"If a foid wanted me I'd probably go mgtow"
How ideology and identity are displayed in dialogues on an *incel* forum

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1 Introduction

The incel community is harboured within a larger network of anti-feminist communities often described as veering "towards misogyny and male supremacism" (Czerwinsky, 2024, p 198). Due to the extremist views of women propagated by members, the community has drawn academic and public interest for the past decade. However, while research has highlighted many relevant aspects less attention has been paid to the rhetoric from a pragmatic viewpoint. This paper therefore examines how ideology and identity is displayed in dialogue on the dedicated incel forum `Incels.is` based on data and analysis in Petrén (2024).

2 Incels, ideology, and identity

As described in Petrén (2024), the exchange in (1) relies on different types of knowledge.

(1)
  A: Sadly us truecels are too far below to compete though.
  B: Normies mog us to infinite.

Lexical familiarity is required to interpret *truecels* ("true incels", with "repulsive ugly appearance") and *mog* ("to dominate or humiliate"), and sufficient contextual knowledge to infer that truecels are too below on the attractiveness scale to compete on the sexual market. However, the exchange also draws on incels' beliefs about women's superficiality. Society, and women in particular, are described as hyper-fixated on superficial attributes and systemically discriminating against ugly men (Petrén, 2024; Solea and Sugiura, 2023). This leads to the conclusion in (1), where interlocutors A and B agree that their status as truecels make women unavailable to them. While incels themselves often deny alignment with any specific ideology and stress the diversity in the community, research includes misogyny and anti-feminism as core aspects, describing them as adherents of the *blackpill* ideology (e.g. Heritage and Koller, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2020; Pelzer et al., 2021). This ideology is centred around the idea that incels due to poor genetics are too physically unattractive to attain sexual and romantic relationships, and incels often rely on traditional sexist stereotypes and pseudo-scientific claims to validate their vilification of women (Rothermel, 2023).

These beliefs constitute a shared worldview that enables inferences and implicit argumentation. We will think of these beliefs as *topoi* – principles of reasoning that are accepted to be true to at least some degree within a community.

Linguistic practices reflect and reinforce identity and are not just outward displays but can be influenced by ideologies and beliefs (Burnett, 2020; Kiesling, 2006). Noble et al. (2020) argue that speakers are able to rely on topoi to communicate because they – and their interlocutors – recognize topoi that warrant their argumentation, and that the allusion to key topoi is also a way of displaying a persona to demonstrate belonging to a community and to emphasise one's own identity. This is crucial for understanding the discourse on incel forums, as it is often based on implicit premises and ideological assumptions about the world.

3 Women's deceitful behaviour

Recurring in the incel discourse is women's deceitful behaviour. In the incel worldview they are a homogenous group of adulterers that abuse, lie, cheat, and trick men. These beliefs inform arguments such as (2):

(2)
  C: if a foid wanted me i'd probably go mgtow knowing what i know now | i wouldn't want to be accused of SH or rape.

To decode this, we need to understand who *foid*

refers to (women) and know the abbreviations SH (sexual harassment) and mgtow (Men Going Their Own Way). For the latter, we need some understanding of the concept, namely that it is a community of men who avoid women to the greatest possible extent because of their perceived toxicity, misandry, and other dangerous traits. The comment equates being in a relationship with a woman with inherent risk, as he will be accused of sexual harassment or rape in doing so. This is based on the implicit premise that women regularly direct false allegations of sexual misconduct against men as a way of controlling, intimidating, or exact revenge on them. This also ties in with the blackpilled "truth" that women are untrustworthy liars and that society is skewed in favour of them.

The same sentiment is expressed in (3), where the interlocutors agree that women should not be trusted.

(3)
D: [...] after being blackpilled you'll have a hard time trusting a foid and whatnot (you shouldn't trust her anyway). But promiscuity ruins women to a much larger extent than inceldom ruins men in that regard.

E: I was going to say that tbh. can you even trust your woman after knowing that much? Especially given that in the situation of most of us, guys past the age of 20, you mostly likely won't be bonding with any virgin girl.

Here, women's presupposed promiscuity is linked to them being untrustworthy and it is implied that only "virgin girls" are reliable. Both of these examples draw on the topoi below:

$$\frac{\text{Women are promiscuous}}{\text{Women are untrustworthy}} \quad (1)$$

$$\frac{\text{Woman is a virgin}}{\text{Woman is reliable}} \quad (2)$$

4   Women's superficial nature

Another example of women's duplicitous nature is the mainstream "lie" that women care about men's personality when choosing a partner. In example (4), we see this expressed in the apparently illogical argument that economic success would make women notice F's "beautiful personality":

(4)
F: If I had a dime every time she talks about my dead uncle I'd be a very rich man.

G: You'd have enough money for women to see your beautiful personality.

This is based on another set of topoi about women in the incel community:

$$\frac{\text{Women are superficial}}{\text{Women care about looks}} \quad (3)$$

$$\frac{\text{Women are greedy}}{\text{Women care about money}} \quad (4)$$

According to incels, women view relationships as wholly transactional: they trade sex in return for economical provision and use their partner to socially climb. However, they do not want to be perceived as cruel and superficial for discarding ugly and unsuccessful men like incels, and therefore lie about their reasons for partner selection, claiming that it is based on compatible personalities. This further reinforces and is reinforced by the belief that women are deceitful and untrustworthy.

5   Discussion and future work

As seen in our examined examples, principles of reasoning that are accepted within the community can be used to underpin argumentation in a way that both facilitates communication and supports in-group identification. Utilising these topoi, incels can efficiently present their argument while displaying their knowledge of ideas commonly propagated within the community, thereby cementing their position within it. However, the analysis here covers only a fraction of topoi in the incel community and provides no indication of how prevalent this type of argumentation is. For this, a quantitative approach to the subject would be beneficial, for example by means of argument mining (Rajendran et al., 2016). Extracting a comparatively large number of instances of arguments, these could be manually annotated to get a coherent view of the topoi used to build argument in discourse in the incel community. As much of incel rhetoric overlaps with traditional sexism, further research could also study the occurrence of these types of sentiments in other contexts. Exploration of this subject could therefore help identify covertly coded language that conveys incel ideology also in mainstream social media.

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