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The “Redpilled” Identity: A Thematic Analysis of an Incel Community’s Beliefs and Emotional Experiences

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Abstract

Introduction: Incel is a neologism to describe online communities of male users defined by an involuntary absence of sexual and romantic relationships. These groups are marked by a conspiratorial and misogynistic ideology, often resulting in verbal aggressions. The aim of this study is to qualitatively explore the emotional experience and beliefs prevalent within an Incel online community, shaping its collective identity. *Methods:* A thread (453 comments, 14,173 visits, and 105,665 characters) has been sampled from an Italian “redpill forum” and analysed by two independent raters by means of Thematic Analysis. *Results:* Four themes emerged: (i) “Non-persons (i.e. women) are not like us” reveals perceived gender inequalities and misogynistic beliefs; (ii) “Without experiences in adolescence you are ruined” reflects the belief that early romantic and sexual experiences are crucial for later relationship satisfaction; (iii) “I have no life” captures expressions of profound distress and life dissatisfaction; and; (iv) “Only ours is true suffering”, highlights a sense of unique victimhood within the community. *Discussion:* The incels’ group identity is shaped by gender role stress, particularly due to the threat of not fulfilling the socially constructed expectations of hegemonic masculinity. This led to suffering as the most observed emotional experience, also exacerbated by hopelessness regarding future intimate, romantic, and sexual experiences. Both the perceived subordinate masculine status and suffering are exploited to rationalize and perpetuate misogyny and degradation of women. The observed openness in discussing suffering and traumatic experiences could be a potential gateway for preventive interventions aimed at improving help-seeking behaviours.