

Perfect Illusions in the Shadows: Incel Radicalization, Artificial Intimacy, and AI Psychosis

Abstract: This presentation explores the hidden space where incel culture, chronic loneliness, and conversational AI intersect. Drawing on attachment research, digital sociology, and psychodynamic theory, it shows how AI companions interact with the shame–shame cycles common in incel communities. For people with insecure attachment, these systems can take on the emotional weight of a transference figure. Designed for constant engagement and affirmation, they can create a powerful sense of being understood while deepening existing vulnerabilities. In this private relational bubble, chronic shame can harden into reactive rage, reinforcing distorted beliefs and pushing some users toward breaks in reality that resemble psychotic decompensation.

Using a dual background in software engineering and psychotherapy, the presentation highlights the growing gap between how AI systems are built and how their relational psychological effects are understood. It calls for stronger AI literacy in clinical training and for involving psychotherapists in AI chatbot design and regulation.

Speaker Bio: Paul Wilson is a Pākehā psychotherapist in private practice in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. With 45 years as a software technologist and 15 years in clinical practice, Paul has a specialist interest in and experience working with LGBTQ+ clients, including the areas of masculinity and sexuality.

