examining language as signs and through the relationship between form and meaning, other, hidden meanings can be discovered. Thus, the methodology for the linguistic analysis of this thesis will be based on the theory of Barthes' myth,

where the notion of a sign not only includes the words and language used, but reveals the shared assumptions present to help us conceptualize not only what the author is saying, but what he is *implying*.

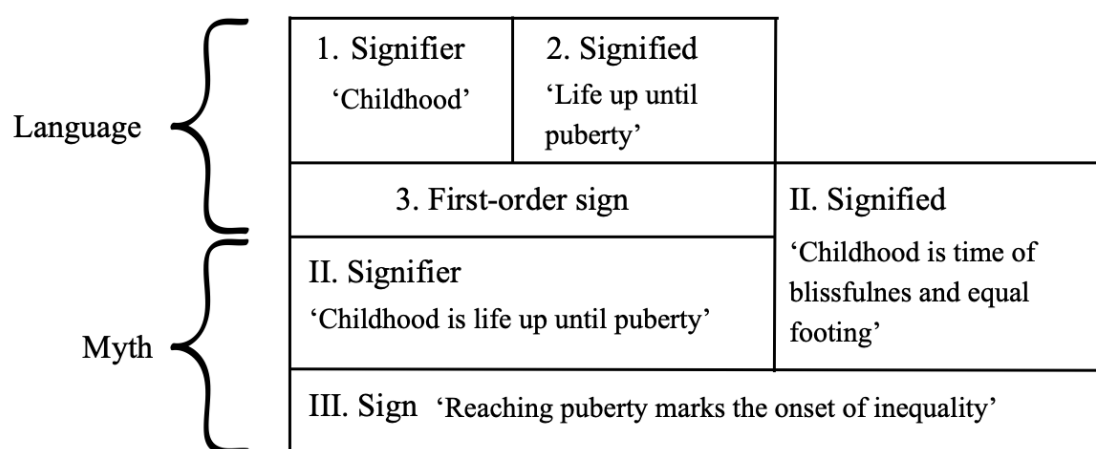
Before the linguistic analysis could take place, however, a phase of close-reading of MTW was required to grasp the nature of the manifesto as a whole. This was necessary to make referencing the text easier for the analysis section, hence the close-reading phase yielded a sort of index, briefly presented in the previous section 4.1., acquired via annotation and grouping of thematically similar utterances and paragraphs together in a separate document. A further thematic analysis could not be done within the narrow scope of this study, rather presenting an interesting prospect for future research.

As this thesis aims to understand how the language and meanings of MTW is constructed as a system, the linguistic analysis has its bases in semiotics, materialized in the notion of myth as a second-order system. In relation to the incel ideology, the focus on the *myth of sex* becomes of highest interest to this study. To achieve this, the analysis itself will be constructed around two major themes: puberty and childhood; and sex and inequality. These themes were chosen firstly due to the chronological nature of MTW, where Rodger begins his narrative from childhood, leading up to the emergence of puberty, sexual desire, and sex. Secondly, the preliminary close-reading of the manifesto pointed towards a connection between these notions in Rodger's construction of his world view. When examined together, these notions help constructing sex as *a myth*, with added, assumed meanings, rather than a mere simple, linguistic sign. Such mythologization of sex may be key to understanding the minds of Rodger and the incel community as a whole, possibly uncovering new details to their ideology.

The semiotic starting point of the analysis is reflective of Barthes' essays, where he first examines the simple, denotive signs, moving onto the culturally accepted implied meanings and the construction of myth through naturalization. Based on this, I have constructed the methodological structure of the analysis to consist of four parts: 1.) identifying the first-order, denotative signs; 2.) identifying the connotations; 3.) examining the linguistic features used to naturalize the meanings; and 4.) identifying the second-order signs, i.e. Myths. The first step is based on definitions found on the *Oxford English Dictionary*, by searching up the words corresponding to the signifiers of the simple signs (denotations) discussed. Opting for a dictionary definition for the denotative meanings has two benefits: first, these definitions can be regarded as the generally accepted meanings by the majority; second, this eliminates the possibility of my subjectivity marring the definition of the denotations that the analysis relies on. This methodology will not be followed in the fixed order presented here, rather, these steps are discussed in tandem with each other throughout the analysis. For example, in identifying the

connotative meanings, it is useful to examine the linguistic, rhetoric tools used in naturalizing the meaning. However, outlining these steps in this manner helps visualize both the methodology used, and the most central points that construct a myth. A brief example of the procedure is presented from the data of this study in the sign of childhood: the denotative, simple sign consists of the word *childhood*, meaning the era before puberty (part 1), to which Rodger has added an implied meaning of blissfulness and equality (part 2) through comparison to puberty (part 3), which then construct the myth of childhood (childhood is bliss and equal opportunity) (part 4). This example is presented in Figure 2 Presented below, following Barthes' notion of myth.

Figure 2 Diagram of the example of *childhood*, using Barthes' myth



The motivational level intrinsic to Myths suggests the significance ideology plays in the construction of a Myth that is built upon the hidden, implied meanings. To examine this, the third part of the four-step analysis presented here proves helpful in understanding these hidden, *naturalized* meanings behind cult-like texts such as MTW. This is arguably the most crucial part of the analysis, since naturalization is the key component in gaining access to the processes that allow for easier distribution of hateful ideologies. This is where the rhetoric tools used in MTW become central to the naturalization of Myth; the analysis will focus on how Rodger describes certain matters, what semantic value do these descriptions contain, and how does this reflect a larger ideological entity. While the linguistic analysis will focus especially on the lexical choices made by Rodger, identifying the more general rhetoric tools utilized in the text becomes an important aim of the analysis. Finally, the last part of the analysis of identifying the myth will take place in section 6 of this thesis, where the results will be discussed in relation to previous research and its relevance to the incel community as a whole.

5 Analysis

Starting off the linguistic analysis, the first step includes defining the key denotative meanings of *childhood*, *puberty*, and *sex*. In examining the OED definitions, the denotative meanings of childhood and puberty are, in a sense, intertwined: in biological terms, *puberty* can be described as the period during which a person gains reproductive capabilities (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "puberty" (n.1.), September 17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5704270773>) whereas *childhood* is denoted as the early stages of one's life, ending at the onset of puberty (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "childhood" (n.1.a.), September 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7843839744>). This proposed, co-constructed nature of the two signs is especially crucial in the denotation of childhood, the end of which is determined by the onset of puberty. The sign of puberty, however, is more heavily defined by biological facts, namely the onset of the production of certain hormones, crucial in allowing the person to reproduce. *Sex*, then, denotes an act between persons where sexual stimulation is present (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "sex" (n.4.b), September 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6273469846>). Unlike the relationship between the denotations of childhood and puberty, the role of sex in this equation is more complicated, however visible in the notion of emerging reproductive abilities associated with puberty. The relationship between these three signs, as they are linguistically realized in MTW, will be elaborated in the following sections, where our focus will be shifted on the connotative meanings and the linguistic tools behind them.

5.1 Dichotomy of Childhood and Puberty

As established above, the denotative meaning of childhood is co-constructed with the denotation of puberty, as an era ended by the onset of puberty. This, along with the chronological structure of MTW, starting with Rodger's childhood, seems good enough reason to begin our analysis with the sign of childhood. The first subsection of MTW is titled *A Blissful Beginning*, marked with the age range of 0-5. The title of the section is not arbitrary, as it is, in fact, quite representative of how Rodger visualizes childhood. Here, the main focus should be placed on the word *blissful*, referencing a sense of ease and tranquility that Rodger associates with the beginning phases of his life.

- (1) I still had a few more years to enjoy life in *carefree bliss* before I would eventually discover how twisted and cruel this "fascinating world" really is. (MTW, 9; emphasis added)
- (2) The feelings of jealousy I felt at nine---years---old were frustrating, but they were nothing compared to how I would feel once I hit puberty and have to watch girls choosing other boys over me. Any problem I had at nine---years---old was *nirvana* compared to what I was *doomed to face*. (MTW, 16; emphasis added)

The examples above indicate the connotation of blissfulness that childhood becomes associated with in MTW, by explicitly referencing to a sense of not only *blissfulness*, but of being *carefree*. Both of these associations are positive in nature, further emphasized by the use of the word *nirvana* in example 2. This example illustrates Rodger's use of metaphor, as he directly compares childhood to a state of nirvana, especially when opposed to life after puberty. This, in turn comes with a negative association, as nirvana is directly compared to a future that Rodger was *doomed to face*. The lexical choice of *doomed*, indeed, carries a heavy negative connotation, quite contrastive to the overwhelmingly positive ones attached to both blissfulness and nirvana, pointing towards the rhetoric tool of contrast. Example 2 is also our first indicator to the role sex plays in Rodger's world: the great feelings of both frustration and jealousy that arise from seeing women choose other men seem to be a significant factor in his 'twisted' world. The dichotomy between childhood and puberty is further elaborated on in the example below.

- (3) As kids, proving our self--worth and gaining validation among our peers was achieved in a *fair manner*, by how good we were at the games we played, or how big our collection of Pokemon cards were. No one had *unfair advantages*. *This was perfect, and this is how life should be.* (MTW; emphasis added)

Here, this dichotomy can be equated to the dichotomy between equality (childhood) and inequality (puberty). The lexical choices *fair manner* and *unfair advantages* are of special interest here, the former being associated with childhood, the latter with puberty. The onset of puberty seems to mar the sense of fairness and equal opportunity associated with childhood, as the emergence of puberty also comes with the onset of *unfair advantages*. The word advantage includes an added meaning of an unequal position, where some hold more favorable positions to others (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "advantage" (n.4.), October 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1013792164>), something that I argue relevant to competitive settings. In fact, *competition* seems to be one central connotation in both puberty, and the subsequent arousal of sexual interaction. Such *gamification* of life, especially of social situations, is an established, reoccurring theme in MTW (Vito et al. 2018, 96; Melo Lopes 2023, 142) appearing not only implicitly (as in example 3), but also as explicit statements:

- (4) The *peaceful* and *innocent* environment of childhood where everyone had *an equal footing* was all over. The time of *fair play* was at its end. *Life is a competition and a struggle*, and I was slowly starting to realize it. (MTW; emphasis added)

Example 4 further illustrates Rodger's use of metaphor, as he directly equates life with competition in "*life is a competition*". Similar to example 2, by placing childhood and puberty in opposition to each other by emphasizing the blissful (positive) nature of one, the unfair (negative) nature of the other, contrast becomes a central tool in Rodger's rhetoric toolbox. The connotations of equality and blissfulness added to childhood are further highlighted here via the explicit lexical choices of *peaceful*, *innocent*, and *equal footing*. The chance for *fair play* is disrupted by the emergence of *competition* and

struggle that refer to the onset of puberty, correlating with the emergence of unfair advantages apparent in example 3. The words *competition* and *advantage* could be grouped together by their implied value, as they both reference to positioning each other as adversaries: competition portrays a situation of opposition, where some gain superior positions to other via advantages. Looking at the example 5, we can be further assured of the presence of competition in MTW:

- (5) The world truly is a *brutal* place, where a man must *fight a bitter struggle* against all other men to reach the top. Humans are nothing but *vicious* beasts in a jungle. (MTW, 65)

This example holds quite a heavy negative connotation as a whole, namely by its lexical choices. The words *brutal*, *bitter*, and *vicious* imply the glum nature of the world, society, as well as the perceived competition, marked by the lexical choice *struggle* against other men. These choices point towards hyperbole as a rhetorical tool in emphasizing the cruel nature of the world, something that the metaphor of *humans as animals in a jungle* is testament to, equating humankind to mere animals. The verb *fight* is also notable, as it points to the proposed connotation of competition, akin to the already established construct of the *game* of life in MTW. Central to conceptualizing this competition is understanding one's adversaries, of which example 5 is evidence of: life is a competition, where *a man* must fight *all other men*, in order to survive in the game of life. While one could argue that this example uses the word man to denote the mankind, this seems improbable in the light of example 2, where Rodger describes the great feelings of jealousy arising from women choosing *other boys* over him. This is heavily reflective of the Us. vs. Them rhetoric, where the in-group (Rodger) attempts to differentiate itself from the out-group (other men). By associating life with competition, thus emphasizing the presence of oppositional forces, such relationship between Rodger and other men begins to become established.

The references to other men discussed above include very covert associations with *enemy* and *competition*, however the word *enemy* does also explicitly appear throughout the manifesto, sometimes accompanied by other words associated with battle and competition.

- (6) We all start out innocent, and we all start out together. Only through the experiences and circumstances of *growing up* do we drift apart, form *allegiances*, and face each other as *enemies*. (MTW, 5–6; emphasis added)

While the lexical choices of *allegiance* and *enemy* are somewhat each other's opposites, both carry connotations of battle that, according to Rodger, seems to start at the emergence of puberty, as it is through *growing up* that we become enemies. Indeed, this example implies that reaching puberty comes with the by-product of allegiances and enemies, as the game of life begins. Further elaborating on both how Rodger conceptualizes his enemies, as well as the nature of life being a competition, these themes seem to somewhat develop and radicalize as the manifesto progresses. While it is *other*

men who Rodger has been forced to compete and battle with, women's role in this equation is arguably just as pivotal.

- (7) I didn't want to die, but I would have no choice. Vengeance is the only path; all other paths had been closed shut. I thought it to be such a tragedy that I was actually going to *wage war against women* and all of humanity. But then again, women's rejection of me was a *declaration of war*. (MTW, 124; emphasis added)
- (8) Women's rejection of me is a *declaration of war*, and if it's *war* they want, then war they shall have. It will be a *war* that will result in their *complete and utter annihilation*. I will deliver a blow to my *enemies* that will be so catastrophic it will redefine the very essence of human nature. (MTW, 131; emphasis added)

Examples 7 and 8 are excerpts from the latter part of the last part of the manifesto, titled '*Santa Barbara: Endgame*', where Rodger has moved on to planning out his *Day of Retribution*. In opposition to the previously discussed examples, where Rodger constructed his opposition to other men through the connotation of competition and battle, the above examples indicate the more extreme stance and positioning of women as actors of *war*. Here, the lexical choice of *war*, alongside with other militant vocabulary associated with it, namely *declare* and *enemies* support the connotations of competition and battle that he associates with the game of life. The choice to declare war explicitly, and only against women is not arbitrary, and is indicative of Rodger's misogynistic world view, where women are the root of the issue. This is another example of metaphor, as Rodger equates women's rejection of him to a declaration of war, where the active agency appointed to women leaves Rodger as a helpless victim, a mere object of their doing and rejection. Here lies implied meaning of the severity of his rejection, as the word war itself is the most extreme act of violence and by equating rejection to war, rejection becomes an act of injustice, even violence. The effectiveness of metaphor is further supported by the use of hyperbole, as Rodger describes the outcome of his plans as *catastrophic*, *utter annihilation*, affecting the entirety of the human nature. Rodger's use of hyperbole is arguably present in many of the other examples discussed above, e.g. his use of adjectives in "the world is a *brutal* place", or the lexical choices of *nirvana* and *vengeance* are considerably heavy, pointing towards exaggeration.

The metaphor of war is similar to the previously discussed metaphor of competition that he associates with other men especially, however the key factor in differentiating the two seems to be gender. Thus, while men are his adversaries on the physical battlefield, associated with competition, women are the true evil, the puppeteers behind orchestrating the war that the battles between men are a part of. To Rodger, the severity of the situation leaves him no other choice than to respond to their declaration of war, the result of which will lead to complete and utter annihilation, implying destruction of an almost post-apocalyptic nature.

5.2 The Duality of 'Other'

Having established the connotational link between puberty and competition, and the subsequent gendered difference in the metaphor of battle and war, examining the two types of out-groups (Other) of men and women proves useful in further understanding these metaphors. The excerpts presented below illustrate some of the lexical decisions made in describing Rodger's adversaries.

- (9) In my history class, I had a crush on a really pretty girl, only to find out that she had a boyfriend, and in my psychology class there was this group of *popular* kids who acted *obnoxious* the whole time. One of them was a very pretty blonde girl, and she actually enjoyed associating with the *obnoxious* boys in her clique. The injustice! I hated them all. (MTW, 78; emphasis added)
- (10) Not only that, but her boyfriend was the type of boy I have always hated and despised: a *tall, muscular surfer---jock* with a buzz cut. As I looked at all the pictures of the two of them together, I shivered with pure hatred. (MTW, 100; emphasis added)
- (11) *A tall, blonde, jock---type* guy walked into one of the restaurants, and at his side was one of the sexiest girls I had ever seen. (MTW, 88; emphasis added)
- (12) After a couple of days I decided to drop my history class. I couldn't stand watching those *obnoxious popular* boys talk to all of the pretty girls in the class. The girls actually liked them! *I should be the one they pay attention to*, but they treated me like I was invisible. (MTW, 84; emphasis added)

The examples presented above share some common lexical items in describing other men who are provided with the attention from women. Some of these descriptors are purely based on looks, with *tall* and *blonde* being repeated, whereas the attributes of *obnoxious*, *popular*, and *jock* are more complex.

The denotative meaning of *jock* is associated with the added meaning of *athleticism* (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "jock" (n.5), October 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3764522783>) that, with the additional connotation of low intellectualism often posits jocks in opposition to geeks or nerds, where geeks represent the smart, less attractive counterpart to the handsome, muscular, meathead of a jock. This was explored in the ethnographic study of Edley and Wetherell (1997, 207), who found that in the school environment of the study, it was the school's athletic rugby players who dominated the social sphere, and that the domination was largely based in physical attributes and their aggressive behavior. This correlates with Rodger's focus on physical descriptors that seem to be intertwined with the notion of *popularity*, as they appear in tandem with each other, whereas the assumption of

aggression is perhaps what Rodger is trying to imply in labeling other men as *obnoxious*. The following excerpt is further evidence to how Rodger conceptualizes a jock.

- (13) All of the hot, beautiful girls walked around with *obnoxious, tough jock*---type men who partied all the time and acted crazy. They should be going for *intelligent gentlemen* such as myself. *Women are sexually attracted to the wrong type of man*. This is a major flaw in the very foundation of humanity. It is completely and utterly wrong, in every sense of the word. (MTW, 84; emphasis added)

In example 13, Rodger attempts to build a sense of Otherness via contrast, as he compares himself with other men as the object of women's admiration. While other men gain the archetype of an *obnoxious jock*, only partying and acting crazy, Rodger self-identifies himself not only as *intelligent*, but a *gentleman*. This is in accordance with the findings of Edley and Wetherell (1997, 210), where the "nerds" of the school attempted to re-identify themselves as *new men*, in an attempt to build an alternative form of masculinity opposing the jocks. In this, the mental weakness of the rugby players became an integral factor in distinguishing the two (Edley and Wetherell 1997, 211), something visible in example 13 well. Moreover, the differentiation and contrast between Rodger and the jocks is further promoted with the lexical choice *gentleman* that comes with the connotations of tactfulness and politeness, presenting high contrast with the obnoxiousness that he associates with jocks.

Besides the description of other men, example 13 is useful in examining the role of women in Rodger's world view. With regard to this, the utterance "women are sexually attracted to the wrong type of man" indicates to the active agency that Rodger awards to women. Here, it is the attraction of women that awards some men with the pleasure of sex, while gatekeeping it from others. A similar sentiment is realized many times throughout the manifesto, including the following excerpts.

- (14) This is how girls are, and I was starting to realize it. This was what truly opened my eyes to how brutal the world is. The most *meanest and depraved of men* come out on top, and *women flock to these men*. Their evil acts are rewarded *by women*; while *the good, decent men* are laughed at. It is sick, twisted, and wrong in every way. I hated the girls even more than the bullies because of this. (MTW, 48)
- (15) They were obnoxious jerks, and yet somehow it was these boys who all of *the girls flocked to*. This showed me that the world was a brutal place, and *human beings were nothing more than savage animals*. Everything my father taught me was proven wrong. He raised me to be a *polite, kind gentleman*. In a decent world, that would be ideal. But the polite, kind gentleman doesn't win in the real world. *The girls don't flock to the gentlemen. They flock to the alpha male*. (MTW 28)

Rodger continues to rely on contrast, as he compares the *meanest and depraved* men to the *good, decent men*; the *gentleman* gets nothing, while the *alpha male* gets to enjoy the pleasures of female attention. The metaphor of humans as animals becomes present once again in example 15, and in a more covert manner in example 14, where the lexical choice of the verb *flock* implies an association

with the behavior of birds. Additionally, hyperbole appears in many of the examples, e.g. in Rodger's description of women's mating habits as a flaw in "*the very nature of humanity*", or as "sick, twisted, and wrong in *every way*". It is obvious that Rodger perceives himself as one of the decent men facing this injustice, as he self-identified as a gentleman in example 13. It seems that is exactly *by women* that these pleasures get distributed, as girls are granted active agency in all the examples presented above, while men are posited as the mere objects of their admiration. This further portrays women as the source of evilness that the world is riddled with, whereas men are depicted akin to pawns in their game, evaluated unfairly, only by their physical attributes.

5.3 The Barbaric Act

The gendered nature of Rodger's belief system discussed above brings us to the final point of our analysis, where the myth of sex is revealed. To achieve this, closer examination of the construction of *sex* is in place, as Rodger emphasizes sex in many parts of MTW.

- (16) *Finding out about sex is one of the things that truly destroyed my entire life. Sex... the very word fills me with hate. Once I hit puberty, I would always want it, like any other boy. I would always hunger for it, I would always covet it, I would always fantasize about it. But I would never get it. Not getting any sex is what will shape the very foundation of my miserable youth. This was a very dark day.* (MTW, 39; emphasis added)

Rodger describes his utter distaste towards sex using hyperbole: the lack of sexual interaction in his life is not only a mere nuisance, it is "*the very foundation of his miserable youth*", something that *destroyed* his entire life. The very heavy negative connotations carried by the words *miserable* and *destroy* illustrate Rodger's negative feelings when faced with sex, and the repeated use of *always* highlights the prominent role sex plays in his day-to-day life. His clear abhorrence towards sex is presented in the example 16, but unveiling the roots of this disgust require further analysis.

As discussed in the previous sections, Rodger states explicitly that a major aspect in defining his relationship with sex is the feeling of jealousy evoked by seeing other men enjoy the company of women. In this, sex seems to gain its evil nature through its unequal distribution:

- (17) Not only did I have to waste my entire youth suffering in loneliness and *unfulfilled desire*, but I had to live with the knowledge that other boys my age were able to have all of the experiences I craved for. *It is absolutely unfair and unjust.* (MTW, 135; emphasis added)

- (18) My life was so *mundane* and *wasteful* compared to the lives all those other men lived. They were in heaven and I was in hell. (MTW, 97; emphasis added)

Once again, the examples above illustrate the uses of hyperbole, contrast, and metaphor. Contrast is especially prominent in example 18, where his life becomes mundane and wasteful in contrast to that of other men, further stressed by the metaphor of *heaven and hell*. This ancient dichotomy holds a heavy connotational meanings. *Heaven* is similar to the lexical choice *nirvana* that Rodger associates with blissfulness, both having positive associations. Conversely, *hell* is negative by nature, implying the agony Rodger has had to face in his life. The source of his contrast seems to be the unequal distribution of sex, showcased in example 17, where Rodger's suffering is magnified by other men's access to sex. His life being sexless, while other men get to enjoy women's company, is then "absolutely unfair and unjust", where hyperbole is used to emphasize the gravity of the situation.

Some being left with *unfulfilled desire*, while others being allowed to experience the joys of sex is framed as an absolutely unfair and unjust condition of society. The idea of equal distribution of sex seems to define Rodger's idea of the perfect world, in which access to sex is almost equated to a human right. Indeed, the power of sex lies exactly in the economics of its distribution, where denying access to it is intrinsically unjust, and a vicious act of inequality.

(19) I began to have fantasies of becoming very powerful and stopping everyone from having sex. I wanted to take their sex away from them, just like *they took it away from me. I saw sex as an evil and barbaric act, all because I was unable to have it.* (MTW, 56; emphasis added)

(20) It was all fueled by my wish to punish everyone who is sexually active, because I concluded that *it wasn't fair that other people were able to experience sex while I have been denied it all my life.* I started to have the desire to create a world where no one is allowed to have sex or relationships. I again saw that as the perfect, fair world. Reproduction can be accomplished without sex, through artificial insemination. *Sex is evil, as it gives too much pleasure to those who don't deserve it.* (MTW, 65; emphasis added)

Rodger continues his use of hyperbole by the lexical choices of *evil* and *barbaric*, where the negative connotations that Rodger associates with sex become obvious. This is where the unequal distribution of sexual activity becomes an identifying factor, as Rodger laments not only having sex *taken away* from him, but *undeserving people* receiving it in change. Especially in the utterance "all because I was unable to have it" lies an implied meaning of sex as an intrinsic right, something one deserves by default. The sole denial of the act is constructed as an act of injustice that enrages Rodger.

Another crucial implied aspect of the denial is with regard to the culprit of the injustice. In examples 19 and 20, Rodger positions himself as the *object* of denial, where the out-group commits the cruelty of taking his rights away from him. In this case, the implied out-group is *women*, especially in light of the previous examples 14 and 15, where women are granted agency of choosing their sexual partners. The evil nature of both women and sex is visible in Rodger's wishes to eradicate both: his declaration of war on women and his dreams of prohibiting sex have very similar connotations regarding the truly

corrupt nature of both. The volition attributed solely to women, then explains how Rodger perceives their role in society as the gatekeepers of sex. They hold the power to distribute sex, which is, according to Rodger, done in an unjust manner, based in the intertwined aspects of social currency and physical attributes. In the myth of sex, sex is then constructed akin to a tool of power and (in)justice, as access to sex should be available to all, rendering its withdrawal intrinsically wrong.

6 Discussion

The aim of this section is to both summarize the findings of the analysis, and to relate these findings to the previous research on the topic. Dividing the discussion into two subsections is based on the general themes of gender and sex visible in MTW, as Rodger constructs other men and women as out-group in different manners, which proves central to the construction of the myth of sex. Thus, the first subsection focuses on how gender as a variable affects Rodger's descriptions, while the second aims to summarize how sex itself is realized in the myth of sex.

6.1 The Other

The chronological narrative structure that MTW follows gives reason to discuss the implications that the notions of both childhood and puberty present to the myth of sex. The denotative meanings of the two are co-constructed, as puberty marks the end of childhood. The most central connotations identified in this study with regard to these notions are blissfulness and equality (childhood), and competition and suffering (puberty). The implied meaning of competition, brought upon by the emergence of sexual desire, is of special interest, as it seems to create the basis of the inequality that Rodger perceives inherent to sex. Additionally, the construction of childhood and puberty is heavily reliant upon the tool of contrast, manifesting either as explicitly placing the two entities in an oppositional position, or by attributing one with positive, other with negative qualities. Contrast was supported by equating childhood with *nirvana* via metaphor, where the positive connotations of blissfulness and equality became central in further highlighting the negative nature of puberty that Rodger describes as an ominous omen of the dark future awaiting him.

Further examination of the connotation of competition is crucial for this thesis, as it is an underlying assumption in the larger myth of sex. In this competition, or the game of life, other men can be established as Rodger's adversaries, unraveled by the lexical analysis. Similar to the Us vs. Them - schema, Rodger places himself in opposition to other men, by attributing himself positively as not only an intellectual and a gentleman, but as one of the men deserving of sex. In the lexical associations made with the Other, i.e. other *men*, however, the positive and negative associations seem to intertwine. In the description of jock, for example, the negative connotations of being rowdy, loud, and of low intellect are accompanied with the positive attributes of athleticism and popularity. In the light of trying to comprehend the constructions of the in- and out-groups (i.e. Rodger and other men), this may seem counter-intuitive, however, these findings are in accordance with the previous research.

The contradictory nature of superiority in the incel ideology is attested by, for example, O'Donnell (2021, 72) and Vito et al. (2018, 94), who emphasize the role of intellectualism and gentleman-like

qualities in constructing the self-perceived superiority of the incel. Vito et al. (2018, 99) consider such self-identification as a restorative act from Rodger, as he fails to fulfil the heterosexual expectation of sex imposed on him by hegemonic masculinity. Instead, attempts to compromise his masculine shortcomings by constructing a new type of masculinity, embedded in intellectualism and being a gentleman, rather than being popular or attractive, i.e. a jock. Similar findings were yielded by Edley and Edley and Wetherell's study (1997, 210-211) of a school environment, where the nerdier kinds were pushed to re-evaluate their questioned masculinity and identity via self-perceived high intellectualism, and the study of O'Donnell (O'Donnell 2021, 71), who established intellectualism a key-component in incel's self-differentiation from other men. The role of intellectualism has also been established in other contexts of the manosphere, as Wright et al. (2020) examined Internet discourse of another subgroup of the manosphere called Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW). The findings of the study indicated that the main topics found on the forum consisted of women (33% of all posts), "feminine or emasculated men" (1% of all comments), as well as other themes, grouped as "references to science, technology, philosophy and religion", especially used in an argumentative manner (Wright et al. 2020, 920–21).

While incels compare and contrast themselves with other men through attributes of intellect and physical features, women are differentiated by quite different means in both MTW and the broader incel community. Due to the scope of this study, much focus could not be placed on the detailed descriptions of women, however previous research provides some insight on the issue. For example, describing women via their animalistic sexual tendencies has been established essential for incel groups (Chang 2020, 263; Lindsay 2021, 43), also visible in the analysis of MTW presented in the current study, where the metaphor of humans as animals is repeated on numerous occasions. In addition to their barbaric, animalistic nature, ascribing women as the scapegoat, per Kimmel (2017) is crucial to not only Rodger, but the broader incel community as well. In the case of Rodger, his tendency to place himself as the object at the hands of women and their rejection points towards scapegoatism, also in line with the findings of Melo Lopes (2023, 145-46), who focused on the significant role of the agency of women in protecting the sovereign subjectivity of men. Nonetheless, avoiding active agency and attributing women's mating behavior as non-human, may point towards Roger attempting to shield himself from the pain of rejection, by establishing it as something completely out of his control and volition. This, however, seems to further propagate his (mis)perception of the control women have in society.

6.2 Sex as a Tool of Power

The question of how Rodger both conveys and naturalizes the meanings he associates with childhood, puberty, and sex were examined in the lexical analysis focusing on the specific language choices made in MTW, especially in his use of rhetoric tools. The most prominent tools identified were contrast, hyperbole, and metaphor. Metaphor was perhaps the strongest of the three, relating to larger conceptualizations, such as *humans are animals*, or *declaration of war on women*. Conversely, contrast appeared especially in Rodger's tendency of distinguishing himself from other men and in his construction of childhood as bliss, in opposition to puberty as a struggle. Lastly, hyperbole was the most salient one, manifested, e.g. in the use of strong lexicon such as the adjective *brutal*. Together, these tools aid Rodger in establishing a belief system riddled with deep-rooted inequality and suffering.

To finally conceptualize the *myth of sex*, as seen in MTW, the connection between the notions of competition, women, and sex becomes crucial. Similar to the notion of women being mere animalistic and evil creatures that make ill decisions based solely on their biology, sex too is associated with maliciousness, corruption, and barbarity. Brought upon by puberty, the biological sexual instincts mar the decision-making process of women, as they seem to opt for the *wrong type of males*, leaving the *deserving ones* void of affection. In MTW, the wrong types of males refer to the jocks discussed in the previous section, who are characterized mainly via physical attributes that subsequently control women's mating behavior. In the dichotomy between 'wrong type of men' and the 'deserving ones', one of the most crucial implied meanings inherent to the myth of sex is introduced: *injustice*. Referring to himself as deserving, marking the sex-having men as undeserving, there seems to exist an unequal distribution of sex among men, facilitated by women. This notion of sex as a distributable good, or a human right has become subject of previous studies as well. For example, Vink et al. (2024) examined the incel ideologies via the concepts of *feminine-coded* services attributed to women, and the *masculine-coded* privileges granted to men. The analysis concluded that these feminine-coded services, including emotional support, certain social services, and most notably, the expectation of reproductive services, were crucial in explaining misogyny in incel groups (Vink et al. 2024, 731). Conversely, men were associated especially with maintenance of face and power, which should exempt them from humiliation (Vink et al. 2024, 733), also correlating with Rodger's fear of rejection discussed previously.

Introduced by the onset of puberty, the final connotation found in the myth of sex is the implied and gendered meaning of competition, as the lexical analysis illustrated that Rodger's use of battle-related words was distributed differently based on gender. Words such as *battle* or *enemy* were directed either towards men or humanity in general, whereas the heavier counterpart *war* was directed towards

women, as Rodger explicitly *declares war on women* multiple times throughout MTW. These findings are in line with O'Donnell's (2020) analysis of MRA forums focusing on *gamergate* discourse that aimed to combat women in the video game industry by a mass harassment campaign. The analysis unveiled the use of the metaphor of *war*, reflected in the rhetorics used during second-wave feminism in the scope of the study (O'Donnell 2020, 670). Moreover, Zoë Quinn, a female figure who amassed the bulk of the harassment during gamergate, was equated to a 'final boss' (ibid.), correlating with the findings of this study, where women were implied as *the nemesis*. The findings of O'Donnell, along with this thesis point towards not only Rodger's misogynistic world view, where *women* are the true enemy, but further reflects the ideology shared in the manosphere as a whole. In this, the previously discussed aspects of biological essentialism (Othering of women based on biology) and biological determinism (describing women as actors ruled by their biology) are only some of the ways incels and Rodger have attempted to justify their misogynistic world view, in which women hold all power of choice.

Identifying the main tenets of incel ideology is only part of the larger picture, as relating these beliefs to legitimizing and justifying real-life violence proves increasingly important. Vink et al. (2024, 734) identify women's failure to tend to the masculine-coded privileges of men as an important factor in justifying acts of misogynistic violence, while Kimmel's notion of grievance entitlement (2017, 21) highlights the bases for grievance to stem especially from the *redaction* of rights. Rodger's manner of portraying himself as someone deserving of sex is proof of such entitlement that is then aggrieved by the sense of him being taken away the access to sex. The sadness caused by virginity becomes explicit in him stating that in a perfect world, sex would be banned altogether, as it is impossible to distribute it in a just manner. Indeed, a deeper analysis on the hidden meanings found in MTW revealed that in the myth of sex, sex is realized as *a tool of power*. The unequal distribution of sex can place men in oppression, where the agency granted solely on women positions them not only as the gatekeepers of sex, but the evil misusers of sex as a tool of power. In this myth, the connotation of competition includes the implication that it is the barbaric, animalistic nature of women's mating rituals that forces men to battle each other. The ones rising to the top, awarded with sex by women, are the men who have won the genetic lottery with the build of a tall, athletic jock, while the unlucky ones are faced with the unjust reality of virginity.

The mental health issues faced by the perpetrators have become a common topic of discourse concerning Rodger and his followers. The absurd nature of MTW, and the fatality of Rodger's case has placed him under especial scrutiny in terms of his mental well-being, illustrated, e.g. by Langman's (2014) psychological analysis of Rodger's psychopathic features. As the mental health issues of these perpetrators are used to not only explain these incidents, but displace responsibility away from the perpetrators (Zimmerman 2018, 1), we face the danger of rendering the underlying

tenets of male supremacy (Vink et al. 2024, 727) and militant misogyny (Zimmerman et al. 2018, 3) insignificant in the eyes of the public. This is partially the product of the type of naturalization discussed in this thesis, through which such ideologies become more widely accepted and circulated. If left unnoticed, empathizing with such 'lone wolves' (ibid.; Cohen et al. 2016) becomes an implicit tool for legitimizing violent ideologies, creating a cycle where extremist language will reproduce instances of real-life violence.

7 Conclusion

Manifesto as a genre is riddled with ideology, as the purposes of the genre often lie in political and social influence, and at times mobilization via call-for-action. This is made possible by naturalizing the underlying ideological beliefs as common sense that both renders them easier to accept, and allows for their wider distribution. As with any genre, however, there are differences found within manifestos, and not all aim to directly mobilize its readers. Elliot Rodger's personal manifesto *My Twisted World* is an example of such, as the author explicitly states that the purpose of the piece is to rather explain how certain life-events led to him committing mass-violence. The glorification of Rodger within the community of incels is testament to the hazardous nature of pieces such as MTW, as Rodger and his actions have been praised by other incel mass murderers following him. This group has proved itself a cautionary example of what ideologically driven groups are capable of; both Rodger and his followers, such as Alek Minassian, are among the deadliest misogyny-driven cases of mass violence, gaining increasing support from incels alike. Rodger's status as a saint by incels has been recognized by both scholars and the public, and the ideologies of Rodger correlate with those of the incel community on the conceptualizations of sex, and most importantly, women. As made explicit in MTW, it was exactly Rodger's twisted, misogynistic world views led him to a position where he was left no other choice than eliminating the enemy, i.e. women.

To further understand the belief represented by incels, the current study attempted answer the questions of 1.) *what implied meanings are used in constructing the myth of sex in MTW*, and 2.) *what linguistic tools are used in naturalizing the myth*. These research questions and the subsequent methodology was based on Roland Barthes' semiotic notion of myth, which enables both the identification of connotations, and the deconstruction of the naturalization process of these meanings. The methodology materialized as four steps that focused on 1.) denotation; 2.) connotation; 3.) naturalization; and lastly, 4.) identifying the myth.

The analysis focused not only on the meanings added to sex, but also to the signs of *childhood* and *puberty*, as they seemed to serve purpose in conceptualizing sex in the chronological structure of MTW. With regard to the first research question, the lexical analysis unveiled positive associations made with childhood, namely *blissfulness* and *equal footing*, whereas puberty marked the start of a new era of *despair*, in which associations of *competition* and *unfairness* were implied. The unfairness implied in the emergence of puberty – and the subsequent sexual desires that arise – is then realized as the competitive setting that men are imposed to by women. Moreover, focusing especially on battle-related lexicon, the analysis revealed gender as a variable in the materialization of associations: other men were associated with words such as *battle* and *enemy*, while the heavier counterpart *war* was associated with women, made explicit e.g. in Rodger's *declaration of war on women*. This contrast

highlights the different roles men and women play in Rodger's ideology, where men were implied as his adversaries, the ones who must actively battle each other, whereas women are implied as the nemesis, the warlords orchestrating these battles. In further examination of the implied meaning of competition, the analysis focused briefly on how Otherness is constructed with regard to gender. The results were in accordance with the notion of the Us vs. Them -schema, where a sense of in-group – out-group -division is established often by attributing the in-group with positive, out-group with negative associations.

To answer the second research question, the naturalization process of the myth of sex was materialized in the use of certain rhetoric tools. Regarding Rodger's tendency of creating a sense of Otherness, the rhetoric tool of *contrast* became central, as Rodger describes himself in positive light (gentleman, intellectual), other men in a negative light (obnoxious brutes). In addition to contrast, *metaphor* and *hyperbole* were observed on multiple occasion. Metaphor was present in equating life to a competition, describing women's rejection of him as a declaration of war, and as equating humans to animals. Hyperbole, however, manifested as certain word choices that carried heavy negative connotations, e.g. sex is *evil* and *barbaric*; as repetition, e.g. of the word *always*; and in utterances asserting absolute truth, e.g. "it is *absolutely* unfair and unjust." These tools seem to function in tandem with each other, as metaphor could be considered to support hyperbole, whereas hyperbole helps emphasize the contrast constructed by Rodger.

The findings of this study are not only in accordance with the already established incel ideology, where women are the root of all evil, but help further illustrate how this role of evil is constructed. The active agency Rodgers grants to women in choosing their mates depicts them as not only the gatekeepers of sex, but the as evil wrongdoers whose animalistic, biology-driven mating rituals place men in place of oppression. The most interesting result of the analysis was the unveiled implied meaning of sex being a *tool of power*, solely executed by women. It is by their skewed mating habits that the injustice of leaving deserving men void of sex materializes in our society, pointing towards the evilness of both sex and women.

Some critique has also been directed on the topic of mental health issues, especially in relation to its carnivalization in the media. This was also the case after the Isla Vista incident, when Rodger's mental health issues were introduced to the discourse as a possible explanation for his actions. These extremely violent, ideologically-based instances of mass-murder are also sometimes denoted as cases of the extreme end, thus less valid as they don't necessarily represent the general issue accurately. This brings us to the concluding arguments of this thesis, as a brief mention on the issue of misogyny and its product of real-life violence is in place. Even though incels and the other misogynistic subgroups of the manosphere are sometimes thought of as merely an online phenomena, the case of Rodger serves

as a public service announcement on how ideologies can, and do, manifest in the losses of real human lives. This violence is usually directed towards minorities and groups in lower socioeconomic positions, the victims in this case being women. Belittling the threat and relevance of such heinous acts such as those of Rodger and Minassian is not only irresponsible, but blatantly dismissive of the safety of all minorities alike. The implicit means in which these ideologies manifest themselves in language renders it an increasingly difficult task to both identify them, and prevent their subsequent spread. Focusing on the role of language and rhetoric in ideologies and how their meanings are naturalized as common sense is, thus an important tool in preventing violence, and halting further spread of hate-filled ideologies, such as that of incels and Rodger.

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Appendix

Finnish Summary

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma keskittyy tarkastelemaan naisvihamielistä *incel*-alakulttuuria, sen sisältämää sovinnista ideologia ja tämän ideologian yhteyttä joukkoväkivaltaan implisiittisten merkitysten avulla. Joukkoväkivalta on noussut keskeiseksi teemaksi incel-alakulttuurissa useiden tapausten kautta, joista tunnetuimpana pidetty Elliot Rodger surmasi kuusi ja haavoitti 14 ihmistä, lopuksi surmaten myös itsensä vuoden 2014 Yhdysvalloissa, Isla Vista -kampuksella tapahtuneessa ammuskelussa. Tapauksen ideologinen latautuminen tulee näkyväksi Rodgerin jakamassa 137-sivuisen dokumentissa *My Twisted World* (MTW), jossa hän avaa omaa, misogynististä maailmankuvaansa henkilökohtaisen manifestin muodossa. Tämä tutkielma pyrkii avaamaan Rodgerin ideologista ajatusmaailmaa, jossa seksi on muodostunut yhteiskunnassa tapahtuvan sorron alkutekijäksi. Seksiä tarkastellaan MTW:n kontekstissa Roland Barthesin (1972) semioottisen myytin teorian kautta, jossa implisiittiset, kulttuurisesti jaetut merkitykset ovat keskeisessä roolissa. Tutkimuskysymykset pyrkivät vastaamaan siihen, millaisia implisiittisiä merkityksiä Rodger liittää seksin myyttiin ja mitä kielellisiä keinoja Rodger hyödyntää myytin naturalisaatiossa.

Naisvihamielinen diskurssi on ilmiönä huolestuttava erityisesti kasvavan kokonsa ja raakuutensa vuoksi. Misogynyä on löytänyt paikkansa erityisesti Internet-palstoilta, missä myös manosfäärinä (the manosphere) tunnettu ryhmä toimii. Kyseistä ryhmää voidaan luonnehtia heterogeenisena, eri alaryhmien kokoelmana, joita yhdistävät sekä huumorin ja meemien käyttö yhteisöllisyyden rakentamisessa että naisvihamieliset ja oikeistolaiset arvomaailmat (Suigura 2021; O'Donnell 2020). Ideologisesti keskeisiä piirteitä manosfäärille ovat feminismin asema vihollisena (Vink et al 2024; Sugiura 2021; Lindsay 2021) ja kokemus oikeuksien poisviemisestä, minkä syypäänä nähdään naiset (Kimmel 2017). Incelit ovat kenties tunnetuin manosfäärin alaryhmä, joka on noussut yleisön ja median huomioon erittäin väkivaltaisen ja häiriintyneen sovinnisten ideologiansa vuoksi. Tämä ideologia on johtanut pahimmillaan joukkoväkivallan tapauksiin, joista Rodger on kenties tunnetuin esimerkki. Rodgerin kirjoittama MTW on herättänyt mielenkiintoa incel-ilmiön kontekstissa teoksessa korostuneen, erittäin naisvihamielisen maailmankuvan vuoksi, missä puolestaan heijastuu incel-yhteisössä jaettu sovinninen ideologia. Kyseinen manifesti on autobiografinen kuvaus Rodgerin keskeisimmistä elämänvaiheista, joiden hän väittää johtaneen Isla Vista-tapaukseen. MTW on kielellisesti hyvin väkivaltainen ja raaka kuvatun samalla Rodgerin hyvin radikaalia ja naisvihamielistä ideologiaa, jonka mukaan hänen yksinäisyytensä ja neitsyytensä on naisten aiheuttama: tämän vuoksi naiset ansaitsevat tulla rangaistuksi väkivallan keinoin. Neitsyys ja yksinäisyys luovat keskeiset raamit myös incel-identiteetille, sillä sana incel johdetaan sanoista

involuntarily celibate (vastentahtoinen selibaatti). Selibaatti viittaa jäsenten neitsyyteen, kun taas vastentahtoisuus viittaa jäsenten epäonnisuuteen seksin harrastamisessa. Toisin sanoen jäsenet kokevat suurta tuskaa oman neitsyytensä vuoksi, sillä he kokevat suurta halukkuutta naisia kohtaan, mutta eivät saa vastakaikua haluilleen. Myös muut incelit kuvaavat Rodgerin tapaan naisia syypäänä yksinäisyyteensä, missä yhteisön naisvihamielinen luonne korostuu.

Rodgerin yhteys inceleihin on häiritsevää, sillä Rodger on saavuttanut ryhmän sisällä suurta arvostusta ja palvontaa; häntä kutsutaan paikoittain mm. pyhimykseksi (*st. Elliot*) tai kuninkaaksi (*King Elliot*). MTW:n ja erinäisten incel-foorumien analyysit ovatkin tuottaneet hyvin samankaltaisia tuloksia. Sekä Rodgerin että incelien ideologian katsotaan perustuvan oletukseen naisten alempiarvoisuudesta mm. vertaamalla naisia eläimiin. Tässä keskeiseksi nousevat biologinen essentialismi (*biological essentialism*) (Sugiura 2021), jonka mukaan naisten ero miehiin on biologinen ja synnynnäinen. Tämä kuvastaa inceleiden taipuvaisuutta turvautua pseudotieteellisiin ”faktoihin” ja tieteelliseltä vaikuttavaan diskurssiin, jossa faktoja arvotetaan korkeammalle tunteisiin verrattuna (Van Valkenburg 2021). Biologisen essentialismin lisäksi inceleiden ideologia perustuu biologiseen determinismiin (*biological determinism*) ja evoluutiopsykologiaan (*evolutionary psychology*) (Ging 2019; Van Valkenburgh 2021), joita puolestaan käytetään kuvaamaan naisten parittelumenoja. Biologisen determinismin mukaan ihmisen geeniperimä ennaltamäärää tämän sosiaalisen menestyksen, erityisesti parittelun osalta (Baele et al. 2021). ainoastaan ns. geenilotossa voittaneet yksilöt pärjäävät yhteiskunnassa, missä erityisesti ulkonäöllä on valtava merkitys (Chang 2020; Van Valkenburgh 2021; O’Malley et al. 2022)

Inceleiden ja Rodgerin maailmankuvaa kehystävät yksinäisyys ja neitsyys tekevät ideologiasta luonteeltaan hyvin synkän ja toivottoman. Tämä ajatusmaailma kulminoituu ajatukseen seksuaalimarkkinoista (*sexual marketplace*), missä naiset toimivat hyödykkeiden, erityisesti henkisen tuen ja seksin, tarjoajina (Van Valkenburgh 2021), joita he jakavat korkean markkina-arvon omaaville miehille. Erityisesti varallisuus ja ulkonäköön liittyvät piirteet, kuten pituus ja atleettisuus yhdistetään korkeaan markkina-arvoon (Chang 2020; Van Valkenburgh 2021; O’Malley et al. 2022), kun taas incelit kokevat itse edustavansa alhaista markkina-arvoa. Huono itsetunto on todettu sekä keskeiseksi peruspilariksi incel-identiteetille (O’Malley et al. 2022) että tärkeäksi työkaluksi selittämään inceleiden kokemaa yksinäisyyttä ja siitä aiheutuvaa ahdistusta (Lindsay 2021). Incelit luovat kuitenkin ylemmydentunnetta muihin miehiin verrattuna älykkyyden ja herrasmiesmäisyyden avulla, sillä molemmat Rodger ja laajempi incel-yhteisö usein identifioivat itsensä herrasmiehiksi ja älykkäämmiksi kuin ryhmän ulkopuoliset yksilöt (O’Donnell 2021; Vito et al. 2018). Tässä ajatusmallissa naiset kuvataan usein biologisen determinismin keinoin elämellisinä, täysin biologian ohjaamina olentoina, joiden ainoa tavoite on lisääntyminen (O’Malley et al. 2022; Van Valkenburgh 2021). Tätä inceleiden jakamaa ideologiaa kutsutaan usein *Black Pill* -nimellä, joka on johdettu

Matrix-elokuvasarjasta. Kyseisen mustan pillerin nieleminen kuvastaa ideologian omaksuvien yksilöiden heräämistä nihilistiseen todellisuuteen, jossa yksilön menestyminen yhteiskunnassa on ennalta määrätty ja inceleitä odottaa väistämätön, yksinäinen kohtalo (Baele et al. 2021; Ging 2019; Hoffman et al. 2020; Sugiura 2021; Witt 2020), joka on täysin naisten määrittelemä.

Incelit ja heidän tekemänsä, erityisesti naisiin kohdistuva väkivalta on osoitus siitä, mihin vihamieliset ideologiat voivat pahimmillaan johtaa. Ideologialla viitataan tämän tutkielman kontekstissa sosiaalisesti ylläpidettyihin representaatioihin (van Dijk 1998), joiden rakennusprosessi perustuu erityisesti kielen ja diskurssin varaan. MTW on esimerkki manifestista, joka on yleisesti ymmärretty väkivaltaisena ja ideologisesti latautuneena genrenä, jonka tarkoituksena on usein mobilisoida lukijakuntaansa (Yanoshevsky 2009). Aikaisemmat tutkimustulokset ovat osoittaneet yhtäläisyyksiä väkivaltaisten tekijöiden kirjoittamista manifesteista. Moni aikaisemman analyysin kohteena oleva kirjoittaja suosi esimerkiksi sukulaisuussuhteisiin viittaavaa sanastoa sekä retoriikkaa, jossa sisäryhmää (in-group) pyritään myös kuvaamaan uhattuna, kun taas ulkoryhmä (out-group) kuvataan vihollisena (Ebner et al. 2022). Nämä retoriset keinot kuvastavat kaikille ideologioille kerkeistä Us vs. Them -skeemaa, jossa sisäryhmä pyritään erottamaan ulkopuolisista liittämällä siihen positiivisia sivumerkityksiä ja liittämällä negatiivisia sivumerkityksiä ulkopuolisiin (van Dijk 1998). Kyseinen skeema näkyy myös Rodgerin ja inceleiden ajatusmaailmassa, jossa oma yhteisö pyritään erottamaan ulkoryhmästä, esimerkiksi toisista miehistä aiemmin mainitun älykkyyden avulla.

Van Dijk (1998) ja Fairclough (1989) korostavat jaettujen oletusten naturalisaation merkitystä ideologian syntymisessä ja levittämisessä: naturalisaation kautta ideologisesti latautuneet ajatukset ja oletukset saadaan osaksi yleisesti hyväksytyyn tiedon piiriä, jota van Dijk ja Fairclough kutsuvat maalaisjärjeksi (*common sense*). Tässä prosessissa merkityksen luomisen eri keinot nousevat keskeisiksi, sillä epäsuorat, implisiittiset merkitykset on todettu tehokkaiksi vaikutuskeinoiksi ideologioiden rakentamisessa ja levittämisessä (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 1998). Siinä missä ideologisesti latautuneet oletukset ovat usein eksplisiittisesti opetettuja, naamioimalla nämä ajatukset maalaisjärjeksi implikaatioiden avulla, ideologian leviäminen laajemmalla mittakaavalla mahdollistuu.

Implikaatiot ovat tämän pro gradu -tutkielman metodologian pohja, sillä keskittymällä tekstissä luotuihin, yhteisöllisesti jaettuihin ja oletettuihin merkityksiin, kirjoittajan omaksumat ideologiat paljastuvat. Tämä tutkielma lähestyy liitettyjä merkityksiä ja implikaatioita Roland Barthesin (1972) semioottisen teorian kautta, jossa hän pyrkii jalostamaan Saussuren ([1916] 1998) ajatusta kielellisestä merkistä, joka muodostuu merkitsijästä ja merkitystä. Barthesin teoriassa Saussuren kielelliseen merkkiin lisätään uusia merkityksiä. Tämän prosessin tulosta kutsutaan myytiksi, jossa merkitsijänä toimii Saussuren alkuperäinen kielellinen merkki, mutta jonka merkittyyntä sisältäviä uusia, yhteiskunnallisesti tai kulttuurisesti jaettuja merkityksiä. Barthesin myyttiä on hyödynnetty eri alojen

tutkimuksissa, esim. kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa (Gold 1987; Makarim et al. 2023) ja kulttuurien tutkimuksen saralla (Lemarié 2024), mihin myös Barthes (1972) itse spvelsi myyttiä. Barthesin tunnetuin esimerkki myytin käytöstä on hänen esseensä ”The World of Wrestling”, jossa hän tarkastelee showpainiin liitettyjä merkityksiä. Kyseisessä esseessä painin yksinkertainen merkitys urheilulajina saa rinnalleen implisiittisesti toteutuvan sankari-vihollinen -dikotomian, joka edustaa laajempaa, yhteiskunnallisesti jaettuina moraalisia arvoja.

Tämän tutkielman metodologinen pohja perustuu Barthesin tapaan hyödyntää myytin käsitettä. MTW:n analyysi koostui neljästä rinnakkain sovellettavasta osa-alueesta: 1.) kielellisten merkkien tunnistaminen; 2.) implikaatioiden tunnistaminen; 3.) naturalisaatioissa käytettyjen kielellisten keinojen tunnistaminen; 4.) myytin tunnistaminen. Ensimmäinen, kielellisiin merkkeihin keskittyvä osa suoritettiin hakemalla aiheelle keskeisimpien sanojen *Oxford English Dictionary* -sanakirjasta löytyvät määritelmät. Turvautumalla sanakirjamääritelmiin voidaan varmistua määritelmien yleispätevyydestä ja välttää tutkijan oman subjektiivisuuden vaikutusta kielellisten merkkien määrittelyssä. Toinen osio muodostui lähiluennasta ja sanaston analyysistä, jossa pyrittiin paljastamaan sanoihin liitettyjä, implisiittisiä merkityksiä. Analyysin kolmas osio on erityisen keskeinen tämän tutkielman kannalta, sillä naturalisaatioon käytettyjen keinojen avulla myös tekstiä raamittavan ideologian tunnistaminen mahdollistuu. Naturalisaatio liitettiin tässä yhteydessä käytettyihin retorisiin keinoihin, erityisesti metaforaan, liioitteluun ja kontrastiin. Viimeinen osio muodostui analyysin tulosten yhteenvetona, jossa Rodgerin luoma seksin myytti sai lopullisen muotonsa.

Analyysi itsessään koostui kolmesta eri osiosta, joissa keskityttiin seksin myytille kolmeen keskeiseen osa-alueeseen. Ensimmäisessä osassa tarkasteltiin lapsuuden ja murrosiän kielellisiin merkkeihin liitettyjä implikaatioita. Lapsuuden kielellinen merkki on rakentunut murrosiän merkin kautta, missä lapsuus merkitsee aikakautta, joka päättyy murrosikään. Murrosiän merkin merkitty taas kulminoituu seksuaalisten halujen heräämiseen. Tämä osoittautuu Rodgerin ajatusmaailmassa keskeiseksi, sillä kyseisten halujen synty aiheuttaa suuren muutoksen myös sosiaalisessa kontekstissa. Tämä muutos materialisoituu MTW:n kontekstissa erityisesti kilpailun implikaationa, joka on osoittautunut hyvin keskeiseksi periaatteeksi Rodgerin maailmankuvassa (esim. Vito et al. 2018; Melo Lopes 2023). Seuraava osio keskittyi erityisesti miesten ja naisten kuvauksiin ja niiden kautta toteutuneeseen sisäryhmän ja ulkoryhmän erotteluun, jossa kilpailun implikaatio vahvistui. Naisten ja miesten kuvausten implikaatioiden välillä oli selkeitä eroja: siinä missä miehet assosioidaan vastustajana, naiset kuvataan sotapäälliköiden kaltaisina, kilpailuasetelman takana olevina tekijöinä. Tämä näyttäytyi erityisen vahvasti Rodgerin sodanjulistuksissa naisia vastaan. Sana *war* yhdistetäänkin erityisesti naisiin, kun taas *competition* näyttäytyy useammin miesten kuvauksissa, missä naiset ovat painostaneet miehet kilpailuasetelmaan keskenään.

Kolmas ja viimeinen osio keskittyi tarkastelemaan Rodgerin kuvauksia seksistä siihen liittyvien implikaatioiden avulla. Tämä prosessi nojautui kahden ensimmäisen osion tutkimustulosten varaan, sillä MTW:n kontekstissa seksiä kehystävät implikaatiot sekä kilpailusta että naisten sosiaalisesta etulyöntiasemasta. Rodgerin eksplisiittiset kuvaukset seksistä barbaarisena ja julmana aktina havainnollistavat jo itsessään seksiin liitettyjä negatiivisia oletuksia, mutta syvemmän analyysin tuloksena seksin myytti näyttäytyi vallan työkaluna. Tämän myytin kontekstissa seksi työkaluna on täysin naisten hallinnassa, jonka epäoikeudenmukainen käyttö johtaa sortoon ja epätasa-arvoon miesten välillä. Seksin myytin naturalisoinnille keskeisimmät retoriset työkalut olivat erityisesti metafora, liioittelu, ja kontrasti. Metafora esiintyi esimerkiksi rinnastamalla Rodgerin kokemaa torjuntaa sotaan, sekä rinnastamalla ihmiset eläimiin viidakossa. Liioittelua esiintyi erityisesti vahvoissa positiivisten tai negatiivisten konnotaatioiden sisältämissä sanoissa, kun taas kontrasti nousi keskeiseksi Toiseuttamisessa. MTW:ssä esiintyykin paljon vertailua erityisesti Rodgerin ja toisten miesten välillä, missä Rodger kuvaa itseään herrasmiehenä, muita miehiä vähä-älyisinä lihakimpaleina.

Tämän tutkielman tulokset korostavat entisestään incel-ideologian naisvihamielisyyttä ja naisten roolia vihollisena kyseisen maailmankuvan kontekstissa. Analyysin tulokset myötäilivät myös aikaisempaa tutkimuskirjallisuutta, joka on lähestynyt manosfääriä, inceleitä, ja Rodgeria maskuliinisuuden (esim. Kimmel 2017; Myketiak 2016; O'Donnell 2021; Vito et al. 2018; Wright et al. 2018) tai naisten kuvausten (esim. Chang 2020; Melo Lopes 2023) kautta. Suurin osa aikaisemmasta tutkimuskirjallisuudesta on keskittynyt inceleihin sosiologian pohjalta, jossa katse suuntautuu erityisesti inceleiden tuottamaan väkivaltaan mm. terrorismin näkökulmasta (esim. Hoffman et al. 2020; Lindsay 2021; Vink et al. 2024). Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma kuitenkin korostaa tarvetta aiheetta koskevalle lingvistiselle tutkimukselle; kieli on keskeinen työkalu ideologioiden rakentumiselle ja tutkimalla merkityksentekoa sanavalintojen kautta myös väkivaltaa lietsovat maailmankuvat paljastuvat.

Incelit uutisoinnin ja tutkimuksen aiheena on kerännyt myös kritiikkiä arkaluonteisten piirteidensä vuoksi. Esimerkiksi Rogerista raportoinutta uutistoimistoa on syytetty aiheen karnevalisoinnista ja tekijälle annetusta turhasta julkisuudesta. Rodgerin merkitys incel-yhteisölle onkin korostunut hänen jalanjäljissään seuranneiden tapausten myötä, joihin esimerkiksi myös edellämainittu Alek Minassian lukeutuu. Vuonna 2018, Torontossa, Minassian surmasi 11 ja haavoitti 15 ihmistä, mitä ennen hän julkaisi Facebook-päivityksen, jossa hän ihannoit Rodgeria ja todisti ”inceleiden vallankumouksen alkaneeksi” (Gismondi 2018; Kini 2018). Minassianin ja Rodgerin tapauksen kohdalla myös heidän kokemansa mielenterveysongelmat ovat saaneet osakseen mediahuomiota, jossa mielenterveyttä on käytetty selittämään kyseisiä joukkomurhia. Lisäksi tämän kaltaisia erittäin raakoja tapahtumia

pidetään usein poikkeavina äärimmäistapauksina, eikä sen vuoksi relevantteina yleisen ideologisen väkivallan kontekstissa.

Inceleitä ja muita ideologisesti motivoituneita, väkivaltaisia murhaajia koskevaa tutkimusta voidaan myös syyttää samankaltaisesta tapausten romantisoinnista ja täten tekijöille annetusta turhasta huomiosta. Kyseiset argumentit asettavat myös tämän tutkielman mahdollisen kritiikin alaiseksi, kuitenkin hyvin lyhytkatseisesti. Nimittäin Rodgerin kaltaiset tapaukset korostavat jaettujen, väkivaltaisten ideologioiden vaarat, jos niiden leviämistä ja toistumista ei estetä. Vähätteleillä väkivallan tekoja joko mielenterveyden ja raakuuden kautta aliarvioidaan samalla väkivaltaisen ja ideologisen vihapuheen riskejä yhteiskunnan laajemmassa kontekstissa. Kun selkeästi misogyyneisesti latautuneet joukkomurhan tapaukset onnistutaan kuvaamaan yksittäisinä ”hullujen” toteuttamina välikohtauksina, myös naiseen kohdistuva väkivalta naturalisoituu ja tulee hyväksyttävämmäksi yleisellä tasolla. Vaikka Rodgerin kaltaiset, väkivaltaiset ja häiriintyneet tapaukset osoittavat kenties väkivallan spektrin yhtä ääripäätä, hänen merkityksensä väkivallan harjoittajana ja ideologisen maailmankuvan kylväjänä on selkeästi vakiintunut inceleiden keskuudessa. Kun yksittäisetkin väkivaltafantasiat ja niiden tuottamat ideologiset viestit jätetään huomiotta, törmäämme riskiin myös niiden leviämisestä laajemmalle yhteiskuntaan. Lähestymällä ideologiaa kielen avulla mahdollistamme samalla piilotettujen merkitysten avautumisen, mikä puolestaan voi toimia työkaluna väkivaltaisten ideologioiden leviämisen ja väkivallan leviämisen estämisessä.