

Temporary Empowerment: Understanding “PUA” as a Buzzword in Intimate Partner Violence in Contemporary China

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Abstract

"PUA" has become a frequently mentioned word on media in China. While it referred to "Pick-up Artist" originally, its semantic meaning shifted to behaviors of intimate partner violence afterwards. The popularity of "PUA" also attracted attention from academia. However, the precise meaning of "PUA" and its socio-cultural implications remain unexplored in the current research scope field of sociology. Therefore, this paper proposed two research questions: 1) What do people experience in intimate relationships when they identify themselves as the victims of "PUA"? 2) How does the concept of "PUA" influence people's understanding of emotional and psychological violence? A qualitative research approach is adopted to address these problems. I conducted in-depth interviews with 18 participants who self-reported as victims or abusers in a "PUA" relationship. By using thematic analysis and introducing the theory of buzzword as my theoretical framework, I argued that though the word "PUA" temporarily empowered victims in abusive relationships to realize the invisible mental abuse, stop self-blaming, and leave their toxic partner, the ambiguity and abuse of the term also limits the impact it could achieve in fighting against intimate partner violence.

Keywords: PUA, intimate partner violence, emotional manipulation, gender-based violence, buzzword.