CrimRxiv •

Review 3 of "'Goodbye, My Friendcels': An Analysis of Incel Suicide Posts"

Jason Manning

Published on: Oct 01, 2021

DOI: 10.21428/cb6ab371.8460b7bf

License: [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Vote: Reject

[For votes to count, referees must reasonably explain why they voted as they did. Thus, please explain your vote. If you voted to publish pending minor changes, specify each change, why it is needed, and, possibly, how it should/could be done.]

This is a good topic. It's actually surprising, given the amount of attention to so-called "incels," that there hasn't been more done on suicide among them.

The research strategy has one unavoidable weakness: we don't know how many of these notes are actually from people who attempted suicide. People will say all sorts of things online to get attention and sympathy.

The weakness isn't necessarily fatal – how people talk about suicide is a worthwhile topic, and to some extent all research based on self-reports assumes a base level of honesty. But with a dramatic and rare behavior being discussed in an anonymous but public forum, the problem seems especially acute.

In the current draft you acknowledge this limitation at the end, but I would suggest acknowledging it up front, so as not to appear oblivious to it or to be hoping to hide it.

I would also suggest being cautious in comparing suicide posts to studies of suicide notes (e.g., notes collected by coroners from people who actually died by suicide), and avoid phrases like "X used a combination of methods" in favor of "X talked about using a combination of methods." I would also avoid saying flatly anyone decided to commit suicide, unless you have other evidence that they followed through on it.

Regarding comparison to actual suicide notes: A common finding is that suicide notes tend to be rather banal ("here's my bank account number, keys to the car are on the counter.") These posts in a public forum, designed, presumably, to attract attention, could tend to the opposite. I wonder if that might influence what sorts of methods ("jumping in front of a bus") people mention in their ideation.

You briefly mention the relationship between mass killings and suicide, but if you want to build a bridge between the suicide literature and the criminological literature, you should probably emphasize the relationship and get deeper into relevant theory. In that light, it would be notable if none of your subjects talked about "taking someone with me." Arguably, other ways to make one's own ending difficult for others – leaving

behind debts or inflicting guilt – are a far lesser but related form of the same thing: flight from life combined with moralistic hostility against those left behind.

Considering the journal's criteria: I believe the work is competent, given some revisions to clarify its boundaries and the importance of the finding. This is to my knowledge new information about an unstudied but worthwhile topic. But I would not say it has any new ideas of a substantive or theoretical nature, especially regarding crime and violence. Indeed, I would like to have seen more focused engagement with theories of suicide, mass killing, and other kinds of violence. Absent this the work has less impact that it could otherwise have, as its broader importance is less clear (e.g., is it really important that "roped" has become internet argot for committing suicide?). I think this qualifies as more than "minor" revisions, so I vote reject. But I think this work will eventually find a home and look forward to seeing another version of it.