



Femcels speeches between extreme solitude and radical break with the Alpha world

Séraphin ALAVA, Rasha Nagem

► To cite this version:

Séraphin ALAVA, Rasha Nagem. Femcels speeches between extreme solitude and radical break with the Alpha world: Counter project monograph. 2024. hal-04552382

HAL Id: hal-04552382

<https://hal.science/hal-04552382>

Preprint submitted on 19 Apr 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Copyright

Femcels speeches between extreme solitude and radical break with the Alpha world

Alava Séraphin
University Professor, Toulouse Jean Jaurès University
FRANCE
e-mail: seraphin.alava@gmail.com

Nagem Rasha
Doctoral student, Toulouse Jean Jaurès University
FRANCE
e-mail: rasha.nagem1@gmail.com

Abstract: This article explores the phenomenon of Femcels (involuntarily single women) as an emerging subculture in digital communication networks as part of the scientific work of the Counter project. Femcels, which often echo or oppose male Incels, develop radical discourses on failed love affairs, social isolation and critiques of patriarchal norms as well as certain trends in contemporary feminism. The study focuses on the analysis of these discourses through social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, highlighting the importance of these spaces in the formation of transnational collective identities centered on gender issues.

The main aim is to deepen understanding of Femcels, a little-studied facet of contemporary discourse on gender relations and female identity in digital society. The study aims to explore Femcels' discourse, their presence in social networks, and the implications of their radicalism and break with the "alpha world". The analysis draws on previous studies and observation of discourse and practice on digital platforms. The article discusses the history of Femcels, their evolution from Yahoo forums to current platforms such as Reddit and TikTok, and examines their unique positioning in gender debates. It discusses how Femcels and Incels conceptualize intimacy, discrimination and loneliness, highlighting significant differences in their reactions and actions. A typology of Femcels is proposed, based on their discourses, ranging from the quest for acceptance to social and critical engagement. Femcels' transition from digital loneliness to feminist awareness underlines the deep critique of heterosexual and patriarchal norms. The article highlights the challenges and resilience of Femcels, as well as their ability to create supportive communities. By offering an in-depth perspective on Femcels, the article enriches understanding of gender dynamics in today's digital and social context, highlighting the importance of rethinking power structures for a more inclusive society.

Keywords: Femcels, radicalization, feminist identity, Pikpill, Femcelcore

Abstract: Cet article explore le phénomène des Femcels (femmes involontairement célibataires) en tant que sous-culture émergente dans les réseaux de communication numérique dans le cadre du travail scientifique du projet Counter. Les Femcels, qui font souvent écho ou s'opposent aux Incels masculins, développent des discours radicaux sur les échecs amoureux, l'isolement social et les critiques des normes patriarcales ainsi que de certaines tendances du féminisme contemporain. L'étude se concentre sur l'analyse de ces discours à travers des plateformes sociales telles que Facebook, Twitter et Reddit, soulignant l'importance de ces espaces dans la formation d'identités collectives transnationales centrées sur les questions de genre.

L'objectif principal est d'approfondir la compréhension des Femcels, une facette peu étudiée du discours contemporain sur les relations de genre et l'identité féminine dans la société numérique. L'étude vise à

Article received on the. Article accepted on the.

Conflict of Interest: The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

explorer le discours des Femcels, leur présence dans les réseaux sociaux et les implications de leur radicalisme et de leur rupture avec le "monde alpha". L'analyse s'appuie sur des études antérieures et sur l'observation des discours et des pratiques sur les plateformes numériques. L'article aborde l'histoire des Femcels, leur évolution depuis les forums Yahoo jusqu'aux plateformes actuelles telles que Reddit et TikTok, et examine leur positionnement unique dans les débats sur le genre. Il examine la manière dont les Femcels et les Incels conceptualisent l'intimité, la discrimination et la solitude, en soulignant les différences significatives dans leurs réactions et leurs actions. Une typologie des Femcels est proposée, basée sur leurs discours, allant de la quête d'acceptation à l'engagement social et critique. La transition des Femcels de la solitude numérique à la conscience féministe souligne la profonde critique des normes hétérosexuelles et patriarcales. L'article met en lumière les défis et la résilience des Femcels, ainsi que leur capacité à créer des communautés de soutien. En offrant une perspective approfondie sur les Femcels, l'article enrichit la compréhension de la dynamique des genres dans le contexte numérique et social actuel, soulignant l'importance de repenser les structures de pouvoir pour une société plus inclusive.

Mots-clés : Femcels, radicalisation, identité féministe, Pikpill, Femcelcore

1. Introduction

Femcels, short for "involuntarily single women", are an emerging subculture finding its place within the vast and complex networks of digital communication, part of a broader movement questioning gender relations and the dominant social structure, often referred to as the "alpha world". Echoing or opposing the incels movement, femcels develop radical discourses that question the modalities of romantic encounters, the hypocrisies or current violence in relationships, and question the dominant model of the couple. Femcels, as a relatively new phenomenon, have their origins in the frustrations and disillusionments linked to romantic failures and social isolation. Taking place in a context where feminist movements have largely contributed to the redefinition of gender roles and expectations, Femcels stand out for their radical approach, often tinged with antifeminism, criticizing both patriarchal norms and certain trends in contemporary feminism.

Social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and other less conventional platforms, have become the main theater for Femcels' expression and mobilization. These digital spaces make it possible not only to share experiences and ideologies, but also to form supportive communities across geographical boundaries. Studies by Moghadam (2000) and Fotopoulou (2016) highlight the importance of these networks in the formation of transnational collective identities, including in movements focused on gender issues. The radicality of Femcels' discourses and their apparent break with the alpha world raise pertinent questions about understanding the current dynamics of gender relations. It is crucial to analyze these discourses not only to understand the isolation and distress that underlie them, but also to assess their potential impact on antifeminist radicalization and online social movements. The work of Harrington (2012) and Bernstein (2012) offers interesting insights into how feminist discourses and practices can transform and diffuse across transnational networks, influencing politics and ideologies on a global scale. We aim to deepen our understanding of these approaches, which are almost absent from the scientific literature, as femcels represent a unique facet of contemporary discourse on gender relations and female identity in digital society. An in-depth exploration of their discourse and presence in social networks is essential to understanding the multiple dimensions of loneliness, marginalization and contestation in the current context of globalization and the digitization of social interactions.

2. History and socio-political analysis of the Femcels movement.

The term "femcel" refers to the female version of an involuntary bachelor, emerging in online discourse since the mid-2000s. Originally appearing in Yahoo groups and forums like Love Shy Woman, these communities gained visibility with the expansion of social networks, including Reddit, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. Despite their historical presence, the notion of involuntary female celibacy has often been dismissed or mocked in spaces dominated by male incels, reflecting a misunderstanding or denial of their experiences and suffering.

To analyze the issue of involuntary celibacy (incels and femcels) from a socio-political perspective, it's essential to go beyond traditional psychological and psycho-social approaches. Research shows that

incel communities are structured around specific norms and beliefs, such as the "marketization" of sexual relationships, misogyny, the legitimization of masculinity, male oppression and violence (O'Malley, Holt, & Holt, 2020). This belief structure contributes to the radicalization and extremism of some members of these communities.

Furthermore, incels' antifeminism and misogyny, exacerbated by digital society, form a digital counterpublic that reinforces an incels' collective identity and produces a form of "stochastic terrorism" where violence is justified as a response to their grievances (Lindsay, 2022). Modern technology and dating apps are perceived by incels as exacerbating gender practices that marginalize them, reinforcing essentialist views of gender and minimizing their own misogyny (Preston, Halpin, & Maguire, 2021).

Femcels, while having parallels with incels in their frustration and isolation, stand out for their unique positioning in these debates. Their very existence challenges the dominant narrative within the manosphere, which tends to ignore or minimize the possibility that women can also suffer from loneliness and romantic exclusion. This challenge is met with resistance, illustrated by the creation of satirical forums such as r/TrueFemcels, designed to poke fun at the idea of femcels (Ging & Murphy, 2021).

Antifeminist women also find a place in these discourses, actively participating in communities that criticize modern feminism and reinforce patriarchal ideologies, while engaging in practices that support existing power structures (Díaz Fernández, García Mingo, & Fuentes, 2023). This phenomenon highlights the complexity of alliances and oppositions within these movements, where issues of gender, power and identity are often intertwined in contradictory ways.

It's crucial to recognize that incels and femcels are not simply a marginal or isolated phenomenon. Their presence and ideologies influence societal debates and gender issues in contemporary society. Understanding this movement requires a multidimensional approach that takes into account the digital, social and political contexts in which it emerges and develops.

The effect of digital echo chambers and algorithmic filters amplifies and differentiates discourses within incel and femcel communities, reinforcing feelings of global belonging and collective identity. In these digital spaces, users are often exposed to opinions and ideas that reflect and reinforce their own beliefs, minimizing exposure to divergent viewpoints and facilitating the radicalization of ideas. This echo chamber dynamic contributes to increased polarization and homogenization of ideas within these communities, which can intensify extreme beliefs and behaviors.

In addition, algorithmic filters on social media platforms and online forums tend to present content that maximizes user engagement, which can lead to disproportionate exposure to content that validates and exacerbates existing ideological perspectives. This can lead to an increasingly narrow and polarized worldview, where members of these communities see themselves as victims of societal injustice, reinforcing their internal cohesion and justifying their antifeminist and misogynist ideologies.

The discourses of femcels, like those of incels, are therefore profoundly influenced by these digital dynamics, which shape and amplify narratives around involuntary loneliness, marginalization and victimization. These discourses are part of a wider socio-political context, where issues of gender, equality and social justice are constantly negotiated and contested. Thus, incel and femcel communities cannot be fully understood without considering the influence of digital technologies on the formation of collective identities, the dissemination of ideologies, and the potentiation of social and political movements in the contemporary digital age.

3. Femcels, incels in the manosphere.

The femcels movement can be compared to incels on certain points, but also presents significant differences, as suggested by Ruby Ling's thesis, "Femcels: Are they really the female equivalent of the incel?" (Ling, R. 2019). Indeed with regard to the critique of a dictatorship of physical appearances and the social hierarchical structure based on attractiveness both movements argue that those considered less attractive are disadvantaged in relationships and society in general. Both incels and femcels share deep-seated feelings of loneliness and exclusion. Both incels and femcels perceive themselves as being excluded from the sphere of intimate relationships, mainly because of their perceived lack of attractiveness. This exclusion is felt as a social injustice where physical attributes determine access to relational opportunities. However, incels tend to focus their loneliness around the inaccessibility of sex, seeing this as the ultimate manifestation of their exclusion. Femcels, on the other hand, emphasize the absence of meaningful, emotionally profound relationships, indicating a difference in the way each group conceptualizes intimacy.

Both groups perceive some form of discrimination from the other sex. Incels express a sense of rejection by women, whom they accuse of unfairly favoring more attractive men, fueling hostility towards women for this perceived preference. Femcels, on the other hand, identify discrimination in men's behavior, but place it in a broader context of patriarchal structures, driving them towards radical feminist ideologies. They see this discrimination as extending beyond the simple dynamics of relationships to wider issues of power and oppression.

The differences between these two groups are clear in their reactions and actions. While incels respond to their loneliness and perceived discrimination with a discourse often tinged with misandry, reflecting an externalization of their frustration. This reaction can sometimes be accompanied by hostile discourse and polarized ideology, as evidenced by their embrace of the "black pill". In contrast, Femcels seek solace and support within their community, engaging in a discourse that, while acknowledging discrimination and loneliness, leans towards solidarity and mutual aid rather than hostility. Their approach is more aligned with a critique of social norms and a quest for structural change.

In this context, incels are fully rooted in the manosphere, which attacks the advances of feminism and proclaims a natural society where men reclaim their stolen virility. Femcels share certain beliefs with radical feminism, notably the critique of patriarchy and the valorization of spaces reserved for women. This similarity suggests that Femcels take a more ideological, women-centered approach to their situation, unlike incels, who are often criticized for their misogynistic views. Yet there's no clear consensus on whether femcels are more aligned with feminist or masculinist ideologies, as the femcel community largely focuses on women's experiences and perspectives. Research on femcels reveals that their discussions often focus on themes related to gender, societal expectations, beauty norms and power dynamics, with an emphasis on the power and consequences of beauty from the female perspective. Unlike male incels, femcels tend to focus on personal grievances rather than external aggression or violence, although some may express extreme views. Faced with what they perceive as oppression, femcels and incels differ on strategy. Whereas incels have been associated with external aggression and violence, femcels often tend to internalize their struggles, focusing on self-improvement and navigating societal beauty norms. Femcels' approach to coping with societal beauty norms often involves strategies such as "looksmaxxing" or maximizing appearance, and "softmaxxing" which includes the use of make-up, styling and perfume. This approach is seen as an attempt to gain societal advantage and navigate the pressures of beauty standards, without necessarily harboring resentment towards men. In this, femcels are not challenging the macho order, but denouncing the impossibility of being able to avoid falling victim to this system.

4. Mots, maux et sens: introduction a une culture femcels.

To understand a phenomenon, it's interesting to note the emergence of words that speak to the ills experienced or perceived. This language, which first emerged with the "involuntary bachelors" movement, is structured in its use and refers to vectors of identification, and thus to the creation of a common collective "we". So what I experience I no longer experience alone. The other is thus named and constructed as an emissary of what I'm experiencing.

Term Femcel	Direction
Stacy	A highly attractive, socially successful woman, often seen as the opposite of a femcel.
Looksmaxxing	Effort to improve physical appearance by any means possible.
Pink Pill	Women's awareness of the power structures that put them at a disadvantage.
Becky	A moderately attractive woman, neither desirable like a Stacy nor in trouble like a femcel.
Chad	Extremely attractive man, often seen as having easy success with women.
Normies	People who don't identify with the extremes of the incel/femcel spectrum, considered normal.
WGTOW	A movement of women choosing to live independently, rejecting

Term Femcel	Direction
	traditional gender expectations.
Misandry	Deep disdain or prejudice towards men, often in reaction to negative experiences.
Sexual objectification	Feeling reduced to a sexual object, treated in a dehumanizing way.
Femcels : Volcels	Distinction between suffered celibacy and voluntary withdrawal from heterosexual relationship norms.
Heteropessimism	A critique of power structures and dynamics within heterosexual relationships.
Femcelcore	A set of aesthetics and behaviors associated with femcels, often marked by irony and social criticism.

Within the linguistic and semantic universe of femcels, terms such as "Stacy" and "Chad" serve as reference points for mapping a perceived social hierarchy, in which "Normies" navigate through romantic and sexual interactions with apparent ease, leaving behind "femcels", confined to a periphery marked by "involuntary celibacy". Looksmxing" then becomes an often desperate attempt to transgress these invisible boundaries, underlining the crushing pressure to conform to unattainable beauty standards. The "Pink Pill" embodies an acute awareness of these power dynamics, propelling femcels towards a quest for autonomy, exemplified by the WGTOW movement, which rejects traditional expectations of women to embrace individual freedom.

In this discursive space, "Misandry" often emerges as a reaction to a perceived "negative otherness", attributing responsibility for their exclusion to misogynistic societal structures and "sexually objectifying" experiences with men, which reduce interaction to a transaction where respect and genuine emotion are absent. This vocabulary, though shaped by feelings of victimization and isolation, enables femcels to transcend their individual experiences of rejection and invisibility, forging a collective identity that resists marginalization. The term "Femcelcore" encapsulates this resistance, adopting an aesthetic and posture that defy norms, while mocking prescribed ideals of femininity, thus affirming solidarity in the face of adversity.

By articulating a critique of the social dynamics that value certain forms of desirability at the expense of others, the language of femcels offers a means of collectively engaging in a reclamation of space and voice, while challenging the power structures that have contributed to their marginalization.

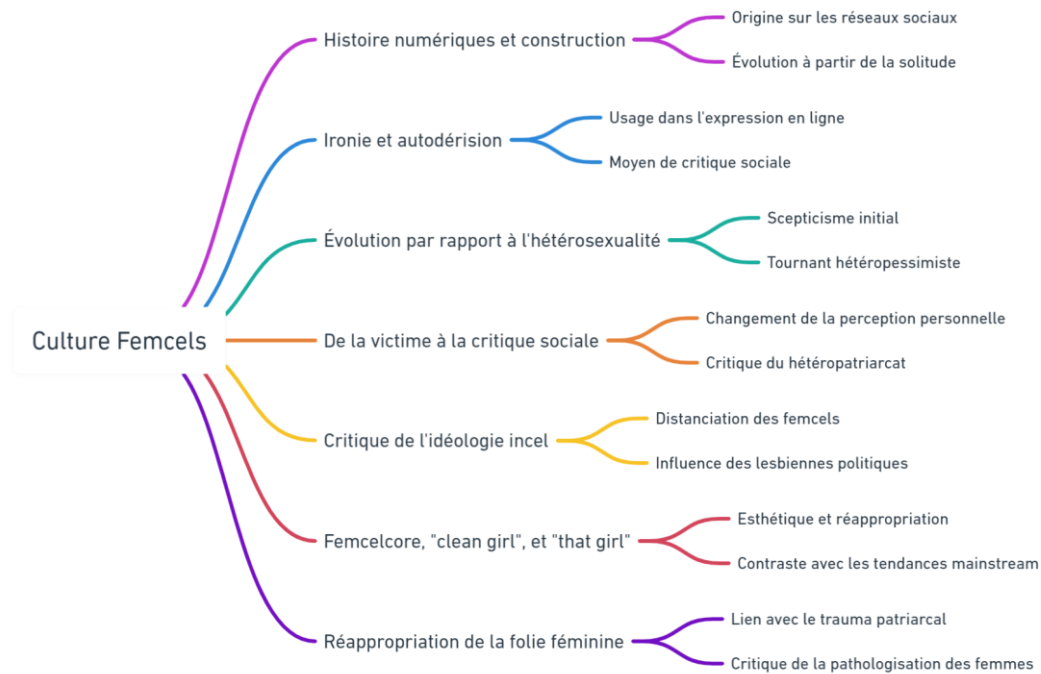


Diagram 1: Themes in Femcel culture.

Femcel culture, often seen through the prism of social media, embodies a complex mix of irony, self-mockery and social critique. These aspects underscore not only the digital evolution of this community, but also its unique response to heterosexual patriarchy and incel ideology. Exploring these dimensions, we discover a subversive reappropriation of feminine stereotypes, notably through "femcelcore", which defies dominant trends such as "clean girl" and "that girl", while reinterpreting the notion of "feminine madness" in a contemporary context. Femcels, emerging mainly on platforms like TikTok and characterized by an online presence distinct from incels marked by biting irony and self-mockery. This mode of expression serves as both a defense mechanism and a social critique, illustrating the frustrations and challenges faced by Femcels in a heteropatriarchal context (Smith, 2021). Femcels' use of irony and self-mockery functions as a dual tool: on the one hand, it enables them to navigate the online social space with a certain emotional distance, and on the other, to subtly critique social norms and expectations of women (Jones et al., 2020). This phenomenon reflects a broader strategy of subverting imposed feminine ideals.

Femcels' stance on heterosexuality and patriarchy has undergone a significant shift, from a simple critique of their personal experiences to a deeper questioning of underlying social structures. Their skepticism, often described as heteropessimism, calls into question the viability and justice of traditional heterosexual relationships within the framework of patriarchy (Lambert, 2019). This shift from a victim posture to active social critique shows how Femcels use their platform to challenge not only their marginalization but also the very foundations of heteropatriarchy. This transition is particularly visible in the way they distance themselves from incels ideology, while sometimes aligning themselves with more radical movements such as political lesbians (Seresin, 2019). From this politicization of a movement we can highlight Femcelcore, as an aesthetic and cultural movement, reappropriates and subverts stereotypes of femininity, in direct opposition to the "clean girl" and "that girl" trends that promote an idealized and often unattainable image of women. This aesthetic serves to critique beauty standards and expectations of women, while creating space for a more authentic and diverse expression of femininity (Tseng, A. 2022.). Femcels' reappropriation of "feminine madness" highlights how women's psychological suffering is often the product of their systemic oppression under patriarchy. By reappropriating this stereotype, Femcels challenge the historical pathologization of women and reposition their "madness" as a legitimate response to social injustice (Chesler, 1972). Femcel culture illustrates a complex and nuanced response to gender and power dynamics in contemporary society.

Through irony, self-mockery and incisive social critique, Femcels redefine the contours of femininity, while challenging the patriarchal structures that continue to shape women's experiences in the digital world and beyond.

5. Epistemological approaches to digital effects in political discourse

The study of radical discourse in cyberspace is essential to understanding the structuring of modern civic and political debate. Indeed, cyberspace, notably through social networks and platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, has established itself as a major prescriber of ideas and social issues, playing a crucial role in the agenda effect. This section develops the arguments presented, providing references and deepening the analysis of the dynamics at play.

Cyberspace, as a prescriber of ideas, significantly orients public discussion topics, highlighting certain themes to the detriment of others. This ability to influence the public agenda is amplified by the virality and reach of social networks, where content can quickly become a focal point for the general public. This dynamic is crucial to understanding the evolution of civic debate in a digital context (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Echo bubbles, facilitated by recommendation algorithms on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, create homogeneous environments where users are primarily exposed to opinions and information that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs. Sunstein (2017) and Cardon (2017) highlight how this continuous resonance of similar ideas can lead to cognitive reinforcement, limiting exposure to divergent perspectives and thus contributing to increased socio-political polarization. The resulting fragmentation of public discourse can weaken democratic foundations by exacerbating divisions and increasing distrust and conflict between communities.

At the same time, the dynamics of social networks can also break the spiral of silence, a theory proposed by Noelle-Neumann (1974), which suggests that individuals may hesitate to express minority opinions for fear of isolation. The unique features of social networks, such as anonymity and the formation of like-minded communities, reduce this fear and encourage the expression of diverse viewpoints. On platforms such as TikTok and YouTube forums, the online disinhibition effect and short, engaging content formats enable minority opinions to gain visibility and influence, defying the traditional spiral of silence dynamic.

A thorough understanding of these mechanisms is crucial to the prevention of radical drift. By identifying how echo bubbles and the breaking of the spiral of silence can both contribute to radicalization and offer avenues for more inclusive civic discourse, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for maintaining a healthy, democratic digital space. This involves targeted interventions to promote diversity of ideas and tolerance in public debate, as well as educational approaches to strengthen citizens' digital literacy. The duality of social networks, as structured and structuring media, shapes contemporary civic and political debate in complex ways. On the one hand, they can reinforce polarization and radical drift through echo bubbles; on the other, they offer the potential to break the spiral of silence, thus fostering a more diverse expression of opinion. A critical and nuanced analysis of these dynamics is essential for navigating today's digital media landscape, and for strengthening the foundations of an open and inclusive democratic society.

6. The Femcels experience

In terms of data processing, we chose to carry out three operations with the aim of describing and characterizing the discourses expressed by Femcels. Firstly, we focused on the overall understanding of the Femcels' experience, which encompasses the relationship, the reaction and the explanation of voluntary or involuntary difficulties in meeting the other. Secondly, we will work on the sentences, identifying the Femcels' themes and arguments, and thus gaining access to their subjective visions of Femcels' "sayings". Finally, we propose to build a typology of Femcels' ways of thinking, by proposing attractors or organizers of thought.

Our database includes 1,365 sentences collected from specific forums, speeches by Youtubers or influencers (USA, Canada, Europe), all describing femcels, expressing experience, explaining cause and effect, and positioning people in relation to femcels and incels culture.

To present the femcels experience, we will rely on an analysis of the emotions and feelings expressed in the sentences to identify subjective sentences showing the subjectivity of the authors. The analysis of

emotions and feelings in the database provided was carried out using a combination of textual analysis and contextual interpretation techniques. The main stages of the method used were as follows:

- **Text Extraction and Keyword Identification:** Keywords and phrases associated with different emotions and feelings (such as pain, anger, appreciation, and indifference) were identified. This step helped to filter and select specific phrases that could express these particular emotions.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** For all sentences, a sentiment analysis was carried out using TextBlob, a text analysis tool in Python, to assess the polarity (positive, negative, neutral) and subjectivity of textual expressions.
- **Finally, a contextual interpretation was used to** interpret meaning in the context of femcels' experiences, taking into account recurring themes and challenges specific to this community. This qualitative analysis sought to understand the nuances and complexities of the feelings expressed.

The femcels' experience, as described through the phrases in your database and the emotional themes analyzed, seems to be characterized by a complex mix of suffering, isolation and indifference, each of which plays a role in their lived experience. Suffering is central to the femcel experience, often stemming from rejection, loneliness, and the pressure of social and aesthetic norms. This pain can be exacerbated by the perception of a mismatch between their personal desires or needs and the reality of their social and romantic interactions. Feelings of pain and anger reveal a struggle against prejudices and expectations, as well as frustration at the obstacles encountered in the quest for meaningful relationships.

Isolation is another significant aspect, which can be both physical and emotional. Physically, femcels may find themselves excluded from certain social or romantic spheres. Emotionally, isolation is accentuated by the feeling of not being understood or accepted, which can lead to an even greater separation between themselves and society. This isolation can be reinforced by experiences of stigmatization and marginalization. Indifference may then emerge as an adaptive response to suffering and isolation, serving as a defense mechanism for dealing with repeated disappointment and pain. This indifference may reflect a certain emotional detachment or a way of preserving self-esteem in the face of perceived failures or lack of recognition. However, it can also indicate a sense of resignation or acceptance of the situation, where expectations and hopes have been adjusted to minimize future suffering.

But femcels, like any group forming a community around shared experiences or identities, can find a sense of belonging and solidarity within their community. This solidarity can emerge from shared discussions, mutual support, and a common understanding of the specific challenges they face in their daily lives. Online forums and discussion spaces enable femcels to share their experiences, stories and challenges, creating a space where they can feel heard and understood. This sharing of experiences can validate their feelings and contribute to a form of collective catharsis. Within the community, there can be a strong sense of mutual support, where members encourage each other, offer advice based on personal experience and provide a shoulder to lean on in difficult times. This support can contribute to a sense of solidarity and belonging. Some female communities engage in forms of activism or advocacy, seeking to raise awareness of their experiences and combat stereotypes and prejudice. Such collective action can reinforce a sense of solidarity and common purpose.

Finally, we can't end this analysis without mentioning the anger born of stigmatization, isolation and frustration. This burning anger, fueled by stereotypes and prejudices, sometimes weighs heavily on their words. At the heart of their discourse is a palpable frustration, marked by the trials and pains of missed relationships and broken interpersonal connections. It's not just the quest for intimacy that's hampered, but also the search for mutual understanding and acceptance that seems constantly out of reach. Isolation, often suffered and rarely chosen, forges a muted anger. This rage is not only against solitude, but also against the mechanisms and circumstances that have forced them into it, reinforcing the walls of their invisible prison.

7. Themes and arguments of Femcels speeches :

6.1 The paradox of digital encounters

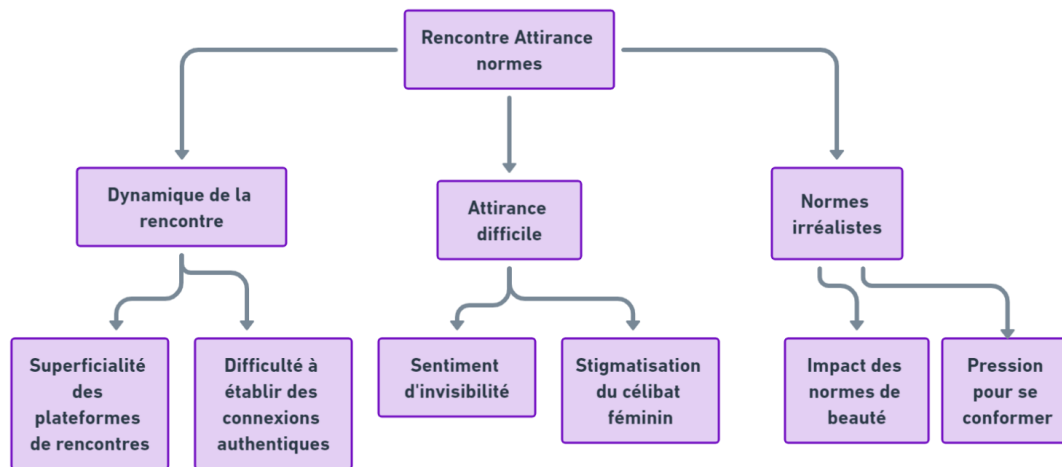


Diagram 2: Femcel themes and arguments.

In the complex world of contemporary dating, femcels offer a unique and often overlooked perspective on the challenges inherent in the quest for authentic, meaningful relationships. Their experience highlights the dysfunctions and paradoxes of a system dominated by rigid societal norms and unattainable standards of beauty. "It's a combination of my lack of organization and my lack of foresight," confides one participant, illustrating the complexity of the personal and societal challenges facing femcels.

Femcels point the finger at the superficiality prevalent on dating apps and sites, where "physical attraction, often based on often unrealistic beauty standards, becomes the main selection criterion". This dynamic, exacerbated by "the ephemeral and impulsively visual nature of swipes and matches", leads to a devaluation of character traits and deep emotional connections. One user sums up this feeling by declaring that "it's all essentially a conspiracy", underlining frustration with a system that seems rigged from the outset.

The impact of beauty standards is another critical point for femcels, who discuss the "negative impact of strict, unattainable beauty standards on their self-esteem and ability to attract potential partners". These standards, ubiquitous in the media and popular culture, create an idealized image of attractiveness, excluding those who don't match these high standards. The feeling of exclusion is exacerbated by a sense of invisibility or marginalization, summed up by the poignant admission of one member who feels like "a mixture of my lack of organization and my lack of foresight", illustrating the bewilderment and confusion in the face of these expectations.

The stigma of female celibacy adds a layer of complexity, with the misguided perception that women should naturally have easy access to relationships and sexual activity. This stigma reinforces a sense of failure among femcels, caught between societal expectations and their personal reality. What's more, the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations poses a particular dilemma for those who don't fit easily into these categories, often forcing femcels to choose between following a traditional path that feels alien to them, or embracing their singularity at the risk of isolation and judgment.

These elements highlight the specific challenges faced by femcels in the modern dating landscape, as well as the shortcomings of a system that privileges conformity and superficial appearance over the diversity and authenticity of human connections. The testimonies and reflections of the femcels offer a valuable window onto these issues, inviting us to question current social structures and dating practices.

6.2 Criticism and heteropessimism :

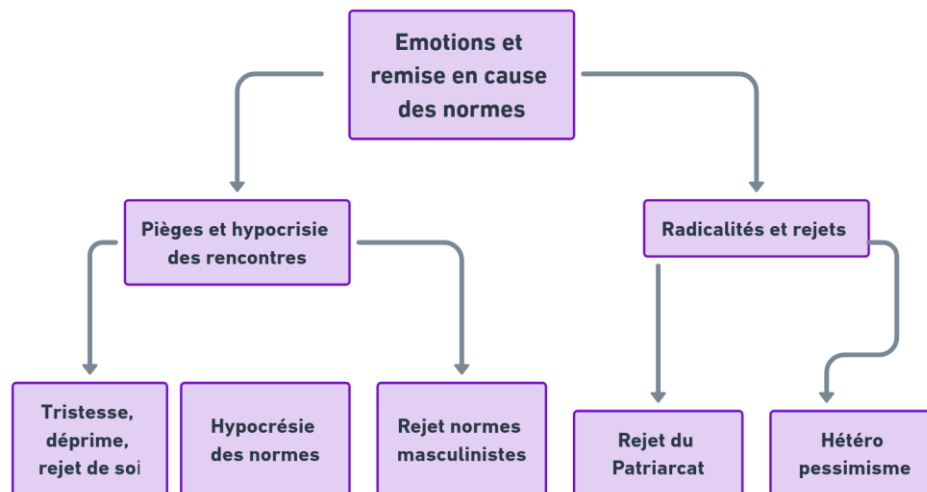


Diagram 2bis: Femcel themes and arguments.

An exploration of the femcels' discourses reveals an acerbic critique of traditional heterosexual dynamics, tinged with a profound sadness and sense of isolation. This emotion is not just the fruit of ordinary loneliness, but rather of a marginalization felt within dominant social and romantic structures. "We're all much more attractive and beautiful than they are", a phrase from their exchanges, captures this duality of desire for recognition and critique of the superficiality that reigns at the heart of social interactions.

This frustration is amplified by the use and reinterpretation of terms such as "alpha male" and "beta male", illustrating the complexity of roles and expectations in heterosexual relationships. The figure of the "alpha male", often glorified for its attractiveness and status, becomes a symbol of patriarchal norms that femcels aspire to deconstruct, while being aware of the paradoxical appeal it represents.

The transition to a more radical critique of seduction models materializes through the prism of metaphorical "pills" - red, blue and pink. The adoption of the concept of the "red pill" symbolizes a critical awareness, albeit tinged with misogyny in its origins. The response to this, the "pink pill", reflects a desire to escape conditioning and oppression, seeking a path towards a feminist understanding of relationships and society. "It's a combination of my lack of organization and my lack of foresight," they confide, revealing the inherent difficulty of navigating these tumultuous waters.

The notions of "Becky" and "Stacy" and the critique of "maxxing looks" highlight the extreme pressures to conform to beauty standards, reinforcing femcels' critique of unrealistic expectations imposed on women. This dissatisfaction culminates in the expression of a profound heteropessimism, where traditional structures of heterosexuality are perceived as inherently unbalanced and oppressive.

"It's all essentially a conspiracy," they conclude, underscoring a sense of betrayal and exploitation within a system of relationships that seems inevitably rigged against them. This shift from sadness and dejection to a radical critique of patriarchal, heterosexual models of seduction reveals a yearning for fairness, authenticity and recognition in a world where norms and expectations seem to constantly conspire to marginalize them.

8. Typology of Femcels :

From this corpus, we can then propose to construct a typology of discourses. Please note that these typologies of Femcels do not refer to existing individuals, but rather to the main lines of discourse that may be expressed by women who declare themselves to be involuntarily celibate. Sometimes the same person can have themes and ideas in several fields. To construct a typology of discourse themes, particularly in the context of qualitative analysis such as that of femcels communities, several methodological steps are generally followed. These involve a combination of content analysis, thematic coding, and often inductive and deductive approaches to identifying and organizing themes. After identifying the themes and the arguments made in the post's for all these themes, we validate opposing ideas to identify coherent or complementary clusters. Our approach identifies three coherent clusters:

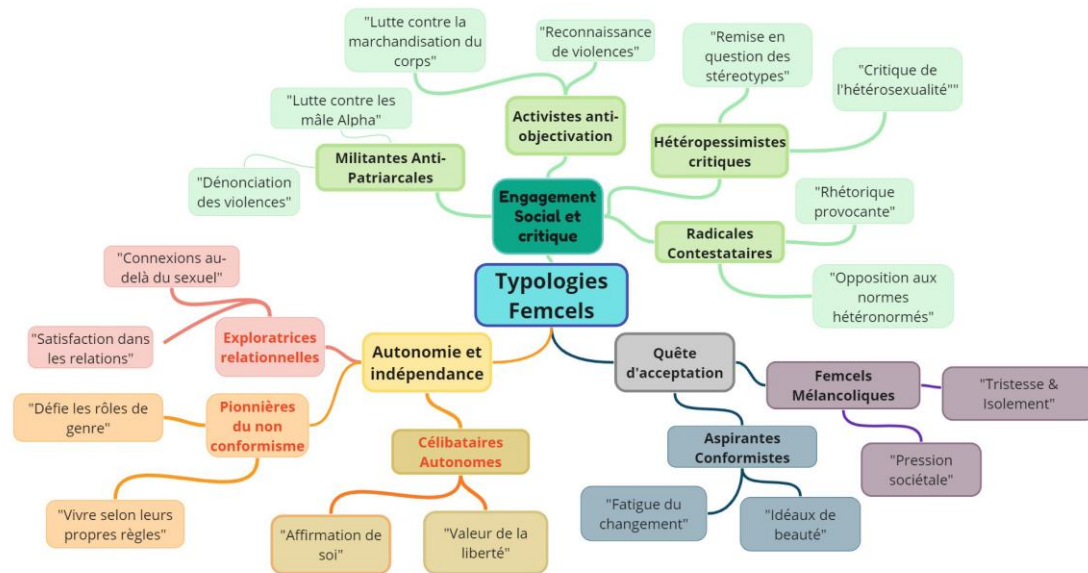


Figure 3: Femcels typology.

Quest for acceptance

- **Melancholic Femcels:** These individuals experience their celibacy as a profound source of sadness and isolation, often exacerbated by societal pressure to find a partner. Their melancholy may stem from past experiences of rejection or a sense of social invisibility. They may express sentiments such as "No one sees me for who I really am" or "I always feel on the margins, unfit for the love others so easily find."
- **Aspiring Conformists:** Struggling to align themselves with society's imposed ideals of beauty and femininity, these femcels may feel constantly falling short of these standards. Their rhetoric might include "No matter how hard I try, I never seem to match what people find attractive" or "I'm tired of trying to change to be liked."

Autonomy and independence

- **Autonomous Singles:** Opting for celibacy as a form of self-affirmation, these women reject traditional expectations of partnership and motherhood. They value their personal freedom and growth, affirming ideas such as "I choose to be alone because it allows me to focus on my passions" or "Celibacy is my freedom, not my condemnation."
- **Pioneers of Non-Conformism:** This group actively defies gender roles and sexual norms, seeking to live on their own terms. They might say, "Why should I conform to an identity that doesn't represent me?" or "I refuse to let society dictate who I should love or how I should live."
- **Relational Explorers:** Seeking to expand understanding of relationships beyond the love/friendship binarity, they experiment with platonic, communal and emotional forms of connection. They may share sentiments such as "There are so many ways to love and connect that transcend the romantic" or "I find deep satisfaction in relationships that aren't defined by sexuality."

Social and Critical Engagement

- **Anti-patriarchal activists:** committed to the fight against gender inequality and patriarchy, these femcels use their voices to denounce injustice. Their rhetoric can include statements like "I'm fighting against a system that devalues women at every turn" or "Our society needs radical change to eradicate sexism and oppression."
- **Anti-Objectification Activists:** These women fight against the reduction of women to objects of desire, insisting on recognition of their full humanity. They might say "I refuse to be seen simply as a body" or "Objectification is a violence that dehumanizes us all."
- **Radical Contestants:** With a more confrontational approach, this group vigorously opposes oppressive norms and dominant behaviors, sometimes adopting provocative rhetoric. They

may express "It's time to overthrow power structures that favor men" or "We won't be silent in the face of injustice."

- **Critical heteropessimists:** This type represents a subset of femcel culture that emphasizes a profound questioning of traditional heterosexual structures and patriarchy. These individuals express skepticism and even rejection of the norms and expectations associated with heterosexuality, seeing these as perpetuating oppressive inequalities and power dynamics. Their critique extends to the social, cultural and personal institutions that support heteronormativity. This group uses irony and self-mockery as tools to deconstruct dominant narratives around heterosexual relationships, often with a mix of dark humor and critical acuity. "Heterosexual love as sold by society is a trap, an illusion designed to keep women in a position of subordination."

9. Discussion: From digital loneliness to feminist awareness.

Femcels' transition from digital solitude to feminist consciousness is a complex process, marked by a radical critique of traditional patriarchal and heterosexual models of seduction. This itinerary, characterized by deep sadness and a sense of isolation, becomes the breeding ground for a questioning of dominant power structures.

Femcels express a deep sense of marginalization in the context of modern dating, amplified by digital platforms that promote superficial and ephemeral interactions. "It's a combination of my lack of organization and my lack of foresight," confides one participant, illustrating the complex intersection of personal and societal challenges. This solitude, exacerbated by digital isolation, becomes a shared experience that unites femcels in a common quest for visibility and recognition.

The superficiality of digital dating, where unrealistic beauty standards predominate, leads to a critique of patriarchal models of seduction. Using terms like "alpha male" and "beta male", femcels highlight the roles and expectations imposed by these models. This reappropriation of jargon serves to articulate a critique of the power dynamics underlying traditional heterosexual relationships, where the value of individuals is often reduced to their ability to conform to unattainable aesthetic standards.

Feminist awareness among femcels is often marked by heteropessimism, a skepticism towards traditional heterosexual structures perceived as oppressive. This critical stance manifests itself in the rejection of patriarchal norms and the questioning of traditional gender roles. Heteropessimism emerges not only as a critique of gender inequalities, but also as a questioning of the very foundations of heterosexual relationships, seen as inherently unbalanced and exploitative.

In this context, femcels don't just criticize; they also seek to create spaces of solidarity and mutual support. Digital platforms, while they can exacerbate loneliness, also offer opportunities for the formation of communities that transcend geographical boundaries. This duality reflects the complex nature of the femcel experience: at once isolated by existing structures and bound together by a solidarity that emerges from this shared marginalization.

In conclusion, femcels' transition from digital solitude to feminist consciousness is characterized by a profound critique of heterosexual and patriarchal norms. This evolution highlights not only the challenges they face, but also their resilience and ability to forge supportive communities. The discussion around femcels offers valuable insights into contemporary gender dynamics, highlighting the need to rethink power structures to promote a more egalitarian and inclusive society.

10. References:

- Alava, S. (2018). Is the Internet a space for radicalization? A study of digital radicalization processes. *Terminal. Information technology, culture & society*, (123).
- Alava, S. Chaouni N., Charles Y. (2020). How to characterize far-right discourse in digital media? An interdisciplinary approach to terrorism prevention. *Procedia Computer Science*; P. 2515-2525
- Bernstein, E. (2012). Carceral politics as gender justice? The "traffic in women" and neoliberal circuits of crime, sex, and rights. *Theory and Society*, 41, 233-259.
- Cardon, D. (2017). *What is digital labor?* INA Editions.
- Chesler, P. (1972). *Women and Madness*. New York: Doubleday.

- Díaz Fernández, S., García Mingo, E., & Fuentes, A. (2023). #TeamAlienadas: Anti-feminist ideologic work in the Spanish manosphere. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 30(3), 421-439.
- Fotopoulou, A. (2016). Digital and networked by default? Women's organisation and the social imaginary of networked feminism. *New Media & Society*, 18, 1005-989.
- Ging, D. (2017). Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, 22(4), 638-657.
- Ging, D., & Murphy, S. (2021). Tracking the Pilling Pipeline: Limitations, Challenges, and a Call for New Methodological Frameworks in Incel and Manosphere Research. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*.
- Harrington, C. (2012). Governmentality and the Power of Transnational Women's Movements. *Studies in Social Justice*, 7, 47-63.
- Jones, R. et al. (2020). "Irony and Identity: The Language of Femcels." *Cultural Linguistics*, 18(4), 456-472.
- Lambert, S. (2019). "Heteropessimism and the Femcel Discourse: Navigating the Complexities of Gender and Sexuality Online." *Gender and Society*, 33(5), 743-764.
- Lindsay, A. (2022). Swallowing the Black Pill: Involuntary Celibates' (Incels) Anti-Feminism within Digital Society. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*.
- Ling, R. (2019). *Femcels: Are they really the female equivalent of the incel?* Thesis B.A. (Criminology), University of Alberta, 2019
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*.
- Moghadam, V. (2000). Transnational Feminist Networks. *International Sociology*, 15, 57-85.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The Spiral of Silence A Theory of Public Opinion. *Journal of Communication*.
- O'Malley, R., Holt, K. M., & Holt, T. (2020). An Exploration of the Involuntary Celibate (Incel) Subculture Online. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37
- Preston, K., Halpin, M., & Maguire, F. (2021). The Black Pill: New Technology and the Male Supremacy of Involuntarily Celibate Men. *Men and Masculinities*, 24(823-841).
- Psychology Today (2023). How Do Femcels and Incels Differ? Retrieved from Psychology Today.
- Psypost.org. (2024). New research delves into the unexplored psychology of Femcels. Retrieved from Psypost.
- Seresin, A. (2019). "The Rise of Heteropessimism: Queer Critique and the Femcel Phenomenon." *Queer Studies Journal*, 22(1), 88-104.
- Smith, A. (2021). "Digital Femininities: The Evolution of Femcel Culture." *Journal of Internet Studies*, 35(2), 112-130.
- Sunstein, C.R. (2017). *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press.
- Tseng, A. (2022). "Femcel Heteropessimism." Post45.org, 12/07/23 cite <https://post45.org/2023/07/femcel-heteropessimism/>