ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SEX CAM MODELING: LABOR, INTIMACY, AND PROSUMER PORN

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The term "camming" describes live, video-streamed performances that are interactive and often include sexual content. This form of sex work has seen explosive growth in the past several years: With an estimated $2 billion in revenues, camming now amounts to 20% of the total pornography industry. Yet, little social scientific research has been conducted to understand the nature, conditions, or implications of camming for cam models, their audience, or society more broadly. Moreover, much of the research on the broader porn industry that might offer some context is dated and the dominant narratives about the industry trace back to the 1960s and 1970s when porn was produced under vastly different conditions. Digital technologies, in particular, have been transformative, allowing performers to self-produce pornographic performances and distribute them directly to fans. These tools also facilitate regular engagement with these same fans in ways that were previously inconceivable.

This dissertation begins with the assumption that the porn industry has radically changed in ways we are yet to fully understand. Drawing on interviews and auto-ethnography, it attempts to offer three distinct theoretical lenses through which these changes can be observed. First, I examine what is bought and sold in cam rooms, concluding that the work of cam modeling (both on camera and behind the scenes) has many dimensions that are not captured by reductionist tropes about selling one's body. Second, I argue that camming fits a broader pattern in online content, where clear divisions between producer and consumer begin to break down. I conclude that camming (and especially custom content/shows) can best understood as prosumer pornography (i.e., as a co-creation of model and viewer). Finally, I explore the ways in which sex cam models actively develop intimacy with clients in spite of the fact that the interactions are defined by social and spatial distance; technological mediation; asymmetry; gendered expectations; and commercial transaction.

CAM MODELING: LABOR, INTIMACY, AND PROSUMPTION

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What is Sex Cam Modeling?

> *For me, camming is beyond a full-time job. It's 24/7. It's a lifestyle, really. You're constantly checking social media. You're constantly posting things. You're constantly taking pictures. […] It's literally a lifestyle that just happens to pay money. […] I'm essentially just sharing my life and my sexuality with the world.*
>
> –Violet Vi

The quality and style of live cam shows vary widely, but they usually include one or more models interacting with a remote audience through a mixture of audio, video, and text. The audience may range from a single individual to several thousand people (depending on the popularity of the performer and whether the show is public or private). Often, models also independently produce shows, working as independent contractors on platforms like MyFreeCams, Chaturbate, Cam4, Streamate, or Cams.com. However, many porn industry giants (Playboy, Hustler, Kink.com, etc.), as well as smaller studios, also sponsor, promote, and/or produce cams.

While camming is still unfamiliar to many people, it is one of the fastest growing sectors of the sex industry. Conventional pornography has declined over the past two decades. Standard pay for mainstream porn scenes has dropped from $1,500 to $500, and total industry revenues are estimated to have dropped by as much as three quarters (*The Economist*, 2015). Meanwhile, camming has exploded into a multi-billion-dollar industry (Rabouin, 2016). By 2013, it accounted for nearly 20%

of overall porn industry revenues and has continued to grow (Richtel, 2013). In fact, camming is increasingly being seen as the “engine of the porn industry” (XBIZ publisher Alec Helmy in Song, 2016). For example, a marketing executive at Kink.com (the Web’s most popular fetish porn site), suggests that “strategically, this is the future […] the value of prerecorded content has eroded across the industry” (in Richtel, 2013). Similarly, an XBIZ executive said, "my feeling is all adult brands are getting in on cams as a matter of survival" (Conti, 2014). Collectively, cam sites are visited by 5% of global internet users on a given day—with top cam sites receiving 30 million visitors each month (Lowry, 2016). It is now estimated that there are at least 12,500 cam models online and more than 240,000 viewers online at any given time (Rabouin, 2016).

In particular, the industry is excited about the fact that the “liveness” of camming makes it impossible to pirate. Leo Radvinsky, CEO of MyFreeCams (the highest grossing cam site), explains, “piracy hasn’t affected the cam sites in the same way it has affected the video sites… there is no way you can pirate a live interactive experience” (Henderson, 2011). (Of course, people can and do record cam shows, but the participatory element is lost in the recording.) For all the attention camming is receiving within the sex industry, little social scientific research has been published on the topic.

Hallie Charms, a model interviewed for this study, similarly explained that:

> Camming as an industry has maintained its profitability in a way regular porn hasn’t. And, I think it has to do with authenticity. When you’re watching someone

> on cam, you can pirate the lived experience, you can't pirate a human conversation, you can't pirate a sense of reciprocal attraction and affection, which is what camming can offer you.

Camming has been described as "Porn 2.0" (Song, 2016), and just as "Web 2.0" was defined by interaction between users (Marwick, 2013; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2012), cam modeling is fundamentally social. Models are often paid simply for conversation—sexual and otherwise.

Given the history and marketing of cam rooms, participants generally approach them as sexualized environment; however, that does not mean that the interactions in these spaces can be reduced to sex. Violet Vi described the complex mix of interactions with viewers as "literally, just a friend kind of thing, but friends that see you naked and masturbate with you regularly; it's a weird dynamic." In fact, models often remained clothed much of their time on cam, and sometimes inform fans that they are just logging on to chat or play games with no expectation of nudity or sexual act. This is increasingly the case as cam models are expanding their brands to include safe-for-work content on platforms like YouTube, Twitch, Patreon, and Instagram.

Viewers not only interact with models, but also interact with each other. Several models interviewed for this study discussed interaction between users. For example, Charlee Bentham described "a good room," saying:

> I really like when people are actually engaging with me and engaging with each other too… not just talking to me, but talking to the other people in the room; it's like

> an actual chat room. There's a little community going on, or a little thing happening—people actually engaging with each other—talking about real things too.

Often, models host raffles and other games that encourage such interaction.

Models also have private sessions with clients. Sometimes, models will allow users to take them private during public cam shows—the digital equivalent to strippers taking clients to a back room for a lap dance. Other models prefer to book private sessions in advance so as not to interrupt the flow of their public shows.

Live sessions are only a small fraction of the work performed by most models. When not on cam, models can spend hours each day updating social media and responding to fans/clients. Models' social media profiles are often a mixture of photos, promotion of content/services they are selling, and glimpses into their personal lives or thoughts.

Many models also use messaging apps like Snapchat or Kik to interact with clients throughout the day. Some services (e.g., SextPanther, NiteFlirt, OnlyFans, or AVN Stars) allow models to be paid directly for calls and text exchanges (the platforms, of course, taking a significant cut for facilitating these transactions). Models may have these sorts of one-on-one interactions with regular clients ("regulars" in industry parlance) multiple days each week. Leena Sativa explained the always-on experience of many cam models:

> Social media doesn't sleep, and social media is a very huge part of what we do. People are constantly asking questions from different time zones across the globe, and we have to be there to answer them. The first thing I do when I wake up, I go

> through my notifications and everything, usually from my bed or while I'm making my coffee. But there's always demand for something no matter how popular or unpopular you are. […] Wherever you are in your career, there's always someone asking for something. So, you do have to be on all the time. It does kind of become a lifestyle.

Some models manage more than a dozen revenue streams. As contractors, they are also responsible to set aside money for taxes and to locate and purchase health insurance. These sorts of backstage responsibilities—typical of any small business—consume a significant amount of time and energy. “You have to be able to do everything by yourself because it's not just clocking in and showing up online,” says Layla Sugar. She goes on to explain:

> Even just things that I take for granted being a model: like making sure that your hair is done, like making sure that your nails look good. […] I committed to looking the part and working really hard to make sure my brand was representing what I want it to.

In fact, models often spend hours preparing for shows or photoshoots, which sometimes have elaborate themes that can include makeup, outfits, sets, and even custom-made sex toys. Even when models are not directly engaged with the work, it is often on the back of their mind. Every errand is also a scouting mission for possible shooting locations. Every social event is an opportunity to produce content for social media. Every shopping trip is a brainstorming session for ways to add to the show.

Leena Sativa observes that “everything we do integrates.” Poppy explains that keeping up with all these different aspects of the work can be exhausting: “I have so much to do at all times. It's never-ending stuff. Constantly.”

During the period of the study, sites for models to independently upload and sell their own short pre-recorded clips (e.g., Clips4Sale, ManyVids, iWantClips, and AmateurPorn) became increasingly popular. These clips stores formalized a set of existing practices by cam models who were previously using cloud storage platforms like Google Drive or Dropbox to sell clips or offer them as rewards in cam room contests. Most of the models that I interviewed spoke extensively about producing pre-recorded porn video content alongside camming. A few models had even quit live camming to sell clips and started to interact with fans mainly through Snapchat or other social media.

The crossover between live camming and prerecorded content also intensified with the emergence of subscription sites and fan clubs. Initially, models began selling subscriptions to Snapchat accounts (a practice forbidden by the site’s terms of service) and distributed new images and clips to fans on that platform. Models regularly had these Snapchat accounts banned and would have to rebuild with a new account.

Models also used Patreon in a similar fashion until their terms of service became more restrictive on porn (Cole, 2017, 2018b). Ultimately, more porn friendly subscription sites like OnlyFans and AVN Stars offered a more stable home for models’ content—though it remains to be seen how long these platforms will last.

The Politics of Porn Studies

As the quotes above indicate, camming is generally understood to be a new, interactive form of pornography. The cam models I spoke with for my research embrace this, readily (and often proudly) acknowledging that they produce pornography. For example, Poppy told me "Camming […] is porn. What I do, I consider it porn. I'm an explicit cam model." Similarly, Britt Beaches said, "It's just a new type of porn and they like the interaction." Leena Sativa joked that, as a cam model, you hope "to become your own Martha Stewart of your own do-it-yourself porn." Given that camming is perceived to be pornographic by both the public and by models themselves, research examining how models relate to and experience this work must consider social attitudes toward pornography that will inevitably shape those experiences.

Pornography has been among the most theorized and debated issue within contemporary feminism. As far back as the early 1980s, Webster (1981) noted that "pornography was assigned a privileged position in the discourse on women's oppression." While analyses of the last 50 years of feminist literature on pornography (e.g., Chapkis, 1997; Ciclitira 2004; Kesler, 2002; Sloan & Wahab, 2000; Weitzer, 2009) reveal a varied set of perspectives and interpretations, the view that pornography is oppressive—not just to the women who create it, but to all women—came to dominate the early decades of the modern feminist movement. Webster (1981) chronicled the growth of this anti-porn agenda, saying:

> A vast sea of feminist solidarity swelled around the issue of pornography. To move against the wave felt truly threatening. Although a few voices addressed contradictions in the anti-porn analysis, no dissenting movement developed. Criticism was kept to a minimum.

Similarly, Attwood (2004) observed that:

> The idea that the objectification of women in pornography works to effect sexual violence in society […] has been particularly influential in academic, institutional and public understandings of sexual representation; working to frame and structure most discussions about this type of representation since the 1980s.

Anti-porn feminism is grounded in the assumption that all pornography is inherently violent, objectifying, and centered on the domination of woman. This is apparent in anti-porn feminist rhetoric. For example, Dworkin (1979 p. 25) says, "Male power is the raison d'etre of pornography; the degradation of the female is the means of achieving this power." MacKinnon (1993, p. 22) defines pornography as "graphic sexually explicit materials that subordinate women through pictures or words." Dines (2011, p. 31) says, "porn plays out 'fantasy' sex that looks more like sexual assault than making love." Barry (1979, p. 206, 218) describes it as "a practice of cultural sadism" and the "explicit 'crystalization' of sexual violence and objectification." Jeffreys (1997) fits porn into a broader definition of sex work as "commercial sexual violence."

Arguably, two distinct counter-movements have emerged in response to anti-porn feminism: sex-positive feminism (e.g., Bright, 2011; Califa, 1980; Queen, 1997; Rubin, 1984, 1993; Webster, 1981) and the sex workers rights movement (Grant, 2014; Lee, 2017, 2019; Leigh, 1997; Smith & Mac, 2018). Despite increasingly being rejected by these and other feminist authors and activists, the anti-porn movement was so influential within the feminist movement of the 60s, 70s, and 80s that it continues to be seen as *the* feminist position in public discourse and policy circles. In fact, the idea that porn is inherently violent, objectifying, and centered on the dominance of women still holds such sway that all other perspectives on pornography are reductively lumped together as "the opposing views." Chapkis (1997, p. 12) notes that

> disputes over the role of sexuality in women's liberation and oppression have dominated debate among women in "second-wave" feminism of the late twentieth century. By the 1980s, these disputes had escalated into feminist "sex wars." One effect of organizing conversations around sex as a "war" of positions was the need to define neatly dichotomous and hostile camps.

This tendency to divide feminist literature on pornography into two opposed "camps" leads to an erasure of nuance, particularly in discussing positions that do not embrace the rhetoric of the anti-porn movement. Worse, in order to set up a tidy dichotomy, these positions are often misrepresented as suggesting that porn empowers women.

While a few authors do, in fact, argue that pornography reveals and enacts women's power over men (Wells, 1994; Paglia, 1990), a careful reading of feminist

literature reveals that many commentators who oppose totalizing narratives about the inherent oppressiveness of pornography (including workers themselves [Sage, 2012]) remain relatively ambivalent about the industry and its broader impact on society. For example, feminist labor theorists discuss the negative social consequences of restricting or criminalizing participation in sex work, given the current problematic social conditions that drive people to this work (Berg, 2014; Grant, 2014; Smith & Mac, 2018). Other feminists argue that general condemnation of pornography only perpetuates the sexual shame and stigma, especially if critics do not offer guidance on how to create pornography that is not problematic (Queen, 1997; Webster, 1981). Some observe that the anti-porn movement relies on self-defeating arguments that undermine the agency of women (Butler, 1990). Others focus on the (often absent) conditions necessary for pornography (and other forms of sex work) to be positive or, even liberatory (Bright, 2011; Webster, 1981). Still others argue that efforts to stigmatize, and even criminalize, pornography contribute to violent social and state repression of sexual minorities (Kipnis, 1996; Rubin, 1993). Finally, many commentators suggest that feminist interpretations of the symbolic significance of pornographic imagery are simply too narrow and that there are other valid interpretations (Attwood, 2002, 2004; Kipnis, 1996; McClintock, 1992; Williams, 1989; Kendrick, 1987).

Despite the range and nuance of the criticism of totalizing anti-porn narratives—and even despite their significant influence on contemporary feminism and sexuality studies—these arguments have nevertheless held comparably little sway over policy, institutional practices, and public opinion regarding pornography. Porn

continues to be framed as a social problem and most efforts to analyze the industry are wedged into simplistic debates about whether porn is good or bad—debates that generally lack historical depth, lumping the so-called "golden age of pornography" between the late 60s and mid-80s with recent phenomena like Pornhub or OnlyFans.

Given the intensity of the political environment surrounding pornography, researchers currently studying any aspect of the porn industry are inevitably pressured to take sides, and findings are likely to be politicized regardless of how they are presented. While this may be frustrating for researchers, the true costs are borne by porn performers. Performers find themselves caught in a double-bind between victimism and stigma.

Victimism describes the way those who have endured certain hardships or traumas become scrutable to society through certain tropes of victimhood. If they depart from these expected behaviors, the legitimacy of their experiences is called into question. Ironically, it was anti-porn activist Kathleen Barry's who first articulated this concept in regard sexual assault; she (1979, p. 44-5) explains:

> A woman who has been sexually assaulted often finds she can only be understood if she takes on the role of the victim; she is assigned victim status and seen only in terms of what has happened to her. […] Victimism denies the woman the integrity of her humanity […]

Part of this denial of humanity is the assumption that a woman who experiences assault lacks agency—that others must define her problem for her and provide rescue.

Barry observes that the imposition of remedies by outsiders often only leads to further harm, concluding that women who experience assault should instead be empowered to define those solutions for themselves.

Lee (2017) observes that these same sorts of victim tropes are also projected onto porn performers:

> To the mainstream media and to the world, you are an object. They will tell you this, and they will tell you it's pornography that has turned your body into an object, and all the while they will be the ones calling you *porn star* and forgetting you have a name. […] the knowledge that you've been naked for money will be a kind of flattening—a thing they cannot see around.

Lee uses the term "flattening" to describe the way that performers are expected to inhabit the victim trope. Similar to the problematic treatment of women who experience sexual assault observed by Barry, Lee (2019) notes that outsiders often attempt to intervene and impose misguided remedies on sex workers they presume to be victims; these remedies often take the form of unwanted regulations, or even criminalization. Lee (2019) explains:

> Increased criminalization has resulted in declining labor conditions for people who trade sex. It has inhibited our ability to speak openly about these conditions. And it has made it harder for us to process our experiences—of coercion and exploitation, solidarity, love, and strength—in our own words, or even at all.

Performers may attempt to resist the victim tropes imposed upon them by society and claim to their work unrepentantly; however, in doing so they risk being categorized as "bad women" with "spoiled identities," who deserve any ill fate that befalls them (Pheterson, 1993). As Pheterson (1993) explains, "women who claim self-determination as prostitutes lose victim status and ideological sympathy." The dual forces of victimism and "whore stigma" together create a double-bind for sex workers: "Whores are dishonored as lost women (the victims) or as bad women (the collaborators)." Anti-porn feminists frequently contribute to the dismissal and demonization of outspoken sex workers. For example, Bindel (2017) recently responded to attempts by sex workers to self-organize, saying that "groups claiming to represent 'sex workers' are just as likely to be a voice for pimps as they are to represent the women who earn their living selling sex." Yet in spite of all these struggles, Agustin (2013) explains that "the woman who sells sex is a deliberate outlaw, which oddly at least grants her some agency." For this reason, the role of "bad girl" is often preferable to that of victim, even if it often means feeling pressure to elide bad experiences so that it is easier to defend their life choices.

Perhaps what is most frustrating is that, regardless of which role a performer is pushed into, they are deemed unworthy of participating in the decision-making processes that shape their working conditions (either because of a lack of capacity or because of moral deficiencies). Despite being "adult women," sex workers "are not deemed capable enough to speak for themselves or to determine their own lives (they are treated like wayward children)" (Pheterson, 1993). In fact, it is often difficult for porn performers to speak out problematic working conditions without being told they

either deserve poor working conditions because of their bad decisions, or without having their testimonies seized upon by anti-porn activists and used to undermine the industry that provides their livelihood.

Lee (2017) notes that having their life stories consistently distorted to fit into one or the other of these tropes has made performers weary of media, artists, and researchers:

> [W]hen they say the industry is defensive, when they say that you thrive on secrecy, and claim that they are uncovering some kind of truth, you will know that they are wrong about almost everything except for this: Yes, you are defensive. You are defensive because you know what the stakes are. You are defensive because you are tired of seeing them hurt the people you love. You are defensive because you've heard their narratives one thousand times and not once have you heard a mainstream narrative that is worthy of the powerful and complex people you know your coworkers to be. You are defensive because you know now that they are trying to mine you.

As Lee's (2017, 2019) work poignantly demonstrates, porn performers' lives are defined by a constant struggle to resist reductive narratives that shape virtually all social interactions in which their work history becomes apparent and even codified into law and regulations. Whether implicit or explicit, all research and commentary on the porn industry occupies a position vis-à-vis this struggle.

Positioning This Research

The struggle to be recognized—and to recognize my fellow performers—as whole, multi-dimensional people drives my work. Porn performers need to be freed of the expectation to serve as avatars for competing political ideologies and given space to articulate their own perspectives on their own stories, regardless of how these perspectives map onto other agendas. The editors of the recently established *Porn Studies* journal argue that in order to move past the reductionism of the feminist anti-porn movement, contemporary porn researchers need to "listen to answers outside the frame of 'exploitation and degradation'" and develop "methods that do not immediately assume victimhood, false consciousness, stupidity or mendacity" (Smith and Attwood, 2014). This is true. However, researchers also need to be equally open to listening to workers' complaints about suboptimal labor conditions and sexist practices (D'Adamo, 2017; Grant, 2014; Lee, 2017, 2019; Smith & Mac, 2018). But most importantly, those studying the industry need to structure their research in a way that will not simply collapse back into simplistic simple good/bad, victim/villain dichotomies.

I approach my dissertation with this objective in mind. Rather than examining the relatively new phenomenon of live sex camming in porn through the dominant theoretical frames—which have repeatedly proven problematic for the performers engaged in the work—I instead seek to offer a set of provocations, applying theories other than those typically used to interpret pornography. To this end, I structure the manuscript as three separate articles, each attempting to push the conversation around pornography in new directions:

1.) Refining what it is we are talking about when we talk about sex camming. To do that, I will focus on the concrete question of what is being produced and consumed in the process.

2.) Describing how intimacy unfolds between online sex workers and clients, who are (initially) strangers engaged in a transaction.

3.) Exploring the interactive nature of online sex work, and in particular custom videos as a uniquely interactive exchange where conventional producer/consumer roles collapse into a phenomena that economics theorists have called "prosumption."

While each article offers a different theoretical lens, they come together to convey this sector of the porn industry, as well as performers' experiences within it, as multi-dimensional. In each, I attempt to foreground the voices of performers themselves. Despite the countless academic books and articles published on the porn industry, one senior researcher in the field, (Weitzer, 2013) notes that:

> Only a handful of researchers have interviewed porn actors, directors or producers, or conducted observations at film production sets (Abbott 2010; Bakehorn 2010). This means that the (usually negative) depictions of those involved in the pornography industry are rarely based on anything more than anecdotal tidbits.

While it was important to represent models speaking to these issues in their own voices, my conversations with participants also guided the topics I ultimately prioritized. Still, despite these concerted efforts to represent the cam community within my research, it is undoubtedly the case that my own experiences as a cam model and my theoretical interests as a researcher also shaped both the topics selected and my analytical approach.

Chapter 2: Methods Overview

This study draws on two years of interview-based and ethnographic research (conducted between October 2016 and October 2018). I interviewed sex cam models about their labor, their relationships with clients, and about working conditions in their sector of the adult industry. I also engaged in participant observation as a cam model and clip producer during this time, though I began working in the industry (in 2013) prior to this study.

My approach draws on two distinct traditions of sex work research: occupational research between the early 60s to the mid-80s and more recent ethnographic research that started to be published in the 90s. The first sought to redirect conversation away from moralizing. As Armstrong (1981) argued, the early approaches of classical sociologists were:

> far removed from a firsthand look at the subject matter. Instead descriptions and conclusions are products of theoretical presuppositions. In a sense, the answers are known before the questions are asked.

In contrast, contemporary sociological analyses began to shift toward examining sex work in the same way we might examine other occupations (e.g., Hirschi, 1962; Jackman, O'Toole & Geis, 1963; Bryan, 1966; Polsky, 1967; Roebuck & Spray, 1967; Skipper & McCaghy, 1970; Winick & Kinsie, 1971; Boles & Garbin, 1974a, 1974b; Hearn & Stoll, 1975; Heyl, 1977; Dressel & Petersen, 1982; Reichert & Frey, 1985). Like other occupations, various forms of sex work have unique incentives and

conditions, which can best be understood from the perspective of the worker. This requires deep interaction with sex workers, so these studies tended to employ interviews and/or ethnography.

A more recent cohort of ethnographers were either sex workers who became academics, or academics who deeply embedded themselves in sex worker communities (Chapkis, 1997; Frank, 1998; Bernstein, 2007). The researchers sought to make central sex workers' interpretations of their own experiences and to produce theory that was reconcilable with these interpretations. As a cam model myself, I come to this research already deeply sensitized to the concerns of cam models. However, cam models (like all sex workers) are not a monolithic group; therefore, as I will describe, much of this research was aimed at gathering the perspectives of other cam models and reflexively evaluating how my positionality may have influenced my own perceptions of the work.

Participant Observation

Sites of Participation and Observation

Cam Sites and Other Sites

During the three years that my partner and I regularly participated in live sex camming, we primarily performed on a site called Chaturbate. Chaturbate was appealing to us because of its reputation for inclusivity (it was one of the first major sites to bring trans and gay performers as well as straight couples under the same umbrella as cis women). Chaturbate also offered a range of apps that made shows

customizable. However, the culture of Chaturbate tended to favor public shows for tips from large audiences. As generally introverted people, this was often difficult for us to maintain, so we later began to perform on Cam4 and Streamate, both of which tended to favor pay-by-the-minute performances for one or a few people.

Our online interaction with clients also extended well beyond these cam sites. We posted (and continue to post) content to the indie clip site ManyVids. NiteFlirt is a phone sex platform but also hosts content. Jessie chats with clients on Sex Panther. We both perform for clients for some of these same clients via Skype. More recently, we have begun posting regularly to the subscription site OnlyFans.

Beyond sex work specific sites, we also engage clients regularly on vanilla social media such as Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram. Importantly, these sites also serve as hubs of sex worker community. While models do occasionally show each other support on sex work sites, most of our interactions with one another take place through conventional social media. Often, these are the spaces where models debrief, vent, and discuss their experiences on sex work specific. Given my focus on performers' experiences, these social media platforms are also crucial sites of participant observation.

Workshops, Panels, and Conventions

During the period of my research, I attended several in-person events. Some of these events, such as the panels and workshops put on by XBIZ Miami, AVN, or Hacking//Hustling, were specifically for a sex working audience. Through these events, I made some of my strongest connections and friendships in the industry. In

some cases, in addition to attending and participating in discussion, I also recorded and released these events as podcasts and in that way became more involved in the organizing side.

Other spaces, such as the convention floor at eXXXotica or AVN, were more public facing. While the primary reason cam models participate in these spaces is to build or provide service to fans, the spaces also are great opportunities for making passing connections with other models, and they contribute to an overall sense of group membership.

On a personal level, these spaces helped me to consciously recognize my own transition to insider status. Looking back on my first trip to XBIZ Miami, I recognized only a few of the models in attendance and had previously interacted with even fewer. Now, when I attend similar events, I am overwhelmed when I try to carve out time to visit with everyone I know.

Complete Participant Observation

In practice, I expect most readers will interpret my role in relation to this research as a form of participant observation. Throughout my data collection, I thought of myself as a participant observer, and I still describe my work in this fashion to others. But as methodological experts have noted, "there is no single agreed on definition for what constitutes participant observation" (Dewalt et al., 1998). Some authors used it broadly to encompass all fieldwork (Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988; Agar, 1996), which would presumably include my own.

However, it is important to note from the outset that my relationship to sex camming does not perfectly adhere to some of the more classic descriptions of participant observer. In particular, my positionality is in conflict with the idea that "the observer's presence in a social situation is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation" (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1956). While I was both a participant and observer, I did not (as I have detailed in the preface) maintain my position as cam model chiefly for the purpose of investigation; I maintained it for the purpose of making money, and, to a lesser degree, to embody a certain representational politics. My involvement in online sex work preceded my research and will almost certainly continue beyond it. For this reason, even descriptors like "going native"* or "becoming the phenomenon" (Jorgenson 1989, p. 62) do not quite fit. I am already part of the "phenomenon."

A problem implicit in these descriptions of participant observation is the assumption that the members of the communities under observation lack the competency or intellectual rigor to participate in academic analyses of themselves. Sex workers in particular frequently have their competency questioned in academic institutions. Writer and former sex worker Alana Massey (quoted in D'Adamo, 2017) highlights the need to challenge the "assumption that people who perform sexual services are incapable of intellectual or academic engagement with the topic of their own work," noting that "sex workers are not just experts of their own experiences but also of the legal, political, and social landscapes where they operate." In fact, to

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* I'm demonstrating the actual language used, fully aware of its problematic colonialist implications.

express frustration regarding this lack of inclusion, politically organized sex workers have adopted “nothing about us without us” as a slogan of the movement (Jackson, 2016). While my academic accomplishments (along with other markers of privilege) may have shielded me personally from some of these assumptions—after all, my research was allowed to progress—I had numerous conflicts with the Institutional Review Board overseeing this project about the competency of my respondents. For example, despite the fact that some of the study’s participants are social media influencers with hundreds of thousands of followers, it was determined that all respondents needed a pseudonym in the study because they could not be trusted to weigh out the implications of making public statements.

Perhaps even more significant than the fact that my participation in online sex work extends beyond the scope of the study is the fact that I am materially dependent on this work (and by extension so too is this research). One set of experts describe participant observation, saying, “When the grant runs out, we go back to our desks” (Dewalt et al., 1998). But of course this world of tenure-lines, grant-funding, and even desks is alien to so many young academics. It has become commonplace for junior scholars to fund both research and teaching through second jobs and by participating in the gig economy in various ways. I am no exception. My grad stipend ended earlier than was previously the norm to accommodate a larger-than-expected incoming cohort. And, while I was grateful to receive a $500 summer dissertation grant from my university, this hardly covered research expenses spanning several years. The flexible and efficient income my partner and I earned from sex work allowed me to stay in school and finish my dissertation.

Even further conflict arises between my positionality and the classic understanding of the role of the participant observer when we consider the way that these texts frame “excessive worry” as a sign of “distorting influences” (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1956). Implied in this notion of excess is the idea that the problems of the population being studied are not your problems—that you can and should back away if your objectivity is at stake. However, this sort of detachment does not remotely describe my situation. One of the well-established truisms of being naked on the internet is that it is a choice you make for life; even if you choose to leave, the stigma never leaves you. Every veteran of the industry knows what Lee (2017) so eloquently stated:

> Pornography will change your life. There is no way to fully convey to you the absoluteness of this. The magnitude with which this is true. This is not the kind of job that recedes softly into the rearview after you quit. This is not the kind of job that you do once and then forget. This job is not forgettable. Once you have done it, anyone who knows you have done it sees a mark on you—believes there is a thing about your personality or life history that is revealed.
>
> After you have made pornography, it will be viewed as a part of you forever, and because it is viewed this way it will be a part of you forever.

Sex work stigma is significant and pervasive part of my life. It shapes all my interactions with family, my choice to abandon all real-name social media, my choice to never share photos or updates about my kids online, as well as the perceived and

actual jobs available to me as an academic. But even more than all this, stigma—along with the shared experiences and traumas of working in the sex industry—have shaped my social world. Goffman (1963/2009, p. 24) describes the difficulty those who bare stigma have with relating to outsiders:

> [T]he stigmatized individual is likely to feel that he is 'on,' having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impression he is making. Also, he is likely to feel that the usual scheme of interpretation for everyday events has been undermined. His minor accomplishments, he feels, may be assessed as signs of remarkable and noteworthy capacities in the circumstances. […] At the same time, minor failings or incidental impropriety may, he feels, be interpreted as a direct expression of his stigmatized differentness.

This stress of relating to "normals" (as Goffman calls them), naturally inclines stigmatized individual to seek the comfort and security of an in-group that both intuitively understands their experiences and sees them as a whole person who cannot be reduced to or defined by a stigmatized attribute. In fact, Goffman frequently invokes sex workers to illustrate stigma, so it should be unsurprising that sex workers form strong in-group communities, distinguishing themselves from the "civilians" who fail to respect or understand us. Again, Lee (2017) eloquently captures this experience:

> If you continue to do this job, it will become harder and harder to have a life outside of it. More and more, it will be the people you work with who will understand that your work in pornography doesn't tell them who you are, and it will be civilians for

> whom the knowledge that you've been naked for money will be a kind of flattening—a thing they cannot see around.

In the absence of support and understanding from civilians, it will be "your sex worker friends" who "will offer you solidarity of every kind" (Lee, 2017). I am no exception. As I have described above, sex workers constitute a large portion of my personal social network, and sex work communities have become my home.

Goffman (1963/2009, p. 37) notes something else that seems prescient to working to do research from this position: "Starting out as someone who is a little more vocal, a little better known, or a little better connected than his fellow-sufferers, a stigmatized person may find that the `movement' has absorbed his whole day, and that he has become a professional." This is also true for me. During the course of this research, I wore many hats in the community, including organizing locally with the Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP), co-hosting the Peepshow Podcast (focusing on news and stories from the sex industry), and working as content editor for Peepshow Media (a magazine-style site devoted to featuring sex worker writing). Like these other efforts, my research is driven by a commitment to this community, but it is also deeply personal. The stakes of this research—any impact it may have on discourse policy—will affect me and my family. How then can I maintain the kind of detachment that the classic model of participant observation demands? I can't.

For all these reasons, I need to acknowledge my complex and unconventional relationship to participant observation. The best option to describe my role that I have found in the methodological literature is "complete participation." According to

Spradley (1980) "this highest level of involvement for ethnographers […] comes when they study a situation in which they are already ordinary participants." Similarly, Dewalt et al. (1998) describe "complete participation" saying that the "ethnographer is or becomes a member of the group that is being studied."

As these authors note, complete participation offers a unique set of challenges to research. Mainly, complete participation raises questions about whether a researcher can sufficiently reflect upon their research or achieve any degree of objectivity if they never step back from the situation. Also, complete participation raises questions of bias based on identification with the groups being studied. To fully engage with these epistemological questions and position my research, I now turn to reviewing a second relevant methodological literature on standpoint theory.

Taking a Stand (Standpoint Theory)

Standpoint theory originated as an effort to establish an epistemological foundation for feminist critique (Harding, 1992, 2004; Hekman, 1997; Hartsock, 1983a, 1983b). Influenced by Marxian observations that ideology is profoundly shaped by power relations (Hartsock, 1983a, 1983b), standpoint theory expands these epistemic claims beyond class position to gender, race, and, ultimately, the intersections of these and other axes of power (Collins, 1986, 1989, 1990/2002). Harding (1992) explains that power not only shapes but limits access to knowledge:

> The starting point of standpoint theory [...] is that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other such politics shaping the very structure of a society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them.

Implied in this observation is a critique of "objectivism"—that is to say, of positivist methodologies that assume it is possible to develop competencies that allow a researcher to have total access to knowledge from a single social position (Harding, 1992). Instead, standpoint theory argues that each person's unique social position affords them a unique (and necessarily partial) relationship to knowledge—what some scholars have call "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988). This means no one person or position has full access to truth.

For most standpoint theorists, however, recognition that knowledge is shaped by the social position of those who produce it is not interpreted to mean that objective knowledge is unobtainable; instead, these theorists argue that "strong objectivity" emerges through a dialectical process of synthesizing knowledge situated in various positions, allowing for the inherent biases and blind spots of these positions to be overcome in the knowledge that results from this process (Harding, 1992). However, to accomplish this, knowledge production must be located in scientific communities that incorporate perspectives from a diverse range of positions. Intemann (2010) explains that

> [b]ecause theory justification depends on a host of background assumptions of which individual scientists are often unaware, including ethical and political values, it is not always possible for individual scientists to identify or assess their own biases or faulty assumptions. For this reason, feminist empiricists take the locus of objectivity and justification to be scientific communities rather than individuals. Although individual scientists may not be able to identify or prevent their own idiosyncratic values from framing research questions, operating as background assumptions, or limiting the range of alternative hypotheses considered, scientific communities as a whole can achieve a higher degree of objectivity to the extent that they are structured in ways to help minimize the negative effects of such biases.

Standpoint theory—and its commitment to strong objectivity—was in tension with the post-modern and post-structural theories that dominated the final decades of the 20th Century (Hekman, 1997). While standpoint theory does share post-modernism's skepticism of grand narratives that attempt to subordinate all other perspectives (Lyotard, 1984), it still claims the pursuit of truth as its goal, seeking to eliminate ambiguities (or, as Bauman might say, "exterminate ambivalences" [Bauman, 1993, p.7]) rather than embrace them. I, myself, share some of the post-modern skepticism that objectivity is obtainable, and, more importantly, I share their concerns that those in power have, historically, justified all manners oppression on the basis of believing they had access to objective truths about the nature of society. It is certainly possible to assume that the goal of producing knowledge from a marginalized position is to "the conversation going rather than to find objective truth" as Rorty (1979, p. 377)

suggests, and to resist the imposition of master narratives. But of course my dissertation need not resolve this decades'-long epistemic debate.

Whether or not the ultimate goal is objective truth, standpoint theory suggests that those within marginalized groups have a unique and uniquely valuable vantage from which to conduct research and engage in analysis. "Outsiders within" scholarly communities "promise to enrich contemporary sociological discourse" by "reveal[ing] aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches" (Collins, 1986). This core assumption of standpoint theory is not simply useful in justifying my approach within this dissertation, but in fact has become central to many contemporary knowledge projects—both academic and popular—with the resurgent interest in intersectionality over the past decade (Collins & Blighe, 2020; Crenshaw, 2017) as well as an intensified focus on concepts of privilege and oppression. These discourses invoke many of the basic epistemic claims of standpoint theory in practice, if not in name.

As so far described, standpoint theory—instead of asking the researcher to bracket their own social position and lived experience—asks what can be seen from that unique position that may be invisible from other social positions. Through this lens, being embedded in a marginalized group or community is not a "distorting influence" (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1956) on knowledge production, but in fact offers a crucial perspective that inaccessible to outsiders. And while standpoint theory originated within feminist discourse, this observation explains its appeal to all those working from marginalized positions (including sex workers).

But beyond merely legitimating marginalized positions, standpoint theory demands constant critique of dominant regimes of knowledge, which often organize the repression of marginalized groups (Foucault, 1975/2012). These material consequences of scientific knowledge are the reason that "standpoint approaches want to eliminate dominant group interests and values from the results of research" (Harding, 1992). One obstacle to challenging these regimes of knowledge is that part of privilege is the capacity to assume that one's own social position is unremarkable or default (McIntosh, 1988). Standpoint theory refuses to concede epistemic privilege on the basis of power. In addition to embracing marginality as a unique source of knowledge, it also requires that those in positions of power be called to account for how their own social position shapes their judgement. Harding (1992) notes that "a maximally critical study of scientists and their communities can be done only from the perspective of those whose lives have been marginalized by such communities" and she concludes that this work is necessary "for scientific and epistemological reasons as well as moral and political ones."

This is the orientation that shapes my work as a (non-traditional) participant-observer. Ironically, however, the dominant discourses that I am challenging are themselves strongly rooted in feminism. Nevertheless, I am suggesting that in this case, the master's tools can be used to dismantle the master's house. Feminists—particularly, white economically-privileged feminists—must also account for the ways in which others have been marginalized by the regimes of knowledge they have produced. It is from my position as a sex worker that I bring a critical lens to the prevailing narratives and endeavor to offer more nuanced alternatives.

Interrogating My Positionalities

Having reviewed the methodological approaches that inform my work, I am now situated to analyze how two key positionalities which I occupy shape my interactions and understanding.

A Sex Working Researcher

My visible position as an online sex worker certainly made recruitment easier. Because sex work has been so deeply politicized by outsiders (especially in the wake of the feminist sex wars) the sex worker community has an understandable fear that researchers will prioritize the promotion of their own ideology above sex workers' own self-determined needs. Lee (2019) captures this sentiment, saying "whatever community coalitions we build, whatever work we do to speak about our own lives even when it is dangerous to do so, our voices will continue to be ignored if what we're trying to say doesn't fit into preexisting narratives"

As a result, sex workers are reluctant to participate in research, especially research led by outsiders. Berg (2014) observes this reluctance and discusses the causes in her research interviewing porn performers:

> [M]any of the performers with whom I have spoken describe various negative […] interview encounters they have had. Condescension, interviewers' sense of entitlement to intimate and seemingly unrelated information (such as that regarding

> histories of abuse), and generally poor social skills are some of the items that performers with whom I have spoken have identified as frustrating features of many academic and journalistic interviews. Performer interviewees also find their words twisted and appropriated toward ends they do not support […]

My role as a content producer, cam model, and podcaster increased my visibility to cam models and signaled insider status that almost certainly increased their openness participate in the study and discuss their experiences. Moreover, my experience in the industry made me aware of community concerns and enabled me to construct my questions in a way that was both sensitive and direct.

A Cis-Presenting Man in a Cis-Women's World

Thus far, I have largely discussed how my role as an insider shapes my work, but there is also one important way in which I am an outsider: namely, gender. While there are certainly many gay/bi and trans/non-binary performers in the industry, cis-women are the overwhelming majority.

Of course, this is no accident. There are significant structural reasons for the overrepresentation of cis-women. First, the socialization of girls—its emphasis on pleasing others and comporting one's body for the gaze of others—lends itself to erotic labor. Second, online sex work is a market. Straight/bi-identified men not only make up the overwhelming majority of porn's consumer base, but cis-men also have more disposable income to spend due to America's persistent wage gap. Finally, many of the early cam sites explicitly forbade cis-men and trans/non-binary people

from performing; this structural exclusion ensured that the industry was constructed around cis-women performers. And, to this day, MyFreeCams—one the most popular sites (and, often considered to be the best paying)—only allows cis-women on cam.

So when I enter cam performer spaces, I am acutely aware that I am entering feminized spaces. This in turn presents potential complications from my research. It has long been noted in anthropological literature that the gender presentation of a participant observer can shape their interactions and findings. More to the point, previous research suggests that "women may find it easier to gain access to some aspects of men's lives than male ethnographers find it to gain access to the worlds of women" (Dewalt et al., 1998).

Given the highly gendered nature of sex work in general—and for cis women cam models in particular—masculine presentation may be a barrier to openness. One fear is that models will project the patterns of interaction they have developed with clients onto me (or that I may be unconsciously be invoking these patterns). I am most aware of this in casual conversation when models tend use "men" and "clients" interchangeably. But it is not only my association with clients that I need to worry about. For many women in the sex industry, "men" is also a stand-in for the bosses, agents, site owners, photographers, etc. who are trying to exploit them in some way. I can't say I blame them. Even through the lens of my own experience, working in the industry is mostly characterized by trying to avoid exploitation from men while finding solidarity with women and queer-identified people.

There are three things that I believe have helped me overcome this gender-based skepticism. First is simply familiarity. Time, experience, and commitment tend

to build trust in communities, and I believe that this can happen in spite of the complexities of this uniquely gendered situation. Second, so many of my interactions with the community are not as an individual but as part of a couple. Being married to a woman in the industry means that, to some degree, my interactions are mediated through her less complicated acceptance as a cis woman. Finally, I have used the term "cis-presenting" to describe myself, because I have a very ambivalent relationship with my own gender. I have never felt comfortable interacting with men in men's spaces. The vast majority of my friendships throughout adulthood have been with women. As a child of the 90s, I have long identified as queer, but, increasingly, I think of myself as a non-binary man—"non-binary" to reflect my gender ambivalence and "man" to reflect my masculine socialization and privilege. I say this all because I think that my own complicated, and sometimes fraught, relationship to gender also influences the degree to which I am accepted into feminized model spaces in spite of my gender presentation.

Interviews

Participants

I conducted 31 interviews. 29 of the participants currently or previously performed as webcam models, one participant was a viewer, and one participant identified both as a viewer and performer.

Sex work, like sexuality more broadly, is highly gendered. Many of the sites used for online sex work organize performers according to gender and some have

gender exclusionary policies. For these reasons, as well as the fact that cis-presenting women constitute the vast majority of performers in the industry, I focused the study on cis-presenting woman performers and limit generalization to this group. Twenty-five of the participants presented themselves as cis-women performers. I also had the opportunity to conduct a couple of interviews with transfeminine models and one with a gay cis-man model. I also interviewed a cis-man who identified as a performer and viewer and a cis-man who identified exclusively as a viewer. I use these additional interviews to provide context to my core interviews with cis-women models.

Because established, successful models tend to be more visible on social media and are more likely to attend conventions, my sample likely underrepresents models who only briefly attempt camming or who do it casually. The vast majority of models I interviewed described online sex work as their primary job. Most had been doing this work for more than a year and relied on it as their primary income. For this reason, I describe them as "professionals."

The models who responded to interview requests also were likely more community-minded than the models who ignored these requests. The fact that no compensation was offered likely also skewed the sample is this direction. In one case, I received an explicative-laced response to a recruitment email chastising me for not offering money (which, as I discussed below, I believe was unfeasible and problematic). The models who did participate often expressed an interest in sharing knowledge and helping the community.

Design

Participants were recruited using a mixture of recruitment posts via social media and recruitment emails. We also distributed recruitment flyers at industry conventions; these conventions were particularly effective for recruiting. I attended them primarily in conjunction with my work as a performer (in one case I was nominated for an industry award), and I established trust with other performers during these interactions. Several performers expressed skepticism regarding academic research, and one explicitly mentioned that she only agreed to participate because I was visible as a performer in the industry.

Nevertheless, the fact that I present as a cis-man likely complicated my interactions, particularly in light of my decision to narrow the scope to cis-women. As I already noted, sex worker spaces are very gendered, and it is common to hear cis-women sex workers make generalizations about men or to move in conversation between discussing the behavior of their clients and their perceptions about the behavior of men in general as interchangeable. One model noted that although she uses Skype all the time, our interview was the first time she had a video call with a man who was not a client. Given these observations, I think it is safe to assume my interactions with models were influenced by gender, probably in ways which I am not fully aware of.

Interviews were conducted in-person or via Skype and lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. In a few cases, I also conducted a handful of follow-up interviews lasting 15 to 30 minutes. Interviews were recorded on an encrypted device.

I transcribed the interviews and then deleted the audio files to maximize confidentiality. Names were also changed for all participants.

As previously mentioned, no compensation was provided for participating. Apart from the fact that the research was unfunded (or rather, funded at my expense via student loans), this population is accustomed to charging substantial rates to talk to cis-presenting men (like myself), and I felt that any amount I could plausibly offer would be insultingly low. Moreover, introducing compensation would make the interaction more transactional, which was problematic given the aforementioned gender dynamic. Instead of monetary compensation, I committed to share my findings (and more broadly participating) with the community. It is certainly possible that some models chose not to participate due to lack of compensation, but except for the one angry response mentioned above, participants seemed unconcerned when I discussed the lack of compensation. At the end of the interviews, many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their experiences, and some requested to see the results of the study. Many of these conversations have led to continued interactions outside of the context of the study, and in several cases, I have developed ongoing friendships that began with these interviews.

Analysis

As chief concern of this project is that the most obvious interpretive frames—radical feminist theories that pornography inherently victimizes performers through subordination, violence, and objectification—have actually hampered empirical

investigation by presuming to establish an *a priori* understanding of the data they are meant to interpret. As far back as 1981, Armstrong observed that studies of sex work

> are far removed from a firsthand look at the subject matter. Instead descriptions and conclusions are products of theoretical presuppositions. In a sense, the answers are known before the questions are asked.

More recently, in a review of what he calls "the oppression paradigm" of feminist theories on sex work, Weitzer (2009) observes that

> the very definition of sex work (as inherently oppressive) is one-dimensional. When oppression theorists present empirical support for their arguments, they typically describe only the worst examples of sex work and treat them as representative. Readers who are unfamiliar with this literature would be surprised at the abundant, serious violations of the canons of scientific inquiry: Anecdotes are generalized and presented as conclusive evidence, sampling is selective, and counterevidence is consistently ignored. Such work is replete with tainted findings and spurious conclusions

Importantly, sex workers own self-articulated perspectives and experiences have often been disregard either because they are presumed to be incapable of speaking due to their victimization or because they are presumed to be coerced or indoctrinated by pimps and "the pimp lobby" (Bindel, 2019).

As an active measure to counteract these methodological issues, I adopted an abductive theory approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), which, like grounded

theory, attempts to bracket out existing theoretical interpretations during data collection to be open to and respectful of all possible narratives that emerge from respondents accounts of their own experiences, and yet also encourages researchers to sensitize themselves to dominant theoretical perspectives so that they can identify outliers or counterfactuals that indicate the limits to those theories. This paper follows the pattern of abductive theorizing, first examining dominant theoretical frameworks, then stepping back from them to examine performers' stories and self-interpretations on their own terms. In my case, the sensitization to not only the dominant theory that pornography victimizes performers (Bindel, 2018, 2017; Banyard, 2016; Dines, 2010; Dworkin 2000, 1993, 1988, 1987a, 1987b, 1979; Jeffreys, 1997; Barry, 1996, 1979; MacKinnon, 1993, 1985; Pateman, 1988; Steinem, 1980), but also labor/Marxist theories (Smith & Mac, 2018; Jackson, 2016; Berg, 2014; Grant, 2014) and sex positive/radical theories (Queen & Comella, 2008; Queen, 1997; Willis, 1993; Rubin, 1993, 1984; Webster, 1981; Califa, 1980) on sex work, in general—and pornography, in particular—as well as literature reviews (Weitzer, 2009; Attwood, 2002; Kesler, 2002; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001; Chapkis, 1997) and sex workers' own accounts and analysis of the industry (Jones, 2020, 2016; Lee, 2019, 2018, 2017; Suprihmbé, 2019; Davina, 2017; Bright, 2011; Frank 2003, 1998).

In practice, the sensitization process—along with my own lived experience as a cam model—informed the questions asked; however, I adopted a semi-structured approach that allowed me to adapt my questions to engage with the topics I perceived as most salient to each interviewee. I also asked each participant what questions they

thought I should be asking and what we had failed to cover; this often led to additional conversations and help me further develop my questions.

I re-listened to all the interviews and took notes, including a list of themes covered in each discussion. In several cases, I completed the full transcripts myself. (Others were anonymized* and outsourced.) I later used my notes to organize quotes from the interviews under subject headings, which helped to identify topics that elicited the most discussion from multiple models. Through this process I was not only able to identify topics which emerged consistently, but also to identify areas where models converged or diverged in their interpretations.

In several cases, I conducted follow-up interviews. In these cases—as well as in later interviews—I was able to discuss emerging themes with participants. (Participants often asked about this during the interviews.) The topic of the final chapter—dialectical performance as exemplified by custom videos—was something I had anticipated less in my initial line of questioning and which emerged out of the interview process. So this was a theme that I was particularly interested in raising in follow up interviews with models who I interview early on.

What I often found in the interviews—particularly around the themes of labor and intimacy—was that models tended to resist totalizing narratives in favor of nuance, noting that their experiences were varied and that most norms had exceptions, though this is also a product of an abductive theory approach that encouraged me to

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* During the consent process, I told participants that I would refrain from using their names and the names of other performers so that the effort required to anonymize recordings would be minimal.

ask follow-up questions about cases that did not fit whatever patterns they were describing. I attempt to organize my themes—and ultimately this dissertation—in a way that identifies patterns without erasing the nuance that was commonplace in my conversations with models.

Chapter 3: What are Cam Models Selling? What are Viewers Buying?

Abstract

This article develops a wide-ranging taxonomy of services provided by cam models, suggesting that although sex and sexualization are inextricable from camming, they are often a backdrop against which other kinds of interaction are more salient. In fact, models tend to describe their time and energies being consumed by activities other than producing sexual pleasure. However, even the production of sexual pleasure is described by models in very active and intentional terms; in other words, it is framed as labor. Thus, I conclude that feminist theories framing models as commodified bodies mischaracterize these cam models' experiences by the negating their consciously performative (albeit sometimes alienated) labor.

I work to understand this labor in a way that maximally highlights the voices of performers themselves, who have too often been excluded from such analyses. As I directly analyze the narratives of my respondents, the paper observes that exchanges between sex cam models and their clients most often involve the production and consumption (perhaps, more accurately, "prosumption") of several of the following: sexual arousal, companionship, intimacy, emotional support, attention, micro-celebrity/fandom.

Introduction

The quality and style of live cam shows vary widely, but they usually include one or more models interacting with a remote audience through a mixture of audio, video, and text. The audience may range from a single individual to several thousand people (depending on the popularity of the performer and whether the show is public or private). Often, models also independently produce shows, working as independent contractors on platforms like MyFreeCams, Chaturbate, Cam4, Streamate, or Cams.com. However, many porn industry giants (Playboy, Hustler, Kink.com, etc.), as well as smaller studios, also sponsor, promote, and/or produce cams.

While camming is still unfamiliar to many people, it is one of the fastest growing sectors of the sex industry. Conventional pornography has declined over the past two decades. Standard pay for mainstream porn scenes has dropped from $1,500 to $500, and total industry revenues are estimated to have dropped by as much as three quarters (*The Economist*, 2015). Meanwhile, camming has exploded into a billion-dollar industry, accounting for nearly 20% of overall porn industry revenues (Richtel, 21 September 2013). In fact, camming is increasingly being seen as the "engine of the porn industry" (XBIZ publisher Alec Helmy in Song, 2016). For example, a marketing executive at Kink.com (the Web's most popular fetish porn site), suggests that "strategically, this is the future […] the value of prerecorded content has eroded across the industry" (in Richtel, 21 September 2013). Similarly, an XBIZ executive said, "my feeling is all adult brands are getting in on cams as a matter of survival" (Conti, 11 September 2014). In particular, the industry is excited about the fact that the "liveness" of camming makes it impossible to pirate. Leo Radvinsky, CEO of MyFreeCams (the highest grossing cam site), explains "piracy hasn't affected

the cam sites in the same way it has affected the video sites… there is no way you can pirate a live interactive experience” (Henderson, 2011). Of course, people can and do record cam shows, but the participatory element is lost in the recording. This participatory element sets sex camming apart from much of the rest of the industry.

Increasingly, cam models are also self-producing short pornographic clips to sell for an additional income stream. These are sold on clips stores such as ManyVids and Clips4Sale, through subscription services like OnlyFans, and direct to fans. As with camming, these clips retain an interactive element, often being produced in consultations with fans or as customs directed by a single fan who pre-pays for the clip to be produced.

Background

Although the field of pornography studies has produced several influential texts that broadly analyze the cultural and historical significance of pornography (Kendrick, 1987; Kipnis, 1996; McClintock, 1992; Williams, 1989), academic literature on pornography is overwhelming dominated by debates about various social and psychological harms that researchers fear it may cause, especially for women (Seida & Shor, 2020, p. 42). Arguably, this narrow focus within academic literature is one of the most significant impacts of the second wave of feminist theory beginning in the late 1960s. Webster (1981) notes that by the 1980s, “pornography was assigned a privileged position in the discourse on women's oppression.” Anti-porn feminism is grounded in the assumption that all pornography is inherently violent, objectifying,

and centered on the domination of woman (Barry 1979; Dines 2011; Dworkin 1979; MacKinnon, 1993). The claims made by anti-porn feminists also inspired numerous studies sociological and psychological studies; but despite findings that consumption of violent content is a predictor of violent or misogynist attitudes and behaviors, such studies have failed to reach similarly conclusive results regarding non-violent pornography (Seida & Shor, 2020; Weitzer, 2014).

Increasingly, over the past several decades, "sex radical feminists" (e.g., Bright, 2011; Califa, 1980; Queen, 1997; Rubin, 1984, 1993; Webster, 1981) have challenged dominant anti-porn narratives of their "radical feminist" counterparts (Chapkis, 1997). Specifically, sex radical feminists have argued that porn is not monolithic, suggesting instead that it is produced by many different creators for many different audiences. Morover, efforts to address problematic content or practices through criminalization only further empower groups already intent on repressing sexual minorities. The arguments of sex radical feminists have had significant cultural influence among a new generation of intersectional feminists and within the field of sexuality studies; however, they have had comparatively little influence in mainstream society. Or, as Berg (2021, p. 19) puts it, sex radical feminists "have decisively won the academic 'sex wars' if not policy makers' favor."

Even if the anti-porn movement is not as central to feminist thinking as it once was, it continues to have enduring influence over how the discussion of the porn industry is framed. One legacy of anti-porn feminism is the tendency to treat the work of porn performers as exceptional—as unlike other work or even not as work at all. This is evident in anti-porn commentators' tendency to describe performers as

commodified bodies and not as laborers (Schwarzenbach, 1990). For example, Edwards (1993) argues that "women are reduced, in the sale of sex or fantasy […] to the level of a commodity." Similarly, Pateman (1983), says "when sex becomes a commodity on the market so, necessarily, do bodies and selves." Marx (1844/1959), of course, discusses the way that "the worker sinks to the level of a commodity" in the sense that workers become interchangeable in a marketplace and that their labor becomes an object separate from them; importantly, however, the worker is still a "*self-conscious and self-acting commodity*" (emphasis in original).

What anti-porn feminists describe is a more radical form of commodification—an almost total reduction of bodies to objects, to raw materials. That is to say, women do not actively participate in producing pornography; rather, they acquiesce to being "used in pornography" (MacKinnon, 1993, p. 113) due to coercive conditions of a patriarchal society and industry. According to MacKinnon (1993, p. 20), "all pornography is made under conditions of inequality based on sex, overwhelmingly by poor, desperate, homeless, pimped women who were sexually abused as children."

While all wage labor is coercive in the sense that our survival necessitates it, MacKinnon intends to convey here that the porn industry is uniquely coercive—that this coercion is of a different order of magnitude of than typical wage labor. To emphasize this point, feminists critics of the sex industry often employ the term "slavery" in lieu of "labor" (Barry, 1979). Dworkin (1979, p. 208) argues that this extreme form of objectification is only tolerated because the victims are women:

> Capitalism is not wicked or cruel when the commodity is the whore; profit is not wicked or cruel when the alienated worker is a female piece of meat; corporate bloodsucking is not wicked or cruel when the corporations in question, organized crime syndicates, sell cunt.

Here Dworkin repeatedly emphasizes the performers reduction to bodies as commodities—a "piece of meat," a "cunt"—inert objects to be traded, not people possessing labor power. Of course, the intent of rhetoric which reduces the industry to a trade in women as objects is to suggest that the only moral defensible position is to eliminate the industry in its entirety. So absolute are their beliefs that women are wholly objectified in the production pornography, anti-porn feminist have encoded these assumptions into their very definitional term: "Pornography is defined as the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women in pictures and/or words that also includes women presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities" (Dworkin, 1979, p. xxxiii).

While many performers have experienced coercive and abusive behavior on set during their careers, the problem with refusing to even entertain the possibility that women "deliberately" (Smith & Mac, 2018) work in the sex industry—and that this work requires significant skill and effort (Berg, 2021; Grant, 2016; Lee, 2019)—is that it precludes the possibility of acknowledging and supporting attempts by workers to organize for better conditions. In fact, because performers' efforts to organize appear to undermine claims that the industry reduces them to passive objects, these efforts to improve conditions are frequently treated as a threat by anti-

porn feminists who often attack organizers, claiming they are operating under a condition of false consciousness or are funded by “the pimp lobby” (Bindel, 2019).

These assumptions also influence what is (or can be) researched. In some cases, grants are designed in ways that prohibit even discussing work that examines the labor of sex workers (Brents, 2008). Moreover, because it is assumed *a priori* that performers lack the agency to meaningfully participate in discussions of the industry, performers’ voices have been excluded from most academic studies. Weitzer (2013) notes that despite over a half-century of research and fierce debate around the porn industry, only a few studies attempt to understand the situation of performers either through interviews (Abbott, 2010; Bakehorn, 2010; Berg, 2021) or ethnography (Tibbals, 2015), and only Jones (2020, 2016) focuses specifically on sex camming (though Berg [2021] certainly acknowledges that self-produced content in cam rooms and elsewhere are an increasingly central part of the industry). Berg (2020) observes the porn industry is full of contradictions; honoring the complexity of performers’ stories often means unpacking these contradictions even if we have to abandon tidy categories in the process. One such tension is the fact that porn performers’ jobs seem to combine work and pleasure—two aspects of life often assumed to be mutually exclusive. Jones (2020, 2016) explores this dialectic primarily through the lens of pleasure, asking what it means to “get paid to have orgasms.” Berg (2014, 2020) makes the case for approaching the same dialectic from the opposite direction by asking what is obscured by the tendency to treat sexual pleasure as exceptional (what Rubin [1984] called “fallacy of misplaced scale”) and by allowing this emphasis on pleasure to eclipse other modes of analysis, including labor analysis.

This paper embraces Berg's (2014) call to de-exceptionalize sex work and approach it as one would other forms of labor. In particular, it seeks to offer a foundation for this sort of labor analysis in the subfield of sex camming, and to do so by centering the voices of performers themselves. A full analysis could easily be the topic of a book, but this paper will confine its scope to two basic questions: What does the work of being a cam model involve? And as a corollary to this question: What is produced and consumed in a cam show?

Methods

This study draws on two years of interview-based and ethnographic research (conducted between October 2016 and October 2018). I interviewed sex cam models about their labor, their relationships with clients, and about working conditions in their sector of adult industry. I also engaged in participant observation as a cam model and clip producer during this time, though I began working in the industry prior to this study (in 2013) and continued that work after my formal data collection was completed.

Participants were recruited using a mixture of recruitment posts via social media and recruitment emails. Physical recruitment flyers were also distributed at industry conventions; these conventions were particularly effective for recruiting. I attended them primarily in conjunction with my work as a performer (in one case I was nominated for an industry award), and these in-person events aided in

establishing trust with other performers, as did the industry podcast I began hosting in 2017.

The sample includes 31 interviews with North American models and viewers. 29 of the participants currently or previously performed as webcam models, one participant was solely a viewer, and one participant identified both as a viewer and performer. Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older (screening questions preceded the survey). Interviews were conducted in-person or via Skype and lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. In a few cases, I also conducted follow-up interviews lasting 15 to 30 minutes. No compensation was provided for participating. Because respondents discussed highly stigmatized (and, in some cases, criminalized) activities, the IRB required that all respondents be assigned pseudonyms.

Findings

Models describe a wide variety of exchanges with clients. From these descriptions, I have attempted categorize distinct types of services cam models typically offer to clients.

Sexual Arousal

Though I have suggested that exclusively focusing on bodies and physical stimulation is problematic in that it can obscure the other kinds of labor that cam models perform,

sex and sexualization are an inextricable part of cam shows. Here I begin to situate this most visible part of cam models' work vis-a-vis the other services they offer.

In many cases, the pursuit of sexual arousal is what first brings a client to a cam room. Britt Beaches speculates that some clients

> may not have outlets for some of their weird sex stuff or who may go cheat on their wives and instead of cheating on their wives, they come and spend a little time with me. So, I'm doing a service for the community. [Laughs.]

Some models, particularly those working on sites like Streamate and Cam4, which cater more to private interactions, observed that organic traffic on these sites tended to lead to interactions that were more narrowly sexual or instrumental in nature. Britt Beaches says, "I have […] guys who come in all the time and they just treat me like a cam girl: 'get to work, this is what I want.'" Similarly, Bridget (who also does text and phone-based sex work) explains:

> Streamate's the most straightforward place as far as people wanting to have some kind of a sexual release. It tends to be less of that without the cam. People are typically coming to the cam for sex stuff.

Similar to old-fashioned peepshows, models are often asked to perform sexual acts that help arouse a masturbating viewer. These performances can be physically taxing, especially if repeated several times each day. Beyond the physical performance, models must do psychological work, anticipating the desires of clients who are not

always direct. Cat observes, “they all know what they want to do but they don't want to say it.” Even more complicated is the fact that embarrassed clients do not necessarily want support or encouragement. Sometimes what they find most arousing is to be humiliated about their desires. Models must parse this complexity.

However, even in these narrowly sexual encounters most clients are also seeking interaction. In a series of interviews with phone sex clients—which is relevant because so many of the many models in this study also work as phone sex operators and described the work as similar, and even overlapping, on some platforms—Jessie Sage (2018) found that sex often serves as a pretext for other sorts of needs. In fact, one client explained, “sex gets put on the table, and everything else is the hidden agenda items,” while another said, “a lot of men want romance but they think it needs to be wrapped in a turn on.”

Britt Beaches describes the blending of the sexual and the more broadly social in discussing interactions with her clients, many of whom are geographically or otherwise isolated:

> this is their social interaction. I'm their date. I'll sit in their kitchen with them. They just want someone to talk to after their long day. Of course, they want dirty stuff too.

That cheap/free pornography is pervasive on the Internet, as well as the fact that many cam models themselves sell clips for significantly less than what a private cam show would cost, is further evidence of the centrality of interaction in these exchanges. Gwen Marlee explains:

> You can go masturbate to anybody—go masturbate to porn. The fact that porn is so free and that you can see so much of it, you have to know that and be able be more entertaining than that and realize it’s not always about making the guy cum. Eventually, you know, obviously that’s part of it.

While interaction distinguishes camming from conventional pornography and open the possibility for broader kinds of connections, some models prefer to keep the focus of their interactions on sex. For example, Lucia Amaryllis says:

> I encourage as much sexual stuff happening as possible, because that's where I make my money. I know a lot of girls are really successful with chatting and gearing that toward their financial stuff. I've never been really good at that. My forte is more just doing as much sexual things as possible. And then I also do privates. Privates are my favorite because it's guaranteed money per minute.

Most models, however, express a personal preference for more involved interactions with clients and find such interactions to be less alienating. Aurora Rosaline describes:

> A good person […] has other interests. I don't mind if someone's interests are purely sexual. It happens. It's sex work. It's not a big deal. But there are people who want to talk about me more as a person.

Longer, more involved relationships tend to produce more revenue, because conversations can last much longer than straight sexual encounters. Even when non-sexual interaction is not directly compensated, the personal connection arising out of conversation may entice clients to purchase pre-recorded clips or other goods (e.g., used undergarments/shoes, Polaroids, written notes, etc.) offered for sale by a model.

The sexual aspects of relationships with regular clients might be described as more seductive than overtly pornographic (Baudrillard, 1979/1990). Occasional sexual interaction—or just the mere possibility of it—creates a kind of flirty glue that holds conversation and other interactions together. In this way, models find themselves walking a tightrope: sex is an attractor, but too much focus on sex can alienate clients or discourage more involved personal connections, which are crucial to business. Gwen Marlee explains:

> That's how you make good money is the connections you make with people. Sometimes people forget that, and we start to almost objectify ourselves. You know, "You want to see my tits? Why aren't you tipping me? You want to see my boobs?" And, they would probably talk to you about the fact that you saw Justice League this weekend and make a connection with you.

Some models experience a struggle regarding being oversexualized. Aurora Rosaline describes her large breasts as both an asset and a detriment (especially when combined with her racial ambiguity):

> Sometimes […] I feel like a lot of people don't want to get to know me, but they would more give that to someone else. I feel like they just see me as a novelty. […] they just see my chest and that kind of sets the tone for the entire interaction. So, that can be hard.

In contrast, Chelsea Burke says that it is easy to get lost in conversation and forget the more sexual aspects of the interactions:

> [F]or the most part, I don't even talk sexual to these guys. And, then, sometimes, I'll notice that I'm just doing too much of my regular life, and I'm like, "here are my boobs." [Laughs.] "Thanks for listening to me talk. Have some butt."

So, sex is necessary to attract clients and keep their attention, but hypersexualized presentation (even if this is the product of biased social perceptions about certain body types, racialized features, etc.) can detract from the sorts of interactions that distinguish camming from conventional pornography. In other words, based on their unique personalities and physical characteristics, each model must figure out how to infuse interactions with sex without reducing them to it. Just like a striptease or fan dance, it is a constant balance of reveal and conceal (Jurgenson & Rey, 2012).

Companionship

Many models—particularly those who offer private interactions via a cam site, Skype, or phone—report having clients who never engage in overtly sexual

conversation. In other cases, where an overt sexual element does exist, it may be secondary. Chelsea Burke explains, “for the most part, I don't even talk sexual to these guys,” while Annie, emphasizing the fact that clients are often more interested in the social interaction than the sexual release, says:

> The actual orgasm is […] just when the call ends on the sex calls. They almost don't even look forward to that because then they feel like they should hang up after they cum. It's like the orgasm is really not the point here.

Abstract theories of objectification tend to posit that clients view sex workers as interchangeable bodies, but cam models report that it is common for clients to want to embed sex within a context of broader social interaction. For example, Poppy explains:

> You have to actually talk to the customers, in order to make money. You have to build relationships, even if the relationship only lasts 30 minutes.

Nadya suggests that social interaction is of particular interest to regular customers, who she speculates may be lacking other opportunities for such interaction:

> I’ve noticed that a lot of the people […] who come in more than once a week and […] who buy Snapchat or Kik or whatever to talk to me offline aren’t there to masturbate. Like, I’m sure they do at some point. [Laughs.] But, they’re more there

> for that interaction and the conversation that comes from it that, maybe, they're not getting at home.

Similarly, Gwen Marlee argues:

> I'm giving them something that they need. They need human interaction and female interaction is something that a lot of men crave. So here I am, providing that.

And, Lucia Amaryllis says:

> [I]t definitely is something where, like, they're so deeply alone or searching for love. There's some viewers of mine… One person who's a regular is a quadriplegic, so he can't really interact regularly—especially sexually. So, I totally understand how camming would be a really good outlet for him… or, like, for people who are involved in the military or are severely isolated.

Most models express a genuine appreciation for fans who seek interaction, and, in some cases, the social interaction on cam sites serves a mutual need for connection. Some models even describe interactions with viewers turning into true friendships. For example, Gwen Marlee says:

> [T]here are people that I've genuinely become friends with through the site. But they've always treated me like a person. They're just my friends, and I know that they masturbate to me sometimes and we don't make it weird. [Laughs.]

Similarly, Sofia Ardent says:

> I have one or two fans that I call my best friends. I talk to them every day. We chat everyday about all kinds of different things. It's not just sexual […] And, I play video games with them and stuff like that. It's not always just about sex. […] I don't get out that much, so having these friendships is a really good way to keep me grounded and not feel alone all the time.

Only models that felt that the companionship they provided was completely performative, although these relationships were less desirable than more overtly sexual interactions. Lucia Amaryllis, for example, says:

> It's interesting because those are the people that literally pay for my life and keep me alive and make it possible for me to do what I want to do. But, at the same time, the emotional connection and the deep friendship—or whatever they feel with me—is something that is completely empty on my side, and I'm totally in it just financially. […] I definitely hope what they're getting from it is what they need. […] But I don't know why I just can't reciprocate that for them.

The vast majority of respondents saw providing companionship as a positive part of their job, even if it is not fully reciprocal. Charlee Bentham, for example, was careful to distinguish clients from "real life" friends, but nevertheless finds providing companionship to be rewarding:

> [I]t does make me happy to see when I have people that are just funny say silly things, especially if it’s been an hour and most of the conversation has been like "oh you're hot" or "oh, show me your hairy armpits" or just comments about appearances or whatever. That can get old and boring and kind of annoying. And then, a few of my regulars [come] in and [start] talking about whatever and [start] saying funny things and making me laugh. You know, it's just like having a conversation with a friend almost.

Intimacy

The tension between the transactional and more personal nature of these provider-client relationship highlights an assumption within classical social theory—and within our popular imagination more broadly—that markets and intimacy occupy completely separate social spheres (Zelizer, 2005). Part of the problem is that intimacy is ill-defined (Frank, 1998).

Most sociological analyses of intimacy echo Simmel (n.d./1950), who describes a relationship as intimate to the degree that we willingly disclose things that we tend to conceal in other aspects of our lives. From this perspective, intimacy is primarily about information sharing, and thus can be unidirectional.

On sites where group shows and group chat are the norm (e.g., Chaturbate and MyFreeCams), the relationships between models and clients are often asymmetrical, with clients knowing far more about a model than models know about clients; this is because models have public personas and are the center of attention in group chat rooms (which is reinforced by the fact they alone communicate by audio and video,

unless it is a private session). This, along with asymmetries in clients and models' social media presences, sometimes leads to fans forming "parasocial" bonds with models that are reminiscent of fan relationships with more conventional celebrities or celebrity characters (Klimmt et al., 2006).

In classic parasocial relationships, "consumers interact with personas (i.e., mediated representations of presenters, celebrities, or characters) as if they are present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship" and even "begin to view mediated others as 'real friends'" (Labrecque, 2014). The asymmetry of these parasocial relationships creates difficult interactions for (micro-)celebrities, because fans may feel they know them extremely well while the models sometimes know almost nothing about the fan. This is further complicated given that, as discussed above, many models do in fact form friendships with some clients. It can be difficult for clients to distinguish between the "parasocial" relationships they may have with a model and the more "real" relationships that other clients have, leading to some clients placing unreasonable social expectations on a model who barely knows them.

Moreover, asymmetrical relationships can feel emotionally precarious for models; if a client becomes upset, they can simply vanish without a trace. Models, on the other hand, are easy to contact by design. Fleur, who has been camming for several years, is frustrated with a pattern of regulars breaking off contact with her rather than resolving disagreements:

> Lately, I haven't been as open, because I feel like it kind of bit me in the ass with a few members that I don't really talk to anymore. […] My members […] know more

> about me than I know about them. So sometimes they take stuff personally when they shouldn't. […] It just kind of sucks. It sucks letting someone get to know me, and then they're not in my life anymore. […] I hate getting close to a regular, and them just leaving. […It's] kind of like a breakup because it's like a friendship ending.

Beyond the act of sharing, informational intimacy requires the act "attention provided by, at least one person" (Zelizer, 2005, p. 14) In this way, both parties participate, even if they participate differently. In fact, on sites that cater to more private, one-on-one interactions (or with clients who regularly pay for such interactions) clients often pay models simply to listen to them. In these cases, the flow of information is reversed (though the interactions are not necessarily less intimate).

Cat expresses irritation about the one-sided nature of some conversations:

> I feel more like a sex therapist sometimes […] consuming my brain hours to sit there and talk to these dudes about their fantasies. […] I have to make them feel comfortable with that. I can't say anything that will make them feel uncomfortable. I have to get them to open up to it.

This kind of informational intimacy is not always unidirectional. In practice, models and clients often engage in bi-directional information sharing which resembles the norms of friendship. For example, Violet Vi says:

> I'm an open book, a lot of my regulars are open books. We share a lot of things with each other. The only hard line that I will ever draw is when it comes to where I am at any given moment.

Similarly, Chelsea Burke explains:

> I pretty much share my regular life, like "oh, I'm going to work today." Or, when I was in school, I would share that. So, we can talk about the struggles of being a student or, if I'm complaining about my boss, then they'll be like, "oh, I've got an asshole boss, too."

However, the problem with sociological definitions that treat intimacy as a structural description of information sharing is that they decenter the emotional dimension that we tend to associate with terms in common usage.

An alternative definition coming from interpersonal communication studies emphasizes the experience of feeling represented in others' communication (Baym, 2018; Beebe et al., 2010): "the degree to which relational partners mutually confirm and accept each other's sense of self." This frame makes subjective experiences and emotions a central aspect of intimacy.

Beebe et al. (2010) go on to argue that "the closer a relationship, the more you depend on a partner to accept and confirm your sense of self; your partner does the same." This perspective is helpful in understanding why, for example, Fleur says that she needs engagement and affirmation from her regular viewers in order to feel comfortable opening up in her own chat room:

> I'm kind of an awkward person, so other people coming in and just being goofy with me makes me feel so much more comfortable. And I get to feel like completely myself in my room.

But this formulation of intimacy as mutual confirmation and acceptance is complicated by the way in which fantasy is often projected on to certain kinds of relationships. For example, Baym (23 February 2018) notes that fans commonly experience deep, unidirectional relationships with musicians, who have never met them but whose lyrics resonate with their own experiences and confirm their sense of self.

Fantasy plays a particularly significant role in provider-client relationships. Frank (1998) observed that patrons of high-end gentleman's clubs would often pay everything upfront, so the transactional aspect would not interrupt what amounted to a dinner date with the dancer. Similarly, Cat is conscious of many clients' desire to have a confidant, explaining that in her interactions she "create[s] this fantasy world in which it's kind of like a girlfriend experience." Leena Sativa empathizes with this need for fantasy:

> I have close fans who have PTSD, who have been through more things than I can even fathom, and there still here today and we're their fantasy, we're their escape. You never know what someone else is going through.

Finally, the gendered dynamic of these interactions is also significant. Hegemonic (Connell, 1987) or toxic (Kimmel, 1995) masculinity discourages (and is, in fact,

threatened by) intimacy outside the context of sexual relationships. The sexualized nature of these interactions may actually be a pretext—or, perhaps, a prerequisite—for intimacy. Another phone sex client in Sage's (2018) analysis explains, "I don't think that there is a way of solving [our loneliness] that doesn't include sex, even among the more gentlemanly, that is how men know how to feel connected." Thus, these intimate relationships (whether authentic or fantasy) are prized, in part, as a rare opportunity for emotional openness—and to be safe and affirmed in so doing.

Emotional Support

While intimacy (as I have defined it here) implies a significant degree of emotional connection, camming can also be understood more broadly as a form of emotional labor. Clients require a great deal of emotional management and many clients specifically seek emotional support via their paid interactions. This leads Lucia Amaryllis to conclude:

> [S]ex work is honestly a very healing work […] especially for people who have gone through sexual trauma—can come and go to a sex worker and explore that space in a way that's really safe and really fun and consensual. […] We're definitely undervalued for what we provide for people.

This is particularly the case for regulars.

This emotional support is performative but can be performed in different ways within different provider-client relationships. Hochschild (1983) famously

distinguished *surface acting* (i.e., presenting the appearance of an emotional state) and *deep acting* (Exhibitionist attempting to achieve that emotion state within a performance). Surface acting is a constant feature of social media self-curation, but it can also be part of more personal interactions. Britt Beaches says:

> I'm putting so much out. Smiling. My face hurts by the end of the day. [Laughs.] I have no smiles left.

But beyond managing outward appearances, she describes how the job requires deep emotional engagement, saying she cannot do the job if she is not in the right mood:

> If I feel burnout or too tired or I'm done, I'm done. [...] When it's not fun anymore, then I'm done. I can't fake it. You can tell if I'm not having fun. If somebody asked for something and they know I don't like it, they can see it on my face right away. I can't help it. I make these micro-expressions that people can see.

However, these provider-client relationships sometimes seem to go beyond surface acting, growing into real care and concern. Bridget explains:

> I do genuinely connect to people on an emotional level. Some people I have known since the beginning, and they watched me evolve over time and grow. And so I'm definitely not just character acting.

In fact, models often struggle to set boundaries. In some cases clients express feelings that are inappropriate to the context, and models are faced with the difficult task of communicating limits without alienating a loyal customer. For example, Chelsea Burke explains:

> I've had a few guys tell me that they are genuinely in love with me, and I'm like, "Ok, hold up. You're in love with who you think I am. You're in love with this naked Internet girl" (who is mostly me; for the most part, it is me). But, I'm like, "You don't even know my name. You know what I show you. Just back up. You're not in love with me. I'm sorry."

These boundary negotiations are difficult not only because clients sometimes have unreasonable expectations, but also because models themselves sometimes grow emotionally invested in a client’s wellbeing. Violet Vi describes feeling a mutual connection with many clients, while also emphasizing the importance of maintaining boundaries:

> I have people that are friends—that I can wholeheartedly call my friends. I've got regulars that come into my room all the time. We talk and spend a lot of time together. You can't not call these people your friends. But you have to hold them at arms’ length because it's very easy for them to catch feelings or get deluded about the nature of your relationship, and then it becomes problematic.

Poppy, who worked as a stripper for a decade before switching over to cam modeling, explains that boundary-setting was a skill she had to develop:

> I 100% have emotional connections with my regulars, and I feel that now, at this point in my life, years later — much experience later — I can deal with it. I know how and where to draw the lines.

Contrary to what we might expect, sometimes acting may take the form of displaying less care or concern than models actually feel in order to maintain boundaries. Poppy further explains:

> When I was younger, I wasn't good at playing a part. [...] There's a huge level of acting and manipulation that comes into play. A lot of times with the hustle. And, I struggled with that. I didn't know how to just be myself but at the same time hustle. You almost had a have an alter ego. You almost had to have this part of yourself that was willing to rip guys off, I guess. Kind of just cut yourself off from the emotions.

In this case, Poppy's struggle is less with faking care or concern for her clients, but instead that the real emotional investment she makes in them will be taken for a desire to grow the interaction beyond the bounds of a provider-client relationship.

After numerous conflicts with clients, Poppy developed what researchers describe as "distancing strategies," through which sex workers' "work on their internal feelings to separate, change and revise one set of feelings that are appropriate during sex work while reserving another set of emotions or feelings for private

interactions" (Sanders, 2005). For instance, this may involve setting certain hours or days where you are unreachable by clients, or it may involve reserving certain sex acts for romantic partners. For Fleur, it means confining relationships to digitally-mediated interactions:

> I don't feed into the meeting up fantasy. People talk about hanging out or people will ask me out on dates and I'm like, "nope. nope. nope. nope." I won't play into that at all. I even had a guy in my talk be like, "oh, we're just talking; it's just fantasy." And, I was like, "no. I'm not going to feed into that," because I don't want to put the idea into someone's head that they do have a chance when they don't. [Laughs.] I'm here to cam—I'm here to have fun and make friends and stuff, but I'm not here to find a date. So I will set that boundary.

This feeling of personal connection with clients while recognizing a need to maintain distance from them is a significant tension for many models in these transactional relationships. Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) uses the term "bounded authenticity" (or, sometimes, "bounded intimacy") to characterize these sorts of relationships. The idea of "boundedness" implies social and emotional involvement that is confined or limited to a contractually specified period.

Bernstein (p. 102) describes bounded authenticity in the context of contemporary high-class prostitution:

> In contrast to the quick, impersonal "sexual release" associated with the street-level sex trade, much of the new variety of sexual labor resides in the provision of what I

> call "bounded authenticity" — the sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection.

However, this pattern can also be found in other (less cost-restrictive) fields of sex work, such as phone sex (Flowers, 2010) or stripping (Frank, 1998). For clients, these relationships offer a low-risk emotional connection; they can walk away at any time. In this way, provider-client relationships may resemble a type of "pure relationship," which Anthony Giddens (1992) describes as:

> entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it.

While some clients may be using these relationships as a stand-in for less contingent relationships, many clients are seeking these transactional relationships as ends in themselves (Bernstein, 2007, p. 120). Cat interprets this rather cynically:

> They […] want it to be all about them. They don't want to put any effort into learning about this other person. They don't want to put any effort into worrying about their personal struggles. They only want little tastes. They only wanted every once in a while. They don't want a real full-blown thing all the time. That's like having a real girlfriend. They're like, "I don't want that. I want to fake girlfriend."

Thus, not only are boundaries important, but creating and maintaining boundaries should be understood as part of the work itself. Failure to be consist with these boundaries may alienate customers. In fact, Bernstein (2007) recounts instances of clients being scared away by providers offering “freebies” or other special treatment to them.

Surface acting, deep acting, and boundary-setting are all well understood facets of emotional labor. However, the workers (e.g., flight attendants, waitresses, nurses, etc.) that have traditional been the focus of analyses of emotional labor have little control over the environments where they work. In contrast, cam models have total control over their own DIY show (at least within the limits of what the cam sites allow). As such, environmental curation is a central aspect of the job.

Gwen Marlee explains that clients want a space where they can temporarily escape their own lives:

> They want to feel a release from the world. They want to forget about the real world for a minute and just hang out with you and laugh or whatever it is.

Many models described the importance of facilitating a kind of emotional safe zone where positive interactions could be expected as a default—both in chatrooms and on social media—although sometimes a more somber tone might be expressed if appropriate to certain events or conversations. Layla Sugar explains, “if I wasn’t having fun, if I wasn’t in a good spirit, if I wasn’t vibing out, then nobody would want to watch me, because no one wants to watch someone be miserable.” Similarly,

Nadya said, “I can’t be like, ‘I’m having a really shitty day, but still, give me all your money.’” While cam models are particularly self-aware of this selective emphasis on positivity, research suggests that this kind of self-curation is actually characteristic of social media norms more broadly, which in turn may set expectations for cam models (Hogan, 2010).

Another element of this work is moderating trolls or other bad actors who are aggressive, confrontational, or even engaging in overt harassment. Fleur describes some of the trolling she has experienced:

> I've had people try to make me feel uncomfortable—the typical douches. "I know you." Or, "I went to high school with you." Creepy stuff like that. […] I exit the situation as fast as possible and just ban them. […] There's definitely a lot of trolls.

This kind of policing, while important for building and maintaining regulars in the long run, could lead to a loss of income in the short run. Often models must make tough calls about whether to engage a potentially difficult client. Annie describes:

> If you have a couple hundred people in your chat room, you have more people who are being nice to you and you can afford to ignore a jerk. But if the jerk is the only guy who's there in your chat room, then you're going to end up interacting with them, for better or for worse.

Attention

While I have already discussed how attention is integral to intimacy, it also serves a couple additional functions that are important to address—namely, respect and exposure.

Many clients (implicitly or explicitly) pursue interactions with cam models out of a desire to have their masculinity affirmed. Because hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) is so closely tied to heterosexual scripts (Kim et al., 2007), heteronormative interactions are often a source of such affirmation. Cam shows offer a venue to perform these heteronormative scripts and have them be positively received and reciprocated.

During one seminar I attended, a successful cam model coached other models, saying "men want to be respected more than they want to be loved." She encouraged models to make overt displays of gratitude when receiving payment, explaining that men are likely to tip more if they feel appreciated. Indeed, the feeling of appreciation is part of what they seek in these interactions. The coach linked this to the traditional concept of chivalry, noting that men feel good if they can be the "white knight" who saves a model by helping her reach her daily tip goal.

Similarly, Leena Sativa explains:

> People need to feel like you're paying attention to them. And if you aren't, or they feel like you aren't, both find somebody else to get that attention from. So if you're kind of a distant person, you may struggle a little more to keep your supporters.

Moreover, she suggests that this is particularly important to demonstrate with new clients:

> Some of these guys have been with me since I wrote my blog long before I started camming. These guys are still some of my strongest supporters today. These guys, to them, it doesn't matter what I do as long as I'm happy. But as far as the general population, the general people following my career, constant interaction — these people need to feel like you're paying attention to them. […] The constant attention and treatment and recognition for tips is super important.

Exhibitionist clients also seek attention as a way to experience exposure and gratify their kinks. In some cases, they are less interested in seeing the provider perform a sex act than to see the provider's reaction to their own naked body or the sight of them masturbating. This desire, in particular, drives interest in cam-to-cam sessions, where for a premium a model will perform on cam for a client while also watching the client on cam. Fleur describes this experience:

> I do cam-to-cam sometimes. I watch people. It's kind of cool. I like cam-to-cam because it's like "everyone gets to watch me," and it's like, "oh, I finally get to watch you." So, it's like, "the table has turned."

In fact, there are entire genres of "penis rating" and "small penis humiliation" that revolve around a provider viewing and objectifying a client.

Exposure can also be more confessional than directly exhibitionist. In criticizing the idea that contemporary sexuality is repressed, Foucault (1976/1990) points to the manner in which the Catholic practice of confession and psychoanalysis both dwell obsessively on sex as a source of truth and meaning. He suggests that the act of confessing itself is a sublimated form of pleasure in remembering or imagining the act.

Micro-Celebrity/Fandom

In her book on lifecammers in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Terri Senft (2008) coined the term "micro-celebrity" to describe "a new style of online performance in which people employ webcam, video, audio, blogs, and social networking sites to 'amp up' their popularity among readers, viewers, and those to whom they are linked online." Alice Marwick (2013, p. 114) refined this concept, saying

> Micro-celebrity is a state of being famous to a niche group of people, but it is also a behavior: the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention. […] They are working in a different milieu [than conventional celebrities], that of the internet, which idealizes transparency and thus expects a certain amount of exhibitionism.

Two dimensions of this definitions are important to consider in the context of this article.

First, micro-celebrity is not just a status but it is a performance produced by models for clients to consume as fans. In fact, cam viewers—particularly regulars—engage in a type of fandom (Hester et al., 2015; Moraine, 2012). Frida, who was occasionally recognized as starring in a few studio pornography films before transitioning to cam work described feeling surprised to discover that she had devoted fans:

> I’ve noticed […] it has a real fanboying aspect. Where it’s like you have people that see you as this character, and then they’re all about you and your character and your character’s personality, so they feel like they want to keep spoiling and spoiling you and treating you as like this celebrity almost, which is really crazy.

Often, however, this fandom is more than simply fawning over a performer; in fact, the participation of fans is so active that it might be better understood as “prosumption” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). These fans help moderate rooms, encourage each other to meet tip goals, participate in group activities such as games, offer possible ideas for shows, vote on various show options, and even start promotional social media accounts to help their favorite models garner votes for various industry awards and prizes. Charlee Bentham described the contributions of one fan, saying:

> There's actually one person… who doesn't have tokens and doesn't tip—I just don't think he has the financial resources for it—but he also makes my shows a lot more exciting, and it feels like he's a friend and an ally on the site for me. So, he's my

> moderator for my room and is actually really fun and keeps the show alive, even if it's kind of dead and even if he doesn't tip, but I appreciate that.

In exchange for the energy that fans invest, cam models are expected to be more accessible than traditional celebrities. Leena Sativa explains:

> I think that […] it's more about the connection than the content itself. […] With a lot of my fans, it's the personal connection, and the content is kind of a bonus.

Gwen Marlee describes:

> I try to consistently spend an hour a day replying to all my messages on my free Snapchat—that's one of the things I do on there—and people seem to really like it. Like, I'll say, "thank you," if they complement me. I just consider it like modern day fan mail. And it sucks because the amount of effort it would take someone into writing a letter and sending it to someone is completely different than the amount that goes into sending a Snapchat. Still, every time I reply to them, even if it's just a heart or a smiley face emoji, so many people are like, "Wow! I can't believe you replied to me. This is the first time a porn star has ever replied to me. Oh my god, you just made my day." And, I'm like, "Really, I can do that just by sending you an emoji?"

A second aspect of Marwick's definition of micro-celebrity which is important to consider is how it combines transparency and exhibitionism*; this provides and aura of authenticity. Marwick (p. 121) explains that part of the appeal of micro-celebrities is their perceived authenticity; although, of course, authenticity is highly subjective, and its definition is slippery.

Models describe tensions in their self-representation between trying to be true to themselves and creating a persona that is desirable to customers, trying not to reveal too much while not seeming closed off or fake. Some models treat camming as an elaborate performance, describing the person they are on a cam as a separate self. For example, Lucia Amaryllis says,

> There's two different people you could say. There's a person I am on Chaturbate and there's a person who I am right now on the real world. […] I try and portray as young a girl as possible. Very kind and super giddy when it comes to chatting—really like almost a cheerleader stereotype, which I'm sure, honestly, you can picture in your head as the stereotypical cam girl. And that's the ideal.

Ironically, she portrays authenticity as something that can be faked, so long as your performance feeds into what viewers want to believe is authentic. She explains her motivation for performing this character on cam:

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* The transparency, exhibitionism, and perceived authenticity associated with micro-celebrity also further reinforces the parasociality described above.

> For me personally, I think just naturally built a persona for my work. And I think that's because in order to be successful in the camming world, I feel like natural personality wouldn't really be successful. [Laughs.] But, then again, I think we all kind of create—you know, when we're in public versus private. […] So I think I naturally did that with camming. I definitely have to keep up with it and make sure I remain in that space, but it's helped me separate my work life from my real life.

Charlee Bentham takes an even more cynical tone about authenticity, describing it as an illusion of marketing:

> [W]ith homemade porn or quote unquote amateur porn people feel like it's more real and more authentic, even though much of the time it's not at all.

However, most models do not feel so disconnected from their public persona. Like Lucia Amaryllis, Bridget suggests that what it means to be authentically oneself depends on context, yet describes the self she presents in work and the self she presents in family life as two distinct but equally authentic facets of her identity:

> It's about being authentic in both places, I guess. And I really do run them separately, but it's still me… Me and my very naughty me.

Many models strongly identify with the self they inhabit on cam. Charlee Bentham explains:

> [M]ostly, I just try to be myself, because it's exhausting to try to be someone else for me. I'm a terrible liar and I would be a terrible actress. […] for me, being myself and acting like myself is more enjoyable than acting like someone else. But there are still parts of myself that I hide. […] I have half of my real self hidden from them, because: 1.) I don't want to feel too comfortable and slip up and say things that my safety, and, 2.) it kind of helps to have a separation between because it's not my real life but it still is a big part of what I'm doing with my time right now.

While traditional pornography is associated with campy overacting and contrived sexual encounters, cam models emphasize the realness of their own self-presentation. For Violet Vi, this was something she had to learn to be comfortable with:

> When I was younger and I first got into camming, I tried to do the cute little bubbly kawaii thing. It got a certain kind of viewers, but that's not really who I was. And through camming, I learned a lot more about myself, so I just decided to drop it. I'm 100% me when I'm on cam now. […] It was something that I couldn't maintain. And I personally didn't like the fakeness of it. And something that camming teaches you is that you are good enough. So putting on a persona is not necessary, because there's somebody out there for everyone.

Other models are like Britt Beaches, who describes her public self as relatively consistent with her private self, but more expressive, saying:

> It's almost like a cartoonish version […] it's like me but bigger and cutesier. […] Exaggerated. […] It’s still me being nice and myself and kind, but it's like extra—extra smiling, extra nicer than I would be. […] I do have to make sure that I'm being

> authentic to myself and what I'm willing to do, or it's not fun. It's definitely still me on the cam, it's just an exaggerated, uninhibited version. I like it.

Webcam model and academic Angela Jones (2016) argues that in addition to authentic self-representation and social engagement, models are expected to reveal their bodies in ways that are authentic as well:

> From the perspective of the camgirls, what customers want is an embodied authenticity. They want to see a woman's body quiver in ecstasy, but they must believe it is real. The format of these online contexts, the livestreaming feature, ostensibly allows clients to verify the authenticity of her bodily pleasure (the orgasm) and, most important, to partake in the entire experience without any physical contact.

The imperative for "embodied authenticity" was evident when teledildonics first became popular on cam sites. These toys ostensibly vibrated when tips were registered; however, many models were accused of having fake devices or of faking the displays of pleasure resulting from them. While it was common to see models apparently over-acting orgasms when these toys first became available, norms have now settled into place on the sites and reactions tend to be more plausible.

In contrast to Jones' observations about the importance of embodied authenticity; Gwen Marlee suggests that the sexual performances are often the most performative aspects of camming—that sex on camera requires bodily contortions and an other-centeredness which is different from sex off camera:

> Putting an act just takes so much more work. When I do my cum shows, sometimes I am putting on an act. When I'm masturbating in bed, I'm laying with the blanket over me, you know? [Laughs.] When I'm masturbating on camera, that's when I'm going to put the act on for you. Not when I'm just hanging out and being myself.

Authenticity may be largely subjective, but what's crucial for camming is that the performer shares a complementary understanding of authenticity with her specific fans. This further highlights the co-produced nature of cam shows.

Another important point is that in contrast to other micro-celebrities, cam models are less likely to generate revenue through sponsorships and more often directly sell personal time and attention to fans. Some models enter camming to monetize the intimate connections their fans have already developed elsewhere. For example, in a recent profile, award-winning cam model Taylor HouseWifeSwag (Freixes, 2018) describes finding success first with a popular blog on Tumblr:

> I posted things that I'm passionate about, like sex and body-positivity, mental health, exploring and discussing kinks, etc. I would stream on one of those safe-for-work free video chat rooms with my followers because I loved interacting with them and I wanted a more intimate and realtime connection with them. That evolved into me thinking, "Hey … it'd be really cool if I could just … show my boobs on here too?" and that's when a few people brought up webcamming.

Other cam models cross over and develop followings outside of the adult industry. For example, Aurora Roseline, describes how a group of cam site fans with whom she developed intimate connections provided a launchpad for her burgeoning art modeling and writing career:

> I have people now who carried over from MFC [MyFreeCams]. They supported me on MFC very early. They went over to Patreon when I started that. […] People who've been around for years, they're still here supporting whatever I'm doing.

Most cam models, regardless of whether they have achieved comparable popularity outside the adult industry, maintain social media presences to engage with fans (even on ostensibly “safe for work” platforms like Instagram)—in other words, using these platforms to perform micro-celebrity. These examples reveal that cam modeling can be used to both develop and monetize the kinds of asymmetrical intimacies that characterize micro-celebrity.

Discussion

Performers’ descriptions of their experience working in new, interactive pornographic media reveal a complex and multi-faceted range of client interactions that call into question long-established feminist tropes about women being reduced to bodies and exchanged as commodities by the sex industry. Although sex may be an inextricable element of these interactions, it hardly comprises their entirety. In fact, cam models often described aspects of their relationships with clients with features such as

companionship, intimacy, emotional support, attention, and fan service as more salient.

To acknowledge the expansiveness this work—how the services models provide extend far beyond sexual gratification—is not to embrace pollyannaish claims that it is empowering. It also does not suggest that cam models' work is easy or that the sex industry is without problems. Rather, these findings indicate that in order to usefully discuss these issues, we need to acknowledge performers' work *as work* and endeavor to produce more complete analysis regarding what that work entails. In particular, this requires analysts to stop attributing "misplaced scale" to the sexual facets of this work (Rubin, 1984), to recognized that many of its difficulties result from gendered needs of men (e.g., social isolation, loneliness, fragility) and the gendered expectations placed on women (e.g., caretaking and emotional support). By unpacking and describing the services offered by cam models, this article offers first steps towards that deeper analysis of gendered interactions and suggests the kinds of questions that might be asked in future.

Chapter 4: The Custom Clip Market as Prosumer Porn

Abstract

This article uses the concept of "prosumption" (i.e., an overlap or convergence in production and consumption) to contextualize a burgeoning market for custom porn clips (i.e., short pornographic videos commissioned by an individual viewer and tailored to their specific desires).* I begin by establishing custom porn as a trend that demands attention and situate it in relationship to the rest of the porn industry. Next, drawing on examples from traditional pornographic video content, I illustrate how the porn market has an established history of blurring production and consumption. Finally, drawing on interviews with custom clip creators, I argue that customs not only epitomize prosumption in porn but that this prosumption is different from the prosumption taking place in traditional porn because the media product itself is unimaginable without the model and the buyer taking part in both production and consumption in near equal measure. Moreover, by demonstrating that performers are both active producers and consumers in the process of co-creating customs with fans, the article demonstrates the limits of much feminist theory that frames performers as passively acquiescing to having their bodies "used" as the raw material of pornographic production.

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* During the period of the study, independent clips sites (such as Clips4Sale, ManyVids, iWantClips, and AmateurPorn) became increasingly popular, and most of the models that I interview spoke extensively about producing pre-recorded porn video content alongside camming. A few models had even quit live camming to sell clips and interact with fans mainly through Snapchat or other social media. Because of this intersection between the live sex camming and independent porn clips markets, most study participants had experience with producing customs.

Introduction

The internet has radically transformed the porn industry, precipitating the collapse of its traditional business model while providing infrastructure for entirely new models, including the sale of self-produced clips directly to fans. Perhaps most significant is the shift toward interactivity. In these interactive media (e.g., sex camming and subscription sites) viewers' input often shapes what and how a model performs. This is particularly evident in the market for custom clips, where fans commission clips to suit their own fantasies. This article explores the custom market through a series of interviews with custom clips producers. I apply the concept of prosumption to situate this new participatory form of pornography and suggest that it follows a broader historical pattern toward collapse between consumption and production as contemporary digital technologies have emerged. I also suggest that examining custom porn clips may help to refine theories of prosumption by offering a case study of a phenomenon that is only possible through what Ritzer (2015a) calls "balanced prosumption."

I start by more thoroughly reviewing changes in the porn industry which led to the development of the custom clips market. I then review the concept of prosumption and demonstrate that even traditional pornography collapses production and consumption in important ways. I conclude from my findings, however, that custom clips are more radically prosumptive and can only exist because of the development of "the new means of prosumption" (2015a). Finally, I suggest new directions for theorizing both prosumption and the porn industry.

Background

The Changing Porn Industry

The mainstream porn industry—that is to say, the large studios that dominated the market for pornographic video from the 1980s through the 2000s—has spent the last decade in an economic freefall. Production of porn films by these large studios has reportedly declined by as much as 75% (Auerbach, 2014). This steep drop in revenues was brought on by a convergence of two factors: the 2008 recession, which precipitated a 50% drop in DVD sales (Campbell, 2014; Stern, 2017), and the emergence of tube sites like PornHub, RedTube, and XHamster that encouraged rampant piracy. "Piracy has killed the industry," observed one industry insider, who then added:

> I'd say 80 percent of the companies that were around five years ago either don't exist or are hanging by a thread. The day a new video comes out, within 24 hours, someone has set up a tripod in front of their TV to copy it and then uploaded it illegally (Moye, 2013).

Similarly, longtime industry reporter Lux Alptraum (2018) recounts that

> by 2008 it was clear that we were entering a new era for the adult industry, one where lucrative pay sites were rapidly being supplanted by free tube sites, many of

> whom lured in audiences with pirated versions of their competitors' product. A decade later, the effect this shift had on the consumer side is readily apparent.

Data on the industry is limited because most porn companies are privately held and have no public reporting requirement; however, commonly shared estimates are that piracy is responsible for $2 billion in annual losses (Pinsker, 2016) for the $10 billion industry (Moye, 2013). These tube sites have become giant businesses in their own right. One commentator (Alberta, 2018) noted: "On planet Earth, only Google and Netflix are known to consume more bandwidth than MindGeek, the umbrella corporation that houses several of the biggest free porn aggregator websites."

Declining studio revenues hit performers hard. According to one top industry agent, the typical income for (cis-)female performers dropped from $100,000 a year to as little as $50,000 after the 2008 recession, while labor expectations regarding social media outreach and personal appearances increased (Miller, 2012). While popular models may be booked for ten or more shoots a month (Miller, 2012), the contractions in the industry have meant that for many models studio work is increasingly difficult to come by, and performers are looking for alternatives. In some cases, this means other forms of sex work, including cam modeling, phone sex, stripping, escorting, and professional dominatrix work (Bernstein, 2019; Alptraum 2018; Dickson, 2014). Often, however, these models are exploring ways of creating and selling porn independent of studios. In fact, The Free Speech Coalition (the trade association for porn models) reports that 75% of their models now self-produce at least some content (Harrison, 2018; Dold, 2017).

These mainstream performers are not entering an empty field. In the same period wherein studio porn experienced a precipitous decline, a booming marketemerged where amateurs (in this case, meaning models who have not been contracted by a studio) have built careers for themselves. While studio shoots are generally referred to as “scenes” (underscoring the assumption that they are intended to be combined with others into a full-length DVD), these independent producers generally release short (5-30 mins) standalone “clips” for direct sale to consumers via Internet download. This transition parallels what the music industry experienced a decade earlier when consumers increasingly began to purchase singles on iTunes in lieu of purchasing full-length CDs. Independent clip producers typically shoot “trade content” with each other, meaning that no one makes a wage for the shoot, but instead each party owns the final product and can sell and distributeto their own fans. Over time, because popular independent models own the content and profit from each sale, they can earn more from a shoot than their mainstream counterparts earn from studios.

When the clip market first emerged, cam models and other independent performers sometimes tried to sell links to allow fans to access self-produced pornographic content stored on personal cloud storage services like Google Drive or Dropbox. Seeing this trend, adult businesses quickly began to build competing platforms specifically tailored to hosting these clips. While sites like ManyVids, Clips4Sale, and iWantClips launched with this specific purpose in mind, sites like MyFreeCams and NiteFlirt have adapted their existing business models. Fan subscription sites like OnlyFans, JustFor.Fans, and AVN Stars also sell access to porn

clips, but pair it with a social media type interface the encourage model-client interaction. All these sites take a 20-40% cut for hosting, payment processing, and sometimes marketing. Clip producers are also selling access to "premium" Snapchat accounts in which they regularly post sexual content. Though such accounts technically violate Snapchat's terms of service, the platform is not as heavily policed as other social media sites (Bakar, 2019; Sage, 2018). Patreon was also used in a similar manner until they banned pornography (Cole, 2018).

In this difficult and competitive environment, porn performers from all sectors of the industry are continually looking for opportunities to expand their base of paying viewers and to secure income. Custom porn clips—or "customs", as industry insiders generally call them—have become one such growth area. These clips are commissioned by an individual viewer, tailored to their specific desires, and paid for in advance. Further, the clips are sometimes marketed as a kind of personalized luxury good; purchasers of this kind of "bespoke porn" (Anuradha, 2017) often pay hundreds—and occasionally thousands—of dollars to interact directly with a model in the production of their fantasies.

While there is no accessible data on the size of the custom clip market, industry executives have been vocal about its potential for growth in recent years (Anuradha, 2017; Ronson, 2017; Cambell, 2014). Moreover, evidence of a shift toward custom content is visible in the pages or design features that many independent clips sales sites (including ManyVids, iWantClips, ExtraLunchMoney, and Clips4Sale) currently devote to custom content orders and creation. One site, Customs4U, makes custom content its exclusive focus. Subscription fan sites that

cater to adult performers have also become natural hubs for commissioning customs because they already encourage interaction between performers and their (paying) fans (Levesley, 2019).

Mainstream porn model Casey Calvert recently told *Buzzfeed News* that she produces 10 to 15 custom videos a month, which now constitute half her income (Montgomery, 2018). She explains her attraction to customs:

> You can't pirate someone saying your name… You can't pirate someone wearing exactly the clothes you want them to wear, doing exactly the things you want them to do. It's the connection, the interactivity.

In fact, there is a sufficient number of mainstream models looking for opportunities to create custom content to encourage the emergence of small custom-oriented studios in geographical hotspots for porn production (such as the San Fernando Valley, Las Vegas, or Miami [Anuradha, 2017]). In spite of this growing infrastructure, and the disproportionate media attention that mainstream models tend to receive for their forays into custom content creation, the market remains dominated by independent and amateur models.

Prosumption Theory

The distinguishing feature of customs is that they are collaborative. In other words, they blur traditional boundaries between production and consumption. For purchasers, this means an opportunity to participate in directing the realization of a fantasy. For the model, it means learning about and adapting clients' fantasy to their

own comfort level and abilities. This phenomenon fits a broader historical trend toward collaborative creation of content facilitated by the internet.

The emergence of social media was one of the defining aspects of the millennium's first decade. Although such platforms were dismissed as lacking the perceived "realness" of face-to-face interaction (Turkle, 2011/2017), as "a chaos of useless information" (Keen, 2007), or simply as a passing fad, their explosive growth demanded sociological analysis. For example, Beer and Burrows (2007) called upon researchers

> to ascertain what sociological agendas are relevant to understanding the large-scale shift toward user-generated web content – a movement defined by the related practices of (to use the argot of the field) 'generating' and 'browsing', 'tagging' and 'feeds', 'commenting' and 'noting', 'reviewing' and 'rating', 'mashing-up' and making 'friends'.

Social theorists began putting forth a range of concepts such as "peer production" (Benkler, 2002), "co-creation" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), "co-production" (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008), and ''produsage'' (Bruns, 2008) to discuss the political economy of user-generated digital content; however, the term "prosumption" (Ritzer 2015a) perhaps most clearly drew a line backwards through the history of sociological analysis which initially focused on production, then later consumption, and now increasingly centers inseparability of the two. In other words, economic analysis of prosumption involves examining "both production and consumption rather

than focusing on either one (production) or the other (consumption)" (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Originally coined in 1980 by futurist Alvin Toffler, the concept of "prosumption" arguably came before its time and was largely overlooked. Ritzer (2015b) suggests that "recent heightening of interest in prosumption is traceable to the fact that the process itself has both changed and expanded enormously in recent years," while Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) note more specifically that "a series of recent social changes, especially those associated with the internet and Web 2.0 (briefly, the user-generated web, e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), have given [prosumption] even greater centrality."

Generally speaking, the term "prosumption" describes an overlap or convergence between production and consumption. Prosumers might be understood as consumers who also act as producers, or producers who also act as consumers. However, this framing arguably takes for granted the production/consumption binary and treats the prosumption as an afterthought. Ritzer's (2015a) more radical interpretation contends that "prosumption is…the generic process; one that subsumes production and consumption" and "that production and consumption, at least in their pure forms devoid of prosumption, do not exist." In other words, what we call "production" and "consumption" are extreme ends of a prosumption continuum; yet even at these extremes, some consumption is required for production and some production is required for consumption.

Marx (1867/1995) himself observed the inseparability of production from consumption, saying that "labour uses up its material factors, its subject and its

instruments, consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption." He calls this kind of consumption—the kind involved in the creation of products—"productive consumption," and concludes that "in so far then, as its instruments and subjects are themselves products, labour consumes products in order to create products, or in other words, consumes one set of products by turning them into means of production for another set."

Inversely, the Birmingham School described how production is necessary in the consumption of media insofar as the audience interprets—and sometimes selects—the representations that they engage with, generating a range of different understandings and experiences of any given content. Emphasizing this sort of productive agency, Stuart Hall (Hall & Grossberg, 1996, p. 137) described such media consumers "codable encoding agents" whose "multiplicity of readings and discourses […] produced new forms of self-consciousness and reflexivity." Echoing this sentiment, albeit with a more romantic tone, Michel de Certeau (1980/2002: 34) argued that media consumers are "unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs." The Italian Autonomist Marxists also share a similar perspective but take a more macro view, with Lazzarato (1996) concluding that "the public is productive by means of the reception that gives the product 'a place in life' (in other words, integrates it into social communication) and allows it to live and evolve."

Ritzer describes three ideal-typical positions on the prosumption continuum. On the two ends are "producers-as-consumers" and "consumers-as-producers," These poles of the continuum reflect the kinds of activities (e.g., factory work vs. home life) theorized in classic political economy texts (e.g., Marx, Hall, Certeau, and Lazzarato

cited above), though with the explicit recognition that production can never fully be separated from consumption and vice versa. The third position, “balanced prosumption,” falls between. Ritzer suggests that balanced prosumption—which involve consumption and production in more equal proportions—has historically been undertheorized though it is increasingly of interest because of how developments in digital communication facilitates it (Ritzer, 2015a; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010. Ritzer (2015a) argues that “new means of prosumption […] made possible by new technologies—the computer, Internet, ATMs, self-scanners, sensors” are leading to “a new world of prosumption” driven by capitalism’s desire to exploit prosumers as an opportunity to create value without paying for labor. He gives examples, including

> lining up in fast-food restaurants to collect one's food and afterward disposing of one's own leftovers; fetching one's own food purchases and using self-checkout systems at super- and hypermarkets; IKEA furniture (with the help of a sheet of instructions and maybe a small tool or two); […] making all-but-the-most-complex travel arrangements on one's own through various websites (e.g., Travelocity, Expedia); […] co-creating and crowd-sourcing (producing) open-source software (e.g., Firefox, Linux) online and then downloading and using (consuming) it; producing and consuming most of what is found on the billion-plus Facebook pages; [and] contributing to and using Wikipedia

While these examples are illustrative, Ritzer does not offer definitive criteria to differentiate the balanced prosumption from the kinds of prosumption happening at

far poles of the continuum; he appears to treat balanced prosumption as a difference in degree (instead of a difference in kind). This will be part of the challenge of applying the concept to customs. However, before exploring customs and their relationship to prosumption, we first need to consider how production and consumption overlap in older forms of pornography.*

Prosumption in Traditional Pornography

Models/Directors as Consumers in Traditional Porn

As with any sort of production site, a range of tools and raw materials (e.g., cameras, lighting, makeup, costumes, sex toys, lube, etc.) are consumed on traditional porn sets. But beyond productive consumption in this most basic sense, there are some instances of creative projects that put models and directors into the role of consumer with regard to their fans. For example, director Erika Lust's *XConfessions* series—whose tagline is "by you & Erika Lust"—solicits stories from fans and makes scenes from the best submissions. Other projects frame themselves as curating (as opposed to directing) sexual representations. For example, the queer-focused *Crashpad* (2019) series features "'real life' couples" who "choose what they want to do on camera." Director Shine Louise Houston describes herself as though she is part of the audience, adopting the tagline "a voyeur with a production company" (n.d.) and saying "I really just control the camera, so everything the talent does is pretty much up to them" (Houston & Hall, 2019).

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* Pornography, of course, has been expressed through every medium from cave drawings onwards, so to keep the scope manageable, this discussion will be limited to motion pictures.

The now ubiquitous genre of "gonzo porn"—defined primarily by lack of scripted narrative—also frequently centers consumption in the process of production by placing the production in the films as a live audience. This style is often attributed to Jamie Gillis, and in particular his 1989 release *On the Prowl*. In the video, Gillis and performer Renee Morgan drive through the streets of LA in a limousine trying to recruit random men to participate in impromptu scenes with Morgan. The scenes focus more on the interactions around the sex than the actual sex. Sloan (2013) describes Gillis' films almost as a form of meta-pornography, arguing that "the subject of his work is why people watch, create, and participate in pornography." But the collapse of audience and producer is even more fully realized as the genre of gonzo porn explodes with series like *Girls Gone Wild* (1997-2013). In these pseudo-documentaries, a host (typically series creator Joe Francis) would lead a camera crews in dance clubs and other college party environments searching for women willing to be recorded engaging in various sexual acts. As one reporter (Hoffman, 2006) describes,

> Francis is often on the other side of the camera, asking sweetly if he can hold the girls' tops, inquiring about their class schedules, chiding them for being "so naughty," saying he wants to see if they've shaved their genitals, begging them to play with their breasts and bend over to expose their thong underwear. They comply.

In these scenarios, the hosts are not performers as much as they are a proxy for the audience, consuming and interpreting sexual images in real time and giving voice to the audience's desires.*

As later gonzo porn has gone mainstream (a fact that many critics attribute to John Stagliano's "watershed" Buttman series [Biasin & Zecca, 2016]), much of the interaction has become scripted or contrived. In other words, the consumption on the part of the producers is now simulated, and the product consumers are getting is more polished than it purports to be—a point that Gillis himself bemoans in a book of transcripts released shortly after his death, saying, "all the other guys who are doing gonzo work are setting up the scenes, and are using hired actors […] my videos contain sexual situations that were taped with as little structure and planning as possible" (Gillis & Sotos, 2012). Nevertheless, what is being marketed is still the idea of a director consuming a scene as it unfolds and acting as a proxy for the audience.

Audience as Producers in Traditional Porn

Audiences are motivated to consume pornography for many different reasons (Attwood et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2015), so it stands to reason that they will engage with porn in many different ways. While direct participation in the creation of traditional porn by consumers is rare, it has some precedent, particularly in the "fuck a fan" trope (Jackman, 2019); this typically takes the form of a contest wherein the

* It should be noted that Gillis and Francis are both reported to have engaged in coercive behavior and to have intentionally degraded performers on and off camera (Butler, 2012; Hoffman, 2006).

winning fan features in a scene with a popular performer (see for example: Tisdale, 2013). Yet due to the fan's inexperience, they may have little say in the creative direction of the film. Studios such as Kink.com are also well known for filming "public" scenes where a live audience watches and is sometimes invited to touch models while recordings are being made (Witt, 2016).

More commonly, however, consumers do not participate directly in production of traditional porn scenes, but instead participate by producing interpretations and experiences associated with those videos. Most obviously, those who consume porn for the purposes of masturbation participate in producing a sexual experience—often orgasm(s)—for themselves. But "porn" is a broad category of materials that are as diverse as human sexuality itself, and these materials are not interchangeable for most consumers. Instead, consumers must work to curate their own porn experience. In the past, this may have meant browsing VHS/DVD box covers in an adult bookstore. In a contemporary context, this may involve using website search functions to tailor the visible content to one's own desires. A recent study (McKee, 2018) observes that porn fans "like to categorize" and "argue about quality"; both of these are "agentic" and arguably productive acts.

For fans, and even for casual viewers, porn is used as a means of exploring, understanding, and developing one's own sexuality; this process contributes to the production of "tastes," and sometimes even "lifestyles" around sexuality (Attwood & Smith, 2013). Attwood (2007) notes that "pornography is […] a resource for constructing identity and an important signifier in the performance and display of gender and sexuality." This meaning-making process does not happen in isolation,

but often is a matter triangulation between self, the media object, and other people who are also working to interpret that object. Fine (1977) observes that “through the process of social comparison, we expect that the presence of a group of acquaintances intensifies one's reaction to any cultural product,” which is why it is no surprise that various subcultures and fandoms have arisen around pornography (Jackson et al., 2019; McKee, 2018). These are visible in the comments section of sites like Pornhub, on dedicated forums, and at in-person conventions. One study of these fans concludes that “almost as much energy and space is devoted to cultivating the ‘We’ of the viewer collective as to discussing the female porn stars” (Lindgren, 2010). For such fans, porn consumption is not just a means of sexual gratification; it is a form of “serious leisure” (Stebbins, 1982) that involves participating in a distinctive sexual (sub-)culture—one that these porn consumers “actively produce” (Attwood & Smith, 2013).

Methods

This study draws on two years of interview-based and ethnographic research (conducted between October 2016 and October 2018). I interviewed sex cam models about their labor, their relationships with clients, and about working conditions in their sector of adult industry. I also engaged in participant observation as a cam model and clip producer during this time, though I began working in the industry prior to this study (in 2013) and continued that work after my formal data collection was completed.

Participants were recruited using a mixture of recruitment posts via social media and recruitment emails. Physical recruitment flyers were also distributed at industry conventions; these conventions were particularly effective for recruiting. I attended them primarily in conjunction with my work as a performer (in one case I was nominated for an industry award), and these in-person events aided in establishing trust with other performers, as did the industry podcast I began hosting in 2017.

The sample includes 31 interviews with North American models and viewers. 29 of the participants currently or previously performed as webcam models, one participant was solely a viewer, and one participant identified both as a viewer and performer. Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older (screening questions preceded the survey). Interviews were conducted in-person or via Skype and lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. In a few cases, I also conducted follow-up interviews lasting 15 to 30 minutes. No compensation was provided for participating. Because respondents discussed highly stigmatized (and, in some cases, criminalized) activities, the IRB required that all respondents be assigned pseudonyms.

Findings

Clips are a Growing Market

Cam models interviewed this study reported growing economic pressure to offer porn clips, particularly custom clips. Two veteran cam models participating in the study described changes in the industry in recent years:

> Lynn: When I started, not everybody had videos. It was something you could do, but you could still be a very successful cam model without videos or clips, and now I would say that you would have to work your butt off to do camming without any sort of [prerecorded] content, especially on social sites like MyFreeCams.

> Leena Sativa: As a cam model, we didn't always need content to survive. Before was really just, you get online, masturbate, make your money […] Today, I'm working 16-hour days. And I have to put a lot of importance on content creation and stuff like that, which is something, even five years later, I'm just starting to learn myself how to do. And it's essential in order to survive.

Guaranteed Income

Customs are different from other kinds of porn clips in that models are paid a significant commission from one person in advance rather than producing the clip first and hoping it sells to enough to compensate the labor invested in creating it. The upfront money makes customs an attractive proposition for performers; however, the pay scale for customs can vary widely. New models often need to gain experience negotiating and develop a sizable fanbase before earning sustainable income. For example, April said:

> I remember one of the first custom videos I did, I charged 400 tokens which is $20 for me $40 for them, and it was like a 30 minute boy-girl video. And I had no idea what I was doing. And I was like, “oh shit, that’s like no money for so much work.” [Laughs] So, that was a good lesson.

Poppy, who is a well-established model, though not a top earner on any of the popular clip sites, says:

> I generally charge $10 per minute. That’s my going rate pretty much. […] The average video is ten minute. That’s what people normally order, but then I get some people that order 15 to 20 minutes.

Leading models can earn much more, including bonuses for monthly sales. A top UK-based custom clip producer recently reported “making 10-minute custom videos for clients who pay between £100 and £500 [roughly $125 and $630] a film” (Maloney, 2019). Unlike large mainstream productions where a single shoot can fill an entire workday, independent clip producers often shoot multiple videos in a single session. Typically, these producers do their own hair, makeup, costuming, lighting, and camera work; therefore, they film in marathon sessions to minimize redundant labor.

Compare this to income estimates for mainstream shoots, which vary slightly (see, for example: Snow, 2019; Blair, 2017), but generally square with recent *CNBC* (Morris, 2016) reporting that

> For a "traditional" sex scene between a man and a woman, the average actress' compensation is typically between $800 and $1,000, depending on the studio's budget. Top-tier performers can earn as much as $1,500, occasionally $2,000, while newcomers with bad representation might earn as little as $300.

Mainstream performers may also command a premium for certain acts, and an even greater premium if it is their first time performing that act on camera. For example, one agent was recently reported as saying that a top model "can expect anywhere from $2,000 to $6,000 for a first anal sex scene" (Blair, 2017). To lesser degree, custom creators can also expect a premium for certain performance, but not on the same scale as studio performers.

Nevertheless, popular clip producers can make significant income from their work. Lynn says she'd be "devastated" to "slip under six figures a year." Gwen Marleigh reports having a premium Snapchat with "over 700 active subscribers" for which she "charge[s] $9.99 a month." She also uses this to advertise clips. These are the top earners but do suggest that independent models' earning potential is comparable to mainstream models.

Resale Value

Once completed and sent to the buyer who commissioned them, most customs are put up for (re)sale on clip and subscription alongside the rest of a model's clips. Felicity explains that this turns finished customs into secondary stream of "passive income." This is also important because models under continuous pressure to produce new

content—both because it maintains the interest of their fanbase and because new content is algorithmically privileged by sites. For these reasons, models want to negotiate resale rights upfront with buyers. Poppy says, “I give the client the choice: They can have a discount if they're comfortable with me reselling it.” Buyers are usually aware of these norms and agree to the video being resold. In some cases, Poppy further elaborates:

> I think a lot of them like sharing, or they enjoy that part of it as well. […] I think it’s somewhat of an exhibitionist type thing too, where their thrill, their idea, their whole fetish is kind of out there for anyone. So, I think it’s probably that exhibition thrill to it.

For these exhibitionist buyers, the resale of a custom is value added.

Not all buyers are comfortable sharing their fantasies with a broader public. Models describe customs that buyers do not want to have resold as “exclusives.” Lynn explains, “exclusive customs, where it was, like, an exclusive video for the person […] that is something I discourage, so it’s something that I charge more for.” Also, some content is simply too unusual or specific to be resold. Daisy explains “The ones that don’t tend to really resale as much or, even at all, are the ones that are really, really niche and specific to the customer.” A common obstacle to resale is when a buyer requests their name be in the video. Felicity notes this, saying, “I do resale my customs […] unless they want a ten minute long custom where I’m saying their name the whole time.” And Cat said, “people don't want to see me say someone

else's name in a video." Models sometimes get around this by filming the clip in a way that the name can be easily edited out.

Simple Production Techniques

Relative to mainstream porn shoots, elaborate production techniques are not generally expected of independent clip producers. Performers describe working with simple tools, often from their own homes:

> Annie: I have a little studio in my bedroom. My roommates think I'm crazy. They don't know what's going on.
>
> Cat: My studio is my whole little tiny San Francisco apartment. It's a mess and I feel bad [my husband] has to put up with it. […] I'm like "Hey, I'm filming in the living room today. Can you sit in the bedroom for a while?" […] I have a shotgun mic that picks up so much, and I have to unplug my fridge.
>
> April: I actually worked from a desktop because I didn't have a laptop at that point, and so when I was filming video I had to use a 20 foot USB cable on my webcam so that I could go and film in my bedroom, and I had no idea what the screen was even showing. So, that was ridiculous.

While many models do push the artistic boundaries of what is possible for a DIY production, it is also not uncommon for clips to be shot on cell phones (Harrison, 2018). But clips producers often argue that simplistic production techniques are not a

bug but a feature. Gabriel Cross, a performer interviewed by *GQ* (Levesley, 2019), explains: “It breaks down the fourth wall and creates the idea that a viewer is more inclusive in the scene.” While these camera techniques may be more about creating an illusion of including the audience, rather than actually doing so, Cross’s perception that his audience wants to feel included is grounded in experience.

Perhaps most importantly, simple production techniques allow for low overhead and quick turnaround. This makes independent clips better suited to a made-to-order market, as few viewers have the financial resources or patience to fund a studio shoot in order to fulfill their own fantasies. The minimalist production and DIY nature of clips also make them nimble—capable of almost instantaneously reacting to cultural trends, such as updates to the outfits of widely eroticized videogame characters (Marshall, 2019; Cole, 1 October 2018)—while the limited distribution helps them fly under the radar of copyright enforcers (Chalk, 2016). This enables independent producers to seize on and stay relevant in the fast-moving meme culture of the internet.

Fantasy Fulfillment

Study participants consistently described customs as a process of realizing a buyer’s fantasies or ideas:

> Daisy: Someone is really thinking about this scene, and they’re imagining it, and they’re willing to trust me enough to bring this idea that they have in their mind to the camera and make it a reality for them. […] They get to have their own ideas brought to life.

Aurora Rosaline: They have something that they envision in their mind, and then I take my creativity and turn it into something that they can have.

Cat: I'm re-creating someone else's sexual fantasy.

Aurora Rosaline describes these contributions from buyers as "the raw materials" that go into creating customs, implying that the consumption of these fantasies are integral to the creative process. In other words, a model must first take in and understand the buyer and their vision before setting out to realize it as a media product. Daisy eloquently captures what this kind of consumption looks like for models:

I really do feel like I'm getting into the customer's head as I'm reading [their script]. You know, I'm kind of reading it in their voice and I'm imagining what they thought of when they were putting this together.

Niche Content

Performer Christina Carter explained to *Rolling Stone* (Dold, 2017) that "customs evolved because we had to start fulfilling a specific fantasy not available on those free tube sites." Daisy, a model interviewed for this study, confirms this, discussing her own experiences as porn consumer before entering the adult industry:

[M]y early experiences with porn is I always thought porn was just very generic. Like, I always thought that I was watching the same things over and over and over

> again. The reasons for that though, now I realize, is because, way way long ago, I was watching most of my porn off tube sites. So I wasn't getting anything different because tube sites are not made for that. And if you want to get the good material, you really have to buy from the individual clip artist.

Mainstream studios are limited by what distributors and financial institutions are willing to tolerate. In some cases, there are written lists of content forbidden by these necessary third parties (Houston & Glover, 2019; Lee, 2018). Moreover, mainstream content is only profitable if it is purchased by a broad base of consumers. Independent clips can be profitable if only a few people—or one person, in the case of customs—purchase the content. This enables independent producers to cater to fringe interests in the "long tail" of the market (Anderson, 2006). Lynn elaborates on how niche desires and fetishes drive much of the custom market, offering the example of a customer who has a fantasy of being berated for accidentally knocking a dominatrix down the stairs:

> He's ordering a custom from me, because I just got off of crutches. [Laughs] But if you are that guy, and that is what turns you on, might be one of .0001 percent of the population that is turned by crutches—and even less so that it's that specific fantasy. You can't just go to PornHub and find that. So, you are part of this very small niche of people that really needs to go to independent creators to order your porn. That's why the weird stuff sells.

This smaller base of customers means that models can offer more personal attention to their fans, and content geared to the specific desires that their fans (and sometimes models themselves) share.

Communication

Before these fantasies can be realized, a model must first become the audience for the buyer, allowing them to unpack their imagination. Sometimes communication between buyers and models is very direct, taking the form of scripts, stories, stage directions, etc. Some buyers are so eager to engage in direct communication that it can be daunting for models:

> Felicity: just so specific about what they want, to a point that it's intimidating. You know, "I want you to be at exactly this angle. I want you to say this, this, this, and this." And it's like, "wow, this is a lot to take on." Sometimes it's like a page worth of things that a person wants.

> Poppy: when they come at me with so many details, and they've already got this script in mind, and, you know, they want a 45 degree angle up her and then they want your feet and your whole body and everything. You know, they give you so much; that's when the pressure's really on. But, generally, I tell them "the more details the better." […] Even though sometimes too many details are overwhelming.

At the other extreme, due to shame, embarrassment, or poor communications skills, some clients can be vague, leaving models to try to read between the lines. Models

often find this most frustrating, because some communication is necessary for models to understand a buyers' desires, ideas, and fantasies. Aurora Rosaline explains:

> [N]egotiating customs and trying to figure out what people want, for me, is the most difficult part because they come saying that they want a custom but they might not necessarily know what they want, or they want to dance around it for like a week. And it's like you try to pull information out of them

In fact, these difficult interactions are pushing Cat away from customs altogether:

> I've been trying to pull myself away from doing custom content in general […] because it takes up so much time […] And it's also consuming my brain hours to sit there and talk to these dudes about their fantasies. And it's fine and everything, but I feel more like a sex therapist sometimes. I have to make them feel comfortable with that. I can't say anything that will make them feel uncomfortable. I have to get them to open up to it, because they all know what they want to do but they don't want to say it.

Once a clients' fantasies are uncovered, models then must determine how to translate them into a performance. Many clients' fantasies hinge not only on *what* is performed but *how* it is performed, and this can require even further communication.

One model told *Rolling Stone* (Dold, 2017), "with customs […] I might email over 100 times with the client about the specific script details beforehand—what color lipstick I'm wearing, what angles of my body are shot, what wardrobe, shoes and props are used." While perhaps not reaching that extreme, study participants

similarly described extensive communication with many clients. For example, Poppy said:

> I think it's probably exciting for them to almost… build this fantasy the way they want to. Even just the smaller details, like, I usually ask them what kind of outfit, and give them ideas of a dress. Or, "do you like pantyhose? Or heels? Or this? Or that?" So, I think keeping them involved in the process definitely makes it more exciting for them. And probably makes them feel like they're getting their money's worth.

This emphasis on communication reveals that understanding clients' fantasies is a process—an active form of consumption which requires significant effort. For buyers, this can part of the appeal: not only does planning a custom serve as a pretext to interact with a model they fan over, but it also flips the script and creates a situation where the model now becomes an attentive audience for them.

Collaboration

The creation of customs is a collaborative endeavor where the participation of both model and buyer is necessary: The buyer elaborates an idea or vision and models lend their skill and embodied performance to its realization. Despite this basic structure, buyers approach these collaborations in very different ways. For example, here is how two participants described their range of interactions with buyers:

> Poppy: I will get people who are so specific that they'll actually write me a script. And then I'll have people who are way more vague; they'll kind of just talk about what they like, maybe give me a small description and maybe choose an outfit or choose a specific act that they would like. So it's a wide range.

> Daisy: Some people put very long descriptions. Some people put very short descriptions. Some have a lot of descriptions including what I want to wear to what I want to say to where I'm going to be—all that nature. Other customers, they give me more control. They say, like, "I want you to make this decision here or here. And so it's just really interesting to see all that difference. You know, some customers want things to be really really specific. Like, they want it to look specific this way. It's just a very dynamic experience.

Poppy expresses ambivalence about this range, saying, "sometimes I prefer the specific because I'm like, 'the more details the better'" but also noting "it sometimes makes me nervous when I get too much information." Similarly, Felicity says:

> If somebody gives me an idea of what they want, some basic guidelines, and then says "have fun with it and do whatever feels natural," that's like the ideal for me. I don't want too many rigid instructions.

For Lynn, written scripts cross the line of being overly specific:

> I'm not good at memorizing lines at all, but I will take something that's a very laid out, like "I want, this angle, then this angle, then this angle" kind of thing. I'll take things that have "I want you to say words like "big breasts." You know, if they've

> got, like, fetish-specific language, I can definitely work that in. And I can do like a beginning, a middle, and an end kind of thing. But, I can't memorize lines; it comes off pretty awkward when I do that. I'm not an actress like that. I'm much better at just talking into a camera and kind of improving on a general idea.

Most models discussed working with clients as a balance: For this creative process to work in an ideal manner, customers cannot be too specific or controlling, but they also cannot be too vague or disengaged.

To avoid these extremes, Aurora Rosaline tells customers, "Lay out what you'd like in a very detailed, concise little paragraph and I'm going to figure it out from there." She describes how this process unfolds:

> I work very much from just like an inspirational aesthetic approach. So for them, it's really easy. They know how I work. They're like, "ok, if I give them this or if I give them this specific idea, they're going to take it and kind of make it their own." And I think they enjoy giving me my creative process, like the way I'm comfortable. And just having me fly away. [Laughs]

The desire for a degree of flexibility in creating custom clips exists not only because it makes the process less difficult or tedious, but because it makes better business sense. Lynn explains that when a buyer allows for some flexibility in a clip, they tend to "sell pretty well because I am crafting them specifically, to not only appeal to that particular person but also something that I know will sell."

The imaginative elements that models consume from buyers in the process of producing a custom are evident in the character of custom videos themselves:

> Daisy: I feel like the producer or director of a video, whatever their vision is or whatever they think their audience wants to see, it's still going to be only their vision. And I think it just brings a whole different perspective to bring in the audiences' ideas and say, like, "what do you want to see."

> Felicity: I […] enjoy someone being able to tell me, 'this is what I like,' and then working to make it happen because those are often things I would never have thought of on my own.

In fact, custom buyers serve as a valuable source of information about different desires and fetishes that sellers may otherwise not understand or even be aware of. Poppy says that buyers often request "crazy things that I wouldn't normally do for a video." Similarly, Felicity says, "I've tried things that I would never have tried otherwise if someone hadn't requested it and found out that either I liked it or that it sold really well." She reflects further, saying, "All of my custom videos that I have sold […] they sell so much better than the videos I made myself, because yeah, people want the same things." Other models had experiences producing niche custom videos which ended up selling far better than they anticipated. Lynn discovered this with a hypnosis-themed video: "I wasn't expecting it to sell well […] and I put it up on Clips4Sale, and it just made me so much money." These unexpected successes highlight the value added by the buyers' contributions.

Models do note that not all collaborations work out. When pressed to commit, sometimes it becomes apparent that clients are using custom negotiations as a ploy to talk with a model about their fantasies, never intending to make an actual purchase. Therefore, recognizing and efficiently dealing with (what the industry refers to as) "time-wasters" becomes a significant part of a model's job.

Regulars

While in some cases interaction with a client is confined to negotiating one or more orders, often models have relationships with clients that extend beyond this type of project. In fact, regular customers met through other forms of interactive online sex work (e.g., cam sites, phone sex platforms, subscription fan clubs, Snapchat, and even Twitter or Patreon) are the most common custom buyers. Poppy describes many of her custom buyers as "regulars" from her time working as a cam model, noting, "I have so many repeat customers. I would say 75% of my clientele are repeat customers that I have done customs with before."

Many models describe frequent interaction with their key clients on a variety of platforms. Felicity, who also performs as a cam model, says, "I do maintain pretty daily conversation with many of the people that are in my community." Models take stock of all these interactions when producing a custom for a specific customer, sometimes even taking notes to refer back to later. Aurora Rosaline reflects that when a regular purchases a custom, "it's almost like, longtime friends just coming to ask you, 'oh, can you do this for me.'"

Lynn confirms this idea that creating a custom requires reading a person as much as it requires reading a set of instructions:

> The reason I get to know them is because they're going to have a better time if you're doing what they like. You know, within your comfort zone, obviously.

This process of establishing a rapport—if not a relationship—with a buyer can be a lengthy and involved process, and even these established relationships may involve continued consumption on the part of models, who need to dig deeper into a buyer's taste and desire in order to continue to produce novel content for them.

Regulars often leave aspects of a custom open-ended. This is not because they are not invested in the outcome; instead, they often do so because they are motivated by a desire to collaborate. This is true in even the most extreme cases. For example, Lynn describes pro-domme (professional dominant) clients who relate to customs with a seeming passivity:

> When I say "customs," sometimes these are more like personalized videos. Like, someone will send me the rate for a custom and say, "whatever you want, mistress." And I just already know their kinks, and so I have a longstanding relationship with three or four subs where they just constantly have one on order. And I am just constantly making them a new video based on what I know of my relationship with them.

In such cases where the relationship with a client extends beyond the confines of a single custom, models are still engaging with a buyer's fantasies, but these fantasies are revealed in the course of their regular interactions, as though the buyer has planted seeds and is waiting to see which first bears fruit through the model's labor. These interactions may be more diffuse, but that does not diminish the centrality of collaboration to the final product.

Discussion

Custom Models as Consumers

As one participant explicitly suggests, buyers' fantasies may be thought of as the "raw materials" in the creation of custom clips. In consuming the fantasies that buyers share with them, custom models certainly engage in process (though immaterial) that is analogous to Marx's (1867/1995) description of productive consumers, whose "labour uses up its material factors, its subject and its instruments, consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption" where "the result […] is a product distinct from the consumer." The distinct product in this case, of course, is the completed clip that realizes the buyer's fantasy through a model's performance, camera work, editing, etc. In practice, this dialectical process often repeats itself many times over during the creation of custom and through a model's relationship with a client. Models occupy the role of audience for buyers' fantasies before switching roles to sketch out a performance on which a buyer then offers feedback, further elaborating their desires so a model can hone the performance.

Insofar as a buyer (and the imaginative fantasy life they reveal to the model in their ongoing relationship) serves as creative inspiration, they can almost be said to occupy a muse-like* role for models. Positioning buyers in this way is, perhaps, useful in thinking about how even relatively passive buyers provide desires, ideas, and fantasies that fuel the creative process. The fact that models work so hard to obtain this information from buyers demonstrates how crucial models' consumption of these ideas, desires, and fantasies is to the custom creation process. In line with Lazzarato's (1996) conclusions about the interconnectedness of consumption, communication, and production in late capitalism, models are positioning themselves as consumers *to be productive* through the recirculation of (buyers') ideas/fantasies (as porn clips).

Custom Buyers as Producers

The effort exerted by buyers lies primarily in act of imagination. But is imagination a productive act? Is it labor? Marx (1867/1995), of course, famously defined labor as value-producing activity—as the exclusive source of value—saying it is the "aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value." Here—by emphasizing mental

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* Buyers could equally be said to occupy the classical role of patron, referring back to Aurora Rosaline's statement that: "[buyers] oftentimes see me as an artist […] it's like they're commissioning me for something that's just for them."

powers (in addition to physical powers)—Marx subtly gestures towards the importance of imagination to his theory and its role in distinguishing human labor from animal instincts. Elsewhere in the same section, he explains that "at the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement," and this is what "stamps it as exclusively human." More poetically, he tells us:

> [A] bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.

Of course, in the case of custom videos, a buyer's ideas and fantasies are not realized until a model assembles them into a video; however, the fact that buyers depend on models to realize their fantasies as media products does not detract from the fact that the imaginative elements that they contribute are part labor-process—a process which, in this case, happens to be collaborative. Indeed, playwrights and other behind-the-scenes creatives regularly produce works that can only be realized through collaboration with others, and no one questions that the effort that goes into developing these ideas is labor (Fine, 1977). In fact, Lazzarato (1996) suggests that the contemporary "post-Taylorist mode of production is defined precisely by putting subjectivity to work both in the activation of productive cooperation and in the production of the 'cultural' contents of commodities," Put simply, communicating and cooperating *is* labor when it results in a cultural product, even if that product is

immaterial, like an idea or fantasy. In fact, “the production and reproduction of communication and hence of its most important contents: subjectivity” is the essence of what Lazzarato (1996) “immaterial labor.”

However, the transactional nature of these collaborations highlights that, while buyers and models are both engaged in labor, they derive different sorts of value from this labor. Buyers seek to create a product that they then can ultimately consume. In other words, they are laboring to create what Marx would call “use-value.” Models, on the other hand, are selling their labor-power for someone else to utilize in the process of producing of the custom clip; these models are thus capitalizing on the “exchange-value” of their labor.

Types of Prosumption

Though porn has never conformed to a simplistic producer-consumer dichotomy, the market for custom clips fully epitomizes a collapse in the boundary between producer and consumer. Using Ritzer’s (2015a) language, clips models and buyers more closely map on to the “balance prosumption” position of the “prosumption continuum,” which distinguishes them from the “producers-as-consumers” and “consumers-as-producers” observed in traditional pornography. However, I want to suggest that refinement to Ritzer’s model can help us to more clearly distinguish these cases.

Although many activities may sometime mix production and consumption in equal proportion, it is important to differentiate activities that require such balanced

proportions. Invoking Aristotle, we might pose the question: When is balanced prosumption an accidental property of and activity and when is it an essential property of an activity?

While examples like fuck-a-fan contests or the *XConfessions* series, no doubt collapse the boundaries between production and consumption in significant ways, ultimately this prosumption is more a gimmick than a fundamental shift in the means of production/consumption. In both porn fan culture and in gonzo porn, production and consumption appear to be even more tightly—more necessarily—coupled. With custom clips, however, the media product itself is unimaginable without the means of *balanced* prosumption that digital communication technologies afford—the means to continuously interact and collaborate as a fantasy goes from imagination to realization. Thus, with customs, the boundaries between production and consumption totally implode for both buyers and models (even if they both derive different sorts of value from the end product).

As a framework the presumption continuum illustrates *differences in quantity* of production and consumption. The case study of custom clips reveals that there are also *difference in kind*. Customs are only exist through balanced prosumption and only via means of (balanced) prosumption. This explains why that, though the porn industry is over a half-century old, customs are relatively new phenomena: Without the means of prosumption afforded by contemporary digital technologies—what Ritzer (2015a) "the new means of prosumption"—customs are simply unimaginable.

Conclusion

In this piece I argue that, as a result of the extensive collaboration between buyer and model, custom clips collapse the conventional production-consumption dichotomy in way that distinguishes it from other forms of pornography. In fact, customs are distinctly prosumptive media that cannot exist without contemporary digital technologies.

However, far more research and analysis are necessary to determine the implications of this observation. If the custom market truly marks a departure from traditional model of porn production, then we need to consider in what other ways this may be transformative: Will a burgeoning custom market lead to more diversity of representation in both the acts and people portrayed? Will direct sales and collaboration between buyer and model lead to less exploitative working conditions? Will these interactions and the products they create be more humanizing to women or other (classes of) people portrayed? Will the economic power centers of the industry shift as a result of new modes of production (or prosumption)?

The fact that the custom market is only made possible through these new technologies also raises questions about whether other kinds of interactive digitally-mediated pornographic performances—camming and phone sex seem like obvious parallels—also diverge from traditional porn in ways that are similar to custom clips. For example, one study (Dobson, 2012) points to cam girls as productive consumers, noting that they often ask viewers to buy them gifts and then publicly perform consumption of those gifts.

Might it be useful to classify custom clips, cam modeling, phone sex, and possibly other forms of interactive digitally-mediated pornographic performances

under the same label? Social porn? Participatory porn? Prosumptive porn? Taken together, these different forms of interactive digitally-mediated pornographic performances constitute an already large and growing market segment within the adult industry. These "forms of production–consumption practice" in porn no longer remain "niche" as one recent analysis (Mowlabocus & Wood, 2015) concluded but are in fact "mainstream." This is especially important given that so much of the theory on pornography—particular from radical feminists—frame performers in wholly passive terms—not as producers or consumers but as bodies "used" as the raw materials in the creation of pornography (Dworkin, 1979, MacKinnon, 1993). In other words, the application of a prosumption framework to pornography may result in more refined feminist analyses in addition to the more direct refinements of economic theory

Finally, this paper demonstrates that porn continues to be fruitful area through which to understand new media production/consumption. In light of the present analysis, researchers are encouraged to explore whether the new means of (balanced) prosumption are giving rise to entirely new creative genres. These questions apply not only to porn, but to other media such as fan fiction. Moreover, with stark producer-consumer dichotomy of the industrial era no longer taken for granted, will aspects of pre-modern artistic creation—for example, the figure of muse or patron—reemerge?

For now, there are more questions than answers about custom clips and other interactive digitally-mediated pornography, but I hope that the framework offered in this paper can help focus research agenda around these issues.

Chapter 5: Intimacy in Online Sex Work

Abstract

The porn industry has been radically transformed by the internet and other digital technologies. In particular, cam, clips, and subscription sites facilitate and encourage interaction between models and fans. While sexual gratification is still central to many of these interactions, observers have noted that they are often providing something else: a source of intimacy. The nature of these intimate exchanges through interactive pornographic media have largely gone unexplored in academic research. This article seeks to make a first step toward this analysis by examining what the literature on intimacy reveals about the uniquely complex conditions under which online sex workers interact with clients: namely, social and spatial distance; technological mediation; asymmetry; gendered expectations; and commercial transaction.

Introduction

The internet and other digital technologies have radically transformed the porn industry. One of the most significant changes is in how performers interact with fans. In the past, porn performers might pose for pictures at conventions or chat with the audience after featured dances at strip clubs, but models rarely had sustained interactions with fans. In fact, because porn was a broadcast medium where a few

models produced content for millions of viewers, it was logistically impossible for performers to even minimally interact with most fans. Today, however, interaction with performers is not just common, it is often expected.

While some remnants of the old studio-based system remain, new cam, clip, and subscription sites provide infrastructure for performers to self-produce content and sell it directly to fans. The same sites also provide opportunity for direct interactions. Cam sites in particular enable performers and fans to engage in live video interactions from the comfort of their own homes. These “cam shows” are at the heart of the new porn economy. Indeed, a trade magazine publisher recently called sex camming “the engine of the porn industry” (Song, 2016).

How these new, interaction-based pornographic media have changed the nature of the industry are only starting to be studied by academics. But one significant observation is that, in addition to sexual gratification, fans are seeking intimacy. Jones (2016) notes that cam rooms “create touching encounters that are pleasurable not for the sexual climax they produce but for the emotional intimacy they facilitate between two or more people.” Journalists have made similar observations as well. One of the earliest profiles of a cam model for a major news publication (Richtel, 2013) even ran with the headline “Intimacy on the Web, With a Crowd,” and observed that:

> Unlike traditional pornography, or even old-school peep shows, the cam medium titillates with the promise of virtual friendship.

Another reporter (McGehee, 2015) made similar observations about the depth of the relationships between models and fans:

> It's not that crazy to imagine this kind of intimacy and fondness developing between long-distance friends over years—what's surprising is that these connections grew out of a form of sex work. But this level of emotional investment is exactly where the appeal of webcams resides—it's not like any other kind of porn. It's real, it's live, it's interactive, and it's relationship-based. A cam session is usually hours long, and most of that is spent talking.

Intimacy comes up explicitly in a *Newsweek* interview with a fan who says that talking to models "does give you that warm, fuzzy feeling for the next couple of days afterward where you know that you had an intimate moment with somebody else" (Rabouin, 2016).

These observations raise significant questions that merit further investigation: Why do men come to cam models seeking intimacy? Are cam rooms and cam model able to provide to this intimacy? If so, how are they able to provide this intimacy and does it differ from the intimacy that occurs in more conventional relationship?

However, the concept of intimacy itself is an obstacle to these studying these interactions. Though intimacy has long been a focus of sociological inquiry, its meaning, the conditions in which it occurs, and even the value it has for people who experience it are all questions for which there is little consensus. The concept, as one author puts it, “remains nebulous in the literature” (Frank, 1998).

Given this lack of clarity, I believe a theoretical review of literature on intimacy is necessary to help guide future discussions and research into new form of online sex work. I devote the first half of this article to attempting to distill some basic definitional elements for intimacy (though, I highlight linkages to cam modeling and sex work more broadly wherever relevant). I divide these discussions into sections on disclosure, identity, and bodies. In the second half of the paper, I turn to examining the conditions of sex cam modeling that make models' work facilitating intimacy uniquely complex: namely, that camming is mediated, asymmetrical, gendered, and transactional. I conclude that we need to expand and add nuance our understanding of intimacy to account for how it manifests in these complex conditions.

Core Dimensions of Intimacy

There is little agreement on the definition of intimacy. In the broadest sense, intimacy might be defined as "the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality," while "intimate relationships are a type of personal relationships that are subjectively experienced and may also be socially recognized as close" (Jamieson, 2011). However, this description is rather vague. Moreover, it relies on the spatial metaphor of "closeness," despite the fact that the importance of spatial proximity is one of things debated by various commentators (Weingarten, 1991). Nevertheless, most discussions of intimacy do hinge on ideas of familiarity, connection, and knowing that the language of "closeness" is meant to gesture toward. Finally, to complicate things even further, the term "intimacy" is also frequently used

as a euphemism for sex or sexualized experiences. In this section, I organize a review of academic discussions of intimacy into three key dimensions: disclosure, identity, and bodies. I conclude by identifying a few core assumption about the nature of intimacy.

Disclosure

The word "intimacy" "derives from the Latin word *intus*, meaning 'within,' and is related to *intimare*, which means 'to make known.'" (Weingarten, 1991). It should be little surprise then that disclosure is integral to many discussions of concept. I explore the relationship between disclosure and intimacy through literatures with two separate approaches: psychological and structural.

Psychological Interpretations

Self-disclosure is frequently considered the most readily observable indicator that a relationship is intimate (Wong, 1981). Because self-disclosure is at the heart of conventional talk therapy, intimacy was of particular interest to the field of psychology before psychoanalysis peaked in the 70s and 80s, leading to the development of various intimacy and self-disclosure metrics (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Coutts, 1973; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958).

Later social psychologists have embraced a broader view of intimacy. Recent work (Schroeder et al., 2017) has suggested it is useful to separate relationship intimacy from the "functional intimacy" of doctor's visits or the "imposed intimacy" of experiences ranging from being stuck in a subway car with strangers to sexual violation. While this is only one possible schema for separating types of intimacies, it

points to the fact that the concept applies to a distinct and complex cluster of interactions that may not be easily captured by a simple definition. In particular, intimacy within sex work relationships may not be represented by definitions that chiefly aim to describe the intimacy of conventional romantic relationships; that said, there is undoubtedly some overlap between that key characteristics of conventional intimacy and intimacy brokered through sex work.

Structural Interpretations

Early sociological analysis of intimacy tended to focus on disclosure, conceptualizing it more as a structural theory of information flows than as something experienced on a subjective level. George Simmel is the most significant theorist to approach intimacy in this way. He (n.d./1950, p. 126) argues that a relationship is intimate to the degree to which we willingly disclose things that we tend to conceal in other aspects of our lives, saying: "The peculiar color of intimacy exists […] if its whole affective structure is based on what each of the two participants gives or shows only to the one other person and to nobody else." This is what it means to have "intimate knowledge" regarding another person (though this can also be used euphemistically).

While the disclosure-based definition of intimacy is pretty straightforward, Simmel, in typical Simmelian fashion, adds a dialectical twist to his analysis. In a conversation focusing on monogamous marriage, he (1906, p. 329) suggests that intimate relations are often held together as much by what is withheld as what disclosed:"many marriages flounder on this lack of reciprocal discretion […] they lapse into a trivial habituation without charm, into a matter-of-factness which has no

longer any room for surprises." In contemporary language, we might say that Simmel believes it is possible to "overshare," to disclose so much about oneself that there is no mystery left—no space for imagination—and that this can lead to disappointment.

Following this logic, Simmel (1906, p. 305) makes a functionalist argument about how lies may be useful to relationships:

> [A]lthough reciprocal knowledge conditions relationships positively […] it does not do this by itself alone. Relationships being what they are, they also presuppose a certain ignorance and a measure of mutual concealment […] However often a lie may destroy a given relationship, as long as the relationship existed, the lie was an integral element of it.

Lies can create a spark of mystery in the mundane—something new to be uncovered. But obviously lies also erode trust in relationships. For this reason, Simmel says that what sustainable relationships require is perpetual growth. Such growth makes it impossible for individuals to be fully known and creates endless opportunities for new discovery. People who work to continually grow and develop themselves "have an inexhaustible fund of latent spiritual riches, and therefore can no more alienate [each other] in a single confidence than a tree can give up the fruits of next year by letting go what it produces at the present moment" (Simmel, 1906, p. 460). In other words, so long as intimate partners continue to grow in a relationship, they remain a source of new and exciting revelations for each other.

What this complex, dialectical discussion of relationships reveals is that Simmel views intimacy not as a static state but as an ongoing process. In other words,

intimacy is not just the result of an accumulation of information people have disclosed to each other but requires that this revelation be constant and ongoing. This distinguishes his conceptualization of intimacy from other thinkers.

The structural approach to intimacy as a theory of information flows continues to be embraced by prominent contemporary theorist such Zelizer (2005, 2000). Though she makes only passing mention of Simmel, she (2005, p. 14) defines the concept similarly, saying:

> Let us think of relations as intimate to the extent that interactions within them depend on particularized knowledge received, and attention provided by, at least one person—knowledge and attention that are not widely available to third parties.

And like Simmel, De Sousa (1991) and Berlent (2008, 2000) put somewhat of dialectical spin on the concepts by linking it to "idealization" and "imagined futures" respectively. Finally, the concept of intimate knowledge is implicit in much contemporary commentary on communications technology (Pariser, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011) that often poses question like: Who gets through your privacy filters? Who gets to see your private or secret accounts? Do you post as though you were talking to real friends? This sort of informational disclosure is assumed to reveal something about the intimacy of a relationship.

Identity

A critique of disclosure-based definitions of intimacy is that they give insufficient attention to the connection between intimacy identity. Simmel (n.d./1950, p. 126), does at least gesture toward intimacy's rootedness in subjective experience and its relationship to our sense of self. He explains that the information we are most reluctant to disclose are the things we believe differentiate us from others, which are also the things we take to be most defining of our personality:

> The "intimate" character of certain relations seems to me to derive from the individual's inclination to consider that which distinguishes him from others, that which is individual in a qualitative sense, as the core, value, and chief matter of his existence.

But this is largely a side note to Simmel's structuralist analysis of informational disclosure. In contrast, discussion of identity is foregrounded with the discipline of interpersonal communication studies. For example, researchers in this field (Beebe et al., 2010) describe intimacy as "the degree to which relational partners mutually confirm and accept each other's sense of self." That is to say, intimacy depends not on how much shared or how private that information is; rather, it depends on how tightly we associate that information to our sense of self. More concretely, something like a social security number may be sensitive information that we share very selectively, but few people would think of this as intimate knowledge that reveals anything meaningful about us. This is because a social security number is impersonal, disconnected from our identity. (Though, perhaps, the fact of having a social security

number—rather than the number itself—may speak to deeper identity-related issues of citizenship and immigration status.)

Importantly, interpersonal communications still frame intimacy as a matter of information exchange. Disclosure remains the mechanism through which intimacy is established. But for interpersonal communications theorists, context matters. The kind of information which is considered intimate for a person will vary according to culture; based on how they are situated in various identity categories (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.); and as a product of individual experience.

Bodies, Exposure, and Touch

Perhaps most obviously relevant to sex work are the ways in which intimacy is tied to our relationship with other people's bodies. To say that people are "physically intimate" often implies sex (e.g., Wiederman, 2000), and sex is traditionally viewed as "the apex of intimacy" (Wong, 1981) Yet paradoxically, not all sex is considered intimate. One researcher (Wong, 1981) points to the example of sexual encounters facilitated by "singles bars," asking, "Does sex necessarily imply intimacy if there is little self-disclosure beyond mundane and superficial conversation?" Similar questions could be posed of contemporary "hookup culture" (Wade, 2017) or, in a less heteronormative context, of anonymous sex in tea rooms or bath houses (Humphreys, 1975).

However, physical intimacy is more expansive than sex and can also refer to other forms of touch or physical nearness. For example, one study (Puri, 2013)

discusses the intimacy forged between Victorian-era mistresses and maids through elaborate rituals of dressing and undressing in private boudoirs or dressing rooms. In fact, the elision between physical intimacy and sex may have ageist implications. Sandberg (2013) finds that many heterosexual senior men describe their relationships as transitioning from sex to intimacy as they age; this sort of intimacy may range from cuddling to lying near one another naked. Another study finds that seniors in nursing homes value social and non-sexual physical intimacy over sexual intimacy and that the first two forms of intimacy were associated with life satisfaction while the latter was not (Bullard-Poe, 1994).

In addition to touch and physical closeness, exposure of the body (even at a distance) may also be perceived as an intimate act. In a very literal sense, this occurs between strippers and patrons. Though she argues that it is sometimes illusory, Frank (1998) observes that, in contemporary gentlemen's clubs, dancers facilitate intimacy in part through "visual access to [their] body that is often deemed appropriate for only the most private situations."

Arguably, bodily exposure can also be described as a form of informational disclosure—in this case, disclosure of a particular sort of sensory information. This becomes increasingly evident as this exposure is mediated through communications technology. In her work on selfies, Lasén (2015) describes "presenting and representing oneself through self-portrait practices" as "opening intimacy to new spaces and participants." She explains that sharing selfies—which are often sexually provocative in nature—is a form of information exchange that "involves tactile interaction and affective movements (pleasure, titillation, joy, disquiet or disgust) that

are bodily experienced." Similarly, in her work on phone sex, Stone (1994) discusses how phone sex operators "compress" bodies and bodily sensations into one-dimensional "tokens" of information that can be transmitted through a telephone. In both cases—selfies and phone sex—bodies are exposed, but only after being translated into easily communicated information.

Distilling the Definitional Elements

This brief review reveals numerous tensions within the literature on intimacy, from which we can distill a constellation of definitional elements:

1. Intimacy usually involves the disclosure of information that is not likely to be shared in most other contexts.

2. Sharing information does not always enhance intimacy in a simple, linear manner. The mystery, fantasy and idealization that thrive in unknowing may also contribute to feelings of intimacy.

3. The information perceived as a most intimate is generally that which is most important to a persons' sense of self-identity. This varies by culture, identity categories, and personal experiences.

4. Intimacy sometimes (but not always) involves touch, physical closeness, or bodily exposure. Bodily exposure may be interpreted as disclosure of a specific kind of intimate information.

Complex Conditions for Intimacy in Online Sex Work

Having now established some basic elements that define intimacy, I want to turn to an examination of the unique conditions under which cam models and other online sex workers establish intimacy with clients. I identify five distinct complicating factors discussed in the literature on intimacy that apply to online sex workers: social and spatial distance; technological mediation; asymmetry; gender socialization; and transactional relationships. I will consider each separately.

Social and Spatial Distance

The issue of distance is something Simmel engages frequently in his writings. In fact, the very concept of "social distance" is often traced back to Simmel's work (Levine et al., 1976). However, his thinking on the subject, as it pertains to intimacy, develops over the course of his career. In his early works on intimacy, he acknowledges the possibility of seemingly intimate relationships with strangers but downplays their significance, arguing that what makes a relationship intimate is not one or two instances of deeply personal information being shared; rather, it is the normalization of that kind of sharing as central to the relationship. Simmel (n.d./1950, p.127, emphasis in original) notes:

> [C]ertain external situations or moods may move us to make very personal statements and confessions, usually reserved for our closest friends only, to relatively strange people. But in such cases we nevertheless feel that this "intimate" *content* does not yet make the relation an intimate one. For in its basic significance, the whole relation to these people is based only on its general, un-individual ingredients. That "intimate" content, although we have perhaps never revealed it before and thus limit it entirely to this particular relationship, does nevertheless not become the basis of its form, and thus leaves it outside the sphere of intimacy.

In these early works, Simmel concludes that in order for intimacy to become the "form" of a relationship, social and spatial proximity is necessary. However, he also observes that too much proximity can be harmful to a relationship—that some space or distance is necessary. He (1906 p. 315) explains:

> Intimate relations, whose formal medium is physical and psychological nearness, lose the attractiveness, even the content of their intimacy, as soon as the close relationship does not also contain, simultaneously and alternatingly, distances and intermissions.

This suggestion that there is not a simple linear relationship between proximity and intimacy foreshadows themes that will be more central in his later writing. For example, his discussion of the social form of the stranger further problematizes the assumption that intimacy and proximity are directly related; he (1917/1972, p. 145) explains:

> [T]he stranger who moves on… often receives the most surprising revelations and confidences, at times reminiscent of a confessional, about matters which are kept carefully hidden from everybody with whom one is close.

Note that Simmel emphasizes it is the stranger who *moves on*—the highly mobile stranger that is not likely to stick around—in whom we are most likely to casually confide. The ephemerality of these interactions—the assumption that they continue on at a distance—becomes the basis on which intimate information is shared. Simmel describes these relationships in dialectical terms, saying they are

> put together of certain amounts of nearness and of remoteness. Although both these qualities are found to some extent in all relationships, a special proportion and reciprocal tension between them produce the specific form of the relation to the "stranger." (p. 149)

What Simmel is observing here is that the constraints placed on relationships with strangers—that is to say, the relationships' "boundedness" (Bernstein, 2007, 2007b)—facilitates disclosure. Too much proximity to a person or too deep a relationship and the stakes of that relationship may seem too high to risk certain kinds of intimate disclosures.

While not directly in conversation with Simmel, more recent work by de Sousa (1991) suggests that conversations between strangers on a plane are exemplary of how social and spatial distance can encourage intimate disclosures; he observes:

> It is a platitude that intimacy requires old acquaintance […] People tell all their secrets to strangers on planes, precisely because they are strangers. With those who know us, there is often too much at stake to tell the truth. With a stranger, like a priest, you have nothing to lose. Masks can be dropped with strangers […]

Similar observations can be made of conversations with taxi drivers.

Yetdespite making some of these earliest observations about intimacy's dialectical relationship with nearness and distance, Simmel remained intent on distinguishing the social form of the stranger from more conventional relationships based in closeness.* This may be in part because he was writing before digital (or, even, electronic) communications technologies radically altered the ways we interact by "collapsing" distance between people in the same networks (Castells, 1996).

Technological Mediation

Public discourse about the consequences of the growing role of digital technology in our lives have often centered on fears that "real" intimate relationships are being undermined by substituting them with something inferior, simulated, and shallow. McGlotten (2013, p. 2) observes that, through the lens of these "technophobic panics,"

* Though, Simmel (1917/1972) notes, even these more traditional intimate relationships contain "a trace of strangeness."

> Virtual intimacies were failures before the fact. If you had to get online to get it, it couldn't be the real thing.

These concerns are evident in the focus of many early empirical studies that attempted to measure the effects of digitally-mediated interactions users' on well-being. This researchers was sparked, in part by widely publicized study that concluded that internet usage patterns correlate with feelings of social isolation (Kraut et al., 1990). However, the original researchers and others were unable to replicate those findings.

Nevertheless, many commentators continue to raise similar concerns. For example, Turkle (2011/2017, p. 12) identifies this "nagging question" at the focus of her work: "Does virtual intimacy degrade our experience of the other kind and, indeed, of all encounters, of any kind?" As question itself suggests, she (2011/2017, p. 16) is pessimistic about technology's role in facilitating intimacy, arguing that:

> when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy.

She argues that digitally-mediated communication encourages us to see each other like robots—something there when we need it but that we can ignore or turn off when we do not; it

> puts people not too close, not too far, but at just the right distance. The world is now full of modern Goldilockses, people who take comfort in being in touch with a lot of people whom they also keep at bay (2011/2017, p. 15).

She believes that this sort of connection without being fully present leaves us feeling lonely and detached. Real intimacy, she (2011/2017, p. 288) concludes, requires embracing closeness—"being with people in person, hearing their voices and seeing their faces, trying to know their hearts."

In spite of such speculation about the deleterious effects of digital technology on human intimacy, Wellman and Rainie's (2012) synthesis of well over a decade of sociological research concludes that there is scant evidence from empirical research to suggest that contemporary "networked individuals" suffer isolation or exhibit anti-social behaviors as a product of their technology-based interactions. In a similarly expansive book titled *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Baym (2015, p. 60) notes that beginning with studies in the early 1980s, researchers express skepticism regarding the potential for deep communication and relationship formation via digital technologies (which were largely text-based at the time) because these technologies lacked "richness." In other words, digitally-mediated communication was limited in its speed, its ability to convey simultaneous social cues, its use of natural language (rather than numbers), and its ability to convey emotional content. Yet in spite of the limitations inherent in earlier technologies, Baym's (2015, p. 151) review of the evidence presented by a range of academic research suggests:

> people can and do develop meaningful personal relationships online… over time people can reveal themselves to one another verbally and nonverbally until they form understandings of one another as rich as, or richer than, those they hold of people they meet in any other way.

In fact, Baym (2018, p. 24) observes that "we are in a time that calls us to use intimacy as a tool with strangers on an unprecedented, technologically mediated, everyday scale."

This is particularly true for "influencers" (Abidin, 2015) and "micro-celebrities" (Marwick, 2015, 2013; Senft, 2008) whose livelihoods depend on appealing to followers with "strategic intimacy" (Marwick, 2015). In fact, many cam models and other online sex workers build followings as micro-celebrities on social media (Patella-Rey, forthcoming).

While researchers challenge many of the conclusions of Turkle and other technoskeptics as unjustified "panic," many do agree that part of the appeal of digital communication technologies is that they facilitate connection while also maintaining distance, enabling us to hide or obscure parts or ourselves. Again, this is particularly evident in research dealing with micro-celebrity. For example, in discussing musicians' interactions with fans, Baym (2018, p. 145) explains:

> Social media technologies may create physical distance that leaves musicians' bodies safe from obsessive fans, but the presence of social media in daily life makes obsessive behavior so visible and invasive that it can make them more

> psychologically vulnerable. […] It only takes a few people who push the boundaries too far to call for developing strategies for managing distance.

In other words, social media "affords" micro-celebrities tools to block, delete, ignore, and disconnect (Davis, 2020; Davis & Chouinard, 2016); in this way, digital mediation can protect emotional well-being as much as physical safety. In fact, for many micro-celebrities, the availability of such tools may be a precondition to having intimate interactions with fans.

For this reason, like Simmel, Baym observes that the digitally mediated intimacy of micro-celebrity has a dialectical character: "For some artists, the dialectic of walking this line between a job that is easier when fans participate and keeping those fans at a distance never stops being challenging" (Baym, p. 147-8). This observation is reminiscent of the "distancing strategies" researchers (Sanders, 2005; Brewis & Linstead, 2000) have observed are employed by in-person sex workers, and online sex workers also develop similar strategies to simultaneously connect and maintain distance.

Asymmetry

Much of the literature on intimacy either focuses on symmetrical relationship or assumes symmetry to be a crucial component of intimacy. For example, Beebe et al. (2010) state "the closer a relationship, the more you depend on a partner to accept and confirm your sense of self; your partner does the same." A few authors, however, deliberately examine how intimacy can be experienced in asymmetrical relationships. For example, one recurrent example considered by Zelizer (2005) is therapy, in which

the patient must share substantial personal information, while the therapist's role is to provide attention.

Baym's (2015, 2018) work on social media interactions between musicians and fans offers a particularly insight analysis of asymmetry. Baym (23 February 2018) notes that fans commonly experience deep, unidirectional relationships with musicians, who have never met them but whose lyrics resonate with their own experiences and confirm their sense of self. She (2018, p. 144) explains that "for a small but problematic handful of fans, obsession with the music leads to obsession with the artist, and a sense that the relationship is or should be mutual." Fans sometimes sustain feelings of intimacy despite extreme asymmetries in their relationships with celebrities because they project fantasies onto them, imagining, for example, how they might interact if the opportunity arises or how celebrities might respond to their own stories.

This projection of fantasy is reminiscent of Frank's (1998) participant observation study of intimacy in strip clubs, where she notes:

> [D]ancers are […] selling particular versions of their 'selves'—their personalities, their attentions, their conversation. Falling somewhere between fact and fiction, composed of a mix of truth and lies […] Although it can be argued that much of the intimacy given by a dancer to her customers in a strip club is a simulation, this is not always so with regulars. […] She might be excited to see him when he gets to the club. She may offer him secrets, self-revelations, emotional understanding, and even love over time; likewise, he may offer the same.

Even if some of the details are made up and the setting is elaborately constructed, she argues that such fantasies produce the real: Real feelings and real identities emerge from such interactions. She concludes:

> [T]he phantasmatic and the real can be intricately intertwined […] In this way, relationships in the strip club may also be satisfying a man's desire for self-realization by providing him with an interaction that compels belief in his imagined self.

Both Frank and Baym could just as easily be talking about online sex work clients whose asymmetrical attachments to sex workers can be so strong that they believe they are destined to marry. I once attended a convention where a fan flew halfway across the world to propose to a model, only to be rejected and asked to leave the event.

Gender Socialization

Intimacy has been a subject of considerable to modern feminism. Many feminists have offered power analyses of heterosexual sex and intimacy. Barry (1979, p. 266) argues "sex must be based in intimacy" because objectification occurs "*where there is any attempt to separate the sexual experience from the total person*" (emphasis in original). In this case, intimacy is contrasted to sex, the former being exposure of the self and the latter being exposure of the body. Dworkin (1979, p. 23), in contrast, has. a more cynical view, arguing that heterosexual sex is fundamentally an act of

domination that “expresses in intimacy power over and against” women. For Dworkin, sex, intimacy, and power are all inextricably linked within patriarchy.

However, the most sustained discussions of intimacy within modern feminism have been about men—in particular, problematizing men’s inability to disclose personal feelings (Jansz, 2000; Weingarten, 1991). In an attempt to operationalize these claims, psychologists began to use the existing metrics to compare intimate relationships across gender lines. While these studies almost universally found men to be more emotionally restrictive and less likely to make personal disclosures (Dindia & Allen, 1992), some researchers argued that such approaches were woman-centric, ignoring the unique ways that men express intimacy (Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009; Wood & Inman, 1993). Namely, men seek to fulfill intimacy-related needs without threatening to disrupt masculine gender scripts that may characterize the need for intimacy as effeminate, vulnerable, or weak (Jansz, 2000). Often, the only way they can accomplish this is by couching their desire for intimacy in (heteronormative) sexual relationships (Way, 2011).

Transactional Relationships

Commercial exchange has often been assumed to corrupt or prevent intimacy. As Nussbaum (1999, p. 293) notes, “unlike quite a few cultures, we do not tend to view sex in intimate personal relationships the way we view an artist's creation of a painting, namely, as an intimate act that can nonetheless be deliberately undertaken as the result of an antecedent contract-like agreement.” Radical feminists in particular

have made these arguments with regards to pornography. Dines (2010, p.17) describes pornography as "the destruction of intimacy," and MacKinnon (1993, p. 27) says "no pornography is 'real' sex in the sense of shared intimacy."

However, in her (2005, 2000) examination of commercial forms of intimacy, Zelizer concluded that economic activity and intimate relations are not "separate spheres" or "hostile worlds," but intersect in myriad ways, including in sex work. In fact, she (2000) explains that her research was initially inspired by a (Edin & Lein, 1997) study reporting that the dating practices of low-income single mothers often resemble the transactional nature of sex work; these relationships are contingent on a boyfriend's ability to financially support herself and her children. One participant even explicitly described her pattern of reliance on "serial boyfriends" as blurring boundaries between intimate and transactional relationships, saying that her serial dependence on boyfriends "isn't for love, and it isn't just for money. I guess I'd call it social prostitution" (Edin & Lein, 1997).

Zelizer (2000) argues that exchange permeates virtually all forms of social interactions, but that is obscured by the fact that what is being exchanged is typically mediated by symbolism rather than taking the form of a direct monetary transfer (e.g., a fine dinner or a wedding ring). She says:

> [M]onetary transfers and intimate relations, including sexual ties, coexist in a wide variety of contexts and relationships, each relationship marked by a distinctive of payment. […] [P]eople pour unceasing effort into distinguishing qualitatively different social including their most intimate ties-from each other by means well-marked symbols, rituals, and social practices.

It can be argued, then, that sex work becomes an object of particular social concern, not because the transactional nature of these intimate interactions is unique, but due to the fact that these transactions are so transparent.

Interestingly, Zelizer (in Richtel, 2013) seems to suggest that cam modeling is categorically different than more traditional kinds of sex work. Noting that cam models regularly engage in deep conversation with clients, she suggests that they are “defining a new kind of intimacy” by offering “something in between” conventional sex work and a relationship. While this perhaps underestimates the degree to which “the girlfriend experience” (Bernstein, 2007a, 2007b ; Frank, 1998, 2003) is provided by other sex workers, Zelizer’s observation about the centrality of these interactions is nonetheless significant.

Additional Definitional Elements

Having analyzed the factors that complicate cam models’ work facilitating intimacy with clients, we can now add these additional definitional elements:

5. Social and spatial proximity often help facilitate intimacy, but sometime distance is an essential element of intimate relationships.

6. Digitally-mediated communication can, and often does, facilitate intimacy.

7. Intimate partners often both share information, and this mutuality is an important aspect of many relationships (e.g., friendship, romantic partnerships), but intimacy can be experienced in asymmetrical exchanges (e.g., therapy, fandom, sex work, etc.).

8. Men and women are socialized to approach intimacy differently. Overt desire for intimacy is socially acceptable for women, but men often must couch their desire for intimacy in the pursuit of sex.

9. Though we most often think of intimacy in the context of family, friendships, and romantic partners, intimacy sometimes occurs in commercial/contractual contexts.

Conclusion

In making porn interactive, digital communications technologies have also precipitated a deeper shift in purpose for the porn industry, which has moved from exclusively offering sexual gratification to providing a source of intimacy. This transformation merits significant research and discussion, especially given that most of the discourse on pornography centers on a production model that has now largely collapsed. The relationships between online sex workers and their clients are complex, defined by social and spatial distance; technological mediation; asymmetry; gendered expectations; and commercial transaction. Yet, despite these complex

conditions, this review suggests that we have the conceptual tools necessary to recognize the intimacy that is taking place and to begin the work of studying the profound changes occurring in the industry.

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