

Excluded. A Digital Ethnographic Investigation on the Femcel Community

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Abstract

The paper purpose is to explore the feelings of exclusion and anger expressed on digital platforms by a community of women identifying within the Femcel subculture. The term “Femcel” is a portmanteau of “female” and “incel” (involuntary celibate), referred to women unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships despite their desires and efforts. This sense of frustration, within the realm of digital communications, is heightened by the architecture of platforms, which reinforces and perpetuates existing power hierarchies, confining individuals within echo chambers.

This paper analyses the most important online Femcel communities on Reddit, named “Vindicta”, through digital ethnography facilitated by the NVivo software. The body of academic literature addressing women’s distress to sexual inadequacy is insufficient; conversely, male Incels have garnered scholarly and journalistic attention for their lack of sexual capital. The study has underscored that despite Incel women being considered unattractive and “undesirable”, they lament the lack of authorization to lay claim to an identity based on this state of abjection. This is due to the presumption that any woman could seduce a man if she really wanted to, consequently disregarding the recognition of the Femcel figure as a legitimate identity, in contrast to the treatment of male Incels.

Keywords: Femcel, online community, gender representations.

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1. Introduction

This work tries to open a passage through the Femcel subculture (women who define themselves as involuntary celibate) and the ways in which the activists of the Femcelosphere share within online spaces their experiences of social exclusion and melancholy for being “left behind”.

Involuntary female single status is organized and discussed within a complex ecology of online forums that are supported and livened up by different impulses and political orientations (Kay, 2022).

Femcelosphere entails different and sometimes contradictory philosophies: some “Pinkpilled” women identify themselves as radical feminists (Radfem) promoting the movement “Women Going Their Own Way”, whose calls for separatism have interesting similarities with previous articulations of political lesbianism, others define themselves as “Redpilled” and antifeminists, some others are obsessed by the idea of “ascending” to a non Femcel condition and of making sure they have men’s approval and attentions, for those who instead define themselves as “Blackpilled” the feeling of being left behind and marginalised by the society because they are ugly provokes a condition of deep depression which does not allow ways out from the Femcelosphere.

Therefore, in the plurality of the Femcelosphere, different expressions related to the different declinations of female live together and they are evidence of models of intersectional social exclusion (Crenshaw, 1989).

From this perspective, the term Femcel can be considered as a portmanteau concept, a meta-construct that includes different identities and involves a wide range of attitudes towards the sense of anger, suffering and humiliation for being involuntary celibate.

Although there is no univocal definition for the term Femcel, also because of few academic studies dealing with sufferings of women who feel sexually failed (Kay, 2022), and although the term tends to gain more and more nuances, in general, the word Femcel refers to those women who suffer because they live a condition of emotional and sexual solitude. This condition leads some women who define themselves as involuntarily celibate to use online female spaces to discuss challenges, risks and the sense of solitude, humiliation, social exclusion and abjection that they have to face every day.

Men’s rights movements (MRM) have grown considerably in the last four decades, above all due to the potential of online communities and social media platforms that are becoming more and more instrumental for the increase in popularity of the movement (Rafail & Freitas, 2019). Scholars state that Incels, or involuntary male celibate, belong to the wider Manosphere, originating from the Men’s Right Movement (MRM) earlier mentioned (Lily, 2016, as quoted in Labbaf, 2020). There is wide existing literature on male Incels (Bratich & Banet-

Weiser, 2019; Bates, 2020, to quote some of them Phillips, 2016; Ging, 2017; Nagle, 2017), which provides an important context and detailed information on the MRM community and on online communities in general. However, while Incels have been and are still now accurately studied, little literature has been produced on Femcels' sense of exclusion and anger.

The study is divided into two parts. In the first part, Femcel and Incel movements are explored, and foundations are laid to observe Femcels' sense of exclusion and sadness. The work moves on to explore, through qualitative ethnographic research, the ways in which users join these marginalised and underground online spaces and through which dynamics their points in common are developed and claimed and their differences are stated as well as to study the role of their digital life in moulding their identification (Delli Paoli & Masullo, 2022). The Reddit community for Femcel "Vindicta" (Balci et al., 2023) will be then analyzed as case study. We chose to analyze Vindicta, among other Femcel communities observed, because being a forum dedicated to beauty advice, it can attract this specific audience and provide an environment where these women can share their experiences and concerns. Beauty forums often address issues related to physical and mental well-being, including self-esteem and self-perception issues. This can make the forum an appropriate place to examine how women who identify as "Femcel" feel, what kind of self-image they construct, and how social pressures influence their self-esteem. Furthermore, an online forum can provide a large pool of data, including posts, comments, and discussions, which can be analyzed to better understand the thought patterns, experiences, and opinions of women involved in the Femcel movement. The use of an online forum allows users to share their experiences relatively anonymously while respecting their privacy. This is particularly important when addressing sensitive issues such as social exclusion and self-esteem. Finally, online forums offer a community context where people can feel more relaxed in expressing themselves. This can be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the social dynamics among women who identify as Femcel and how they influence one another.

2. Femcel, Incel and gender representations of involuntary celibate in digital media

The massive spread of digital platforms has extended the possibilities, for different social groups, to create real online communities where they exchange and nurture their own ideas. In the last years these online environments have given the chance to groups of men who define themselves through the term Incel (involuntary celibate) to grow and become more and more dangerous. The

figure of Incel has become the symbol of a form of “toxic masculinity” and of what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) has called networked misogyny.

The Manosphere (Farci & Righetti, 2019) represents a range of blogs, forums and Websites dedicated to debating masculinity. Its two most significant subcultures are Men’s Rights Activists (MRA) and pick-up artists (PUA), but it also includes antifeminists, groups for fathers’ rights, Incels (involuntary celibate), androphilic (men attracted by the same sex who do not identify themselves as homosexuals), paleo-masculinist (who believe that male ruling is natural) and even more obscure and marginalised groups (Gotell & Dutton, 2016).

Online platforms as Reddit and the website 4Chan have risen as breeding ground for communities of men who are denied women’s sex and affection.

Curiosity and morbidity about the phenomenon of “involuntary celibate”, together with anonymity and self-referentiality of this subculture, has often led the press to give portraits that are confused and not totally corresponding to reality. The most widespread is that Incels are all the same and referable to the category of men who are losers, who are not able to have sexual relations, therefore ignoring social and ideological aspects and repercussions of the phenomenon. This study wonders how the figure of the Femcel woman and her feeling of being left behind enmark in the wider scenario of platforms dominated by chauvinist logics. An interesting aspect, so far little considered by scholars and researchers, is exactly the sense of exclusion felt by women and expressed in online private and marginal spaces, and the fact that also women can define themselves as involuntary celibate (or it would be better to say singlehood). In this receptacle of anger and social inequality the so-called Femcels have found their own space, an online community of women who describe themselves as unable to have sexual or romantic relations due to a toxic mix of misogyny and impossible standards of beauty. They are a female version of male Incel, rightly involuntary celibates who, in general, feel authorized to have sex with women and feel resented if they do not obtain it. Analyzing and comparing the figures of Incel and Femcel, Kay (2022) underlines how Incels’ seething resentment can be intended as a much wider structure of feelings, therefore white men’s anger and humiliation for being left behind are more and more present as a propulsive affective force in contemporary politics and culture.

The figure of Femcel, differently from the figure of male Incel, does not have the same political drive within the collective imaginary. In other words, if women’s sexual exclusion is intended as a problem, it is a problem there is nothing to do about. Kay (2022) intends the difficulty in deciphering the Femcel identity in a wider context in which white men’s anger, expropriation and solitude are hyper-visible, but where women’s psychic suffering, exclusions and

humiliations are not accepted as political problems. The link between involuntary male celibate and wider issues of injustice and inequality is a common aspect in the debate on mainstream media. Some claim that involuntary male celibate can be considered a consequence of social and cultural rules imposing standards of beauty, gender roles, sexual performances and romantic success. These rules can create pressures and expectations that some individuals are not able to meet, leading them to feel excluded or isolated.

In online spaces, as in offline life, women who identify themselves as Femcels can face a specific kind of gender abuse and sexualization. While male Incels can be perceived as “ugly” or “non-desirable” by society, Femcels often face a further dimension of stigma linked to the assumption according to which every woman can easily attract a man if she really wanted to. As a consequence, Femcels’ experiences can be denied or minimized, creating a dynamics in which their challenges and pain are not adequately recognized or understood. This can lead to a sensation of isolation and lack of support within the online community. A backbone of the Incel ideology is that women tend to hypergamy, that is they are biologically advantaged in having all sexual partners they want, even those above their reach. For an Incel, therefore, a woman can never be an involuntary celibate, and evidence of this is exactly the attentions that a Femcel receives from men as soon as she starts attending an Incel community. Within the Manosphere, but also on mainstream media where this discourse is poured, the clear message is that women are the only ones benefiting from the new sexual market, as they have a high “sexual value on the market” which they use to the detriment of men. In many respects this argumentation is not new: it has been long stated that sexuality is a domain where women have power over men. That power is attributed to a logics of “supply and demand” in which men are always desperate looking for sex (Kay, 2022).

3. Research methodology

Taking into account the theoretical premises outlined in the preceding sections, this study aims to analyze the experiences, emotional landscapes, and social interactions of women within the Femcel community. The primary objective is to uncover and comprehend the nuanced narratives, feelings of exclusion, and social pressures faced by Femcels, exploring their digital engagement, identities, and intersections within these marginalized online spaces.

Reddit is an online platform hosting a wide range of communities called subreddit, where users can share contents under the form of text, posts or hypertextual links, take part in discussions and interact with people who have

similar interests. Users, moreover, can give marks to, “upvote” or “downvote” the posted contents: these marks determine, then, positioning and visibility of the different contents on the pages of the site.

For this reason, it has been chosen to adopt a qualitative research approach based on digital ethnography, a method that suits ethnographic techniques with the study of social space of online discussion (Delli Paoli, 2021; Delli Paoli & D’Auria, 2021).

The use of Netnography as a research approach for the analysis of gender-related topics on online forums represents a methodological framework that is rich and highly attuned to the nuances of digital contexts, offering a significant contribution to the understanding of social, cultural, and communicative dynamics associated with these themes. Multiple factors have influenced this choice, rooted in the very nature of virtual forums and the complexity of gender-related issues addressed in these spaces. First and foremost, Netnography provides a robust methodological framework that enables researchers to immerse themselves deeply in the virtual environment of online forums, allowing for ethnographic analysis of social interactions, communicative practices, and user behaviors. This approach precisely captures the subtleties and intricate dynamics that characterize gender-related discussions and interpersonal relationships within these digital communities. Secondly, Netnography offers the opportunity to gather data directly from the source, namely, participants in online forums, without interfering with the dynamics of conversation. This promotes an authentic and non-intrusive analysis of the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of members of virtual communities, including those who identify with specific gender identities.

More specifically, the digital field considered is the online community *Vindicta* present on Reddit. The digital field for this research is the discussion forum, and in particular, the digital material has been collected on the homepage of the subreddit, which includes detailed information about *Vindicta* and the objectives of the community, the process of identification, slang, labels and categories, the key assumptions of being a female user of *Vindicta*.

The observation of the platform and reading its contents (lurking) has been carried out adopting a non-participant approach (therefore, without interacting with the subjects of the study and without revealing our role of researchers) because it has been considered that the presence of a stranger within this particular community would have been unwelcome and not desired. There are different discussions around the problem of researchers’ invisibility in social spaces. Although aware that the practice of lurking has different ethical implications (Bell, 2001; Delli Paoli & Masullo, 2022; Heath et al., 1999; Hine, 2005), it has been thought that in the case of the Femcel community of *Vindicta* it is able to offer a unique opportunity to collect “natural” data, as members are

not aware of their status of whistleblowers and they do not modify their attitude in consequence of the presence of the researcher (Delli Paoli & Masullo, 2022; Langer & Beckman, 2005; Puri, 2007). In other words, it has been thought that in this case the benefits of lurking can overcome the social and ethical costs of such a violation (Delli Paoli, 2022). For this reason, to protect participants' anonymity, direct quotations have been reported in anonymous form, deleting all users' personal detail. Some selection criteria have been crucial to filter large quantities of data that have been later manually memorized. A targeted approach (Delli Paoli & Masullo, 2022; Patton, 1990) has been used for sampling message threads. Comments of the forum have been downloaded and saved when considered relevant for the community (they have received a high number of comments and "upvotes"). A total of 1042 comments has been analyzed.

To provide a framework of the phenomenon studied, analysis and collection of data have been carried out simultaneously and in an interconnected way; this process implies the exploration, organization, interpretation and extraction of the meanings of collected data. In order to do so, a manual qualitative analysis of the content of comments has been carried out.

The conversations were collected on Reddit between January and April 2023, examined by the researchers, and categorized using the NVivo software. This tool serves as a valuable support for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, providing a method to organize, analyze, and extract meanings from unstructured data such as texts, audio, video, images, and other formats (Coppola, 2011). Through this process, 1042 comments were gathered and categorized by the software into five overarching categories: 1. Antifeminism; 2. Assertions about feeling beautiful; 3. Pink pill ideology; 4. Beauty advice to shine and become a Stacy woman; 5. Irrelevant comments. Qualitative analysis played a central role in the adopted methodology. A meticulous examination of these narratives aimed to comprehend the perspectives of Vindicta members regarding feelings of exclusion and social dissatisfaction arising from self-perceived unattractiveness. Simultaneously, quantitative analysis facilitated measuring the frequency and distribution of words, ideas, and narrative structures associated with the concept of beauty and the phenomenon of lookism in society. This methodological approach helped the acquisition of quantitative data, enabling a more impartial understanding of prevailing patterns within the conversations.

4. The research object and the analysis of comments¹

Vindicta is part of the wider Pink pill community, composed by radical feminists who, through their activism on forums and social media are attracting more and more attention and new female followers, and it includes different philosophies, even contradictory ones, as previously said. The community called Pink Pill is a heterogeneous Femcel movement which focuses on women's education and empowerment. This term derives from the concept of Red pill that has become popular in the context of Incels and of men's rights movements (MMR). Redpilled are a group of misogynous men stating they know the "truth" (reference to the science fiction film "The Matrix") about women, considered the cause of their solitude. In the context of the Pink Pill community, the "red pill" represents the idea of an education that aims at providing women with a critical perspective on society, relations and gender issues. Moreover, some Pink pill ramifications are considered misogynist, transphobic and homophobic (Cousineau, 2021). The Pink Pill community has taken shape as an answer to dominating models of beauty and the challenges that women can face in society. Women too often have to deal with sexism, racism and stereotypes that can negatively impact on their self-esteem, relations and opportunities. Within this complex ecology, the subreddit *Vindicta* is the most important forum dedicated to female involuntary celibate, apart from being a Femcel space strongly oriented to the desire to "shine". It has been founded after the Internet site ThePinkPill.co has been closed down, in response to the "Red Pill" community, and it includes 60,934 members.

The community offers a wide range of functions as resources and information about the community, a message board, a chat room and discussion forum. It is a Subreddit created as space where Femcels can talk about "lookmaxxing", which is advice to improve one's own physical aspect with a combination of "soft" approaches make-up and "hard" approaches (plastic surgery), health (HEALTH-MAXXING), personality (PERSONALITY MAXXING), sociality (SOCIAL-MAXXING). All Subreddits are equipped with a widget "Information about the Community" at the top and a widget "Moderators" at the bottom, that can't be rearranged nor removed. At the top on the right, in an overhead post, all the main characteristics of the community are explained and described and a message of welcome to users is sent (Tab.1):

¹ The comments and descriptions used in this research and taken from the *Vindicta* forum are made public by the platform.

Table 1. About Community.

About Community
Vindicta is a women-only community 100% dedicated to improving beauty, attractiveness, and allure. We weaponize beauty and make it work for us. Come for honest discussions, science, tips, and tricks to help you acquire your desired look. This is a ThePinkPill.co community. Created Aug 2, 2019

This description indicates the sense of support, solidarity and sociality that the forum tries to provide, and also how this sociality is based on negative affections, sharp and sincere judgments and the awareness that beauty must be used as a weapon to win the game of romantic relations.

Immediately after this, there is a section containing the rules of Vindicta and two more sections containing some introduction to lookmaxxing and some strategies and theories to look more beautiful (Tab.2):

Table 2. Rules and concepts.

r/Vindicta Rules	Intro to Looksmaxxing	Looks Theory
1. No Men Allowed	The Key To Getting a Snatched	Psychology of Attraction
2. No subjective beauty	Waist/Flat Tummy	Features Essential to be a Stacy
3. Truerateme posters will be banned	Booty Building Masterpost	Failos, Halos, and Neithers
4. Don't have a victim mentality	Masterpost for Resources	Facial Profile Analysis
5. No Racism or Internalized Racism	The Rules of Looksmaxxing	Witch Skull vs. Angel Skull
6. All posts must add value to the subreddit	The Holy Trinity	Short midface is essential to be a stacy
7. No cope posts	Beginner's Guide to Looksmaxxing	Small lower third + short midface is CRUCIAL to being a Stacy
8. This sub is primarily for ugly women	Soft-Maxxing part 1: Makeup	What Makes Eyes Attractive?
9. No Personal Attacks	Weight Loss is the Best Surgery	What Makes an Eye Area Good or Bad
10. No Self Posts	Comprehensive Fragrance	Foreheadmaxxing
	Masterpost	

The homepage of the subreddit Vindicta, moreover, has a board for users' posts and a section called *Wiki* containing information about the slang and the basic principles of the community (Tab.3).

Although so far few studies have been carried out on Femcels, the community seems to be very active (interactions among members are regular) and interactive (communication among participants is consistent). On the forum, one can read posts focused on making the most of one's aspect in order to "help you get through in society", references to romantic appointments as if they were military missions ("armed beauty") and incitements to "play in order to win". As male Incels, even female users of *Vindicta* find the reason for being sexually refused in their own aspect and believe that beauty is a science (Toma & Hancock, 2010). In one of the most voted posts entitled "Beauty is universal", the most appreciated comments attribute women's beauty to shared

characteristics among which “symmetrical face”, “fleshy lips”, “small noses”, “positive inclination of the eyes”, “smaller forehead”, “neotenic features” and “smaller jaw/chin”.

Table 3. *r/Vindicta – Wiki (2 years ago)*.

What is Looksmaxxing?	What is Vindicta's version of Looksmaxxing?	Where can I find the most helpful posts for beginners?
Looksmaxxing is the process of 'maxxing out' your looks to the best they can possibly be. This is based on 'the female beauty ideal' of your culture and scientific studies. Beauty ideals vary across cultures, however there is some crossover. all races seem to find women with neotenus features attractive [citation?] and a higher waist to hip ratio is generally preferred, except for one remote tribe which actually preferred a lower waist to hip ratio [citation?].	Vindicta's version of Looksmaxxing includes Mentality-maxxing, Money-maxxing and many more. These things are outside of the realm of traditional looksmaxxing, but are very important during the process. You want to work on building a life that is fulfilling to you, along with self worth and a strong dose of resilience. Looksmaxxing is a notoriously painful process, and if you're not taking care of yourself it will eat you alive.	If you are on desktop, please see the sidebar. If you are on mobile, please check out the About section.

Some Femcels feel a sort of resentment towards the kind of feminism that challenged traditional standards of beauty, especially requiring that even those who were not up to those standards must feel beautiful anyway, regardless their own experiences.

In a post created by moderators, a welcome to Vindicta is given and the purpose of the community is underlined:

“Welcome Back to Vindicta! Hello ladies! Welcome back to Vindicta!

It's been a long time coming with so many women sending messages and saying in other spaces how they miss this sub and the community of incredible women that made it something special here on Reddit.

A few things to catch you up:

We are a community for women only!

This sub is about acquiring and enhancing beauty with actionable tips and useful observations. Positivity is always welcome but it is not a replacement for advice or objective discussions about beauty and looksmaxxing. We can virtue signal everywhere else. We want to keep this sub very useful to you by helping you find out what you really need to know.

[...] The unapologetic beauty of all ethnic backgrounds are welcome here. Every last one! Post what you want to see to encourage more posting of what you want to see. From ratings charts to talks of specific features or goals, we want to make sure all shades have a seat at the table.

Vindicta was created for unattractive female users on Reddit and helping them mastermind ways to drastically improve their appearance and allure. I ask that users be respectful and helpful because we want to pump out success

stories from women who actually get help and feel comfortable asking for it here. If you see mean girls acting against other users here, please flag for removal.

Vindicta can get pretty hardcore but like all female spaces online, it will have its limits. Vindicta is a pink pill community and you can find its uncensored counterpart (as well as other female-based subs you miss from Reddit) on [ThePinkPill.co/+Vindicta](https://www.thepinkpill.co/+Vindicta).

ThePinkPill is a new and growing female-based version of Reddit where women get to be unfiltered. All types of female communities, banned or not, can sprout without worrying about being ousted or attacked by men or punished for unpopular opinions. It's in its very early stages so those who want to mod, donate, or contribute to building it to an amazing female alternative online are more than welcome. Alright, let's get back to the business of weaponizing beauty! Welcome back!"

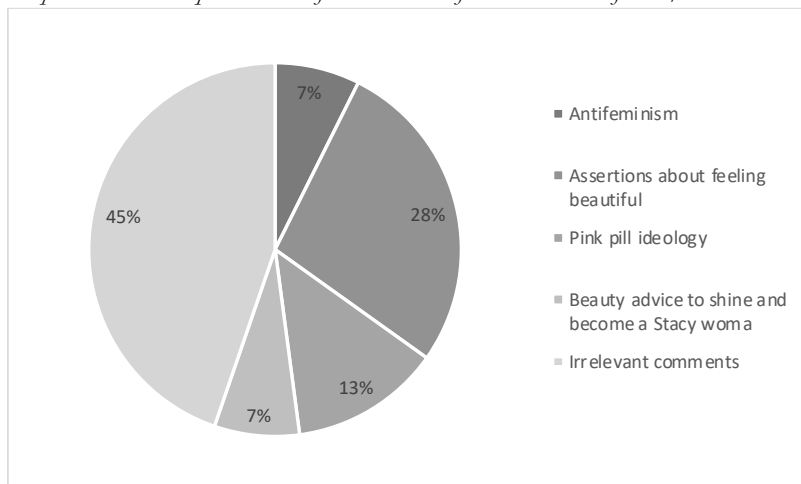
The analysis of comments has focused on highlighting experiences that are common to these users who identify themselves as Femcel, deriving from the fact that they feel ugly and excluded by the dimensions of sex and intimacy. Therefore recurrent topics, concerns and the most discussed topics in the community have been recorded. Through the content analysis of the comments, four central concepts arise, which include information about the identity, faced challenges, adopted strategies and shared values and the main concerns of the community. These four concepts are: 1. Antifeminism; 2. Assertions on feeling beautiful; 3. Pink pill ideology; 4. Beauty advice to shine and become a Stacy woman. The Graph 1 displays the categorization of comments.

An interesting aspect emerges from the "Pinkpill ideology" category, representing 45% of the total. Comments categorized in this class reflect an ideology that supports a critical perspective toward the dominant culture and social norms related to gender. It may embrace a critical approach toward patriarchy and societal beauty standards, encouraging female empowerment and a radical change in gender dynamics. "Antifeminism", refers to comments or discussions that oppose feminist ideologies, amounting to 7% of the total comments. "Assertions about feeling beautiful", constitutes 28% of the comments and involves expressions or discussions regarding personal feelings of beauty or attractiveness. "Beauty advice to shine and become a Stacy woman" represents 13% and includes advice or discussions aimed at enhancing one's appearance to conform to social standards associated with being a "Stacy woman".

The category "Irrelevant comments" which is the 7%, contains comments as: "talk to you later", "see you later", completely useless to our study. These conceptual cores can be included within a wider framework, that sees the

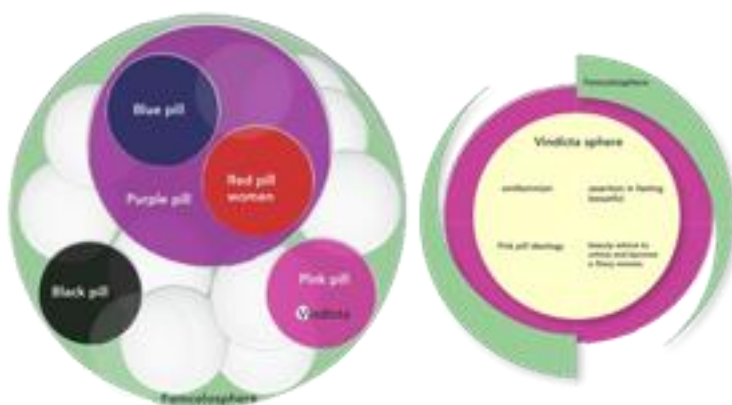
Community Vindicta (Fig.1) as a ramification of the Femcelosphere. The Femcelosphere is made up of different and heterogeneous declinations of the phenomenon: Pink pill, Blue pill, Red pill, Purple pill, Black pill (Fig.1).

Graph 1. Pie chart representation of comment classification extracted from r/ Vindicta.



Note: Irrelevant comments (7%); Antifeminism (7%); Assertions about feeling beautiful (28%); Pink pill ideology (45%); Beauty advice to shine and become a Stacy woman (13%). This caption provides a summary of the data depicted in the graph and highlights the corresponding percentages for each category

Figure 1. Representation of Femcel subculture.



Vindicta, inhabited by Femcel women, belongs to the wider Femcelosphere, and more specifically is a Pink pill environment. The representation of the spheres that is here proposed, does not identify the quantity of users in the sphere but only the presence of some realities within the Femcelosphere.

In spite of their community identity built through and within *Vindicta* and other platforms dedicated to the topic of involuntary singlehood, there is a nuance of variation in the way one is part of the Pinkpilled community. It can be noted, in fact, a certain degree of heterogeneity in the way in which these users find themselves in this online ecology and the personal reasons these users have to define themselves as “ugly”, Femcel, “unfuckable”, excluded. Therefore, two main dimensions of distinctions can be identified in this community. The first is linked to the fact that they feel ugly and try to “shine” and this leads to the need to be on forums such as *Vindicta* (Vindicta Sphere).

User 2: “This sub was founded by unattractive women. You cannot come in here and then shit on us. Average-looking and attractive women are allowed, but this sub is mostly focused on helping women who are well below average glow up.

We have worked hard to create this sub to help out fellow ugly women. All women can benefit from looking better, so all women are welcome here, but average and above average women are not the main focus of this sub. Below average women are. We mainly want to see ugly women become better looking, improve their social skills, gain relationships, etc.

We do not welcome any bluepilled posts/comments or any coping. Bluepilled basically means saying shit like “personality matters just as much as/more than looks,” “you just need to be confident,” “looks don't matter” etc. We also do not welcome comments like “pretty girls have it hard,” “just because you're pretty doesn't mean your life is easy,” “pretty girls have a lot of pressure on them” etc. This sub doesn't give a flying fuck about the “problems” of pretty women.

Edit for clarification: To be honest I thought it was pretty clear I'm not telling pretty women to leave, but I guess not 😬 here's my response to a former ugly woman asking whether she should leave the sub:

You're definitely still welcome here. You just can't shit on ugly women, tell us that it's fine to be a 4 or 5, give tips like “confidence will change how everyone sees you!” or tell people that all they need to do is dress cute and fill in their brows. Basically what I am saying is that you should be mindful of the fact that this sub is primarily intended for ugly women. You're welcome to share and receive tips, just keep in mind that ugly women have a long way to go before they can become beautiful and don't shit on us.

Hope that makes it extra clear”.

The second dimension is represented by belonging to the wider Femcelosphere, which is here considered as an umbrella concept which includes different identities (Delli Paoli & Masullo, 2022) and includes a wide range of attitudes towards the sense of anger, suffering and humiliation for being involuntary single.

User 3: «Women are not seen as valuable unless they're beautiful. Ugly women are invisible or worthless.

A controversial take but it's the truth.

Women are NOT valued for their ability to provide or earn money but for their looks and domesticity (if even that). No matter how much you try to rationalise that your personality matters; it simply wouldn't if you were ugly. Take Susan Boyle for example, it doesn't matter how sweet, lovely, dedicated or good of a singer she is; she didn't look the part and had limited success whereas, someone like Madison Beer can launch a successful music career based off her looks. Cindy Kimberly went viral because of her looks too and now makes more money than all those ugly femcels studying their ass off in engineering or CS schools for merely being pretty. Remember, when your parents told you that you should work hard and achieve your goals? Yeah, well all that doesn't matter if you're ugly because all people see is that your face is inadequate and all those doors that are wide open for pretty girls slam in your face. While, you study hard and collect pennies from your part time job to just meet the ends hoping that your crush doesn't notice your scruffy hair which you forgot to wash; stacy can just post pictures on Instagram to earn a sizable income and secure a job before she even graduates because the male interviewers are influenced by the halo effect.

With the rise of social media, beauty is no longer an option but a compulsion. Most women subconsciously know this which is why the beauty industry and the anti-aging industry are worth billions of dollars. Older women try face yoga, fitness and lathering on sunscreen too late in order to convince themselves that they have 'still got it' and that their 50 yr old bot bellied balding Billy Joe husband is still attracted to them. Because it's too hard to accept the fact that he is totally not perverting on the 19 yr old college girl for whom he offers to take out the bins, walk dogs and mow the garden (using his mouth instead, of the mowing machine because the poor girl needs to save electricity).

Anyways, that was a long winded way of saying that women are hardly valued for anything else other than beauty. I have the blessing of being hideous so the treatment I receive from people everywhere is hostile and it's so evident that they're bothered by my presence as an ugly woman.

This might be a ranty water is wet kind of post but I'm sick of women thinking that personality has any impact on how people treat them because let's be real bitchy Taylor hill would still get people licking her toes».

Reading the different posts on the homepage of Vindicta, many references can be found to the Incel language, which is used in the whole Incelosphere (Schofield, 2021). Users, for example, frequently use terms such as “Chad”, used to refer to “high rank” men, and “Stacy” to “high level” women (Dolce & Pilla, 2019). Vindicta has many similarities with male Incels’ concerns. The common topics of discussion in the group are how ugliness impacts on life opportunities, sociality, romantic relations and careers. Instead, “Stacy” girls are considered as the real winners because they are courted and desired in any situation.

User 4: “Stacy, Stacylite, Becky, Normie, Femcel. Whats the catch?

Im a bit confused on these therms. Can anyone tell me how would be the difference of each ones dating experience? What each of these means excatly? Do you need to be Stacy in order to have fullfied romantic life? Do Beckies Normies and Femcels have more stuggle on dating? What does does terms mean and how do you understand which one is you?”.

In this Pink pill community, “ugliness” influences women’s lives, as pointed out by opinions and debates on the platform Vindicta.

User 4: “ugly (<4) Sometime when I was getting some changes to my face, the "friends" I had got really hostile. Trying to gaslight me into believing I was improving my life "because i hated myself", sending me horror stories of botched plastic surgery to try to talk me out of getting work done, holding these weird interventions where they'd get random acquaintences on video saying they liked how i looked before because it was "more unique" or "different".

The first time a random person flirted with me at a bar after my glow up, one of my biggest "friends" (they were bullies) had a complete meltdown in the bathroom. She was crying because nobody had bought her a drink tonight but someone was flirting with "fucking Squirrels" , like the idea of anyone being attracted to me was a personal assault on her.

This sort of "token ugly girl" treatment happens all the time. Talk to anyone who was fat but lost weight, or had bad acne but it cleared up--- people who used to keep you around because they have low self esteem and comparing themselves against someone "uglier" makes them feel good.

I got away from all those people after that one girl had a breakdown and everyone coddled her and told me i should have considered HER feelings before changing MY face.

The friends I attract these days are naturally supportive, interested in helping eachothers careers or learning about eachothers hobbies. Being normal looking is a completely different world because people see me as a person whose words and contributions matter, instead of as a scapegoat to be made fun of and called "weird". Nothing about me or my behavior has

changed besides the color of my hair, the shape of my brow, and the symmetry of my face”.

According to female users, the society often imposes unrealistic standards of beauty and promotes stereotypes of beauty that can negatively influence women’s perception of their own body image. Women can feel object of judgment, criticism and discrimination based on their physical aspect, and this can impact their self-esteem, trust and emotional well-being.

Their physical aspect influences their social and relational interactions. This can involve access to chances of romantic meetings, friendships or job opportunities. For this, women who talk on Vindicta feel marginalised, excluded or treated in a different way because of their physical aspect.

User 5: “I honestly have the same question as i have ton of major unchangeable failos like large misshapen skull, major jaw deformity and extremely low ipd between eyes. Literally all of my features are failos, i dont even have one halo. I need ton of major hardmaxxing to become just a normie or normal looking atleast, not even a becky or stacy, i still dont have enough funds for it and its safe to say i never will, even my family is against surgeries and just tell me to rely on softmaxxing. I would describe myself between 2-3 even a 3 is generous i feel. I just wish r/trufemcels was back as it was the only community i related to. Im sorry if this comment isnt suitable for vindicta but i just wanted to let you know i relate to how your feeling and i hope you find some motivation for looksmaxxing”.

A negative perception of one’s self linked to physical aspect can contribute to mental health problems, such as insecurity, social anxiety, depression and eating disorders. Moreover, pressure to adapt to unrealistic ideals of beauty can create a sense of inadequacy and frustration.

“Ugliness” is also associated to bias and discrimination in different spheres of life, including work, health, education and the public sphere (Rhode, 2010). Women who do not comply with dominating standards of beauty declare they suffer from prejudices, unfair treatments or disadvantages (Wade, 2017).

This leads to the need to talk to the other members of society and constantly feel in competition with them. The society often promotes a culture of competition based on physical aspect, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and poor self-esteem. Women can feel obliged to comply with some standards of beauty and compete with others, creating a competitive and unhealthy environment. According to female users, in contemporary culture, physical aspect and image play a significant role on social media. Being considered “beautiful” on these platforms can have an impact on a person’s popularity, attention and social perception.

5. Conclusions

In such a scenario, digital platforms represent a real laboratory for mass actions modelling users' attitudes in designing a new public space of communication (Boccia Artieri & Farci, 2020): «Platforms do not reflect social: they *produce* the social structures we live in» (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 2), that is they take action in the ways we define links through forms of connection mixing social rules and socio-technical rules that are typical of online environments (van Dijck, 2013).

In the case of Femcel, in fact, the use of a common language generated through dynamics that can be defined as geek (in the Internet jargon, a person possessing an extreme interest and a remarkable inclination for new technologies), would lead to a sort of activism, in order to protect the in-group (Ging, 2017). Firstly, thanks to the presence of a common vocabulary which endorses the adoption of an antifeminist (Balci et al., 2023), lookkist language and attitudes typical of the Incel movement, these users can freely express their ideas and opinions.

These ideas, impossible to be freely expressed in our current world, as deplored by the surrounding society, are communicated underground.

Secondly, within these forum, constantly sharing information among users generates a situation in which they are exposed only, or almost exclusively, to opinions agreeing with their own's and confirming their point of view about specific topics. This phenomenon takes the name of echo chamber, and, as demonstrated, is particularly widespread in blogs, discussion forum and social media (Sunstein, 2017). Moreover, this phenomenon can be reinforced within homophilic nets of users who, avoiding confrontation with opinions different from their own's, end up finding reinforcement to their convictions.

The fact of expressing their solitude online presents many similarities with the ways in which Incels use their social exclusion as starting point to build homosocial links among them. As underlined by Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019), male Inceldom is based on a "solitude which finds the others", and this is what makes it different from previous predigital interactions of male isolation. Posting on the net male-oriented resentment allowed by digital media technologies has been widely considered as having given origin to new monster-like forms of misogyny, whose power is thriving and multiplying.

Through their discussions on individual perception of ugliness and continuous references to physical appearance and the phenomenon of lookism, as well as reflections on the theory of objective beauty (Moonshot, 2020), and their openness to experimenting with makeup, skincare (Softmaxxing), and cosmetic surgery procedures (Looksmaxxing) to gain greater social acceptance (Cortés, 2022), these women highlight a critical and often neglected aspect in

contemporary society. They express a desire to be accepted without being judged on the aesthetic standards imposed by patriarchal society, asserting the right to express themselves against the social taboo surrounding the aspiration to enhance their appearance to become more attractive. The presence of such discussions within the Reddit community r/Vindicta underscores the significance of these issues for Femcel women and, more broadly, for users who feel excluded and debased by society, seeking mutual support and understanding in these spaces. Cultural pressures, as well as the management of public image (Bourdieu, 1979), and self-presentation (Goffman, 1959, become fundamental elements in the daily lives of many. Social dynamics within Femcel communities emerge as decisive in shaping individuals' self-perception and unattainable aesthetic ideals for most people. These online communities serve as spaces where individuals seek emotional support and understanding, highlighting the complexity of personal identities beyond mere physical appearance (Ging, 2017).

The online group that has been analyzed does not seem integrated, although members share many experiences among them. It is important to note that fellowship within a social group is a complex and multifactorial process (Forsyth, 2018). Many elements influence group dynamics and cohesion among its members. Facing differences, promoting open communication and building mutual trust can contribute to improve fellowship in the group. On the contrary, on Vindicta communication is focused on expressing their personal experiences in order to reach, in an individual and personal way, their own aims and objectives in relations and in improving their aspect. The community is mobilized to share experiences and exchange advice on looks, because within this platform the topic which mostly stimulates conversations and discourses is exactly ugliness and the inability to obtain romantic or friendly relations.

In conclusion, the analysis of the group examined has revealed the presence of a strong antifeminist attitude, with an evident focus on lookkism and an individualist approach.

Moreover, the group has put remarkable emphasis on appearances, giving privilege to the concept of lookkism and giving excessive importance to physical aspect as the basis of people's value and success. This focus on external surface has contributed to promote an individualist approach, in which the value of an individual is mainly measured on the basis of his/her appearances, rather than on his/her personal qualities or contributions to the society.

These characteristics of antifeminist, individualist approach and lookkism within the analyzed group can have negative implications for gender equality and the promotion of a more inclusive society.

Throughout this research, several limitations have emerged and warrant consideration. The sample size, while representative of the specific reference

population, was limited and might influence the generalization of results to other demographic realities. Other constraints may exist in temporal limitations that could have restricted the depth of analysis or the completeness of coverage on certain aspects, potentially overlooking fundamental considerations or in-depth explorations of specific topics. It should also be recognized that the findings obtained might not be directly transferable to other contexts as this study focused on a specific context, and significant differences may exist in other social or cultural settings.

Further limitations could be identified in the lack of insights into some key variables and the inability to control certain external factors that might have influenced the results. Finally, ethical aspects, such as data management and informed consent, were carefully considered; however, they might still impact the implications of our study. Understanding and acknowledging these limitations may provide an opportunity for further research development and enhance the quality of future studies.

This research enriches the theoretical landscape of Femcel and Incel movements through an in-depth analysis of social and cultural dynamics and interactions within online communities. It delves into individual narratives, highlighting social pressures and perceptions of exclusion experienced by members, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of the Femcel and Incel phenomena. This comprehensive approach allows for the exploration of complex social, cultural, and emotional implications associated with these movements, contributing to a more comprehensive assessment of their impact and dynamics within contemporary society.

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