Defining female involuntary celibacy: a data-driven study on /r/trufemcels

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Abstract

This thesis delves into the experiences of female involuntary celibates, or 'femcels,' within the online forum /r/trufemcels on Reddit. It explores how femcels construct their identities and navigate involuntary celibacy within a predominantly male-dominated discourse.

Utilizing data from three years of posts and comments on /r/trufemcels, the analysis employs data-driven methods to identify and analyze linguistic and thematic nuances. Concepts of interest are identified on basis of given attributes, and the most biased words associated with them are uncovered. To validate these biases, a topic modeling technique, specifically Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), is applied.

The findings highlight the evolution of femcel discourse, rooted in inceldom yet marked by the emergence of the 'pink pill' ideology, contrasting with the male-centric red pill ideology. Unlike the red pill, which often disregards femcels, the pink pill provides a validating counter-narrative, emphasizing the distinct challenges women encounter in relationships. While resembling the red pill in its scientific presentation, the pink pill draws extensively from feminist ideologies to bolster its stance.

Discussions on /r/trufemcels extensively center on physical appearance, ranging from debates on the societal value of female looks to discussions on combating objectification and improving one's appearance. These discussions often spark friction regarding the tenets of the pink pill ideology, prompting debates that veer towards embracing more radical feminist ideas. Femcels collectively emphasize the intersectionality of marginalized identities, such as race, sexism, and ableism, attributing them as contributors to their experiences of involuntary celibacy. The findings corroborate femcels' perception of their undesirability as a manifestation of epistemic injustice, stemming from societal biases toward attractiveness and the dismissal of their experiences, perpetuating testimonial injustices. Consequently, femcels reject superficial positivity narratives, opting instead to reclaim agency by embracing their identity linked with perceived ugliness.

The analysis revealed that femcels perceive celibacy through an ethical lens, shedding light on the unequal distribution of romantic suffering shaped by gender dynamics in patriarchal societies. Discussions on relationships demonstrate femcels' skepticism toward conventional ideas of love and intimacy, illustrating their awareness of the inherent risks and challenges within heterosexual relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital landscape, we find ourselves situated in what's termed the 'post-digital' era, where digital technologies have seamlessly woven into the fabric of our daily lives. This era represents a pivotal moment where digital tools have become integral to our interactions, perceptions, and societal structures. Digital platforms, once mere facilitators, now emerge as potent actors capable of fundamentally altering or disrupting our social, cultural, and political landscapes. Understanding how these digital platforms exert their transformative potential necessitates delving into the intricate interplay between technology and power structures. These platforms wield significant influence over the dissemination of information, the formation of cultural norms, and the construction of collective identities. Moreover, they harbor ideological underpinnings, embedded within algorithms, interfaces, and business models; shaping human behavior and societal discourse. While these platforms offer unparalleled opportunities for connectivity, expression, and community building, they also raise significant concerns regarding privacy, misinformation, and the amplification of extremist ideologies.

One movement that has drawn considerable attention due to its association with extremist ideologies are the group of individuals who self-subscribe as *involuntarily celibates*, commonly known as 'incels'. Defined by experiences of romantic and sexual frustration, incels have sought solace, validation, and solidarity within online spaces, particularly on platforms like Reddit and 4chan. The spotlight on incels has intensified in the aftermath of violent attacks perpetrated by individuals self-identifying as incel, sparking widespread public concern and prompting extensive research into their motivations, beliefs, and behaviors. However, amidst this scrutiny, the experiences of their female counterparts – often referred to as 'femcels' – have largely remained overlooked and marginalized.

It is within this context that this thesis aims to address a critical gap in the existing discourse surrounding involuntary celibacy. The central hypothesis revolves around examining the linguistic and thematic patterns within /r/trufemcels on Reddit by employing data-driven methods, followed up by a content analysis in order to get a qualitative fundament to strengthen previous findings. I hope to elucidate how users on /r/trufemcels construct and perform their femcel identity, and how this aids them in navigating their status as involuntary celibates within a predominantly male-dominated discourse. Through this exploration, the aim is to enhance a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of involuntary celibacy in online communities. This involves illustrating that femcels, although emerging from inceldom, may share linguistic practices and raison d'être, yet remain fundamentally and ideologically distinct.

The characterization of these online gatherings prompts consideration of whether they align with the concept of a 'community of practice.' A community of practice focuses on groups of people engaging regularly in common practice, emphasizing the social significance of their actions (Wenger, 1999). Within subreddits such as /r/trufemcels, members share a domain characterized by experiences of involuntary celibacy, societal pressures, and gender dynamics, inspiring participation, guiding learning, and giving meaning to actions. Moreover, within these subreddits, a sense of community is fostered through joint activities, discussions, and mutual support. Despite the anonymity of online interactions, members engage in shared experiences, exchange advice, and develop social bonds. Lastly, a community of practice centers around a focus on practice, where members are practitioners in the shared domain of interest, actively participating and interacting. While the precise classification of these online phenomena remains debatable, viewing them through the lens of 'communities of practice' offers a framework to examine shared experiences, communal support, and the cultivation of a collective identity within /r/trufemcels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Origins of the incel movement

Incels typically identify themselves as young men facing social isolation and frustration due to their perceived inability to establish romantic or sexual relationships. The term first emerged in the 1990s when a Toronto university student founded a website to openly discuss her experiences of sexual inactivity. Known as "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project," this socio technological platform was constructed with inclusivity in mind, where individuals could share their thoughts and personal experiences. In 1997, the founder initiated a mailing list on the topic, using the abbreviation INVCEL, later shortened to "incel," to encompass anyone, regardless of gender, who experienced loneliness, lack of sexual activity, or prolonged absence from romantic relationships. The initial intention was to foster an inclusive space for people marginalized by social awkwardness, mental illness, or other factors contributing to sexual deprivation (Sisemore, 2020). However, during the 2000s, platforms like 4chan and Reddit played a prominent role in encouraging the spread of extremist rhetoric in order to gain attention and visibility – a militant incel identity began to emerge around the belief that that those who identify as "incel" must act to take control of their lives and exact revenge for the dismissive and derogatory way they were treated (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020). Among these online spaces, the /r/incels subreddit on Reddit garnered much attention and grew to be an active hub for discussions of inceldom. However, the subreddit quickly became infamous for its misogynistic and racist nature, with members often blaming women for their involuntary celibacy,

expressing hostility, and even advocating for violence, including rape (Gillett & Suzor, 2022). This shift towards extremism and toxicity brought incels into the public eye, particularly following a series of murders committed by individuals like Elliot Rodger, who went on a shooting rampage that killed six people in Isla Vista, California, in 2014. Rodger had been a frequent poster on the /r/incels subreddit, where he expressed his hatred for women and his desire for revenge. He also left behind a manifesto in which he blamed women for his loneliness and unhappiness. In 2018, Alek Minassian, who also had been a poster on the /r/incels subreddit – where he expressed similar views to Rodger, killed ten people in Toronto, Canada. Minutes before the attack he posted a message on Facebook, in which he said that he was "in the midst of an Incel Rebellion." The string of violent attacks associated with incels has brought gender-driven violence into focus as an emerging trend in domestic terrorism. These incidents underscore the influence of online communities in radicalizing frustrated young men, who harbor deep personal grievances (Beauchamp, 2018).

Studies on incels

Scholars from diverse disciplines, spanning sociology, psychology, gender studies, and media studies, have delved into multifaceted dimensions of the incel phenomenon. As discussed earlier, the pertinence of the incel subject was amplified by incidents of violence perpetrated by self-identified incels, prompting investigations into its intersections with terrorism and security concerns. Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro contribute valuable insights into the inception and online trajectory of the incel movement. Their analysis probes the potential for extremist beliefs within the incel community and the consequential implications for public safety. They posit that while the incel worldview may not overtly exhibit political motivations, its fundamental belief system orbits around the subjugation and repression of a specific group—namely, women. Consequently, acts of violence associated with incel ideology are deemed to wield wide-ranging societal impacts, aligning with a discernible trend in terrorism characterized by a pronounced hate crime dimension (Hoffman, Ware & Shapiro, 2020).

Previous research has also scrutinized the incel community's connection to masculine identities within the broader context of the manosphere— a multifaceted online network characterized by diverse web-based communities that coalesce around shared discussions concerning masculinity, gender relations, and perceived challenges faced by men. The manosphere encompasses a spectrum of ideologies and movements, with notable factions including men's rights activists (MRAs), pick-up artists (PUAs), men going their own way (MGTOW), and incels. In the article *Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere,* Ging contends that this discursive space, marked by internal conflicts and contradictions (e.g. Christian vs. atheist,

homophobic vs. LGBTQ+ inclusive), maintains a shared focus on the preoccupation with male hegemony. While traditional forms of antifeminism continue to act as the catalyst in the loosely affiliated network of the manosphere, the technological affordances of social media play a pivotal role in disseminating novel forms of masculinity, particularly encapsulated in the concept of "beta masculinity." This emergent form operationalizes tropes of victimhood and emasculation, introducing a fresh articulation of aggrieved manhood to the diverse mosaic of the manosphere (Ging, 2019).

Central to the politics of the manosphere is the concept of the Red Pill, an analogy which derives from the 1999 film *The Matrix* – in which the protagonist is given the choice of taking one of the two pills. Taking the blue pill means switching off and living a life of delusion; taking the red pill means becoming enlightened to life's ugly truths. The Red Pill philosophy purports to awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing, and is the key concept that unites all of these communities. Lastly, there is the black pill – a term that represents a more nihilistic and fatalistic perspective. Those who identify with the black pill believe that societal and biological factors heavily dictate one's success in relationships and life in general, fostering an outlook that rejects the possibility of personal agency in improving these circumstances (Glace, Dover & Zatkin, 2021).

In their study on the incel lexicon, Gothard (2021) explored incel language use on Reddit by employing a data-driven approach to reveal online expressions within the community, specifically focusing on the temporal dynamics revealed through a rank ordering of phrases constituting the emergent incel lexicon. Gothard's investigation brings attention to the generation and normalization of an extensive, coded misogynistic vocabulary that serves as a crucial element in shaping the group's identity. The researchers construct a glossary encompassing bigrams and trigrams containing terms from the incel lexicon, providing valuable insights into the diverse contexts in which these terms find application. The study places particular emphasis on the discourse surrounding the term "women," uncovering a predominantly hateful discussion that aligns with the researchers' initial assumption about the toxic and misogynistic nature of the incel community.

In their study titled *Discovering and Interpreting Biased Concepts in Online Communities*, Ferrer, van Nuenen, Such and Criado introduce a data-driven method to discover and interpret biased concepts in online communities through use of NLP methods as word embeddings. Recognizing that language serves both as a reflection and perpetuation of implicit biases, their method proves to be valuable in researching online communities where biases and stereotypes may differ from those in mainstream culture, making the use predefined concepts for analysis challenging. The findings of the study reveal a pattern where women are objectified, contrasting with men's engagement in articulations of aggrieved manhood. These observations align with

previous social science studies on /r/TheRedPill – another subreddit part of the broader manosphere, emphasizing the hostile and misogynistic language within this community. The study's ability to replicate existing theories suggests the method's reliability in isolating relevant biased concepts and facilitating exploration of the community's constructed relations between words and concepts.

From incels to femcels

Inceldom is often characterized by rigid and narrow perspectives on gender dynamics and relationships. A prevalent belief within incel communities is that women cannot experience involuntary celibacy – an assumption that stems from the perception that women possess inherent advantages in dating due to their gender. Incels typically view women as always being in positions of power, which they believe results in greater opportunities for women to find romantic or sexual partners. Inspired by the incel culture and jargon, the femcel – portmanteau of female involuntarily celibate – is defined as the female equivalent of an incel. However, the term "femcel" gained significant attention and usage in 2018 with the emergence of a new subreddit named /r/trufemcels. Participants in this subreddit engaged in discussions regarding topics such as "pretty privilege," feeling overlooked by men, and the pervasive misogyny within their society. As women were excluded from traditional male-centric involuntary celibacy spaces, largely due to the misogynistic nature of the incel movement, they increasingly identified as femcels and created their own forums. In doing so, they sought to reclaim the experience of involuntary celibacy and assert their right to acknowledge and name their feelings of loneliness and alienation (Tiffany, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The emergence of the incel movement began on the internet; however, conversations about their experiences of inceldom are rarely encountered on prominent social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Instead, they tend to congregate in internet forums moderated by fellow incels or sympathetic individuals. These forums provide a "safe space" for incels to freely express their thoughts without fear of ridicule or criticism (Pelzer et al., 2021). As such, most of the data used for this study has been gathered on Reddit, specifically the subreddit /r/trufemcels. In the context of online communities, identifying and analyzing of the language nuances, presents a challenge due to the sheer volume of content. To address this, this thesis employs the data-driven methodology developed by Ferrer et al. to uncover and interpret biased concepts within an online community's language. Concepts of interest with varying attributes (e.g. gender, religion) are used to discover the most frequent and biased words toward them. Furthermore, these discovered biases

are categorized through semantic clustering and further interpretation is facilitated by attaching semantic labels and rankings. Combined, this method can make sense of most important biases both at a conceptual level and in a more detailed manner, using the vocabulary of the online community studied. Second, it pioneers a fresh method for categorizing biases through semantic clustering and analysis.

To validate these identified biases, an additional topic model will be applied, employing the popular Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) method. LDA is a generative statistical model; it approaches the existence of words in a corpus as a probability issue through the application of Bayesian statistics. The highest coherency was found in fitting the model with five topics. From those five topics, the submissions that included the highest number of words for a certain topic were selected. As topics generated by LDA are not named by the algorithm, information about the keywords present in the topics, along with the original text posted on Reddit, were named by me after doing a close reading. This step serves as a cross-verification, ensuring that the identified biases are consistent across different analytical approaches and fortifying the overall reliability of the data analysis.

I argue that this methodology is tailored for the unique linguistic landscape of /r/trufemcels, in order to and comprehend linguistic biases, with a specific emphasis on the construction of the femcel identity and gender, using the prevalent vocabulary that defines their online discourse. Arguably, interpreting social media data requires an understanding of the social contexts in which digital phenomena unfold, as well as consideration of subjective viewpoints and motivations. This understanding can be gained through qualitative social science methods. Data hermeneutics offers the potential to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative approaches in studying digital discourses, enabling a deeper comprehension of online phenomena (Gerbaudo, 2016). Moreover, social media platforms such as Reddit, not only reflect offline realities but also serve as spaces for contemporary ideological groups and processes. Subreddits, organized by topics, function as "discourse communities" where members share common goals and methods of communication (Kehus, Walters & Shaw, 2010).

Data source and data collection

This study draws its data from Reddit, a dynamic social media platform renowned for its diverse array of "subreddits"—individual communities organized around specific topics or interests. Within these subreddits, users can share text posts, links, images, and videos, fostering discussions and content-sharing relevant to the subreddit's theme. Covering everything from news and entertainment to hobbies, niche interests, and support communities, Reddit serves as a rich tapestry reflecting offline realities while simultaneously acting as a space for the evolution of contemporary

ideological groups. The subreddit selected for this research is /r/Trufemcels, which was created on April 4th, 2018. It was eventually banned for violating Reddit's content policy aimed at combating hate speech. The ban took place in August 2020, when the subreddit had slightly over 25,000 members.

Since /r/trufemcels was banned by Reddit and the Reddit API (PRAW) only provides real-time data access, initial data was obtained using Pushshift – an archival and search API that enables retrieval of extensive historical data from Reddit. Pushshift offers monthly data dumps and computational tools to facilitate searching, aggregating, and exploratory analysis on the complete dataset (Baumgartner et al., 2020). Data from the /r/trufemcels subreddit was scraped using PSAW, a Python wrapper for the Pushshift API.

As visual content could not be obtained using the Pushshift API, images and memes used to further enhance the discourse analysis were obtained via The Wayback Machine. The Wayback Machine is an initiative of the Internet Archive, a non-profit organization dedicated to building a comprehensive digital library of Internet sites and cultural artifacts, has proven to be an invaluable resource for our data collection efforts. With a repository that spans over 858 billion web pages, the Wayback Machine captures and preserves the digital landscape, presenting web pages as they appeared at the time of capture. This extensive archive serves as a trusted citation source, offering a snapshot of online content that aids in establishing the historical context of discussions and visual materials. Imagery such as memes, screenshots, and photos posted on /r/trufemcels, has been salvaged from the Wayback Machine. This ensures that the images are presented exactly as they appeared during the time of capture, enhancing the reliability and credibility of our data.

Ethical considerations in data collection

Respecting the fundamental principle of anonymity on Reddit, where user identities are shielded behind pseudonyms, our study inherently upholds a commitment to privacy. All data collected and analyzed are void of any personally identifiable information, ensuring the protection of individual participants' identities. This approach aligns with established ethical guidelines, safeguarding contributors from unauthorized disclosure. The focus of our research remains firmly fixed on aggregated patterns and overarching themes within the dataset. By steering clear of individual user profiles and specific content, this research mitigates the risk of privacy breaches or unintended harm to participants. The analysis operates solely at a collective level, seeking to extract valuable insights without compromising the anonymity and privacy rightfully expected within online communities.

With the banning of /r/trufemcels, the platform has deemed its content as violating community guidelines, often related to issues such as hate speech, harassment, or other forms of harmful conduct. In light of this, the ethical dimension of this research pivots on the understanding

that the data being analyzed is a remnant—a snapshot—of conversations. The inability to retrace original posts due to the banning of the subreddit further underscores the anonymized nature of the data. However, it introduces limitations in terms of transparency, as I cannot directly reference or attribute statements to specific contributors. My commitment to ethical conduct is reinforced by a conscious effort to avoid any attempt to de-anonymize or trace back individual contributions, upholding the principles of privacy even within the constraints posed by the banning of this subreddit.

Subreddit domain	number of entries	average words per entry	active from
/r/trufemcels	152230	49.56	04/04/2018 – 22/08/2020

Table 1: Description of the collected and preprocessed data.

Data preprocessing

In the process of crawling the subreddit, only textual data was extractable, leading to the exclusion of posts containing images from the corpus. While Reddit permits users to augment their images with additional text, the omission of image-based posts was deemed necessary as a considerable portion of the ensuing discussion depends on the visual content. Due to the constraints of the scraping process, cross posts, and links to external websites were also excluded from the final corpus. The textual content underwent additional preprocessing, involving the removal of remnants of URLs and HTML markup language and finally encoding the corpus in UTF-8 to ensure that special characters are appropriately encoded and decoded to ensure compatibility with subsequent text analysis.

Emojis, integral for conveying meaning in online communication, presented a challenge, as they are not inherently processable in the Python script used. To address this, the *demoji* Python package was employed, replacing emojis in the text with their corresponding textual descriptions. This step was crucial for preserving the semantic nuances conveyed by emojis in the corpus.

Lastly, posts and comments with a word count below three were excluded from the final corpus. This step not only served to reduce noise by eliminating spam messages but also aligned with the considerations of training models with Word2Vec. Word2Vec, a widely used algorithm for learning word embeddings, benefits from longer texts as they offer more contextual information. Longer texts enable the model to capture richer semantic relationships between words, a prerequisite for meaningful and generalizable embeddings.

These considerations were taken into account to ensure the corpus the models were trained with was concise and clean in order to reduce any pollution due to noise in the results of the textual analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Exploring /r/Trufemcels

The subreddit known as /r/trufemcels initially faced skepticism, often dismissed as satire, particularly by male incels who questioned the authenticity of female involuntary celibacy (Owen, 2022). Despite these early doubts, the subreddit evolved into a significant gathering, drawing 25,000 Reddit users. Embracing a self-identity as 'the truest of femcels,' the community distinguished itself through a commitment to rigorous moderation. This approach aimed at providing a secure space for women to 'vent, relax, and be free of male input.' Throughout its existence until removal, the subreddit's focus on moderation was particularly evident in efforts to limit the presence of men within the /r/Trufemcels community. Similar to many subreddits, /r/Trufemcels had a guidelines page outlining the type of user content deemed appropriate or inappropriate by moderators. For instance, the guidelines explicitly indicated that men who chose to participate were considered visitors only, precluding them from engaging with members and contributing content to the forum. Reddit, as an online platform, operates on a self-organizing principle concerning the content it generates and the visibility it accords to such content. The upvoting and downvoting mechanism, constituting a point system where users score content, determines its placement on the page— permitting highly rated content to ascend to the top while downvoted content is concealed. Moreover, reward systems like badges and self-organizing tools, such as the capacity to pin comments and assign flairs (predefined tags users can choose to display next to their username), act as "platform signals" aiding the identification of content esteemed as high-quality and aligned with the community's core ideologies (LaViolette & Hogan, 2019). A stickied comment from a moderator addressing the mandatory use of flairs provides additional insight into how these "platform signals" establish boundaries regarding the types of content deemed suitable for the subreddit:

> *"**Ok ladies- r/Trufemcels now REQUIRES FLAIRS.** There is a menu available where you can select what you are. It is extremely important that femcels know who is saying what. The femcel identity is near and dear to our hearts and your stories are not helpful if, for example, it is a Stacy saying something that is obviously not applicable to femcels. Stacy has advantages a femcel does not. Stacy experiences things differently than femcels do. The available options are:*
>
> > *Femcel: A very unattractive woman. Sub 4/10 and unable to get a partner because of it.*
> > *Former Femcel: A femcel that ascended.*
> > *Volcel: Voluntarily celibate.*
> > *Normie: Average looking.*
> > *Becky: Basic, not unattractive*
> > *Stacy: 8-10/10 lookswise."*

This comment, in conjunction with the guidelines and about-section, illustrates that subreddits often function as communities with a broadly agreed-upon set of common public goals and communication mechanisms among their members. These communities also share expectations about permissible and impermissible content, including who can express certain views and the use of specific words and phrases (Swales, 2011). As evident in this post created by one of the moderators of the forum, uncovering gender-related biases within the /r/Trufemcels subreddit necessitates a nuanced approach beyond simplistic dichotomies of binary genders, as users on the forum assert that femcel experiences differ from those of other women. To identify these distinctions, the classification of the mandatory flairs outlined by /r/Trufemcels moderators serves as a useful guide.

On the opposing end of the spectrum is the "*Stacy*," an 8/10 in looks, as opposed to femcels who are described as "sub 4/10." The term "Stacy" originates from incel discourse; representing an idealized, conventionally attractive, and sexually successful woman. Coined alongside "Chad" — the popular male counterpart who epitomizes ultra masculine traits — these terms function as archetypes used by incels to categorize individuals within their perceived social dynamics (Gothard, 2021). Consequently, attribute concepts were formulated based on labels like Stacy, Becky, and Normie, as well as pronouns related to others (e.g. she, they, her) versus the use of personal pronouns (e.g. I, our, us) as selected attribute concepts for femcels, to ensure the most accurate representation of biased concepts in discourse on /r/Trufemcels associated with '*other women'* who *'experience things differently than femcels do'.*

Not like other women: Stacy, Becky and femcels

Based on these adjusted attribute concepts, Figure 1 compares the top-5 clusters for *femcel* and *Stacy* in /r/Trufemcels. In each figure, clusters are organized from left to right, beginning with the highest-ranked cluster. The upper section of the figure displays biases toward femcels, while the lower section showcases biased concepts toward *Stacy*. The area of each cluster corresponds to the aggregated frequency of its words, reflecting the number of times the words of the cluster were found in the data. For instance, the cluster 'women' is the most frequent biased concept for Stacy, while 'hair' and 'skin' are the most frequent biased concepts for femcels. Cluster colors align with their average sentiment, ranging from negative (red) to neutral (yellow) to positive (green).
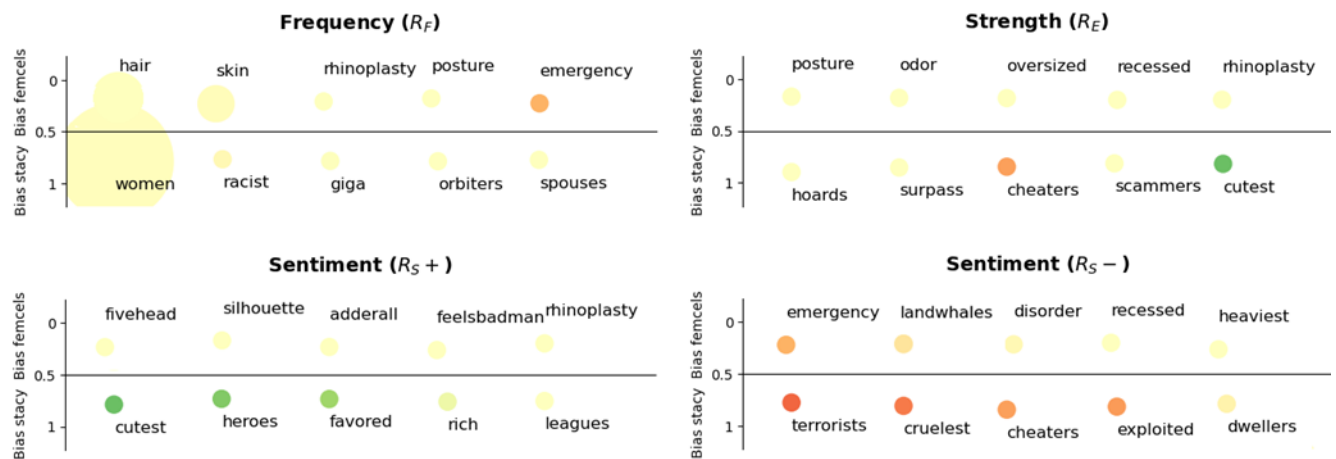
Fig. 1: Top-5 clusters, labelled with their most frequent word, biased towards femcels and Stacy in /r/Trufemcels, ranked by most frequent, strong, sentimentally positive and negative bias. Higher ranking clusters are shown ranked from left to right (x-axis), the area of each cluster corresponds to its frequency (quantity of times the words of the clusters were found in the dataset), the color with its average sentiment, and the y-axis shows the average salience of the words in the cluster. Finally, each of the clusters is tagged with its most frequent word.

The biases directed towards Stacy within the positively charged clusters, specifically labeled as 'cutest' and 'favored,' provide insights that resonate with her conventional depiction. According to the attractiveness scale, Stacy is portrayed as unparalleled. Notably, terms associated with incel discourse emerge prominently in the labels of the most frequent biases. One such adjective is 'giga,' notably recognized from the term and associated image 'GigaChad'—an internet archetype symbolizing an ultra-masculine, physically attractive male. Given that Stacy is considered the female counterpart to Chad, the application of this adjective to her aligns with expectations. Another prevalent incel term that surfaces is 'orbiters'—referring to men who harbor unrequited feelings for a woman deemed out of their league. Typically, these orbiters remain unnoticed by the desired woman except as a source of validation and attention. The concept of orbiters plays a significant role in reinforcing incel ideology, serving as a tangible example of the perceived unfairness in the dating world. In the incel worldview, attractive women like Stacy are thought to only be interested in dating conventionally attractive and sexually successful men, overlooking individuals who do not fit this mold. Orbiters, therefore, stand as evidence of this perceived unfairness, with incels believing that these individuals are willing to sacrifice anything to be with a woman, even in the absence of reciprocated feelings.

Fig 2: Becky vs. Stacy meme, based on the popular 'Virgin vs. Chad' meme template.

The sentiment analysis reveals notable distinctions in sentiments associated with Stacy compared to the femcel sentiment scores, which predominantly maintain a neutral tone. This contrast can be attributed, in part, to the enduring connection of the Stacy label to its origin in incel discourse and the associated 'Chad,' 'Virgin,' and 'Becky' memes – which categorize individuals based on their perceived sexual attractiveness, shaping stereotypes around gender dynamics.

Depicted in Figure 2 alongside *'the Becky'*, Stacy is emblematic of an idealized representation of conventional attractiveness, embodying hyperfeminine traits such as a slim physique, an hourglass body shape, long hairless legs, and blonde hair. This portrayal associates her femininity with the strategic use of sexual allure to manipulate men, gaining access to financial and material resources. Despite her high sexual value, Stacies are deemed of low socio-moral value within incel communities due to perceived traits of manipulation, promiscuity, shallowness, and inherent unfaithfulness (Zimmerman, 2022).

It's crucial to highlight that both Stacy and Becky are consistently depicted as white women, reinforcing the narrative of white supremacy that pervades incel discussions (Menzie, 2020). Stacy's attributes of being slim, white, and feminine contribute to her perceived status within the incel ideology. This binary characterization extends to the broader incel worldview, where the only recognized types of women are those who are white, thin, and conventionally attractive (Jennings, 2018).

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1-gram	Bigrams	Trigrams	1-gram	Bigrams	Trigrams
Stacy	Becky Stacy like Stacy Stacy even get Stacy want Stacy giga Stacy Chad Stacy white Stacy Stacy lite always Stacy	look like Stacy can't get Stacy even though Stacy men want Stacy Stacy even Becky incels want Stacy along comes Stacy Stacy gets attention best friend Stacy could get Stacy	Femcel(s)	femcel sub former femcel femcels exist fellow femcels black femcel baby femcel femcels want consider femcels femcel experience ugly femcels	high school femcel still consider femcel believe femcels exist femcel safe space femcels ugly women femcels want love like femcels feel femcels date incels baby femcel flair men hate femcels

Table 2: Top-10 bigrams and trigrams for 'Stacy' and 'femcel(s)'.

Presented in Table 2 are the ten most frequently encountered bigrams and trigrams associated with the terms 'Stacy' and 'femcel(s)' within the corpus. A bigram, denoting a sequence of two adjacent words, and a trigram, signifying three consecutive words, enable the scrutiny of phrases and expressions, thereby unveiling specific language patterns. Their significance lies in their capacity to facilitate a nuanced comprehension of how language functions within distinct contexts and communities. The exploration of these bigrams and trigrams reveals recurring linguistic patterns. Specifically, the term 'Stacy' consistently appears with adjectives inherent in the incel lexicon, identified earlier as biased concepts—examples include 'giga Stacy' and the presence of 'Chad.' Notably, the trigram "Along comes ____," found in the corpus, originated from 4chan and gained popularity through its use in so called "green text" stories.

Green text is a distinctive style used on 4chan for concise storytelling, anecdotes, or expressing reactions. 4chan, an imageboard website with various boards dedicated to specific topics, includes the /r9k/ board, known for discussions on loneliness and social isolation. These narratives, presented in green text and adopting a first-person perspective, adhere to specific stylistic and content-focused conventions on the site. Users familiar with the platform understand these conventions, and the unique formatting contributes to a shared linguistic identity within the 4chan community. Besides green text formatting, users often incorporate specific phrases, memes, or references associated with this storytelling style (Ludemann, 2018).

Given that the term "Stacy" emerged from incel discourse, the negative sentiments toward biases associated with "Stacy" observed in /r/Trufemcels, including descriptors like "exploited," "cruelest," and "cheaters," align with its original conception. As such, this aligns with the portrayal of Stacy as the ultimate embodiment, as per incels.wiki, "of every wicked, depraved aspect of feminine nature." Furthermore, Figure 1 indicates that 26.30% of the total semantically tagged concepts are related to status or indicators thereof (e.g., success, respected, in power). For instance, in the meme presented in Figure 2, Stacy is deemed a perfect 10, while Becky is a 6/10 (basic, not unattractive). However, both are considered to have sexual market value. The implication is that Stacy can afford a

"$2000 Gucci bag" while Becky has an unbranded "$5 backpack." As the stickied comment by the moderators stated: "Stacy has advantages that femcels don't have". As such affirmative judgements regarding physical beauty are among the positively charged sentiments toward Stacies, as evident in clusters such as 'favored' and 'cutest,'. This sentiment is also reflected in bigrams and trigrams in Table 2 – Stacy is desired by men, and she receives attention; in stark contrast to femcels who want love, but are hated by men.

I argue that femcels seem to adopt linguistic practices similar to the established incel lexicon concerning emblematic terms, we see this in the use of formats such as the green text popularized on 4chan as well as earlier discussed jargon such as normies or orbiters, and terms to name positions on the decile scale of attractiveness such as giga Chad or Stacy lite. Moreover, they appear to share the constructed connotation of these terms, suggesting that femcels subscribe to a worldview where attractiveness and control over sexual access bring inherent benefits beyond the dating realm, and as a consequence Stacies benefit from their attractiveness in ways that enhance their societal position.

In contrast to their male counterparts who spend much of their time either praising Chad for his godlike masculinity or fantasizing about dethroning Chad; either by enticing a beta-uprising such as Alek Minassian proclaimed during his killing spree or by discussing political means to end their celibacy such as the redistribution of sex by the government. On the other hand, femcels appear to harbor a mix of resentment and envy towards Stacy. Above all, they express a desire to emulate her to enjoy the perceived privileges that come from looking good. This sentiment is poignantly captured in a comment from a user on /r/Trufemcels: *"I guess the long and the short of it is I am hoping my looksmaxxing will pay off. I have gone from a 2.5 to I think around a 5. I hope I can reach 7-8 in another year or so, with appropriate plastic surgery and more weight loss. I just want to be a Stacy so that society treats me right."*

Figure 3: Intertopic Distance map of the LDA topic model featuring the top-15 most salient terms per topic.
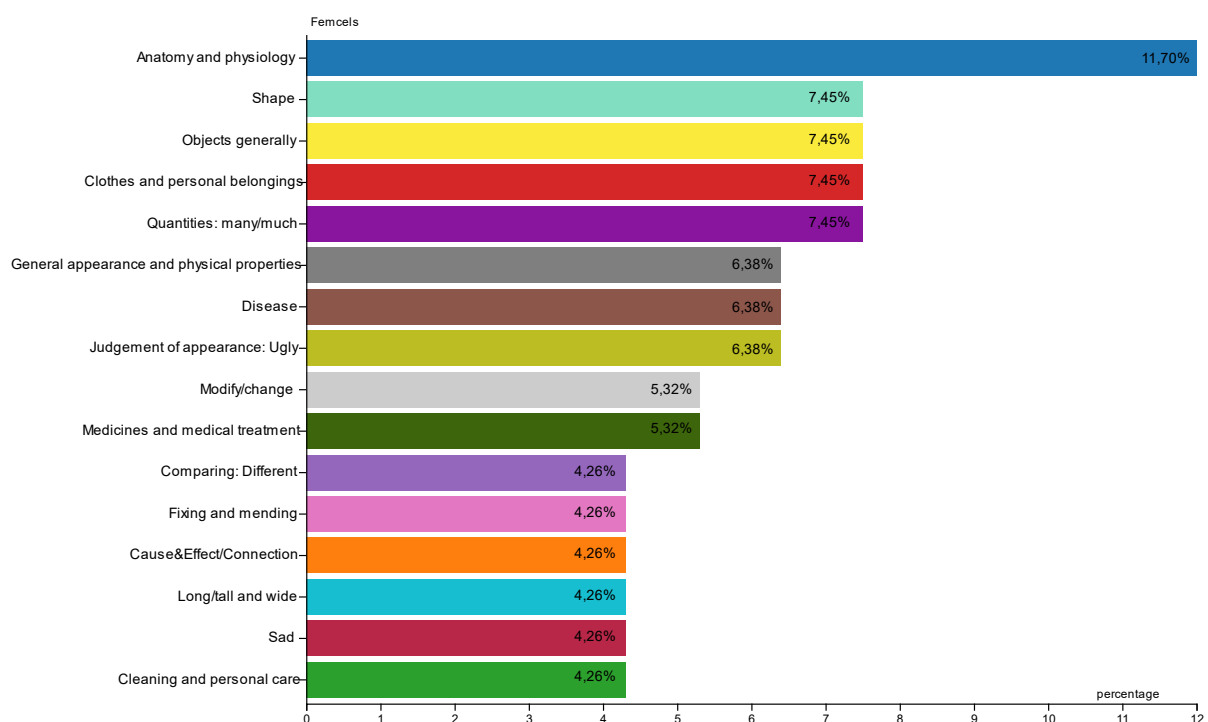
Topic model

Figure 2 illustrates the five topics generated through the LDA model's topic modeling process. The intertopic distance map visually represents the proximity of similar topics and the distance between dissimilar ones. The size of each topic's circle in the plot corresponds to its relative frequency in the corpus. For each of the five coherent topics, a set of keywords was generated, facilitating the identification of submissions that prominently feature specific topics. This approach enables us to pinpoint the top submissions associated with each topic. Following the results of the LDA topic model, the generated keywords, and a meticulous examination of the most relevant submissions for each topic, I categorized them as follows: romantic relationships, physical appearance, subreddit governance, pink pill, and daily life.

Notably, the largest topic that emerged is "romantic relationships," aligning with expectations given the centrality of the lack of romantic relationships as the primary identity marker for inceldom. There is a small overlap between this topic and "pink pill," a theme that I will delve into later in the analysis, highlighting its differences from the red pill ideology of the manosphere.

The overlap between these two topics is not surprising, considering the connection between the source of pain (loneliness) and the perceived construct that exacerbates this suffering (pink pill).

Additionally, the topic labeled "daily life" appears to correspond with the subreddit's intended purpose – providing a platform for likeminded individuals to share their experiences. This topic intersects with the theme of "physical appearance", suggesting that appearances may play a significant role in the daily lives of femcels. This connection will be further explored under the theme of 'lookism.' Lastly, a distinct topic revolves around subreddit governance and communication. Given the heavy moderation and multiple rule iterations in /r/Trufemcels to maintain its role as a safe space for femcels, the emergence of this topic is unsurprising.

Femcels

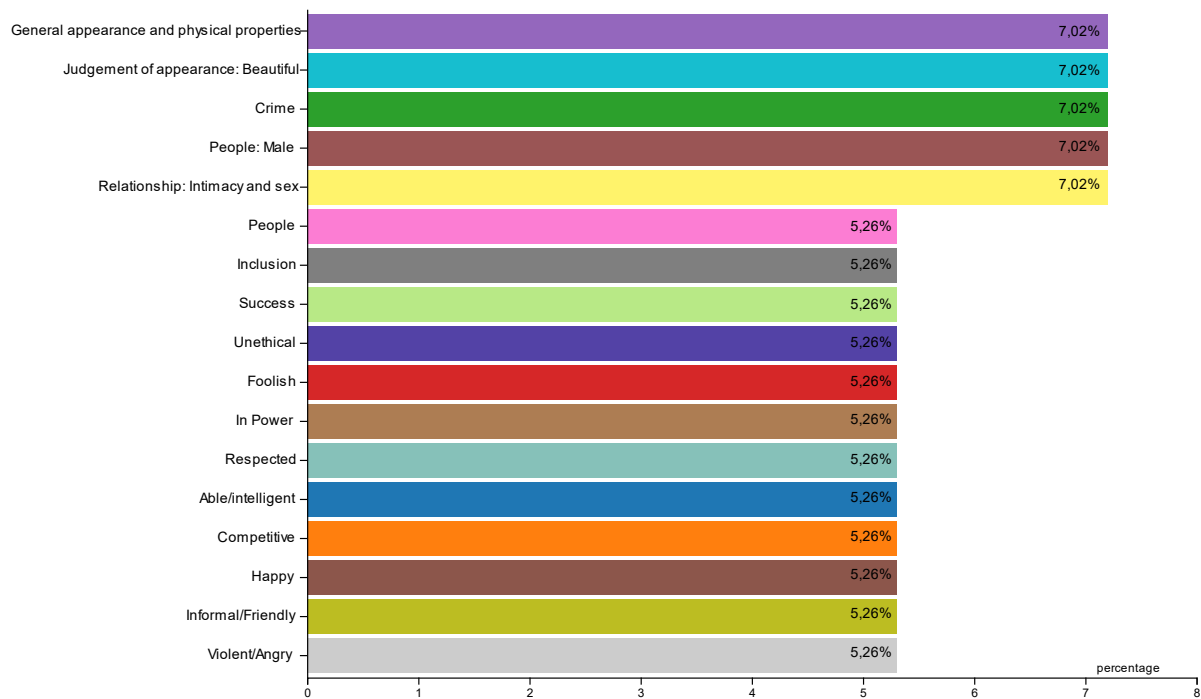| Category	Percentage
Anatomy and physiology	11,70%
Shape	7,45%
Objects generally	7,45%
Clothes and personal belongings	7,45%
Quantities: many/much	7,45%
General appearance and physical properties	6,38%
Disease	6,38%
Judgement of appearance: Ugly	6,38%
Modify/change	5,32%
Medicines and medical treatment	5,32%
Comparing: Different	4,26%
Fixing and mending	4,26%
Cause&Effect/Connection	4,26%
Long/tall and wide	4,26%
Sad	4,26%
Cleaning and personal care	4,26%

percentage

Fig. 4: Relative frequency of semantic categories for biased concepts towards femcels (top) and Stacy (bottom) in /r/Trufemcels.

The Pink Pill

Within the manosphere, the "red pill" symbolizes a collection of ideologies that actively challenge mainstream narratives surrounding gender, relationships, and societal norms. It entails the rejection of feminist perspectives and advocates a worldview that portrays men as victims of ongoing social and cultural shifts. In the incel worldview, sex is perceived as a commodity, and the ability to engage in it is viewed as a measure of success. Incels adhere to their own version of sexual economics theory (SET), placing sexual relationships within 'the sexual market.' Symbolic boundaries are created by incels to distinguish themselves, as 'virgins' or sexual losers, from physically attractive and sexually successful men – the 'Chads' – who dominate this sexual market (Andersen, 2022). However, the red pill perspective posits that negative features can be compensated for, enabling men to attract women by elevating their 'sexual market value' (SMV) through improvements in social or economic status or physical appearance (Ging, 2019).

It's not just the perceived hegemonic masculinity epitomized by the Chads that stands in incels' way of obtaining love and sex. In the context of an ideological framework where sexual engagement is perceived as a metric of success, women are cast as coveted prizes. Incels posit that women's preferences for specific traits in men – such as physical attractiveness or social status – are rooted in evolutionary processes termed 'hypergamy'. This concept proposes that women, throughout human evolutionary history, developed preferences for mates who could provide resources or enhance reproductive success (Preston, Halpin & Maguire, 2021). The "80/20 rule,"

asserting that 80% of women pursue only the top 20% most attractive men, reinforces incels' conviction in female hypergamy. The meme presented in Figure 2 exemplifies this, depicting Becky, lower in attractiveness hierarchy than Stacy, aspiring to be with an attractive, sexually successful man despite having plenty of other less handsome admirers (i.e. beta orbiters).

In the red pill worldview, grounded in the belief that women inherently possess privileges in spheres of dating and relationships, femcels are precluded from claiming involuntary celibacy status. Instead, they were often ridiculed as "volcels" (voluntarily celibate) in communities like /r/incels and /r/braincels, where self-proclaimed incel women frequently faced trolling and exclusion (Kay, 2021). According to the principle of hypergamy, incels argued that any woman can find a partner by lowering her standards and dating men outside the "top 20%", as depicted in the memes in Figure 5. Since the red pill philosophy does not recognize the existence of involuntary celibate women, the emergence of the 'pink pill' provides femcels with a counterpart to the red pill ideology. The primary distinction, indicated by the adjective 'pink,' emphasizes the gendered nature of this ideology.

Fig. 5: Images from the Femcel page on incels.wiki that reference the principle of the 80/20 rule and the perceived invalidity of female involuntary celibacy.

The exclusion of female incels from the core incel community, despite their shared sense of disenfranchisement, can be attributed to differences in how these groups assign blame for their circumstances. In the male incel community – as well in as the broader ideology of the manosphere, feelings of humiliation and despair are often ascribed to external factors, particularly the perceived rise in women's power and their supposed ability to oppress certain men sexually. This often leads to the venting of anger and the assignment of blame onto women as a collective entity. In contrast, femcels also perceive themselves as victims of a similar attractiveness hierarchy, leading to their exclusion. However, their attribution of blame reflects broader gender inequality and assumptions surrounding women's sexuality. This perception is rooted in societal norms that prioritize physical appearance, making it difficult for women to compete in an increasingly appearance-focused market (Hart & Huber, 2023).

To gain deeper insights into the ideological foundations of the pink pill philosophy and its application by femcels in understanding their life circumstances, a dataset of comments was compiled matching key terms from the 'pink pill' topic identified by the LDA model (Figure 2). The subsequent analysis involves a close reading of these comments.

When broaching the subject of the pink pill's origins and implications, femcels often sought clarification regarding its definition and its relationship to existing pill philosophies like the red pill. This confusion was exemplified by a new user who expressed uncertainty, questioning, "I'm so confused, isn't this called pink pill not black pill or are you just using the term black pill in this context for your purposes?" In response, another user stepped in to elucidate the disparities, outlining, "Black pill is male nihilism that renders many of them useless […] hopelessness makes them give up. Women use the pink pill to overcome grave truths and hopefully lead better lives." This exchange not only highlights the distinction in naming conventions but also underscores the fundamental differences in application, setting the pink pill apart from ideologies predominantly shaped by males, which femcels often criticize for fostering sentiments of resignation.

Moreover, another user shed light on the widespread adoption of the pink pill across women-only spaces on Reddit, attributing its elusive nature to this broad usage. As evidenced by the comment, "The pink pill is very vague. Lots of people are using it," the proliferation of the pink pill within these forums has led to ambiguity regarding its precise meaning.

Truths, science and pills

To rectify misconceptions and establish a standardized interpretation of the pink pill, moderators and users compiled a repository of studies and articles aimed at educating the community. This repository is frequently recommended in discussions revolving around the pink pill, as exemplified in

this user's response: "Refer to the pink pill repository stickied post on r/Trufemcels/ for studies that support our beliefs." The creation of such repositories reflects findings from Jaki et al. (2019), highlighting how digital affordances, like wiki software, enable the construction of collaborative ideological resources. These platforms serve as self-initiated infrastructures of meaning, allowing communities like femcels to curate and disseminate information that legitimizes their beliefs, thus reinforcing their collective identity.

Additionally, this repository is often cited on the forum to counter opposing viewpoints, as evidenced by the comment: "There is a pink pill repository on this sub that dispels everything you say. There are numerous studies that prove that […] (they are linked in the repository). If you're not willing to do the research and have a thought-out discussion (instead of just regurgitating the same tired old lines), kindly GTFO." Users who refer to the repository often deploy empiricist repertoire and bibliographic citations to construct claims as factually based and exempt from ideological bias. This strategic use of language and rhetoric not only serves to bolster the femcels' arguments but also aims to position them as proponents of objective truth, enhancing the credibility of their narratives (Andersen, 2021). Additionally, the compounding of literature and content is held in high regard as a communal activity, as this user's comment showcases with her appeal to the moderators to include an article posted by a fellow femcel: "Too based to not be acknowledged. This belongs in the sacred scrolls of the Pink Pill," underlining the importance of construction of internal coherence and consensus.

This legitimizing of the pink pill philosophy through pseudo-intellectual discourses is also observed in the frequency of tokens distributed within the Pink Pill topic displayed in the map of the LDA topic model shown in Figure 3, where some of the most salient terms in that topic revolve around curating and disseminating information such as 'research', 'article', 'medium', and 'guide'. As Jaki et al. found in their study on incels.wiki – femcels likewise use digital affordances to establish alternative information channels in order to reframe involuntary celibacy as a legitimate life circumstance and attempting to reinforce their worldview as objective by adopting the stylistic conventions of scientific writing, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of their beliefs and insulating them from external scrutiny (Andersen, 2021). Furthermore, by reinforcing their appeal to rationality and categorizing those outside the inceldom as "bluepilled" normies, femcels draw symbolic boundaries. One user expressed disdain for normies, stating the last thing she wants is "for some normie to tell me some blue pill bullshit […]. If anyone is to push me to my death it would be the normies who constantly deny and invalidate my life experiences with their endless fucking platitudes." Another user echoed this sentiment, describing normies as "the most ignorant and

unsympathetic people," portraying them as individuals devoid of independent thought, who blindly conform to mainstream societal norms and peer pressure. These expressions assert that normies fundamentally differ from femcels, incapable of understanding the issues surrounding involuntary celibacy (Nagle, 2017).

Many femcels equate embracing the pink pill to awakening to certain 'truths,' with one of the most recurring revelations being the pervasive influence of 'lookism'—a deeply ingrained societal prejudice concerning physical appearance. For femcels, taking the pink pill is akin to "finding out the truth about men, lookism, and society," as described by one member. Moderators on /r/trufemcels echoed this sentiment, citing numerous femcels facing life obstacles due to "severe inadequacies that exceed what is considered normal and are usually physical in nature, but not limited to it (e.g., autism, PTSD)." Comments from femcels further emphasize their belief in the direct correlation between a woman's physical appearance and her societal worth and treatment. One user emphasized, "[..]to be female in this society is to be valued for worthiness starting with her appearance first and foremost," a sentiment echoed by another femcel who stated that it is "well known and undisputed, the pink pill manifested in the strategies of women for absolute centuries," highlighting the pervasive reality of women being primarily evaluated based on their appearance. Consequently, femcels commonly perceive the awakening to the pink pill truth as a universal female experience.

The impact of embracing pink pilled ideologies on individuals' lived experiences or daily lives varies significantly, as illustrated by one user: "Everyone's reaction to the Pinkpill is different though. Some of us try to looksmaxx [...] some of us just want to go WGTOW (Women Going Their Own Way) or LDAR (Lay Down And Rot). Some of us can't looksmaxx due to medical or financial reasons [...]. Some of us really are mentalcels, and depression or social anxiety keeps us from social-maxxing." These comments highlight the diverse range of responses to the insights brought about by the pink pill. They parallel the varied strategies observed in the male incel community, such as striving for romantic success through self-improvement or adopting a nihilistic "black pill" worldview by relinquishing prospects of relationships. The assortment of responses to the pink pill's revelations mirrors the array of approaches seen in the male incel community, showcasing femcels' adaptation to their circumstances influenced by both personal factors and broader ideological viewpoints.

Essentially, a spectrum of interpretations regarding the pink pill philosophy emerged among femcels, yet they unite in their overarching objective of scrutinizing and contesting societal structures that

perpetuate gender-based discrimination. This close reading and analysis suggests that at its core, the pink pill philosophy aligns closely with fundamental feminist principles. Out of the 767 comments discussing the pink pill, feminism was explicitly mentioned 74 times (9.65%). However, terms implicitly associated with feminist theory and discourses, such as 'society', 'gender', 'objectification', and 'discrimination', surfaced 107 times (13.94%). Furthermore, references to men were made 404 times (52.65%), while discussions on beauty and appearance constituted 201 mentions (26.21%).

Feminism and the pink pill

I posit that feminist ideals are deeply ingrained in the discussions surrounding the pink pill philosophy, as evidenced by various expressions. Apart from explicit entries that ignite feminist discourse (9.65%), numerous remarks regarding femcel experiences are firmly grounded in feminist principles. For instance, one user characterizes society as a "system of hierarchies," highlighting the gender disparities within these structures. She argues that the best outcome is for individuals not to end up "at the bottom of the one you were ascribed to (women)." In her perspective, femcels can either strive to conform to society's expectations of femininity or choose to reject these standards and embrace their authentic selves. As she articulates, "do not play by patriarchy's rules. It's not entirely possible, but you can still affect a LOT of its components.", which she describes as processes of internalization and construction of the social world, highlighting how norms shape perceptions and assign value – which resonates with feminist theory. She asserts that this refusal to conform is the only way to prevail, as femcels are presented with a dichotomy within societal expectations: "[…] get better at conforming to your gender's ideal, or wallow in self-pity or self-hate." She rejects these options by abstaining from participating in the game altogether. I argue this comment can be interpreted as advocating a feminist approach – it acknowledges the existence of the patriarchy and identifies it as a system of hierarchies. The user suggests that individuals have the power to influence patriarchal components and emphasizes personal empowerment and self-determination. Moreover, she underscores the potential for increased happiness by rejecting patriarchal norms, such as conforming to gender ideals, which she attributes to low self-esteem and abuse stemming from lookism. Many comments within the community aim to reject the status quo, echoing sentiments of exclusion and the lack of understanding experienced by femcels in their daily life, which one user laments how interactions are characterized by how "*paternalistic and fake-concerned people can get when trying to relate to us [femcels]. We already understand the pink pill and the unfairness of it all. Just because the world expects you to keep your head down[..] it doesn't mean you have to. […] Our physical appearance is not the barometer for our actual value as women*". These comments reflect an acknowledgment of the hardships of involuntary celibacy and societal

expectations regarding appearance, and calls for femcels to prioritize their own well-being over conforming to oppressive norms.

A significant portion of comments concerning the pink pill also consistently center around the theme of 'men' (50%). It's not surprising that there's an inherent connection between society, beauty standards, and men. Many femcels share negative experiences in their interactions with men, as highlighted by one user who points out that "a lot of men feel like levels of respect given are based on attractiveness which is why half the comments in here [/r/trufemcels] are of fucked up men[..]" This sentiment finds widespread support, with many asserting that "A lot of men treat you based on how attractive or fuckable they find you." Femcels commonly argue that standards of attractiveness differ between women and men; as one user puts it, "what men consider average is actually hollywood/porn average.", hence their beliefs that men predominantly show interest in the so-called "Stacys".

Figure 6: Meme posted on /r/trufemels utilizing the Lisa Simpson template.

In many discussions, the media is blamed for exacerbating the objectification of women by portraying idealized body images, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards. "I'm angry that society and everyone sugarcoat just how much looks determine a woman's life," expresses one femcel. Another user adds: "I'm angry that media has been brainwashing young girls to think that photoshopped images are beauty ideals [...]. I'm angry at the hypocrisy and guilt-tripping men have done to women since the dawn of civilization." These comments illustrate that, for many femcels, lookism is a social construct that imposes a standard for attractiveness, leading to negative judgment

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if women fail to meet that standard. The issue lies in society's definition of beauty, perpetuated by the media, which benefits men and renders femcels powerless to attain their desires.

Some femcels advocate for prioritizing self-care over catering to men: 'Instead of worrying about your looks, focus on yourself! After all, you're alive for you, not some moid [man].' Ultimately, these discourses revolve around realizing and asserting self-respect among members – this shift in perspective entails acknowledging and standing against mistreatment from men and societal pressures regarding beauty standards, portraying this as an expression of self-care and self-love. As expressed by Aronowitz (2021), femcels assert their entitlement to respect despite societal pressures and mistreatment. This sentiment is echoed in a widely circulated meme within /r/trufemcels, depicted in Figure 6, which serves as a poignant critique of the injustice perpetuated by society's superficial fixation on physical appearance. The meme prompts contemplation regarding the inherent contradiction of professing allegiance to feminist ideals while overlooking the challenges encountered by women who deviate from conventional beauty norms.

Radical feminism
While several women-only subreddits, such as /r/femaledatingstrategy and /r/vindicata, align with the pink pill and feminist principles, comments in the dataset that explicitly mentioned feminism also included discussions about rejecting or critiquing feminist ideas In the study 'Femcel Discussions of Sex, Frustration, Power, and Revenge' conducted by Evans and Lankford, it was discovered that the majority of femcels striving to improve their circumstances or increase their power aimed to do so through group mobilization, self-improvement, or challenging the patriarchy – strategies also evident in the data analyzed for this study.

As for the first strategy, we witness these strategies directly in how femcels provide emotional support to one another, often using endearing terms like 'sister' to address fellow users and collectively referring to experiences with possessive pronouns such as 'our', which nurtures a shared sense of empathy towards other femcels' stories. Furthermore, femcels protect their online space by using flairs to differentiate contributors, highlighting the importance of identity and credibility and creating distinct in-group dynamics. Active moderation and the banning of men and trolls from the subreddit further reinforce this sense of community protection.

The theme of self-improvement also takes center stage, particularly through 'looksmaxxing' practices and other efforts aimed at enhancing life circumstances. As previously observed, this includes seeking alternative methods to boost self-esteem or cultivating a mindset that questions internalized norms detrimental to one's happiness. However, discussions on the third strategy –

'Challenging the patriarchy' spark diverse opinions and debates, significantly impacting the interpretation of the pink pill and shaping the overall discourse on /r/trufemcels.

For example, numerous comments suggested that it is impossible to empower undesired and unattractive women within the confines of the patriarchy, as expressed by one user: "I feel like only the most privileged women in terms of access, resources, or social standing can afford to thumb their nose at the status quo." This alienation from feminist' movement is also observed by another user who explicitly voices her feelings of exclusion: "Why do you think some feminists have sounded exactly like the men they are combatting when it comes to ugly girls?" Another user expressed how support from other women totally misses the mark for her, stating, "Personally, I find women who want to positive speak [...] annoying. […] the whole 'believe in yourself' 'be strong' while being tone-deaf to the severity of loneliness is decidedly anti-woman to me." Some users even take engage in gatekeeping, suggesting that women "can't be pink pilled if you ignore the plight of unattractive and unwanted women." Echoing these sentiments are femcels who link this to an anti-liberal feminist narrative. One user remarked, "Liberal feminism (mainstream/3rd wave) only cares about fake sexual empowerment aka objectification; they don't care about ageism or women's issues, they just recycle the same topic over 50 times. They don't talk about how men either see us as fuckable or invisible." Another user recommended "The Beauty Myth" by Naomi Wolf, highlighting its critique of liberal feminism's view of beauty, stating, "It speaks so much sense […] It is also against the liberal feminism garbage view of 'everyone is beautiful!'".

I contend that what is witnessed here symbolizes a clash between two prevailing strands of feminist thought that shape femcels' understanding of the pink pill. This can be best described as a dilemma: should feminism focus on helping women navigate society as it is, or should it advocate for a more radical approach aimed at transforming society entirely? The narrative that suggests feminism has overlooked certain women, coupled with the sentiment that not all women are equally represented within it, underscores the lack of intersectionality in feminist movements. As articulated by Crenshaw, this absence of intersectionality has led to the downplaying of how various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and others, intersect and compound to shape individuals' experiences. This sentiment is echoed by users who highlight the intersectionality of systems of oppression within the femcel community, particularly concerning the experiences of femcels of color.

Evidence of this intersectionality emerges from the analysis, with phrases like 'black femcel' frequently appearing in the bigrams and trigrams presented in Table 2. Moreover, selected

comments such as, "The world is harsh to black women from childhood. This is why even normie black chicks are pink pilled," and another user's recommendation of a "Pink Pill course designed specifically for black women to help us navigate this world," emphasize the unique challenges faced by femcels of color. These comments and the contributions of femcels of color to the femcel canon reflect the concerns of many marginalized women who feel that mainstream feminism has inadequately addressed the intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression they encounter. Arguably, these experiences can foster feelings of alienation and skepticism about the inclusivity of mainstream feminism (Crenshaw, 2013).

In summary, these comment examples depict a sense of disillusionment and, at times, assign fault to liberal feminism for overlooking certain marginalized groups of women. Consequently, a portion of users on /r/trufemcels advocate for the pink pill ideology to align with the principles of radical feminism. Radical feminism posits that women's subjugation by men stems not from a lack of civil and political rights, as conceptualized by liberal feminists, but from oppression through patriarchal domination. Patriarchy denotes a system where the male social group wields economic and political power, both within families and society, resulting in the complete subordination of women to men (Cottais, 2020). This dominance is enforced through patriarchal culture, sexist socialization, misogynistic norms, control over women's bodies, and use of force. Radical feminists view men as beneficiaries and perpetuators of these oppressive power dynamics (Millet, 1970).

In a study by Ling (2022) on radical feminism and women-only subreddits such as /r/femaledatingstrategy and /r/trufemcels, four criteria of radical feminism, as defined by Mackay, were employed to analyze these communities for radical feminist ideology. These criteria include: a commitment to dismantling the patriarchy; the utilization of women-only spaces; a focus on male violence against women; and the recognition of pornography and prostitution as forms of male violence (Mackay, 2015). The overlapping themes between these definitions that I will utilize to examine the data are as follows: women's bodies as the focal point of their oppression, male violence (exploitation, abuse) as a mechanism of dominance, and commitment to the abolishment of the patriarchy.

Support for the themes espoused by radical feminists is evident in the comments compiled in the pink pill corpus. For instance, one user views the pink pill as a means of political mobilization, asserting: "Pills like feminism aren't supposed to make us happier, they exist to make us revolt against these injustices." Similarly, another user highlights its subversive potential, suggesting: "Use it to your advantage... we use it [pink pill] to recognize injustices against women where before we

have just accepted them as the status quo." Moreover, the posts and comments consistently express disapproval of patriarchal systems, emphasizing its detrimental impact on women and need for political activism and social change.

The comments primarily focused on the adverse impact of the patriarchy on women. As one user articulated, the patriarchy appears "indifferent to women's very real terror of something like the reversal of Roe v Wade [...] that will mostly be used to torment women, and lead to their deaths." Another user expressed a similar sentiment, stating: "this world is dominated by pure misogyny [...] It's a man's world, so there's barely any empathy [for women] and lots of men just don't care about how they treat us because they know they can get away with their abusive behaviours." These strong sentiments against the patriarchy resonate with the core tenets of radical feminism, reflecting both negative perceptions of it and a staunch advocacy for its abolition.

Moreover, in light of the understanding that women's bodies are considered the locus of their oppression, femcels engage in discussions concerning cultural and commercial messages about idealized feminine beauty. Reflecting on this topic, one user observes that girls "get objectified from a very young age […] media conditions them to think that the highest-level compliment they'll ever get is a man praising her for her *looks*. […] society tells girl/women all the time that hot girl = valuable female (or rather object, but if you ain't hot then you're even less than an object)." This comment resonates with Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) theory of objectification, which elucidates how women internalize objectification through experiences of sexual objectification. The user emphasizes how cultural messages about beauty—defining it, cultivating it, and its perceived rewards—implicitly perpetuate objectification through media representations of women. Another user reflects on how practices of objectification extend to women controlling each other's bodies as well: "setting some sort of artificial bar that if a woman can't meet, doesn't meet, or doesn't care to meet it, then she is not a *Good Woman*. It is part and parcel of teaching other women to internalize this misogyny and foolishness and enforce it on each other." In summary, these comments underscore femcels' awareness of how sexist socialization and misogynistic norms contribute to the control over women's bodies—an enforcement that is perpetuated by women themselves through internalized scripts. Consequently, some femcels vehemently reject these norms, as exemplified by this user's comment: "Why the fuck would I WANT to cater to their standards, so they can just use me up and then ruin me like Hollyweird [Hollywood] does to young vulnerable girls. […] No thanks!" Here, the user directly links conforming to these beauty standards to exploitation or abuse.

According to Liz Frost (1999), the societal value placed on women's beauty often leads to criticism of women's active engagement with their appearance. This phenomenon is exemplified in the practices of femcels who critique others' attempts to enhance their appearance, labeling such efforts as capitulation to patriarchal norms, as this user expresses: "[…] to looksmaxx is kowtowing to the patriarchy. […] we [femcels] are called pickmeishas (e.g. women ostensibly prioritizing male attention over self-respect and solidarity with other women) by other women." Consequently, these criticisms induce feelings of shame and ambivalence among femcels regarding their appearance, reflecting the belief among some radical femcels that patriarchal beauty standards perpetuate the objectification of women. A viewpoint that is divisive within the /r/trufemcels community, as one user counters: "But I don't understand these standards that need to be met to be an acceptable feminist. To be feminist you can't desire the love and affection of a man? Can't want to be attractive even if it's not for men? […] If you don't have the heart to march against the man, you're not a good feminist?" fostering a belief that one's commitment to feminist ideals should not be contingent upon adherence to conventional beauty norms.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable trend among more radical feminist femcels to position themselves as 'more pink pilled'. One user characterizes a segment of liberal feminist femcels as "[...] partially pink pilled. Or rather, they are the face of third wave feminism. They are openly cynical about men but still want to get laid." Another user echoes this sentiment, remarking that /r/trufemcels "has become overrun with pick-mes and female white knights lately. Nowadays you can't even express a basic pink pill without someone rushing in to defend men's honor. I miss when this sub was actually pink pilled." This comment suggests that the subreddit /r/trufemcels was deemed more faithful to pink pill ideology when discussions about men were characterized by greater criticism and scrutiny. These instances suggest a hierarchical interpretation of who qualifies as a "true" femcel, and what criteria one needs to meet in order to be recognized as one – with adherence to the pink pill ideology serving as a measure of gatekeeping. Consequently, we observe a conceptualization of the pink pill as a pathway to embracing radical feminism and elevating one's status within the femcel community, as exemplified by this user's comment: "Radical feminism gave me a more thorough and healthier version of the pink pill."

This hierarchical dynamic is also evident in the allocation of the 'baby femcel' flair, a frequently occurring bigram in the data, denoting femcels who are under the age of 21 and have not yet achieved the status of 'full-fledged femcels'. Various rationales are presented for why younger femcels identify as baby femcels on the subreddit. While a prevailing sentiment suggests that

younger femcels are more susceptible to vulnerability, as articulated by one user: "They [baby femcels] are young and impressionable. […] I care about formative years and projections. As a community of women who don't waste time with the bullshit, let us be a benefit. […] Don't attack our baby femcels. Guide them. […] Let's take care of our own." Conversely, some users dismiss the experiences of younger femcels, asserting that most of them "aren't even capable of deciding if they're actually ugly. Once you're an adult and your self-esteem is a little bit higher, it's easier to objectively determine where you fit in the world. Baby femcels overexaggerate their ugliness." Another user diminishes the validity of young users' experiences, suggesting that for 'real femcel stories', one should consult "real ones [femcels], not the melodramatic baby femcels." Finally, one user questions the inclusion of high schoolers or "baby femcels" in the subreddit, expressing uncertainty about their readiness to engage in discussions about dating and relationships.

Lastly, there are concerns regarding the emotional well-being of young femcels, particularly due to the sensitive nature of discussions surrounding appearance and relationships. As a result, offering guidance and support to younger femcels is perceived as a means of safeguarding them from potential harm and nurturing a sense of unity within the community. Some femcels advocate for the outright banning of young femcels from the subreddit, arguing that it would shield them from exposure to sensitive content. Additionally, others contend that restricting access to younger members could enhance the quality of discussions as they believe that baby femcels may lack the life experiences necessary to fully comprehend the ramifications of embracing pink pill ideology.

In summary, the 2022 study conducted by Ling establishes a correlation between radical feminism and women-only subreddits such as /r/femaledatingstrategy and /r/trufemcels, revealing substantial alignment between femcel ideology and radical feminist principles. The present analysis of the pink pill topic corpus corroborates these findings, providing additional evidence in support of such assertions. Moreover, the study highlights the manner in which both liberal and radical femcels frame the concept of the pink pill and find common ground in pursuit of shared objectives. Nonetheless, it is important to refrain from conflating radical feminists with femcels despite ideological similarities, as each group maintains distinct goals and motivations for their respective affiliations.

Notions of misandry
From this perspective, it will be interesting to focus deeper on /r/trufemcels biases and conceptualization of men – as this does not only feed the reason for the subreddits existence – as the absence of a (male) partner is the cause for their celibacy. Secondly, as our selection of comments on the pink pill showed that in utterances about the pink pill, 'men' we mentioned in

52.65% them – that is a significant amount, as such we should examine this. Thirdly, because the pink pill philosophy is inherently feminist, and radical feminist perspectives are present in the pink pill as well, this influences their perception of men – radical feminism is occupied with criticizing men's role within patriarchal systems. According Kate Millett in her seminal work "Sexual Politics" (1970), radical feminists perceive men as benefiting from and perpetuating oppressive power dynamics. From this perspective, women's bodies serve as the locus of their oppression, though which it manifests by means of unfair beauty standards, sexual objectification, harassment, and rape, all of which function to uphold men's dominance over women. We also see this in the data; when we analyzed the biased concepts /r/trufemcels has towards men, many negative sentiments arise. We see this in clusters spearheaded by concepts such as 'degrading', 'assault' and even 'murderer'. In the context of radical feminism, abuse suffered by men is seen as being enabled by the patriarchy – as within this system, individuals are systematically born into a hierarchy where men are privileged, enabling them to exploit, use, and abuse women.

Evans and Lankford: Nearly half (48%) of their posts about men and sexual topics focused on men committing sexual misconduct (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual assault, or rape). The most common themes in femcels' discussions of men's power were men's possession of financial, political, or institutional power (36%)—and concerns about their privilege in a patriarchal system—or men having power associated with their physical strength or violence (31%). We also see this in the data analysis in this study; when we analyzed the biased concepts /r/trufemcels has towards men, many negative sentiments arise. We see this in clusters spearheaded by concepts such as 'degrading', 'assault' and even 'murderer'. According to Millett in Sexual Politics" (1970), radical feminists perceive men as benefiting from and perpetuating oppressive power dynamics. From this perspective, women's bodies serve as the locus of their oppression. This oppression manifests not only through unfair beauty standards and objectification – as femcels call 'lookism' but also harassment and abuse, all of which function to uphold men's dominance over women. In the context of radical feminism, abuse suffered by men is seen as being enabled by the patriarchy – as within this system, individuals are systematically born into a hierarchy where men are privileged, enabling them to exploit, use, and abuse women.

Lookism

Femcels define themselves by their absence of sexual and romantic encounters, frequently attributing their perceived lack of attractiveness to difficulties in establishing relationships. Within the /r/Trufemcels community, members classify themselves based on their perceived level of attractiveness, often utilizing a decile scale for comparison. Notably, among the available flairs, one

stands apart from this hierarchy: "Former Femcel," denoting individuals who have transcended involuntary celibacy by improving their circumstances – a process commonly known as 'ascending'. This transition highlights a parallel between the pink pill ideology and the red pill philosophy, both of which suggest that unfavorable traits, such as physical appearance, can be addressed or compensated for.

The emphasis on these negative attributes is also evident linguistically through the use of the "-cel" suffix – derived from "celibate" – which is commonly employed for self-identification in incel groups. Moreover, this suffix can be appended to other characteristics or traits that define the individual, often those they consider responsible for their involuntary celibacy. For instance, someone attributing their incel status to mental illness or a psychological disorder might self-identify as a "mentalcel." Similarly, an individual facing social exclusion due to obesity might label themselves as a "fatcel." Within incel communities, extensive discussions revolve around strategies to address these perceived shortcomings. Consequently, involvement in such strategies, aimed at self-improvement and overcoming obstacles, often leads to the adoption of new terms suffixed with "-maxx." This suffix denotes a process of compensation and enhancement and can serve as a verb. For example, someone striving to enhance their physical appearance through exercise may engage in "gymmaxxing," while efforts to improve one's socioeconomic status to attract a partner may be termed "careermaxxing."

Furthermore, rather than compensating for their unattractive physical appearance by excelling in other domains, incels and femcels frequently engage in discussions about strategies aimed at improving these undesirable features of their appearance – a practice commonly referred to as "looksmaxxing". This inclination can be ascribed to their belief in the concept of "lookism," which encompasses discrimination based on physical attractiveness or its absence. In femcel discourse, lookism is depicted as a pervasive and systematic form of social discrimination, as evidenced by their resentment and envy towards individuals perceived as attractive, such as Stacy. As one user comments, "Stacies keep perpetuating lookism and denying pretty privilege, as it suits them." Another user echoes this sentiment, stating "because they have everything, they become so condescending […] they never had to suffer the consequences of their actions as everyone worships them." The comments illustrate how they conceptualize Stacy as benefitting from positive lookism, receiving favorable treatment based on physical beauty, leading to associated social and economic advantages encapsulated in the 'beauty-is-good' stereotype (Lemay, Clark & Greenberg, 2010).

Conversely, femcel experiences highlight the opposite aspect – encountering negative lookism, they articulate the mistreatment and the psychological and sociological ramifications of this phenomenon. As articulated by a user, "I was much happier and healthier emotionally when I was completely aloof to lookism. In hindsight, yes, the pretty little girls were treated better and with more affection. I did not understand that I was not pretty and thought being studious was the way to be recognized." Beyond the individual realm, discussions on lookism illuminate its systemic influence across various domains of life, as another user observes, "lookism is a real thing and it doesn't just have to do with romance; the more attractive you are, the easier it is for you to get ahead in life." Similarly, another user's rationale for engaging in looksmaxxing underscores a similar sentiment, stating, "to make networking easier, get favors from people, and to feel pretty for myself. If I can't change lookism, then I sure as hell will exploit people with it," demonstrating a belief that beauty correlates with success across all facets of life.

Ascending through looksmaxxing

The prevalence of discussions around looksmaxxing within femcel communities highlights the pervasive nature of lookism. Looksmaxxing, the practice of maximizing one's physical appearance through various means such as grooming, styling, fitness, cosmetic procedures, and other methods aimed at enhancing attractiveness, underscores the relentless pursuit of conforming to idealized standards of physical beauty portrayed in the media. In all analyses, extensive discourses surrounding looksmaxxing were observed and emerged as salient themes in the data, reflecting its importance within femcel communities.

Firstly, the LDA topic model depicted in Figure 3 revealed a coherent theme centered on physical appearance. This theme encompassed various terms related to specific physical attributes such as nose, skin, eye, and hair, as well as terms like makeup, surgery, and exercise. Secondly, an examination of the relative frequency of semantic categories found in biased concepts towards femcels, as depicted in Figure 4, further emphasized the significance placed on physical properties. Categories such as Anatomy and Physiology and Physical Appearance and Properties accounted for a substantial portion (18.08%) of the total tagged concepts, underscoring the pervasive emphasis on physical appearance within these discussions.

While the LDA topic model shed light on words associated with modifying physical appearance, such as makeup, surgery, and exercise, linked with looksmaxxing, the semantic categorization depicted in Figure 4 provides deeper insights into their relationship. Notably,

alongside the frequent occurrence of appearance-related concepts, judgments about these appearances tend to be overwhelmingly negative for femcels. Moreover, a significant portion of the semantically coded biases falls under categories focusing on alteration, including 'fixing and mending' and 'modify' (9.61%). Additional themes such as 'medicine and medical treatments,' 'clothes and personal belongings,' and 'cleaning and personal care' also emerge, indicating a broader discourse on improving appearance beyond the initially identified terms.

Finally, this assertion finds support in the biases observed towards femcels, as depicted in Figure 1, where negative sentiments predominantly center around aspects of physical appearance. Particularly noteworthy is the cluster led by 'rhinoplasty' (a procedure involving the restructuring of the nose), which emerges as one of the most positively perceived words regarding femcels.

Additionally, a closer examination of these biased clusters reveals how the more ambiguous semantic categories such as 'shape' and descriptions of dimensions and quantities such as 'tall, wide,' and 'many much' sheds light on how these terms are utilized in femcel discourse to address the deficiencies they seek to alter or improve during their looksmaxxing practices. For example, femcels may use these descriptive terms to articulate concerns about physical features, like this reply of a user: "My list is pretty much yours but I'd modify it to say chronic skin/autoimmune disorder (acne, rosacea, eczema, ichthyosis) and I'd replace "masculine voice" with "disproportionate body" (asymmetric tits; no-waist bodies; concave chests...all my issues, lol) and jaw/orthognathic that not only cause self-hatred, but physical problems."

Further exploration through close reading also revealed the distinction between "softmaxxing" and "hardmaxxing" – the former involving lifestyle changes such as dieting, personal care, wardrobe styling, and makeup application to enhance one's appearance, while the latter, also known as 'plasticmaxxing,' entails cosmetic enhancement through plastic surgery. As one femcel clarifies her looksmaxxing efforts to others: "(Softmaxxing) Started working out regularly so I could gain lean muscles, started using retinoids and AHA/BHA on my face, got an expensive haircut and a dye job at a top salon […] (Hardmaxxing) I got rhinoplasty and a boob job lol. Botox in my masseter muscles, restylane under eyes […]"

The relatively large semantic category related to 'medicine and medical treatments' can be attributed to discussions surrounding hardmaxxing, as showcased by this comment in which a user lists perceived facial shortcomings: "recessed and horizontally grown maxilla, high gonial angle, excess skin on my submandibular triangle, excess fat storage on my cheeks, […] and very small brow ridge, sclera show and hooknose."

Racial implications of lookism

The hierarchies and distinctions that incels establish regarding physical appearance and attractiveness are heavily influenced by racial dynamics and societal norms that dictate standards of beauty, predominantly shaped by Western ideals (Menzie, 2020). Many incels self-identify using terms like ricecels (East Asian men), currycels (Southeast Asian men), Blackcels, Arabcels, and other ethnic identities, attributing their incel status to these racial factors (Kelly, DiBranco & DeCook, 2021). As previously discussed, in memes, "Stacies" and "Chads" are predominantly depicted as white, and while incel communities have terms for physically attractive men of other racial identities such as the dark skinned "Tyrone" – the white "Chad" remains the default.

Similarly, the data underscores the significant influence of racial dynamics on femcels' perceptions of physical attractiveness, as evidenced by the bigrams and trigrams in Table 2 revealing implications of racial dynamics. A clear dichotomy of desirability emerges around racial categories, associating whiteness with Stacy and blackness with femcels. This observation is reflected in the comments, as articulated by one user: "everyone here acknowledges pretty privilege yet refuse to acknowledge the privilege associated with white skin. We never had a chance. Not only were we born with dark skin, We also happened to be ugly on top of it. As though competing with white women whilst having dark skin wasn't torturous enough. You don't seem to understand just how lucky you are to be born with the most desired skin tone."

The intersectionality of marginalized identities is frequently cited by femcels, as highlighted by another user: "racism, sexism, and lookism often intersect into an unholy trinity. […] It's like, no matter how pretty you are, you'll always be held back by racial stereotypes and expectations. The halo and horns effect is influenced by race as well, not that many people want to admit that." These comments illustrate femcels' perception of lookism as a construct with an inherent racial dimension, perpetuated by Western-influenced beauty standards that reinforce narratives of white supremacy (Deliovsky, 2008). This perspective reveals a distinct experience of femceldom among femcels of color, who often contend with a heavier burden due to the intersectionality of marginalized identities. As one user points out to a fellow user: "you have more of a chance to get out of femceldom than most of the ethnicels on here, especially black femcels."

Similar patterns are evident in the biased concepts identified in Figure 1, particularly with the emergence of the term "racist" as a biased concept towards Stacy. This discovery prompted a deeper investigation into the cluster. Upon closer examination, the cluster revealed numerous terms from incel jargon, reflecting hierarchies of attractiveness and associated judgments. These terms include "shallow," "chad," "becky," "whore," "stacy," "inkwells" (a slur for incels), "bimbos," "wives,"

"girlfriends," "brad" (referring to a man less attractive than Chad but still considered good-looking), "naomi," "pickmes," and "incels." By employing a method that interprets biases on associated attribute concepts (e.g., Stacy), the need for arbitrary, predefined concepts is bypassed. This approach allows for the isolation of unknown and undefined terms, thereby prompting further examination and analysis of these terms.

Of particular interest was the unknown term "Naomi." Upon closer examination, it became evident that within the community discourse, 'Naomi' is used interchangeably with 'Stacy,' particularly to describe an attractive woman of African-American descent. This was corroborated by user comments indicating the varying levels of attractiveness associated with these terms, as exemplified by this statement: "Becky is average/around average so 4-6, Stacylite is a 7. Stacy is 8+. You'll see people say Naomi. That's a Black Stacy. Naomilite is a 7. Naomi is 8+. Source: Me. I've been around for a while." Further interchangeability of these terms to denote hierarchy is also observed in relation to other terms such as 'Becky', as this user points out: "Keisha is Becky's black counterpart, a cute woman with slightly above average looks."

Moreover, discussions among femcels unveiled the practice of labeling attractive women based on ethnicity or culture to encompass a wide spectrum of variety. The need for this inclusive approach was highlighted by a user's remark: "every community has their own 'Stacy' and it'll still be tied to skin color, facial symmetry, bone structure, the gender typical features. If you fall outside of it and are a femcel type...that's it.

Furthermore, it can be argued that in their naming practices femcels are influenced by mainstream beauty standards perpetuated by popular culture, as this comment shows: "Black: Naomi; Latina: Selena/Salma; Indian: Priyanka; Asian: idk any famous asian women of the top of my head sorry". In these labels we also see how celebrities who are regarded as attractive serve as symbols of desirability and success, and their names are utilized to create new terminology (e.g., "Naomi" derived from supermodel Naomi Campbell, similar to Indian actress Priyanka Chopra). This further underscores the ethnicized nature of judgments of appearance, linking specific labels to names of those who they believe best embody beauty standards in that culture.

However, a notable contrast arises between femcels and incels in the context of the emergence of racialized neologisms. In incel discourse, ethnic references typically pertain to the user himself, frequently accompanied by the -cel suffix, as earlier exemplified by terms like 'currycel' which function identity markers for individuals who are deem themselves involuntarily celibate primarily due to systemic racial disadvantages. On the other hand, within femcel discourse, racialized or ethnicized neologisms appear in labels used to describe others, and furthermore, to do so from the viewpoint to look up to them or to assess them positively. For instance, the term

'Naomi' is frequently discussed as she is perceived as more relatable for femcels of color, as this user states: "I'm friends with another Black femcel here and we both cope by adoring Naomis on social media. […] As the dark-skinned girl, you are the counterculture aesthetically so 'rebrand' yourself with style and fashion. See what the fab girls our color do and take those tips one at a time and enjoy the hell out if each thing you do. Hair. Lip color. Wardrobe. It takes time but it works." This linguistic practice reflects nuanced cultural perceptions of desirability and their influence on the pursuit of aesthetic improvement.

While femcels of color utilize specific terminology to articulate their experiences authentically, as this user describes: *"For some reason when I see a Naomi it just feels extra personal because it's like I have no excuse for the way I look. [...] I mean like, a Stacy could walk by and I'd just be like I could never reach that full potential even if I'm looksmaxxed."* However, these discourses underscore the pervasive influence of racism on perceptions of attractiveness, whereby certain bodies are assigned status and value according to Eurocentric beauty standards and able-bodied ideals. One user reflects on the intersection of race and attractiveness, stating: "I'm Mexican in a mostly white area. I feel your pain. I've even been asked if I'm black by bullies, implying that being black is a bad thing. It's hard being on the outside looking in." Another user highlights the challenges faced by black women in the dating sphere, noting: "Black women really do have it the hardest when it comes to dating. The perception of beauty is so Eurocentric that traits normally associated with black people are seen as 'bad'. Darker skin, curly hair, etc... even though none of these traits are actually detrimental to survival, society finds these traits 'ugly' because they don't align with the Eurocentric ideal."

As Rodrigues and Przybyło (2018) assert, Eurocentric beauty standards have perpetuated the conflation of whiteness with beauty and goodness, while racialization has been associated with ugliness and moral failing. This scholarly observation is reflected in user comments, such as: *"Being a Naomi isn't going to make people treat you better, so I'm pretty sure white girls are the only true Stacies. From a young age, black women will perceive the differences in the way they are treated compared to their lighter peers."*

Ugliness as a taboo

In the paper 'Lookism as Epistemic Injustice' (2023), Thomas Spiegel states discrimination based on ugliness is a widely recognized phenomenon, as studies have shown unattractive people are denied various opportunities (regarding work, romance, friendship etc.) in life as opposed to beautiful people. We see this reflected directly in the personal experiences of femcels, as one user shares "I'm always the one blamed if I get caught talking or laughing in class. Never others doing the same thing

as me and who sit right beside me. I see Chads and Stacies easily escaping the 'Sorry, I'm late' situation just by smiling at the professor.", sketching a situation in which she as an ugly person is punished more than her attractive classmates. Comments by users further corroborate this notion, as one user states "Attractive women are able to reap rewards and benefits […] Because of this, they're treated better […] It's undeniable that they make more money, are considered more able, and have advantages during negotiations […] Men are also inclined to sympathize with and care about the well-being of women they're attracted to." This shows femcels are very aware of these mechanisms – which is not surprising given that the existence of lookism is a fundamental tenant in pink pill ideology. Lastly, Spiegel states there are real repercussions in being denied these opportunities; unattractive people risk being deprived of social and economic goods. This is a very persistent narrative that we see perpetuated by the meme in Figure 2 – Stacy can sport a "$2000 Gucci bag" while simultaneously "never have worked a day in her life." Also, the semantic categories support this narrative, as we see that besides her physical appearance, so called "Stacies" are also discussed in terms of success and power, reflecting how repercussions of scales of attractiveness translate into positive discrimination as well. This sentiment is further underscored by the comic depicted in Figure 7, wherein a stereotypical "Stacy" character is depicted as unaware of her privilege and indifferent to the challenges faced by femcels. Consequently, femcels often encounter difficulties in their interactions with individuals they label as 'tone-deaf' or 'blue-pilled,' who demonstrate a lack of understanding regarding lookism. This lack of awareness is often compounded by the taboo surrounding discussions of physical appearance and ugliness.

Figure 7: Comic posted on /r/trufemcels about interactions between a 'Stacy' and a 'Femcel'.

Besides this, Spiegel argues that there is a lack of social awareness concerning lookism compared to other forms of discrimination like racism or sexism, which unlike ugliness, are ascribed to individuals and commonly embraced as part of one's identity. A comment by a femcel acknowledges this disparity of awareness, stating "I am not trying to say that racism is equal to lookism, at all. I'm simply saying that the topic of racism is more easily discussed and understood than lookism. If a WOC claimed to be treated badly/unfairly because of their race/ethnicity and their claims were brushed aside, the person arguing them down would be called ignorant and rightfully so. The same can't really be said when talking about lookism." As previously discussed, the intersectionality of lookism and other marginalized identities are fundamentally known and acknowledged by users on /r/trufemcels. However, this it is through this lack of social awareness, Spiegel argues, that we can understand how ugly people may face epistemic injustices as well. Unlike other forms of injustice, such as racism, which may be actively disputed – which the previous commentator used as a strong argument – the stigma attached to ugliness leads avoidance of the subject. Femcels experience this as well, as this user expresses hardship with getting recognition from family: "I get that she [users' mother] never experienced the negative effects that came about with being unattractive so I guess she can't relate? She does acknowledge that lookism exists but when I talk to her but she always dismisses me." Another femcel echoes this sentiment of not being taken seriously by friends "she [users' friend] actually told me, 'You're not pretty, you're cute. Your face is unique.' […] To anyone experiencing delusion or doubting yourself; beauty is not subjective. […] If I wasn't below average, I'd know and feel I wasn't." These comments show how discourses of ugliness are met with collective silence which leads to ugliness becoming taboo, contributing to testimonial injustices, where individuals who perceive themselves as ugly may be reassured that their appearance is not a factor in their social circumstances, despite evidence suggesting otherwise, leaving people who feel ugly might not get listened to or taken seriously when they talk about their experiences. Furthermore, terms like 'ugly' carry a slur-like connotation, further complicating the issue, as instead of calling someone ugly, people might try to avoid hurting their feelings, but this can make it harder for them to understand their situation.

Spiegel's analysis posits that these factors contribute to the stigmatization of ugliness, rendering individuals who perceive themselves as unattractive less inclined to embrace this aspect of their identity. While many femcels self-identify based on their perceived lack of attractiveness, distinguishing themselves from "normies" or "Beckies", their collective experiences often encompass a transformative realization regarding the role of perceived ugliness in their mistreatment. For instance, one user reflects, "I was very bluepilled back then […] I was quite happy with my life, I always had confidence. […] Now when I think about that time, I know why girls talked trash about

me - it wasn't because I thought I was 'pretty' and they were just jealous, it was because I was legit ugly." A previously mentioned comment calls out attempts by "normies" to dismiss notions of self-subscribing ugliness as "blue pill bullshit […]", stating these attempts "deny and invalidate my life experiences." – underscoring the prevalence of testimonial injustice endured by femcels.

These expressions suggest that dismissing and downplaying the impact of unattractiveness can turn into a form of epistemic gaslighting aimed at avoiding perceived insults, resulting in the perpetuation of the taboo surrounding ugliness.

A femcel articulates this perception, highlighting the incongruence of societal messages promoting universal beauty with the harsh reality of lived experiences: "'All girls are beautiful, just have confidence in yourself' - always said by a hot 10/10 female celeb who has never experienced being bullied about her appearance before in her entire life." Another user echoes this sentiment: "'Just take a shower, wear makeup and smile more,' advice from people who don't even have to try to get attention." In accordance with Maty Gaitskill's perspective (2022), femcels' resistance to subscribing to superficial positivity narratives signifies their desire to confront reality head-on, notwithstanding society's inclination to shield them from perceived insults stemming from the stigma surrounding ugliness. Despite the painful realization of embracing an 'undesirable' trait like ugliness as part of their identity, Gaitskill's notion that "[…] 'owning' a negative identity is a kind of power" resonates within femcel discourse. Thus, reclaiming the term 'femcel' emerges as an act imbued with liberating and empowering implications for users of /r/trufemcels, who grapple with societal standards of attractiveness.

Romantic relationships

Involuntary celibacy, characterized by the absence of romantic and sexual experiences, naturally leads discussions toward topics concerning relationships and their ramifications. This theme prominently emerged as a coherent topic within the discussions on /r/trufemcels, as evidenced by Figure 3. This emphasis on relationships and loneliness also has historical roots, evident in the first iteration of an online platform dedicated to involuntary celibacy – the website "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project." This website provided a supportive environment for individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to share their struggles with loneliness and dating obstacles (Beauchamp, 2019).

However, with the emergence of the manosphere and the associated incel movement, discourses of involuntary celibacy underwent a significant transformation. This shift altered the

membership composition and tone of discussions, resulting in the formation of an exclusively male community characterized by hostile, heteronormative, and misogynistic attitudes (Tietjen & Tirkkonen, 2023). Given the disproportionate focus on incels in existing research compared to femcels, this chapter initiates by examining literature concerning incels' conceptualizations of intimate relationships. This exploration serves as a foundational step towards identifying potential similarities or distinctions between incels and femcels.

Incels and aggrieved entitlement

As previously discussed, the incel ideology is deeply intertwined with the vilification of feminism – attributing perceived societal grievances to its influence. This perspective significantly shapes understandings of romantic relationships, glorifying a patriarchal past characterized by early marriages and strict adherence to traditional gender roles, which purportedly granted men exclusive access to sexual relations (Baele et al., 2021). Consequently, incels perceive the contemporary societal landscape as a fiercely competitive sexual marketplace governed by standards of physical attractiveness and feminine "hypergamy."

This worldview is rooted in gendered moral norms that reflect incels' patriarchal ideals of femininity and masculinity. According to this ideal, women are expected to fulfill men's needs for emotional labor, care, attention, love, and sex, while men are entitled to social status, recognition, and employment opportunities (Manne, 2017). Kimmel's concept of aggrieved entitlement (2017) further elucidates this phenomenon, highlighting how incels perceive their lack of sexual success as a deprivation of their entitled privileges within society. According to Kimmel, this can lead to responses of frustration and hatred, which prompted some self-identified incels to reclaim their perceived losses through aggressive or violent means.

Incels perceive themselves as fundamentally "deprived of sex," with a significant proportion reporting virginity or having missed crucial developmental milestones (Incels Wiki, 2021; Stijelja & Mishara, 2023). Przybylo (2019) observes that the incel rhetoric, which emphasizes sex as a crucial component of a fulfilled life, aligns with a system of compulsory sexuality that pressures individuals into engaging in sexual activity. Furthermore, the concept of "ascension" highlights incels' fixation on intimate relationships as the ultimate source of social fulfillment. This term implies a profound transformation, lifting individuals out of their previous state of loneliness and social isolation. It also reinforces a hierarchical structure within the incel community, where sexual success is paramount in determining one's personal worth. Moreover, this hierarchy also affords to restrict fellow incels to

their perceived roles; even minor interactions with women are met with accusations of boasting and subsequent attacks from peers (Kates, 2021; Tietjen & Tirkkonen, 2023).

Finally, Kay (2021) emphasizes the significance of contextualizing inceldom within the framework of neoliberalism's adverse impacts on social structures and the resurgence of misogyny and white heteropatriarchal dominance. According to Kay, political dialogues concerning sexual inequalities, exclusion, and humiliation often center predominantly around white men and masculinity. This underscores how "aggrieved entitlement" validates grievances stemming from perceived loss of status and privilege among white men. For instance, figures like psychologist and internet personality Jordan Peterson, who advocate solutions such as "socially enforced monogamy," contribute to heightened debates surrounding sexual redistribution (Peterson, 2018). Consequently, white male incels become the most visible and extreme manifestation of this abjection, attracting significant academic and journalistic attention. The plight of male incels is thus situated within broader discussions on contemporary society's generation of new forms of inequality, prompting discourse within an explicitly political framework of distributive justice (Kay, 2021).

Celibacy and Commitment

Similarly to their male counterparts, femcels place significant importance on overcoming their celibacy and gaining recognition as romantically and sexually desirable individuals, often similarly referred to as the process of "ascension." However, a distinction between femcels and incels arises when it comes to defining the prerequisites of celibacy, leading to differing interpretations of transitioning out of this state.

As previously highlighted, femcels often faced rejection and mockery on incel platforms (e.g. /r/Incels, Lookism.net, incel.is), frequently branded as "volcel," implying that their celibacy was entirely voluntary and that they could engage in sexual activity if they lowered their standards for partners. This suggests that incels tend to prioritize interpersonal sexual encounters as one of the primary determinants of celibacy. This emphasis may be rooted in the heightened societal pressure placed on men, particularly, to partake in sexual activity, a pressure that persists from adolescence into adulthood (Carpenter, 2010). However, on /r/trufemcels, a distinct viewpoint regarding the understanding of celibacy and its voluntary or involuntary nature comes to light. As this explanatory comment by a moderator states: "I notice confusion, semantic issues, and lack of understanding […] as to what exactly 'Incel' means when it is applied to a woman. This is considered 'involuntarily celibacy' when a woman withholds sex because it is **unethical** for her to subject herself to this treatment. Here you find misogynists, rapists, abusers, and all things subhuman. Refusal to have sex on the basis of harm **does not imply voluntary celibacy.**" This sentiment is echoed by users, with

one expressing; "Yes, I am volcel. But out of self-preservation." Another femcel adds: "Ugly women are stereotyped as being low maintenance, easily manipulated, and easy to fuck for a reason." Thus, I argue that we can discern that the involuntary aspect of their celibacy is experienced as abstaining from sexual interaction due to ethical concerns. Another user explains the rationale of self-identifying as celibate: "Femcels can usually get casual sex […] The issue with femcels is being unable to find relationships or marriage. One of the dictionary definitions of celibacy is being unmarried, so someone who wants to be married but has zero chance at ever getting married is technically involuntarily celibate." As such, I posit that for femcels, celibacy is more about a lack of commitment than it is about interpersonal sexual contacts. This perspective finds support in the statements of users: "We [femcels] want to be loved. I've never been loved or committed to and never will be. […] I don't need, want, or value meaningless sex." Another user affirms this, stating she can "get sex but that isn't saying much. […] Being acceptable enough for sex doesn't mean they will love and care for you."

Moreover, this appears to be attributed to the pervasive influence of society's ingrained lookism, where femcels, as unattractive women, often find themselves in disadvantaged positions – romantic relationships and dating included. As articulated by one femcel, "For women, your attractiveness determines how your S.O. [significant other] will treat you." This belief finds further support in the skewed distribution depicted in the biases shown in Figure 1, particularly within the cluster "spouse," encompassing terms like 'wives' and 'girlfriend,' which heavily favor Stacy. A user reflects on this discrepancy, noting, "they [men] give their love to Stacy. Stacy gets the good stuff, she gets the favors, she gets the nice presents." Similarly, another user expresses frustration, "they claim they don't 'have time' for a relationship when they're talking to me. But as soon as Stacy shows up, they suddenly have time. […] They could just be honest and say I'm too ugly to be committed to." These comments highlight femcels' perception that attractiveness hierarchies significantly impact the quality of relationships attainable by individuals.
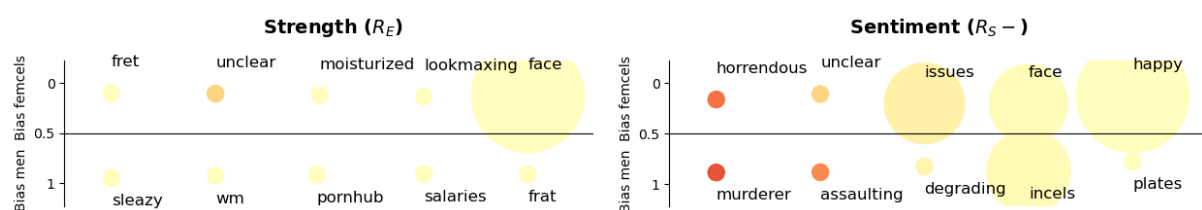
Fig. 6: Top-5 clusters, biases towards women (femcels) and men in /r/Trufemcels, ranked by strongest and sentimentally negative bias. Higher ranking clusters are shown ranked from left to right (x-axis), the area of each cluster corresponds to its frequency (quantity of times the words of the clusters were found in the dataset), the color with its average sentiment, and the y-axis shows the average salience of the words in the cluster. Finally, each of the clusters is tagged with its most frequent occurring word.

Further insights into how femcels conceptualize relationships can be gleaned from the analysis of Figure 6, which illustrates biases observed in /r/trufemcels concerning men. By selecting attribute terms indicating males such as he, him, man, boy, along with terms signifying men and relationships like boyfriend, husband, partner, and date, insight into femcels' biases towards men are gained. The figure reveals notably strong negative sentiments, with two clusters suggesting threats of physical violence (e.g., the clusters 'murder' and 'assault'), and another cluster led by the term 'degrading'. This aligns with the moderator's depiction of female celibacy, wherein sex is portrayed as a potentially harmful and unethical experience that femcels subject themselves to. Furthermore, this aligns with similar findings found by Evans and Lankford (2023), who found the prevailing theme in femcels' discussions regarding men and sex centered on the prevalence of men perpetrating sexual harassment or assault. This prompts further exploration into the ways in which this unethical treatment is expressed and experienced.

When discussing relationships and dating, posts from femcels shed light on a variety of issues concerning their interactions with men. For instance, one user recounts her dating history: "Dated a broke college student who ghosted me and only texts me when he is horny. My 2 exes [...] gave me attention but it was all fake they just wanted my resources. [...] They both discarded me and never loved me or validated me in that way. I knew I was being settled on but thought they would grow to love me if I was accommodating enough Another femcel's narrative mirrors this sentiment – she states she tried to please her partners, but "…In return they never made any effort. [...] They never brought me anything positive. At best they were a drain, at worse they were emotionally manipulating me in order to ruin my life and sometimes technically raping me." Lastly, a femcel who 'lowered her standards' shares a similar sentiment: "It's been suggested that we only want Chad and should date within our league. When I tried to date an uggo short guy he treated me worse than anyone I've ever opened up to." These narratives shed light on the delicate position femcels find themselves in—striving for genuine love from men, exerting extra effort to compensate for perceived physical shortcomings, all while contending with the looming specter of harassment, misconduct, or assault. Despite these challenges, many femcels still yearn for intimate relationships with men, navigating these desires alongside the persistent threats they face. One femcel addresses this complexity: "Suggesting that women here [/r/trufemcels] hate all men is quite silly since the majority of women here want loving relationships with men. True, some of us just dgaf [e.g. don't give a fuck] anymore, and even some are very distrustful of men. [...] We are tired of the cries of "Not all men!" when we *know* it's not ALL men but it's **too many** men who are abusive." These experiences highlight the presence of hidden misogyny in modern dating, relationships, and society

as a whole. In essence, 'femcels might struggle more than most to have fulfilling sexual and romantic relationships, but their no-holds-barred assessments of the sexual marketplace reveal a lot about the misogyny-laden obstacles to female pleasure' (Aronowitz, 2021).

As evidenced by these shared anecdotes and narratives, femcels' discussions on relationships bring to light a myriad of issues. These include instances of men exploiting women's desires for genuine connections, prioritizing physical intimacy over emotional compatibility, and displaying ambivalence by simultaneously desiring so-called "Stacies" while harboring resentment towards them. Such observations underscore the unequal distribution of romantic suffering, deeply influenced by gender dynamics within heteropatriarchal societies. As Simone de Beauvoir (1953) famously argued, while love often enhances men's sense of self and sovereignty, for women, it can represent a perilous domain where their sense of self is often compromised. In essence, heterosexual love tends to nourish and empower men while sapping and diminishing women. This notion is poignantly depicted in the comic illustrated in Figure 8, wherein the 'red pill' perspective of prioritizing the desires and requirements of men in order to secure a romantic relationship exacts a considerable toll on femcels. This is evident not only through the explicit reference to the sacrifices of a woman's 'autonomy' and 'soul' in the accompanying text but also by the suggestive maid attire worn by the character dispensing the advice. Such attire alludes to the expectation of accommodating men's sexual needs and domestic responsibilities, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Figure 8: Comic posted on /r/trufemcels depicting different 'pill' perspectives on finding a relationship.

This sentiment is encapsulated by a femcel who remarked: "There's no cost for men in having a girlfriend. It boosts their confidence, it boosts their happiness, it boosts their chances with women. It does the opposite to women." Indeed, femcels articulate numerous reasons why heterosexual

relationships can be draining for women, ranging from men using them as emotional crutches: "it's very common for men to use ugly girls as empathy giving machines" to being left for more desirable partners: "Your life will be much more fulfilling without a wurstie [man] parasite draining you for your emotional labor, only to leave you later for an attractive woman." These comments underscore the psychological toll femcels may endure, in addition to instances of physical harm as previously noted.

Moreover, femcels delve into the inequitable power dynamics within marriages, scrutinizing men's intentions and shedding light on the disparities inherent in heterosexual relationships. A femcel's response to a visiting incel encapsulates this sentiment: "So you would only be with a woman for what she brings to the table for you? As some kind of service? Either fulfilling tasks, or an attractive appearance that you enjoy?"

In committed relationships, fear of rejection remains significant for femcels, as expressed by one user: "Just because you're married, it doesn't mean you're not a backup girl. Some guys even marry and have kids with their backup, after they've given up hope on Stacy. But if he treats you like shit, you're still his backup and he'd still branch swing if he got the opportunity." These comments indicate that even if a femcel enters a romantic relationship, she may face unjust mistreatment from her partner.

Furthermore, femcels express contempt for casual sexual encounters. One femcel elucidates the gender disparities in hook-ups: "Casual sex does not rustle most women's jimmies enough to venture the risks (STI, pregnancy, psycho sex partner), yet most men deem the risks worth it and are just as happy to plug their cord into any random socket." Another femcel questions the benefits for women: "How is being used as a cum sock for a man who doesn't even like you, who doesn't care about you orgasming and isn't giving any kind of commitment in any way validating to a woman?"

Gender differences also manifest in reputational consequences. While men gain social status by engaging in multiple sexual encounters, women who do the same are often labeled as "sluts" (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). Femcels denounce this double standard: "Ugly women being sexually available in a way that degrades themselves is beneficial for men. It's why they continue to suggest it." Another femcel highlights the disadvantage: "I'd rather be a virgin than a fucktoy then they would call me a slut for sleeping around and that will decrease my smv [sexual market value] even lower." Femcels also point out how men use hookups to inflate their sexual history: "to increase his n-count [number of partners one has had sex with] while tricking you into believing he's going to commit after." These comments form a narrative that aligns with the findings of Evans and Lankford, according to whom discourses surrounding sex and men largely focus on the perceived common tendency of men to sexually exploit women.

DISCUSSION

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this study. The data used for analysis was obtained at a time when /r/trufemcels was already banned by Reddit – this limitation restricts the availability of new data sources and may impact the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Additionally, the study relied solely on text analysis, and qualitative interviews or surveys were not feasible – without direct interaction with participants, the study may lack depth in understanding individual experiences and perspectives within /r/trufemcels. Also, the findings may not be generalizable to all femcel platforms, while this study focused on Reddit, other platforms are known to have been used by self-identified femcels to congregate, the most popular being PinkPill.co – as such, different online platforms may have distinct cultures and dynamics that could influence femcel discourse differently.

The analysis of content on /r/trufemcels unveils a nuanced interplay between feminist ideals and the pink pill philosophy propagated within the forum. The alignment of femcel discourse with radical feminist principles underscores the potential of online communities to serve as platforms for feminist mobilization and activism. Further research could explore the role of women-exclusive online spaces, including other subreddits like /r/Vindicata and /r/FemaleDatingStrategy, in fostering feminist solidarity, empowerment, and collective action among marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the adoption of the term 'femcel' on other social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok introduces new dimensions to the discourse. The emergence of 'femcel-core' as the latest aesthetic trend challenges traditional stereotypes associated with the term. While femcels are often portrayed as bitter and mentally unwell, TikTok's appropriation of femcel culture embraces instability and challenges societal norms (Ward, 2021; Taylor, 2022). This phenomenon warrants further investigation to understand how the rebranding of femceldom intersects with broader cultural shifts and challenges conventional notions of romantic and sexual options.

Lastly, the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and other axes of identity emerges as a prominent theme in the analysis. Future research could delve into how intersecting forms of oppression shape individuals' experiences of involuntary celibacy and influence their engagement with feminist discourse. Exploring alternative conceptual frameworks that center the voices and experiences of marginalized groups could challenge dominant narratives within feminist discourse and provide a more inclusive understanding of femcel experiences.

CONCLUSION

The LDA topic modeling has unveiled three predominant themes entrenched within discussions on /r/trufemcels. Foremost among these is the emergence of the 'pink pill' ideology, which furnishes femcels with a counter-narrative that validates their experiences while diverging from the predominantly male-centric perspective epitomized by the red pill ideology. Whereas the red pill concentrates on male-centric experiences and strategies for augmenting sexual success, the pink pill accentuates the distinctive hurdles confronted by women in navigating the dating and relationship sphere, which are often deemed non-existent within the incel movement. The reluctance to assimilate femcels into the incel fold may stem from disparities in attributions of blame for their life circumstances; male incels frequently attribute their tribulations to external factors, such as blaming perceived societal grievances to the influence of feminism, while femcels pinpoint broader gender disparities and societal norms concerning women's bodies and sexuality as contributing factors. Fundamentally, the pink pill embodies an endeavor by female celibates to reclaim their disregarded position within the incel milieu.

Femcels employ pseudo-intellectual discourses to lend credence to the pink pill philosophy. This is evident in their frequent utilization of terminology associated with research, articles, and guides, all aimed at curating and disseminating information. By adopting the stylistic conventions of scientific writing, femcels bolster the validity of their convictions, appealing to the notion of scientific legitimacy as a shield against external scrutiny. Additionally, femcels delineate symbolic boundaries between themselves and normies, branding normies as "bluepilled" individuals who conform rigidly to mainstream societal norms and lack comprehension of involuntary celibacy issues. This characterization of normies as uninformed and unsympathetic underscores femcels' feelings of isolation and frustration with societal attitudes toward their predicaments. Finally, the embrace of the pink pill truth is perceived as a collective female experience, highlighting their beliefs in the correlation between a woman's physical appearance and her societal value—a phenomenon femcels term 'lookism.'

The discourse surrounding the pink pill philosophy strongly reflects the influence of feminist ideals, with a significant portion of comments grounded firmly in feminist principles. This encompasses the acknowledgment of societal hierarchies, gender disparities, and the pervasive impact of patriarchal norms on individuals' lives. Additionally, many femcels blame the media for exacerbating the objectification of women and perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards. They voice anger at the portrayal of idealized body images and the societal pressure placed on women to conform to these standards. Within /r/trufemcels, there's a collective call to prioritize self-worth and well-being over

conforming to oppressive beauty standards and gender ideals. This entails rejecting societal pressures and advocating for self-love and acceptance. Ultimately, many femcels operate under the premise that they are entitled to respect. This underscores the importance of asserting self-worth and challenging societal norms that contribute to feelings of inadequacy and marginalization.

However, critiques of mainstream feminist ideas are also present. Some femcels believe that empowering undesired and unattractive women within the confines of the patriarchy is futile, and as such, advocate for a more radical approach to feminism that addresses the systemic issues perpetuated by patriarchal structures. The experiences of femcels, particularly femcels of color, highlight the intersectionality of systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, and ableism. Phrases like 'black femcel' frequently appear in discussions, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by marginalized women. The alignment with radical feminist principles suggests a desire for more comprehensive and inclusive forms of feminism that address the intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression faced by femcels. Many comments within femcel communities view the pink pill as a tool for political mobilization and recognize its subversive potential. Femcels engage in discussions critiquing cultural and commercial messages about idealized feminine beauty, highlighting how such messages perpetuate objectification and control over women's bodies. This leads to ambivalence among femcels regarding efforts to enhance appearance, with some criticizing such efforts as capitulation to patriarchal norms. This criticism induces feelings of shame and division within the community, reflecting a broader debate over the role of appearance in feminist ideals. While some advocate for prioritizing self-respect over conforming to beauty standards, others question whether adherence to such standards is antithetical to feminist principles.

The second prominent theme identified in the data revolved around preoccupations with physical appearances. This theme was anticipated early on in the investigation, as affordances of the platform, such as reward systems like badges and self-organizing tools such as the ability to assign 'flairs' acted as "platform signals," facilitating the identification of how content is organized to align with the community's core principles. The available flairs were structured based on hierarchies of attractiveness. One notably differentiating flair "Former Femcels", mirrors aspects of the red pill philosophy, suggesting that individuals can overcome involuntary celibacy and "ascend" the life state through self-improvement. Similar to incels, linguistic markers such as the "-cel" suffix serve as identifiers within femcel discourse, highlighting the pervasive importance put on factors and attributes perceived to be contributing to involuntary celibacy. As such, strategies for self-improvement and addressing perceived shortcomings, often referred to as "-maxxing," are prevalent themes within the community, indicating a shared belief in compensating for unfavorable traits. The

emphasis on physical appearance within femcel communities is evidenced by extensive discussions on looksmaxxing, the practice of enhancing one's physical attractiveness through various means. Among femcels, looksmaxxing is driven by a desire for personal fulfillment and the pursuit of societal advantages, reflecting a belief in the correlation between physical attractiveness and success.

Moreover, racial dynamics heavily influence the hierarchies and distinctions surrounding physical appearance and attractiveness. On incel forms terms like "ricecels" and "currycels" are indicative of how individuals attribute their incel status to racial factors, demonstrating the intersection of race and involuntary celibacy. Additionally, the default depiction of physically attractive individuals, commonly referred to as "Stacies" and "Chads," tends to align with whiteness, emphasizing the pervasive influence of Western beauty standards and the privileging thereof. Femcels often highlight the intersectionality of marginalized identities, including race, sexism, and lookism, as contributing factors to their experiences of involuntary celibacy. This intersectionality exacerbates their challenges, as racial stereotypes and expectations can hinder even those considered conventionally attractive. However, on /r/trufemcels unique labels appear, such as "Naomi," specifically referring to an African-American woman perceived as attractive – as opposed to the canonically white Stacy. the use of specific terminology, such as "Naomi," by femcels of color reflects cultural perceptions of desirability and serves as a means of authentic expression. These linguistic practices underscore the significance of cultural identity within the femcel community and highlight the diverse ways in which beauty is perceived and celebrated.

Furthermore, the marginalization experienced by femcels due to unattractiveness can be understood as a form of epistemic injustice. Femcels possess a keen awareness of the biases and privileges afforded to attractive individuals, particularly women, across various spheres of life, encompassing work, relationships, and social interactions. The semantic categories used to describe "Stacies" further underscore this narrative, revealing the societal perception that attractiveness often aligns with success and power. Femcels frequently share experiences of being dismissed or invalidated when discussing the impact of lookism on their lives. This collective silence surrounding the topic of ugliness perpetuates testimonial injustices, discouraging individuals from speaking out about their experiences of discrimination based on appearance, further marginalizing them. These expressions underscore how dismissing the impact of unattractiveness can perpetuate a form of epistemic gaslighting aimed at avoiding discomfort, further reinforcing the taboo surrounding discussions about ugliness. Femcels firmly reject superficial positivity narratives that promote universal beauty, recognizing the dissonance between these messages and their lived experiences of bullying and marginalization. As such, we see that embracing an identity associated with ugliness can

become an empowering act for some femcels, challenging societal norms and reclaiming agency over their narratives.

The third prominent theme revolves around romantic relationships within the femcel community. Like their male counterparts, femcels place great importance on overcoming celibacy and being recognized as desirable partners, a journey often termed "ascension." However, a key distinction arises between femcels and incels regarding the understanding of celibacy and its voluntary or involuntary nature. While incels focus on the absence of sexual encounters to define celibacy, femcels perceive it more as a lack of commitment, often driven by ethical considerations. Femcels define celibacy as abstaining from sexual interaction due to ethical concerns rather than a lack of opportunity. Analysis of biases within /r/trufemcels regarding men reveals strong negative sentiments, including clusters suggesting threats of physical violence and degradation. These sentiments resonate with femcels' perception of sex as potentially harmful and unethical echoing findings by Evans and Lankford (2023) regarding instances of sexual harassment or assault perpetrated by men.

Furthermore, discourses on relationships on /r/trufemcels underscore the unequal distribution of romantic suffering influenced by gender dynamics within patriarchal societies – femcels articulate the notion that heterosexual love tends to empower men while diminishing women's sense of self. They cite various reasons why heterosexual relationships can be draining for women, ranging from exploitation, emotional manipulation to abuse. Moreover, casual sexual encounters are similarly scrutinized, emphasizing the gender disparities and risks involved, femcels question the benefits for women, stressing how such encounters often lack emotional validation and commitment, and the unfair reputational consequences faced by women engaging in hook ups.

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APPENDIX

The items depicted in this appendix are samples from the data used to perform the analyses in this paper. The complete datasets can be downloaded from the Google Drive linked to my university account: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10kI8e0CgAYVaHIUE64oPakghT_H-X85b?usp=sharing

This appendix consists of samples from the following data:

a. Trufemcels_submissions_clean.csv – a dataset that contains scraped and preprocessed data from submissions posted on /r/trufemcels.

b. Trufemcels_comments_clean.csv – a dataset that contains scraped and preprocessed data from comments posted on /r/trufemcels.

Unnamed: 0	created	comments	id	author	flair	score	title	selftext	corp_len
5579	2019-06-29 0...	3	c6shq3	spongeboii1234	Baby Femcel	43	I've gone down a self loathing/porn rabbit hole (long rant)	and I hate myself for it.	3201
7864	2020-03-28 0...	12	fqclko	TigerlilyxO1	Femcel	264	Looking at my baby picture made me cry hard. It made me...	Today I stumbled upon some old pictures I foun...	2821
7272	2020-01-26 0...	13	etyq1z	crimsonletter	Mentalcel	36	How do you make friends as an adult?	I have none.	49
7764	2020-03-21 19...	13	fmk25r	quietlyill	Mentalcel	62	To be completely honest, I never really understood the exte...	Like I don't really know how to put this feeling in...	1007
7622	2020-03-11 00...	21	fgnohx	passionate0102	Former Femcel	21	Is it true that a woman can always get sex even if she is "ug...	I think it's true, I could have a different man ev...	305
7466	2020-02-23 0...	16	f82fa2	quietlyill	Mentalcel	179	Does anybody else feel like no matter how much they glow...	Obviously, life as a depressed/anxious Stacy &g...	1005
7588	2020-03-08 0...	2	ff9nps	greenteaapplepie69	Mentalcel / Femcel	15	confused mentalcel vent	I've been really confused lately.	204
8411	2020-04-25 0...	18	g7lpsl	Slight_Picture	Baby Femcel	7	Could someone rate my face? Too shy to post publicly.	Would anyone mind rating my face? If so please...	210
5637	2019-07-03 2...	28	c8u41b	uglygalthrow	Femcel	36	Is there any truth to this?	Search for the AskWomen thread on being the...	2715
8066	2020-04-09 1...	30	fxtjtc	gillinthewater	Femcel	46	Let's talk about plastic surgery	I feel like plastic surgery is a hugeee cope on thi...	1692
6744	2019-11-23 00...	6	e090bc	RareSorbet	Femcel	34	Do any of you take sleeping pills for lonlieness at night?	I didn't realise it was a thing untill I read about a...	720
4693	2019-04-26 0...	3	bhgmmo	sprinklesquiggle	Volcel	13	Small rant about life	Because of my genetics and environmental fact...	1686
6643	2019-11-04 11:...	10	drfrnqj	uglygalthrow	TruFemcel, Very Mentally Ill	41	Anybody else scared to leave the house?	I have some kind of eye infection and maybe mo...	275
6607	2019-10-30 08...	4	dp3dk4	sadgirl_juice	Volcel	4	daily reminder	daily reminder that no matter how gorgeous you...	300
5511	2019-06-22 14...	13	c3p2v0	femaleaspie1999	Mentalcel	91	Most people who talk about female privilege are the ones w...	&#x200B;	651
8299	2020-04-19 2...	8	g4cr6h	Happylittleshadows	Femcel	59	I'm not recognized as a female to begin with	Once at hs i was standing with a group of girls a...	313
5282	2019-06-02 15...	30	bvxfzx	daveachapella	Baby Femcel	189	Is anyone else drained from seeing pretty girls EVERYWHE...	Ugh. I know I'm a Bitter Betty. I'm in no way bla...	1219
5403	2019-06-14 15...	6	cOk5rs	idiots_are_stupid	Femcel	5	Can somebody rate my side profile?	I'm seriously considering chin or nose surgery b...	120
5613	2019-07-02 0...	18	c82tcy	uglygalthrow	Femcel	24	What is the worst part about being a femcel in your opinion?	To me, it's people not even giving you a chance...	158
5132	2019-05-24 0...	7	bscfnp	Justanuglygirl22	Volcel	17	Made a new sub for volcels/wgtow	I saw a few people here wondering if there was...	775
5428	2019-06-16 19...	7	ctcox4	Throwawaygal0293ru0	Femcel	5	You ever wonder why guys always refer to objects with femi...	I think it's because deep down, they actually do...	332
8506	2020-04-29 0...	0	g9z9pl	sleepie_	Baby Femcel	1	Why do men, especially red pill and conservative men, cons...	Obligatory disclaimer... I'm younger than 18... s...	2794
3358	2019-02-07 2...	4	ao7qm0	femmecel	Femcel	4	Most hot girls lowkey have no presence tbh	Like RiRi and almost every women empowermen...	124
3703	2019-02-21 21...	37	at7vif	khmln	Femcel	83	I crush on fictional characters	Because I am ashamed of having a crush on rea...	384
8112	2020-04-12 01...	10	fz14sc	CoolAndNice	Femcel	42	Anyone notice people are nicer when you wear a facemask	Moids are more social to me it's a confusing fee...	108
6251	2019-09-14 07...	11	d4181g	dontknowwhyimalive	Mentalcel	143	College is a nightmare	A week of college has passed but it feels like it'...	754
6256	2019-09-15 13...	48	d4jbio	cheezypussy	Femcel	421	Minors shouldn't be allowed on this sub	I think itd irresponsible to let minors on this sub...	494
4857	2019-05-07 07...	18	blmxfp	existentialpanic	Femcel	16	Have you ever found a "miracle" product for your skin?	Jojoba oil was a life saver for me back when I ha...	909
7374	2020-02-11 01...	16	f208tc	littlecuterose	Socialcel/Mentalcel	26	Anyone else notice that stacies/gilga stacies seem to have n...	Like I mean they either are dumb af and act you...	186
3047	2019-01-11 10:...	30	agw2ra	BlackPillTruthBomb	Former Femcel	Ascended	10	Are there any other women here with kids or are considerin...	I was considering becoming a single mother by...	783
7908	2020-03-31 0...	47	fs4zq5	face2cmnarrower	Trufemcel	128	I have no sympathy for people who are bitching because th...	How am I supposed to feel sympathy for people...	1267
3368	2019-02-08 0...	31	aoch0n	gigababegirl	Femcel Supremacist	31	Femcels, Sisters, Confession time. What are your guilty ple...	I'm a feminist who loves to play classical piano...	399
4552	2019-04-15 08...	11	bdcr3a	missTheraphosidae	Femcel	58	I don't hate men...	But when someone makes a post like saying ho...	418
4746	2019-04-28 2...	26	bifs0z	popcorn_popcorn	Normie	11	Today I noticed stretch marks on myself for the first time	I was looking at myself in the mirror today and r...	761
6158	2019-08-27 21...	9	cw9jqv	YeetThisAccLater	Femcel	67	Why does it matter so much?	(Please excuse me if I sound crazy, I am very st...	1943
4377	2019-03-31 15...	12	b7njfq	MotznRoth	Normie	54	Examples pf True Kindness	I think, amid the bitter doses of Black- and Pink...	999
6182	2019-08-30 15...	10	cxgycd	RareSorbet	Femcel	16	Descriptions about wives and girlfriends from guys are now...	I was reading r/titfu which is pretty much r/Today...	529
6284	2019-09-21 15...	13	d7atmu	daveachapella	Baby Femcel	53	I thought I ascended. I was so wrong	I was so happy. But i was so wrong. I was appro...	757
7596	2020-03-09 0...	13	ffin19j	ihatebeingfa	Femcel	38	Feeling like I can't ascend because I'm blackcel	Is it possible to looksmax as a black femcel? I fe...	289
7777	2020-03-22 1...	2	fn05n8	raindampened	Fatcel	19	developing small crushes based on personalities	so this is an observation based on my personal...	1640

a.

Unnamed: 0	created	id	score	author	clean_text	corp_len	parent_id
42077	2018-10-31 21:33:02	e8t6u1w	7	psychoticsecretariat	Yep they never tell the whole story, which is that most women are perfectly willing to date men they might rate "below...	346	t3_9sw0e
5855	2018-06-08 10:21:19	e0bf5b	15	throwaway-637	Fatcels are volcels. Any fat femcels here: lose weight, and only come back if guys still merely treat you like a joke.	323	t3_8ph72o
36708	2018-10-13 22:51:09	e7pmve3	4	waytogoradar2	Is it cause they're sick if not being able to use the bathroom in peace in their home country. Cause I think anyone would...	143	t3_9nva3g
325	2018-05-09 07:17:27	dyon1vw	-2	FederalCatastrophe	Spoiler: it is a man pulling a prank.	37	t1_dyo2d05
61986	2019-01-19 02:29:14	eeej60a	15	daveachapella	That's an example of what women genitally prefer and causes mass outrage amongst men. I'm not encouraging women...	597	t1_eeeih1u
94092	2019-04-29 07:33:23	em1faja	1	sprinklesquiggle	I thought the same until I found Maggie Lindemann.	50	t1_em09zhj
55072	2018-12-22 22:52:52	ecct6sr	1	greensilvermoss	I think there can be clusters like that because for me even my mom's generation it was normal for the women to make...	751	t1_eccegw9
59684	2019-01-08 12:28:43	edjym7o	6	[deleted]	Thanks! Being ugly your whole life kind of has its advantage in a sense that you mostly observe people and learn their l...	222	t1_edjv24a
41158	2018-10-28 18:01:35	e8m0lew	3	baepsaeya7	Just lipstick alone makes me look weird. But I gotta go a bit more dramatic to not look like a little kid playing with her m...	136	t1_e8m0diq
124572	2019-12-05 23:54:57	f9s619q	2	SnowHunter9000	Truerateme is trash. They always rate obvious 8/9/10s as 6.	59	t3_e6bpq4
37010	2018-10-15 05:28:20	e7se27g	-2	LegendaryGreatfool	Mmmk. Not quite familiar with how Reddit works.. I figured it would take awhile for it to pick up anyways lol.	110	t3_9o8y50
86170	2019-03-28 23:23:30	ejm3acv	1	bloobird08	Well if it wasn't long then it's possible it's because he just can't keep a girl like that.. she probably left for a better opti...	53	t1_ed6nek8
57636	2019-03-02 01:04:04	ed1nynx	13	gigababejfl	While MGTOW gets the concept right, let's talk about how so many of them decided to pay for sex and attention on a r...	446	t1_ed1nqzr
79194	2019-03-08 01:06:09	ei18r95	7	future-stacy	I grew up stupid rich but now I'm estranged from my family poor. I'm going to statusmaxx and start a tech business tho...	123	t3_ayixv3
55821	2018-12-26 14:13:09	ecl0uiz	25	opposietetechnician3	I think that's mostly just r/gendercritical, with the transgender trend it's kind of taken over. The Tumblr radfems I follow...	217	t1_efz45ey
6398	2018-06-10 22:12:37	e0g5cjb	2	[deleted]	Change your personality says IT	31	t1_e0fag2x
38181	2018-10-19 14:51:28	e824bn0	3	ausreisepflichtige	what is that? tindermaxxing and volcel?	39	t1_e8246wp
58413	2019-01-04 04:14:13	ed75fq4	4	[deleted]	I've posted on normal subs and gotten rude comments	53	t1_ed6nek8
90273	2019-04-14 16:29:53	ekvea8z	1	coratoad	How did you fall in love with him?	34	t3_b1lzip
82111	2019-03-16 21:53:50	eioprdu	1	Automatic_Child	I will when I get skinny	24	t3_bcr0q0
75786	2019-02-27 05:02:09	ehdffbd	1	melancholyblues	I'm the biggest chicken you ever met. I can't even handle ominous soundtracks	151	t1_ehc5w9v
14410	2018-07-03 22:17:15	e1qlssq	10	yes-imavolcel	I really wish that the emotional support was stronger in brotherhoods. Caring for other people shouldn't be designed to...	873	t1_ejm2oqc
16395	2018-07-10 03:25:51	e23kdso	1	norussianayy	Not to piss on your parade, but isn't a collective hive-mind toxic mentality antithetical to supporting one another?	118	t1_e23jfuq
78838	2019-03-07 02:54:45	ehyplza	6	oikoii	Oh, trust me, I know that logically 100%! And I don't think less of any *other* woman based on her appearance, only *m...	198	t1_ehypf26
129548	2020-01-29 01:30:17	ftv7xhl	6	needecon	First of all, "the wall" isn't a hard number and it applies to both genders/sexes. Simply put, if you stop putting effort into...	1071	t3_ev7e0o
44766	2018-11-11 21:56:54	e9iazea	2	-Dies-	It explained it all well enough, I appreciate it.	50	t1_e9iac4h
94296	2019-04-30 08:09:46	em4c5lw	11	gigababejfl	I'm mad bc its true.	20	t1_em4b5wh
36398	2018-10-12 12:42:23	e7mn936	5	AsleepMaterial	Wig? I'm trying to get the courage to wear them myself.	55	t3_9ni2qt
12774	2018-06-28 01:12:14	e1eqof9	1	[deleted]	Not surprised at all. I remember another femcel posting on here that she had been messaging with an incel but then h...	144	t3_8ue9ny
666	2018-05-10 21:03:42	dyrpu43	5	TheOtherGuy9603	Lose weight, fix posture. Fucking loser femcels just as retarded as loser incels	80	t3_8hz6t4
15285	2018-07-06 08:48:00	e1vmwmz	5	SleuthingSloth	It's okay. I don't *usually* hate myself too much for the way I am, but I am realistic about how others are likely to see m...	249	t1_e1vm658
140482	2020-04-07 02:55:41	fmn9b9r	2	[deleted]	I know what you mean. I feel like most of the people I've seen on here aren't actually ugly at all.	259	t3_fv0uj4
129047	2020-01-23 09:29:29	ftbigct	4	clickclack58	not her, the braces one. if you look at her post history, she has other pictures and she's so pretty.	101	t1_ffbit3j
8079	2018-06-17 18:46:45	e0tqxn8	3	aquestforlove	I tried this experiment out myself, same pics, and it got TONS of messages within the first hour of the profile being crea...	126	t3_8rs8m4
15247	2018-07-06 06:54:50	e1vieok	1	Lezzymclezface	I feel like you have some serious daddy issues rn. Your constant need for attention is not just regular rapey troll bullshit...	176	t1_e1vi922
103632	2019-06-05 19:40:53	eq3i931	4	bigiimcringe	Yeah, I figured. I'll def. Make sure they're an actual poster here before spilling the tea.	91	t1_eq1v9r9
60431	2019-01-12 10:56:00	edvrz3g	24	[deleted]	Dude, if you were ugly I would tell you that, this isn't a sub for "everyone is pretty" bullshit. That's why I'm *telling* you,...	265	t1_edvqt123
20811	2018-07-28 01:41:57	e35fjcc	2	[deleted]	Thank you. Dear lord I've never even come close to a penis and I'm 32.	71	t1_e351sby

b.