



## **ONLYFANS IS ONLY PORN:**

**THE ONLINE ECOSYSTEM OF WEBCAMMING AND ONLYFANS**



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## Introduction

In the early days of the internet, it was often said that cyberspace would emancipate humanity from old stereotypes and prejudices. But the proliferation of online pornography proved this view naïve by solidifying the age-old sexist norm that a woman is worth her appeal to men. This is especially true for OnlyFans and webcamming.

Both OnlyFans and webcamming are mainly used by women to sell online sex to men. OnlyFans is essentially a marketplace for photos and videos; webcamming is a live streamed sexual performance. Both are marketed as new, fun, and lucrative alternatives to the drudgery of low-wage jobs. Both are said to empower women to manage their own finances, careers, and lives. In reality, however, OnlyFans and webcamming are little more than old-fashioned sexism—putting naked women on display for male approval—repackaged as technological freedom.

OnlyFans and webcamming are two hustles in the wider online ecosystem of global porn. Every top 30 performer on Pornhub in 2021, for example, also sold content on OnlyFans. Conversely, a search for “OnlyFans” on Pornhub results in more than 50,000 videos. They are, in truth, one and the same. The home page of OnlyFans reads: “Sign up to support your favorite creators.” It would perhaps be more accurate, this report documents, for OnlyFans to announce: “Sign up to support pornography.”

### What is OnlyFans?

OnlyFans is an online emporium that allows people with a following “to monetize their content”—mainly videos and photos— “while developing authentic relationships with their fanbase” (see OnlyFans, Mission). But the latter is empty rhetoric. The platform exists to make a profit.

It is simple to set up an account as a “creator” or “fan.” The platform takes a percentage of all transactions. Many creators sell recipes, yoga lessons, poems, and music. But OnlyFans mainly consists of porn. How much? We don’t know for certain. The platform does not report this information. But a quick search on the web shows estimates ranging from 60% to as high as 98%.

OnlyFans is set up as a type of online journal or blog. Creators post updates, mainly videos and photos accompanied by brief text, which fans access through monthly subscriptions or pay-per-view. Creators can also sell private text messages, live webcam performances, custom-made videos, and one-on-one webcam chats.

OnlyFans is mainly intended for influencers of one sort or another who have already gained a following on other venues. Unlike Amazon, eBay, or Pornhub, OnlyFans does not allow for useful browsing or searching. Instead, fans learn about a creator and their username elsewhere—on a sexual webcamming platform, for example—and then visit and perhaps subscribe to their OnlyFans page. In fact, many pornographic creators maintain two OnlyFans pages. On a free page, they post provocative but not explicit photos. These are intended to lure fans into purchasing a subscription or content on the creator's paid or VIP page. Again, the sole purpose of OnlyFans is to generate revenue.

OnlyFans was founded in 2016 by Tim Stokely, who had previous business experience in the adult industry. A few years later, he sold a majority stake to Leo Radvinsky, who once operated porn websites that advertised stolen passwords, bestiality, and children (*Brewster & Dawkins, 2021*). These claims were likely false. But Radvinsky made them nonetheless to profit from men attracted to the sexual assault of kids.

OnlyFans does not advertise itself as a pornographic marketplace. But porn is the reason it exists. There was thus feverish outcry in August 2021 when OnlyFans announced a ban on explicit content due to banks refusing porn-related transactions. The decision was swiftly reversed and OnlyFans, like Pornhub, remains almost synonymous with the online pornography industry (*Nilsson, 2021*).

OnlyFans is not the only platform that allows porn consumers to purchase videos, photos, and more from their preferred performers. Scores of similar sites include: AdmireMe, Exclusv.Life, FanCentro, Fansly, Fan-topia, iFans, IsMyGirl, Centerfold (owned by Playboy), LoverFans, OKFans, FlirtBack,<sup>1</sup> Frisk.chat, ModelHub (run by Pornhub), MyGirlFund, SextPanther, SinParty, Solo.to, SoSpoilt, Undresso, Unfiltrd, and xFans. This list could go on. Most platforms, like OnlyFans, are aimed at general porn audiences. But others cater to fetishes or kinks. Cliptress, for example, specializes in femdom, or porn featuring dominant women and submissive men, which is a variant of BDSM (bondage/discipline, domination/submission, sadism, and masochism). Scatbook describes itself as: "The unique social network for fans of the most extreme content; Scat [i.e., feces], pissing, and all kind of content that creators cannot show you on other platforms." YezzClips includes "toilet slavery."

OnlyFans requires users to be at least 18 years of age. The platform requires creators, but not fans, to submit a government photo ID, a selfie while holding the ID, and, in the United States, a social security number (see OnlyFans, Age and identity verification).

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<sup>1</sup> Flirtback is now the landing page for MegaCams, which had an artificial intelligence or AI search tool that allowed users to find sex performers who resembled anybody— "the girl next door"—in an uploaded photo. MegaCams did not address what happened if the girl next door didn't consent (see Vincent, 2016).

The site also periodically rechecks age and identity “using both technology and human intelligence.”

OnlyFans prohibits posts that depict, promote, or mention children as well as weapons, drugs, self-harm, suicide, incest, bestiality, necrophilia, urine, excrement-related material, and nonconsensual image abuse (so-called ‘revenge porn’) (see OnlyFans, Terms of service: Acceptable use policy). The platform also forbids “violence, rape, lack of consent, hypnosis, intoxication, sexual assault, torture, sadomasochistic abuse or hardcore bondage, extreme fisting, or genital mutilation.” That the site needs to expressly ban this content says something about its consumers. But many of these activities are freely available on mainstream porn sites where performers often mention their OnlyFans accounts. Despite its policies, moreover, videos of actual rapes have been uploaded to OnlyFans (*Cotter, 2021; NBC, 2022*), and the platform has been sued by at least one survivor (*Jane Doe v. Fenix Internet LLC et al.; Minsky, 2022*).

OnlyFans also prohibits posts that “stalk, bully, abuse, harass, threaten or intimidate” as well as hate speech. The latter includes content intended to “vilify, humiliate, [and] dehumanize” individuals or groups based on their identity, which includes their sex and gender. The site also forbids “unsolicited” content that “sexually objectifies . . . in a non-consensual way.” But one could argue that much of the content on OnlyFans violates many of these policies by dehumanizing women—and men—and by endorsing sexual violence that portrays women as little more than vessels intended to be filled with male pleasure. At best, OnlyFans certainly trivializes sexual aggression.

OnlyFans experienced meteoric growth during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Business plummeted for escorts, strippers, prostitutes, and other commercial in-person sexual services, while online marketplaces for virtual sex flourished. Job losses during the pandemic, too, coupled to meager social supports, pushed many women, now destitute and desperate, to sell themselves online. Prior to the pandemic, OnlyFans had 7.5 million users—which jumped to 85 million a year later (*Boseley, 2022*). Today, the site boasts more than 150 million fans served by over 1.5 million creators who receive an annual payout exceeding \$5 billion (see OnlyFans, Company). But that payout, we will see, is not evenly distributed. Most content creators receive less than poverty-level wages.

OnlyFans is not a self-contained site, as mentioned above. It is part of a wider pornographic ecosystem that includes mainstream porn sites as well as sexual webcamming sites, which drive much of the traffic to OnlyFans. This online ecosystem was aptly summarized by one performer on the webcamming platform BongaCams. Her profile reads: “I’m waiting for you, I’m here for you, I will definitely make you happy, I’ll be here for you every time you need me.” Both webcamming and OnlyFans mainly feature women laying bare their naked subordination to the male gaze.

## Webcamming and OnlyFans

OnlyFans and webcamming are not restricted to any gender or sexual orientation. But most performers are women, and most of their customers are men. For example, BongaCams had 2,051 “females” online one afternoon in December 2022, but only 490 total for “couples,” “males,” and “trans.” I presume it to be true, too, that female performers are anticipating only male viewers.

OnlyFans, as noted above, restricts the functions of its search bar. This is intended to protect the privacy of creators who do not want family, friends, and coworkers to find them, and thus to attract more creators and revenue. There are, however, third-party search engines, such as OnlyFinder, but these have limited utility. To find someone’s OnlyFans account, then, you need to learn their username, typically from their profiles on pornography websites and webcamming platforms.

In fact, most regular porn performers now maintain OnlyFans or similar pages. So do most webcam models, who are also known by the diminutive or childlike term “cam girls” (never “cam women”). They want fans to frequent their webcamming and porn sites as well as their OnlyFans pages, all in hopes of further attracting a paying audience.

On traditional porn sites, the consumer is largely passive, except for searching content and the obvious act of self-pleasure. Webcamming is different. Customers interact directly in real time with the performer, either speaking into their computer microphone or typing on a device. Normally, unless a customer has paid for a private chat, everybody in the virtual room, including nonpaying visitors, can see the performance and listen or read the dialogue. (The text scrolls down a small window sidebar on the screen.) But typically, only paying customers can communicate with the performer. Much of the conversation, such as it is, centers on tips to see certain sex acts, such as stripping, masturbating, and using sex toys. From the performer’s perspective, as well as the webcamming platform, talk or text is cheap. Only the tips, or payment for private chats or shows, generate real revenue.

Many webcamming platforms do not require registration to view a performance. These platforms are, like most major porn sites, open to the public of any age. In fact, the homepage of a webcamming platform generally resemble the landing pages of so-called tube sites—named after YouTube—which showcase thousands of pornographic videos.

Webcamming is a booming sector of the porn industry. A popular site, Chaturbate, had 470.7 million visits in October 2022 and was listed in the top 50 websites globally for viewer traffic (*Similarweb*, 2022). Unlike most webcamming and porn sites, Chaturbate does ask users to confirm—by clicking a button—that they are over 18. But the site does not verify the age of a user. In December 2022, I clicked on that button, and saw 91 small

or thumbnail images of primarily live performances, mostly showcasing naked women engaged in sexual activity. There were 88 more pages. Stripchat (which, when last checked in January 2023, also requires age confirmation), was live streaming 6,158 performances.

Webcamming, unlike regular porn, is interactive. But interaction consists mainly of men tipping a model to perform sexual acts, ostensibly for her own enjoyment but really so the men can pleasure themselves. Ideally, according to the standard plotline, they climax together (though, not unsurprisingly, the performer is usually performing) (*Marsh, 2016*).<sup>2</sup> To tip, users must register and purchase virtual tokens. These tokens allow platforms to evade restrictions imposed by many financial institutions, including PayPal, on direct payments for sexual services.<sup>3</sup>

To entice viewers to deposit ever more tokens, and to keep them returning, many performers stage contests, bonuses, and games. To add to the carnivalesque atmosphere, platforms tend to feature bright colors, flashing lights, lots of sounds, emojis, and the like. It's not unlike a casino. An elusive goal is to catch a so-called whale (i.e., a wealthy, long-term client), who continuously lavishes a performer with money and gifts. For this reason, camming is often associated with the form of prostitution called "sugar dating," whereby wealthy men (sugar daddies) pay typically younger women (sugar babies) for sex, entertainment, and companionship.<sup>4</sup>

Most platforms allow cam girls to also sell videos, photos, sexual texts (or sexts), access to private social media accounts (*Drenten, Gurrieri, & Tyler, 2019*), and phone sex conversations. Another popular service is the one-on-one webcam chat, whereby the performer and consumer both watch each other. Most women who sell sexual services on webcamming platforms also do so on OnlyFans and similar sites.

There are many webcamming platforms, including: AdultWork, AmateurCams, BongaCams, CamSoda, Chaturbate, EyeKandiCams, FilipinaWebcams, Flirt4Free, ImLive, JerkMate, LiveJasmine, MyFreeCams, PlayWithMe, PrivateCams, Streamchat, and StripChat. Users can visit websites to read reviews and comparisons (e.g., AdultWebcam. reviews, BestAdultCamSites). One platform, SugarBounce, is developing porn-related NFTs (nonfungible tokens) and a Blockchain payment system.<sup>5</sup> Webcamming is a thriving industry. And it is hand in glove with OnlyFans.

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<sup>2</sup> With upward of 50 private shows daily: "Not possible . . . that many times for real," (see Marsh, 2016). Please note that I cite this and other non-scholarly works on the assumption that the authors are speaking and writing honestly. Should that assumption prove false, my arguments remain valid and sustained by scholarly sources I cite as well as my own online observations.

<sup>3</sup> Payment systems with no such qualms, which are beloved by porn sites, include Epoch, CCBill, Skyprivate, Paxum, and ProBillr, the latter owned by MindGeek, the parent company of Pornhub.

<sup>4</sup> Platforms include SugarDaddy, WhatsYourPrice, WealthyMen, EstablishedMen, and RichMeetsBeautiful (see Heidi, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> See <https://sugarbouncencryptomedium.com/>.

## Agency

Many scholars see OnlyFans and webcamming as empowering for women (*Cardoso & Scarcelli, 2021; Dorsey, Craddock, & Howard-Howell, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2022; Henry & Farvid, 2017; Jones, 2016; Senft, 2008; Stuart, 2016; Vlase & Preteasa, 2022*). These platforms allegedly allow women to rebel against male-dominated puritanism, to celebrate sexual and gender diversity, and to shun dreary low-wage jobs. Selling online sexual services, too, allegedly permits women to assert bodily autonomy, erotic agency, and public visibility.

I believe these stances to be well-intentioned, but misguided. For webcamming and OnlyFans are simply online versions of an old and tired patriarchy that commodifies women's bodies as disposable sex objects. As such, these platforms undermine, rather than promote, women's agency. They perpetuate the belief that men should only value women they find sexually appealing—and that women, as one ex-stripper put it in her self-published memoir, should “look for their identities in others' opinions of them” (*Hageman, 2021*).

There are numerous blogs, websites, online forums, and books offering advice on how to financially thrive through OnlyFans and webcamming. Most of the books are self-published by performers, and available for free or only a few dollars on Amazon Kindle. One gets right to the point that I am making: “In my clients' eyes, I am not really here as a person. I am a means to an end, a vehicle for their desires, a facilitator for their lusts and an object on which they can project their fantasies” (*Harding, 2012*). Many other performers echo this sentiment in their webcamming profiles:

- “I love to feel myself at your feet . . . order me, and tell me how you want me and what you want me to do . . . I am willing to treat you like a stallion, like my king.”
- “Tell me your desires and I will be happy to satisfy each one of your orders.”
- “I can be your lady, or I can be your slut, you pick.”
- “I like to do everything you ask me because I like to be your whore.”

This is not to say performers do not insist on rules. Most profiles list a few common rules, such as: “Do not demand without tipping first!” “Always be nice and respectful to me and everyone else in my room,” and “No bargaining!” Others identify more specific boundaries:

- “No pee, poo, or vomit.”
- “I don't do anal. Maybe someday.”
- “Don't use such terms like babe, honey, bitch, bad girl, etc. Call me Lexi ❤️”



Most platforms also allow performers to ban users from their rooms. But turning away customers who request “pee, poo, or vomit” hardly exemplifies workplace empowerment.

Yet OnlyFans and webcamming are often promoted as personally and financially empowering. One modeling agency claims: “You’ll feel like a queen. You’ll buy everything you want; you’ll gain confidence in yourself . . . you can seduce any man” and “you’ll be able to fulfill your dreams” (*Studio 20, n.d., accessed January 2023*). Women can upgrade their lifestyle, enjoy their work, be their own boss, and potentially make a lot of money (*CamgirlIMFC, 2015*). In just one year, “it’s possible to earn a million dollars, and that’s a fact” (*Cashcam Studios*).<sup>1</sup> The Studio 20 pitch also advances the myth of self-reliance. A model will “become financially independent.” Success depends only “on the effort and your involvement in this job. . . . Exactly how much you make depends only on you” (*Studio 20, n.d., accessed January 2023*).

These ludicrous statements aim to persuade vulnerable women that, through hard work and diligence, they can earn riches from selling online sexual services. But there is no credible evidence that webcamming and OnlyFans provide significant incomes to a sizable number of women. In fact, I will show later that the opposite is true. Thus, while many performers list expensive goals on their profiles—typically cars and houses—others seem more honest about the reality of low earnings. One model listed rent, local tax, electricity, and food shopping.

Webcamming also promotes the myth self-invention. Most cam girls, as I discuss later, fear for their safety and do not divulge their real names. But performers often spin this anxiety into an opportunity to “get creative and have fun with creating a new persona of yourself! You can be anyone you want to be!” (*Cam Codes, 2018*). But refashioning the self is rarely successful. One ex-performer, Sally XXX, was initially thrilled to re-create herself as a “strong woman,” and receive validation from her fans. Yet she still felt “vulnerable and weak” and “exposed and violated,” and still suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder, bulimia, anxiety, and emotional trauma. Webcamming for Sally “was a substitute for what I know I should be doing: seeking professional help” (*Sally XXX, 2021*). For Sally, like many other women (*see Hageman, 2015; Mazzei, 2019*), OnlyFans and webcamming promise what mental health and addiction professionals call the “geographic cure:” the belief that moving someplace else—such as cyberspace—will resolve your problems. It rarely does.

Often, in fact, webcamming and OnlyFans simply replicate trauma through the demand by men for women to engage in self-debasement. One performer was “disgusted” by some of her online experiences, including requests involving urine and feces, and to insert a dildo from her anus directly into her vagina (*Cailidd, 2014*). One survivor was “very

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<sup>1</sup> Other webcamming agencies include Strictly Models, EyeCandyWebModels, Next Level Modeling, and ModelCentro.

excited” at first. “I’d never made that kind of money.” But about the years she performed, she’s said: “I’d sometimes collapse, and I wanted to die—but I’d always go back. . . . you subconsciously accept humiliating, despicable, exploitative and abusive situations—rape in every sense—as ‘okay.’” She also remarked that she didn’t see many “well-off” women performing: “Most came from backgrounds including family neglect, abuse, rape, drug addiction, despair, mental illness and depression. I myself was sexually abused by my father and was neglected by my mother. I grew up in a home where rape equaled love” (*quoted in Gil-Ad, 2022*). For her, webcamming was a form of “survival sex.” She sold the only thing she thought she had left to offer: her body. In these circumstances, the choice she made was no real choice at all (*see also Wang, 2021*).

Many women on OnlyFans and webcamming platforms will write a customer’s name on her breasts. One performer on BongaCams was willing to do so for 88 tokens or \$4.40. But since all platforms take a percentage of earnings, which is upward of 50% for BongaCams, this performer might only take home \$2.20 for allowing a man to symbolically own her body. On Chaturbate, a performer who also sold content on OnlyFans had scrawled “whore” and “slut” on her breasts. Yet another performer, this time on OnlyFans, was selling a video for \$10, titled “Slutty collared submissive whore. . . . Gagging drooling and depthroating . . . until she cries. Covered in degrading writing and dirty talking about how much of a dumb slut she is.” “If it’s what they want to do,” says one defender of OnlyFans, “creators should be supported, not shamed” (*Heinrich, 2020*). I agree that women forced into selling sex should not be shamed. But neither should we support an industry that profits from debasement.

## Illusions of Authenticity and Intimacy

Both webcamming and OnlyFans are built on the fantasy that men are paying for authentic intimacy and relationships. In truth, a male customer is controlling women, tipping them to do whatever he finds arousing, which is mostly what he has seen on porn sites. “A lot of men enjoy the personal experience” of webcamming writes Eliza Wilde in her self-published, collection of short stories, because they “can essentially find a ‘custom’ girl who fits their needs” (*Wilde, 2019*). Performers do not act as their own persons. They are advised by modeling agencies and guidebooks to bathe regularly, apply fresh makeup, do their nails and hair, change outfits—sexy outfits—regularly, and always smile. For as HookupGuru writes: “You’re expected to be horny, no matter what. If you’re not, pretend that you are. . . . guys come to webcam chats for entertainment. They don’t want to deal with moody bitches” (*HookupGuru*). To keep smiling, one performer recommends “facial fillers.” With them, she can work long shifts and “literally never look tired” (*Lovett, 2020*). In all this, there is one message: Webcamming and OnlyFans require women to not appear and act like real people but as custom girls whose sole goal is to please men.

The idea that OnlyFans and webcamming allow for intimacy is patently absurd. The

sole rationale for interacting with customers is to gain tips, not relationships. Indeed, no honest relationship is even possible since performers are instructed not to reveal their true identity and personality. Moreover, many women on OnlyFans do not themselves text, message, and chat with their fans. Rather, agencies outsource that work to “cheap English-speaking labor around the globe” (Marcus, 2022). Yet I believe many men, and even some scholars, confuse this fake intimacy and commodified affection for authentic relationships (see Berg, 2017; Bernstein, 2007; Sanders, et al., 2020).

On the webcamming platform Flirt4Free, for example, recent reviews of one performer included “beautiful personality enjoy her company” and “it’s like you are really with her.” One customer was particularly effusive: “We know how much we feel about each other and how much we think about each other and how much we miss each other. Rachel, you are so very special to me. My Lady Love of My Life xx Hopefully we can meet again soon.” Yet none of these men know Rachel in any substantive way. Her online persona is a fabrication. Another performer on Flirt4Free, Kathy, was similarly lauded as “equally good to talk to as a friend and good as a lover.” Said another customer: “We had great chemistry . . . the best time I’ve had in a while.” I doubt Kathy felt that way. Her profile did not say that she was seeking companionship. She wanted to earn money to visit Malta.

The absurdity of imputing relational authenticity to these platforms was eloquently voiced by one performer: “You might have to masturbate in front of someone a few dozen times before he really warms to you” (Vera quoted in Matache, 2018). I suspect that few people, including academics who argue the contrary, would readily warm to someone whose idea of intimacy was a few minutes on Chaturbate or OnlyFans.

Many men on these platforms are not even interested in warmth. They seek out uninhibited violence against women. Consider these requests of a performer “(which she refused)”: “pee/drink pee, poo/eat poo, vomit/eat vomit, insert a hairbrush into my anus . . . insert shoe heel into my vag, watch someone cut his dick off, cut any part of my body . . . suck on a used tampon” (quoted in McGehee, 2015). Or the men who paid another performer to “put a dildo on the end of a drill” (Oppenheim, 2019). Admittedly, the latter woman wanted to stand apart from the webcamming competition. Yet, I would hardly call that entrepreneurial empowerment or a new kind of intimacy (see Koskela, 2002; Rand, 2019). It instead illustrates that the greater a woman’s “economic and social vulnerability, the less power she has to say no to any porn user’s specific demand” (Farley & Donevan, 2021, p. 36)—including, in one horrific case from England, a performer dying after agreeing to a man’s request to watch auto-asphyxiation (Hicks, 2019; Lal & Shammass, 2019). Detectives later discovered that he watched her die, making no attempt to reach emergency services.

## OnlyFans and Pornhub

Most popular porn sites are available for free. Not so OnlyFans, which requires registration. One needs to enter a name, email, password, and a credit card. (OnlyFans accepts Visa, Master Card, Diners Club, Discover, and JCB, among others.) There is no fee for enrollment and no obligation to spend, but a valid credit card is mandatory and makes it easy to subscribe to creators.

In September 2022, I randomly selected one of the top performers on Pornhub. She sells content on ManyVids, FanCentro, and Fansly. But I visited OnlyFans. Her free page displayed about 1,000 posts, most of which included photos that have garnered more than one million likes. As on most free pages, the photos are pornographic in style, but the performer is partially, if sometimes barely, clothed. Anyone with an OnlyFans account can view and like the photos on her free page. One can even tip the performer, which is charged to the credit card on file. But these images are intended to entice the fan into purchasing explicit videos or a subscription to her paid or VIP page—ideally, both.

On free OnlyFans pages, porn videos are almost always shaded gray. Payment is required to unlock and download the content. When I visited her page, it cost \$15 to unlock “Ass, Titties, Pussy, Videos, Bootyhole and letting you in close! I want you to see all my naughty parts up close so you can choose where to start playing. How would you like to Start Baby?” Below it was a photo. She is lying down, head tilted backward toward the camera, mouth open, hands covering her breasts. “Want to hear me talk about your Big Cock?” That cost \$25.

Pornography has its own slang. A common kink on porn sites, as well as OnlyFans and webcamming platforms, is “JOI,” or “jerk-off instructions.” On her free OnlyFans page, this performer was running a one-day special of \$30 to unlock “JOI and my Masturbation video together.”

A subscription to her paid OnlyFans page ranged from \$10 for 30 days up to \$83.96 for six months. OnlyFans subscriptions are recurring charges unless the subscriber cancels. On this page, the performer—or, more likely, her agency—had posted 335 videos and photos, none of which are visible without a paid subscription.

This performer is famous, at least in the porn industry. Do lesser-known women also maintain OnlyFans pages? To find out, I visited Pornhub one day in September 2022, which requires no fee, registration, or cursory click on an “I’m over 18” button. The homepage displays recently featured videos. Scrolling ahead a few pages, I used Google to learn that 75% of the women performing in the 44 displayed videos sold content on OnlyFans. Pornhub had 2,273 Recently Featured pages, or 100,012 videos. Three-quarters of them—

many tens of thousands of performers—amounts to a sizable quantity of porn available for purchase on OnlyFans. (Most of the women without an account sold content on similar sites.) The amount a performer charges for an OnlyFans subscription rises with her popularity. One woman charged as little as \$4.99 a month. For a \$5 tip, another would enter the fan’s name in a raffle to win a “free dick rating video.”

Social media is an important driver of traffic to OnlyFans. Twitter and Snapchat are preferred since both allow nudity and porn.<sup>6</sup> Plus, OnlyFans allows creators to sync their account with Twitter. But creators also promote themselves on Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, TikTok, YouTube, Reddit, Telegram, Peach, Twitch, SuicideGirls, Cameo, Discord, and more. Ironically, many of these platforms do not allow nudity or even links to OnlyFans. So, performers need to be sly. Any “accountant” on TikTok, for example, is understood to sell porn, not tax advice, on other sites (*Browne, 2021*). Performers also evade these bans by setting up pages on intermediary platforms, such as AllMyLinks and LinkTree, on which they list their OnlyFans, webcamming, and other porn-related sites. Then they advertise that web address through social media.

Some fans want to purchase gifts for performers. Thus, OnlyFans and webcamming profiles often include links to Amazon wish lists. (Similar ecommerce websites with wish lists are WishTender and Throne.) Predictably, these lists include items such as lingerie. But they also encompass more mundane goods: throw pillows, chairs, jewelry, shoes, pet supplies, espresso machines, suitcases, and gift cards for Wendy’s, Starbucks, Subway, Southwest Airlines, and more.

## OnlyFans and Webcamming

Recall that OnlyFans is a destination or marketplace for purchasing photos, videos, and blog-like updates from models and performers. One such woman is Katerina from Ukraine, who cams on Chaturbate.

On her Chaturbate profile, Katerina posted a link to her OnlyFans page. A subscription is inexpensive. Her regular monthly rate is \$10, but she was running a sale in October 2022 for only \$3 a month. At that rate, she is unlikely to generate much income. Most women on Chaturbate perform alone. But Katerina often live streams with several other young women, none of whom look to be older than their early twenties. On many webcamming platforms, in fact, one sees troublingly young-looking performers. I return to this later.

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<sup>6</sup> Albeit with some restrictions, for example, see Twitter’s Sensitive Media Policy, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/media-policy>.

Katerina has posted 260 photos and 410 videos on OnlyFans. All feature explicit sexual activity, typically masturbation, often with sex toys. In the videos, the young women frequently slap their own buttocks, a common activity in webcamming, and continuously sway to pop tunes and techno music. OnlyFans allows for text-based, typically delayed or asynchronous dialogue between creators and fans. On Katerina's page, the conversations are generally comments by fans along the lines of (this is verbatim): "♥Hot Mouth Hot Tongue Hot Tits Hot Ass Hot Pussy Hot HOt HOT."

At the top of her OnlyFans page, Katerina posted links to her webcamming rooms, other porn-related websites, and her social media accounts, such as Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube. Like many performers, Katerina sells subscriptions on some of her social media, including Instagram, as well as video chats and messages on WhatsApp and Skype. On her OnlyFans pages, too, she displays her weekly webcamming schedules for Chaturbate, Stripchat, and the Polish-language platform ShowUp.tv. She also included a link to her Amazon wish list, which included sex toys and skimpy outfits, a tote bag, Calvin Klein sandals, and Gucci sunglasses, as well as Snickers bars and M&Ms.

Katerina's Chaturbate profile also includes links to her social media accounts. But whereas subscriptions through OnlyFans are billed to the user's credit card, Chaturbate charges tokens, which are billed to a credit card. Like most cam girls, Katerina's profile also provides a link to her OnlyFans page and lists her highest tippers or "best lovers." She ends her profile with: "Your support and love makes my dreams come true."

Katerina, too, like almost every performer, posted a tip menu. For various amounts of tokens, she will, for example, flash her feet, wear pantyhose, slap her backside, or insert an anal plug. Other performers list "ice cube on boobs," "paddle spank," spitting on their breasts, rating a man's genitals, watching him climax, and much more. Katerina's tip menu also includes "drink shot of vodka," which is unusual, since many platforms ban alcohol, drugs, and intoxication to forestall legal challenges to consent.

Particularly disturbing is that Katerina will affix clamps to her breasts and genitals. This would seem to violate the terms and conditions of Chaturbate, which forbid "actual or simulated...unsafe actions, including violence, blood, torture, pain . . . or any actions associated with causing physical or emotional harm" (*Chaturbate, n.d.*). Admittedly, it is possible that Katerina honestly derives pleasure from using the clamps and does so of her own free choosing. Perhaps the same is true of other women on Chaturbate who insert baseball bats into their anuses, clip automobile jumper cables onto their breasts, and lick their armpits (*van Doorn & Velthuis, 2018*). But I believe it is more likely that the clamps simply illustrate how far many performers will go, due to coercion or financial despair, to earn a money.

Most scholars who study webcamming and OnlyFans would disagree. One criticized platforms that prohibit “non-normative” sexual behaviors (e.g., erotic asphyxiation) and “full-service work” or prostitution (*Stegeman, 2021*). Another calls the ban by OnlyFans of certain activities, such as “extreme fisting” (OnlyFans, Terms of service: Acceptable use policy), “economic coercion” (*Easterbrook-Smith, 2022*). I am not kink-shaming, as one journalist warns against (*Tierney, 2018*). I am instead speaking out against sexual cruelty. For that very same journalist also reported on cam girls who were asked to send men their childhood photos, vomit while fellating a dildo, engage in racist name-calling, mail them dirty panties or bodily fluids, and insert sausages into their genitals.

We also need to flag another disturbing aspect of OnlyFans and webcamming, namely, the sexualization of children. These platforms generally have two areas of focus: a section which displays the live performance or video, and a side bar where the performer and her fans type messages. The main area often features sexual debasement, as I just described, while in the side bar, fans are sending tips, which can include the purchase of cutesy emoticons. It is thus possible for a fan to show his delight at Katerina affixing a clamp to her breasts by paying tokens to display little cartoons of flowers, teddy bears, a smiling sun, and hearts. The jarring juxtaposition of childishness with sexual violence is disturbing.

So is the presence of stuffed animals in some performers’ Amazon wish lists. These plush toys are perhaps intended as props to attract men to the cam room who are interested in the infantilizing affect (*for the same suggestions, see Mathews, 2017*). Predators are known to use TikTok and Discord to coax children into porn, sexual abuse, and human trafficking (*Kelly, 2022; Levine, 2022*). There is also a market for webcamming sites that feature child sexual assault.<sup>7</sup> This is not a problem of a few deranged men, but criminal behavior seamlessly woven into the entire cyber-ecosystem of OnlyFans and webcamming.

## Controlling Women

A ubiquitous item in the pornographic ecosystem is the Lovense, a Bluetooth-enabled, remotely controlled vibrator or sex toy. These devices are technically known as “teledildonics” or “cyberdildonics.” Lovense is sex tech company headquartered in Singapore. Other such firms include RealTouch, OhMiBod, Satisfyer, and We-Vibe. But the Lovense Lush is the gold standard. These items, wrote one journalist, are “stretching the boundaries of sexual wellness” (*Dawson, 2022*). But on OnlyFans and webcamming platforms, the gadgets are used not for wellness but to control, and hence, harm women

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<sup>7</sup> Many of the traffickers and website operators are Americans who relocate to the Philippines (see Mendoza & Gomez, 2017).

(I believe that most scholars miss this point, e.g., Döring et al., 2021; Faustino, 2018; Liberati, 2017; a welcome alternative is Sparrow & Karas, 2020).

To use the device, a performer downloads the Lovense app, which connects her computer or laptop to the vibrator via Bluetooth. Most crucially, the app is integrated into most webcamming platforms. Using the app, the performer assigns a price in tokens to levels of intensity and duration (e.g., low, high, earthquake, and fireworks). She inserts the device, turns it on, and customers in her cam room can deposit tips to automatically trigger vibrations. As the performer coaxes men into scaling up her pleasure by depositing more and more tokens, she writhes and gasps appreciatively.

These sex toys are neon pink. On cam sites, one sees the florescent tails of these devices protruding from the genitals, undergarments, and lingerie of model after model. When a user tips a performer to activate her device, everybody in the room hears a tone, ping, or chime, much like a carnival game. If several viewers are tipping, the sounds occur in rapid succession, an absurd soundtrack to an unsettling performance.

The performer remains in the throes of ecstasy for however long her fans deposit tips and the device keeps vibrating. Bored fans will simply go elsewhere. Notwithstanding her ceaseless pleasure, the performer must also constantly glance at her screen to read her audience's requests and questions—and to type her replies. Conversation occurs verbally, too, and most performers generally thank each tipper by username—again, all while she is putatively ascending to the heights of delight.<sup>8</sup>

That men “can actively make you orgasm by tipping you is a big turn on for them,” says one camming site (*Adult Girl Boss*, 2022). But these sex toys are not for the performer's enjoyment. They are meant to arouse male customers through an illusion of their sexual prowess—that all it takes to please a woman, at his chosen convenience, is a few tokens.

Something of the same imbalance of power, only worse, was suggested in a post on the Fan-topia blog: “helpful tips and tricks for creators.” The blogger recommended “gagging:” “Gagging refers to getting choked [sic] lightly by your partner until you make gagging sounds. Often it is the male partner who gets off to the sound of their partner gagging, by the knowledge that they are big enough to make their partner gag. Likewise, the submissive partner may enjoy the dizzy sensation that comes with the choking or the feeling of having something thrust down your throat to the point that you are gagging” (*Fan-topia*, 2021; see also Perry, 2020).

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<sup>8</sup> For privacy concerns about these devices harvesting data for commercial purposes, see Kobie, 2018; Wilson-Barnao & Collie, 2018.



One online performer believes that men are drawn to OnlyFans and webcamming because they “perceive their wives or girlfriends to be miserable bitches” (*Harding, 2012*). Other men are too shy to date, too busy at work, or too “unattractive” and thus thirsting for approval and affection (*Aella, 2018; see also McGehee, 2015*). But these platforms offer an even worse solution: sexual violence against women. And how should performers cope with their emotional toll? One blogger’s answer: “Get a lil drunk...Camgirls tend to drink a lot...My friend once told me that she used to get on cam, black out, and wake up every morning with a thousand dollars” (*Aella, 2018*).

I am suggesting here that men who frequent the online pornographic ecosystem are driven by one reason: misogyny. One former performer commented in an interview: “I cried after work virtually every day from the stress and strain from all of the jerks who came into my room and abused me” (*Marsh, 2016*).

Unsurprisingly, this ecosystem portrays no alternative view of masculinity. Indeed, OnlyFans and webcamming tend to view men as boorish simpletons. Performers are advised that they can influence men into tipping by saying such things as: “That’s a very masculine name” or “Who wants to give me my first orgasm of the day?” Since some men get excited when defeating rivals for the attention of women, performers should stage competitions. Another strategy is utilizing antagonism, as one blogger writes:

I recommend, if you have the money to spare, go find a low-earning camgirl and tip her an amount you think will make her happy. Pay attention to how that feels. A huge draw towards this is the power—to make someone happy, or sad, to make them do whatever you want. You want to let men feel this power as viscerally and directly as they can—and one of the easiest ways to do this is antagonism towards you. I don’t mean this necessarily in a negative way—I mean to imply the narrative that you don’t want to do a thing for whatever reason. “That dildo is too big,” “Oh my god I can’t have another orgasm,” “I don’t want to spank myself,” etc. This can be done in an obvious tone of fun; I don’t mean to say that these guys are abusing you or want to abuse you—they almost always do not want to abuse you—just that some playful tension between you and them makes them feel with extreme clarity their connection with you. (*Aella, 2018*)

One modeling agency recommends Batman Day and Naughty Nurse Day (Boleyn Models). In an interview about her on-camera persona, Zeya Marsh – an evident pseudonym - says “I have a whole alternate personality. Lovely Zeya, she is close to my real life, but without all of the normal ups and downs or bad stuff. This alternate Zeya is a nasty girl who loves sex and works in the cam studio because it turns her on. Men in the real world don’t fulfill her, she’s only fulfilled by having members watch her masturbate” while she ostensibly fantasizes about them (*Marsh, 2016*). Part of the violence of OnlyFans and webcamming sites is how these platforms frame the male viewers to appear as

hollow as the women who perform for them.

As another performer wrote of her fans: “The real world is hostile to them, a wife who’s belittling them, a girlfriend who makes them feel bad, or a job that’s destroying them. I am their escape, someone who can listen and even let them work out their sexual fantasies” (Marsh, 2016). But the escape she offers to men who feel powerless in the real world is a fiction of controlling women. That message is sure to impact the real women these men encounter in their offline lives. That same performer admitted as much. “A lot of guys want to me to dominate them. These are the guys who hurt women in real life, and they think by letting me dominate them, they’re somehow making up for being assholes” (Marsh, 2016). Or, as another wrote: “It is better [for men] to find some form of release online rather than going around assaulting people” (Sally XXX, 2021).

Admittedly, neither Zeya Marsh nor Sally XXX are writing scholarly accounts. But on the assumption that what they say here is honest, then their comments make clear that the online world of OnlyFans and webcamming is no mere fantasy, but inherently connected to real-world violence. And if their accounts are fictitious, the overall thesis of this research report remains intact and supported by the scholarly sources I cite. Additionally, I provided above numerous other examples of aggression and violence that performers are willing to tolerate and self-inflict.

The connection between what happens onscreen and off-screen is why many online sex fantasies are so frightening. In her collection of tales based on her own camming experiences, Eliza Wilde writes about one performer who recounted a man who asked her to pretend that she was a hired killer who had sex with her victims before killing them and then playing dead herself. “At the end of the roleplay (after you have killed me), please use red lipstick to put lots of red dots on your tits and stomach and make them look like bullet holes in your body.” He also asked her to “shake your body as if being shot by 20 machine guns” (Wilde, 2019). Is this true? I do not honestly know. But it doesn’t take long to find performers who advertise “anal fisting,” for example, “slap pussy (with a belt or paddle).” It is thus reasonable to assume that the audience for private webcam shows would include men who find real and performative violence arousing.

No less concerning is that OnlyFans and webcamming often feature women—or cam girls—made to look like sexually available children. One source recommends that models dress in a “schoolgirl’s outfit” for their profile photos, the text reading: “I’m sorry my homework was late. Please don’t punish me—too much” (Harding, 2012). Or pose with “spanking gear,” saying, “I’ve been a naughty girl.” Male customers have asked performers to role-play incest, act like their “mommy,” and hug a teddy bear while sucking their thumb (Baxter, 2013; Marsh, 2016). Conversely, some men want performers to watch them sitting in a crib while dressed in a diaper or peeing themselves as they wear woman’s panties. In *Confessions of a Cam Girl*, Sally XXX recalled a man whose fiancée allegedly

died. He wanted to pleasure himself while watching Sally masturbate, dressed in a bridal headpiece. She poured baked beans on herself in the tub for another customer, a not uncommon request known as “splashing.”

These online performances do not feature a woman’s full humanity or authentic self. OnlyFans and webcamming allow men to demand that women dress, undress, and act in accordance with the desires of patriarchy, which often combine sexuality with violence and childhood.

## Earnings

Similar to e-commerce companies like eBay, webcamming platforms make it easy for sellers and customers alike. In exchange for its services, eBay generally charges a fee on each sale of about 12%. OnlyFans takes 20%. The fees imposed by webcamming platforms are far higher, even reaching 70%. That takes a bite out of earnings.

Yet the self-published, 29-page Kindle pamphlet, *Beginner’s Guide to Becoming a Webcam Model*, tempts women with a figure “up to and over \$1,000 a day while most make around \$500 to \$2000 a week” (*Anthus, 2016*). Boleyn Models advertises “Make up to \$10,000 a week on Steamate” (Boleyn Models). Eye Candy Web Models boasts of high commissions every week. Ready Set Cam surveyed performers and concluded that full-time models “earn \$2,625 [per week] on average, or \$136,500 per year” (*Ramer, 2022*). All these figures are overly optimistic.

For example, the modelling site I-CAMZ pays performers \$1.00 per minute for each customer in a premium chat, and \$1.25 per minute for one-on-one chats. “On average, models make from \$250 to \$2,000 a week, however some webcam models make much more” (*I-CAMZ, 2023*). And some presumably make much less. A modeling earning the low end of their spectrum, or \$250 a week, would gross \$13,000 annually, which is about the current U.S. poverty rate for a single person. At least one studio in Bucharest (Rich Girls Studio) seemingly recognizes these low wages and so offers interest-free loans to some of its models for housing, transportation, and “aesthetic operations.” This makes me wonder how many women, raised in poverty, take up this offer and endure years of crushing debt (*see Biddle, 2012; Pressly, 2017*).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Romanian webcamming, fuelled by economic despair, is often run by crime syndicates. Sexual abuse, rape, trafficking, violence, and money laundering are rampant.

Many performers, as noted earlier, contract with so-called modeling agencies, which variously provide training, advertising, tech support, and garish studios.<sup>10</sup> But agencies also take a percentage of earnings. In the United States, too, performers are generally hired as independent contractors, not employees, and thus receive zero benefits: no health care, no retirement, no vacation, and no sick days, nor other employment benefits, including workplace safety, and sexual harassment and civil rights protections (*see also Pelletier, 2020; Watson, 2014*). Of course, performers are required to report their incomes. For earnings over \$600, OnlyFans and most camming platforms send the performer—and the government—suitable tax forms.

Recall Katerina, the Chaturbate performer I discussed earlier. She has attracted a sizable number of followers. But it is impossible to say that they translate into a livable wage. Chaturbate charges between \$10.99 for 100 tokens up to \$159.99 for 2,025, or a price per token of 11¢ to 8¢. On average, a customer pays about \$40.50 to see Katerina masturbate. But she earns much less since Chaturbate takes 40%-50% of a model's earnings. Therefore, Katerina only takes home about \$21-\$25 for what her tip menu describes as “fingers in pussy.” That does not suggest a lucrative endeavor.

The same is true for Monique, a performer on CamSoda. Tokens cost 8¢-13¢ each. Models receive about 65% of their gross earnings. Thus, Monique’s “paddle spanking” would cost the consumer a little over \$6 but she would net \$4. Performers in the Philippines fare even worse. Most are paid only for private shows. Tips received in public rooms, which take up most of their hours, go to the platforms. Performers are therefore compensated for less than 1% of their time (Mathews, 2017).

What about OnlyFans? One creator, who lists her location as “Boobs Land,” sells videos but not monthly subscriptions. For \$19.00—of which she would take home about \$15—a fan can view this plot: “I was at the mall, and I was trying some new clothes 😍 I always love shopping on weekends 🙄 but then I got hot 😳 and started to masturbate next to the people 😬 I was trying to stay quiet but I came sooo good 😊 do you think they heard me? 🙄🙄” I find it difficult to imagine that this video attracted a sizable audience.

Some OnlyFans creators do generate seven-figure incomes, including a few well-known porn performers. But they are the rare exception. The following experience of one Australian content creator is more typical: “I can have some days where [I] only make maybe \$10, and then [I] can have weeks where [I’ve] actually cashed in about \$500” (*Rose quoted in Boseley, 2022*). For an employed single-person household in Australia, the latter is still a wage of poverty.

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<sup>10</sup> There is also a small army of OnlyFans and webcamming consultants, such as OnlyFans Strategy (*see also Crockett, 2021*).

According to one source, the average OnlyFans page has 21 subscribers, each paying less than \$20 for a monthly subscription. In total, then, the average creator earns \$5,040 annually or \$420 each month (*Georgiev, 2023*). A slightly earlier study calculated average monthly revenues of only \$250 (*Hollands, 2019*). The median was \$136, which meant that one-half of all creators earned less than that amount. That figure does not support the common claim—here phrased by Cam Model Protection—that “most” performers “use content creation as a way to pay for higher education . . . get them through hard times . . . [or] a bridge to their next career.” This is especially true for those models, I add, who earn \$150 each month but are paying Cam Model Protection \$169–\$469 monthly to locate and remove pirated content. (*For the trade in stolen porn from OnlyFans, see Cole & Cox, 2020.*) Pornhub has more than 5,000 videos of “OnlyFans leaks.” (Similar content can be found on OnlyFansLeaks.tv, TheLeakBay, BitchesGirls, OnlyfansDetective, and LeakedModels, and even if these sites are fraudulent, they still show evidence of demand.)

OnlyFans does not report on exact earnings. But its About page states an annual payout of more than \$5 billion to over 1.5 million creators. But those large numbers average out to only \$3,333 a year per creator, or \$277.75 a month. Again, that’s not enough to cover tuition, or much else.

A 2020 study of FanCetro, which is like OnlyFans, supports this argument. Researchers found that 96.6% of a sample of 16,000 performers or “influencers” earned “zero revenue” in one pay period (*Lykousas, Casino, & Patsakis, 2020*). Even then, 80% of those who did earn money still failed to reach the \$100 threshold required to receive a deposit. In all, less than 1% of the performers brought home a paycheck.

Additional evidence that OnlyFans and webcamming are mostly unprofitable is the fact that many performers sell various items on other platforms. They market videos on clips4sale, ManyVids, iWantClips, and NiteFlirt, among other websites. Some work for sexting firms, which pay per message (e.g., TalkToMe). Performers often set up pages on platforms such as CamModelStore to sell Skype shows, phone sex, and even the clothing they wore for porn shoots and webcamming sessions. Items for sale now on CamModelStore include a leather bikini, French maid outfit, red boots, and rhinestone pasties. Of course, these platforms also take a cut. The latter charges \$149 annually to maintain a virtual store, and charges 20% on each sale.

Perhaps most shocking is that many performers on OnlyFans and webcamming platforms sell their used panties. The author of the Amazon Kindle book, *How I Made \$15,000 in One Year Selling My Used Underwear*, boasts on her website: “You can be one of the sellers that walks hand in hand with me and goes on to make anywhere between \$200 and \$2,000 per month selling used underwear and more online!” (*Rosa, 2022*).

A popular online marketplace for porn performers is ExtraLunchMoney. The name, of

course, is another sordid nod in the industry to the sexualization of children. Performers on the platform not only sell used underwear but also bath water, bottled breast milk, dirty socks, used lip balm, worn gym sneakers, old toothbrushes, and more, even soiled undergarments, vials of vaginal fluid, and candy that has been inserted into genitals, called pussy-pops (*Saunders, 2017*). Other marketplaces for these products include UsedPanties, WornFantasy, and several subgroups on Reddit. Many of the women who advertise on these sites also cultivate clientele on Discord, Twitter, Snapchat, and, of course, OnlyFans. It is all a part of the same pornographic ecosystem.

## Escorting

According to the International Labour Organization, of the 27.6 million people forced into labor worldwide, 6.3 million of them are forced into “commercial sexual exploitation,” and women and girls account for 4.9 million of that figure (International Labour Organization, 2022). OnlyFans bans posts that show, advertise, or promote escort services, sex trafficking, and prostitution. But one study found that many creators on OnlyFans are aware of children appearing in content sold by adults on the platform (*Avery Center, 2021; see also BBC News, 2021*). Almost one-third of the respondents in that study, too, could identify accounts that were managed by sex traffickers, and 30% had been contacted directly by suspected traffickers seeking to manage their accounts (*see also MacKinnon, 2021*). Equally revealing was the finding that many porn consumers did not purchase videos on OnlyFans. They had more than enough free content on so-called tube sites. Instead, they used OnlyFans to contact prostitutes.

Prostitution on OnlyFans and webcamming platforms often goes by other names: escorting, girlfriending, and sugaring. These terms all refer to women who maintain online and face-to-face relationships with customers in exchange for payment or what is euphemistically referred to as a donation or honorarium. They send texts, photos, and sexts; speak on the phone; go out to dinner; and more, including sex: it’s called the “girlfriend experience” (*see also Sales, 2016*).

Notwithstanding the ban on solicitation by OnlyFans, many escorts took to the platform during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain ties with their clients (*Brownholtz, 2021*). While users can’t directly advertise their full services on OnlyFans, they can promote themselves and their bodies to existing and prospective clients through videos, photos, and general updates (*e.g., Valens, 2020*). Escorts can also post links on OnlyFans to other sites, such as Instabio.

Escorting needs to be understated on OnlyFans but not necessarily on webcamming platforms. Amateur Cams links to SexMeet. The AdultWork platform, “England’s eBay of sex” (*Walsh, 2005*), lets users search for cam girls as well as escorts. The homepage

for CamSoda displays a Dating button that leads to the “Best Hook up and Adult Dating Sites in 2022.” These include Fling, Instabang, Uberhorny, SmokeAndPoke, and Milfplay. CamSoda also runs advertisements by HookUpEasyTonight. Many other websites, too, facilitate hookups. The women who advertise on them often post to Instagram—and to OnlyFans.

Escorting and prostitution, together with OnlyFans and webcamming, are all intermeshed in the same pornographic ecosystem. Women often move from one to the other, sometimes out of financial necessity and sometimes due to coercion, among many other reasons (*Bernstein, 2019*).

## Conclusion: Danger and Desire

What is it like to view a webcamming session? Most platforms, as noted earlier, allow unregistered viewers to enter rooms, though not to participate in the performances. At any moment, there are thousands and thousands of performances. In the afternoon of September 14, 2022, in Boston, I counted over 8,000 live shows from Europe and Russia on BongaCams, LiveJasmine, and Chaturbate. Based on a few minutes of sampling pages on each platform, I estimated that almost two-thirds of the rooms had less than 10 men present.

A good percentage of the performers looked bored, even as they made attempts to appear seductive in the hopes of attracting paying customers. Lots of the women raised their shirts to just below their breasts; many had removed their shirts to affect the so-called hand bra. There are dozens and dozens of women on every page of every platform, page after page. To my eyes, they all blended together, and I found it difficult to distinguish one from the other, even though they were all dressed, undressed, and performing slightly differently. Eyelash extensions, heavy makeup, and the so-called Botox lip flip predominate along with skimpy outfits.

Some of the women were clearly at home, mainly in their bedrooms. Many were in webcamming studios. Almost every woman was monotonously swaying slightly to music. Many were vaping, using their phones, and sipping from plastic water bottles. The women who were not entertaining large groups of fans seemed mostly bored. They would every now and then smile, caress a breast, or effect a come-hither expression. But they looked decidedly indifferent. Almost every woman in every cam room had her florescent pink Lovense sex toy inserted, there at the ready to vibrate into action for the right number of tips. But one also saw lots of colored dildos and the occasional mechanical thrusting machine. Performers, too, often slapped themselves on the buttocks.

On Streammate, a performer waiting for tips was munching on potato chips in her bra

and panties. Her profile said she was a 30-year-old Romanian who would “take you on a journey of passion.” But no such journey was happening at moment. Another performer eventually received enough tokens that she was obliged have sex with her toy while moaning furiously. But she looked like someone forced into calisthenics at the gym and miserable.

To be sure, many of the women did appear to be enjoying their solo sex play and the interaction with their paying customers. But there is no reason to believe that this pleasure was anything but an act, which would swiftly disappear if the tips did likewise. But even the women who look the part of the ecstatic, satiated lover did not communicate much in the way of empowerment. There was little evidence of genuine intimacy or joy at the putative freedom to set one’s working hours, to escape low-wage dreariness, or to act as an autonomous and independent agent. Indeed, the latter is nigh impossible when the very premise of webcamming is, as on OnlyFans, to please men. Webcamming and OnlyFans do not point the obvious way to economic emancipation. But they do resemble prostitution.

Underneath this, too, is the fact that webcamming is fraught with danger for performers. The *Beginners Guide to Becoming a Cam Model* warned of “creeps” who “private message you the most disgusting things that make your stomach drop.” Performers do not disclose their real names or talk about their real lives. Do they meet fans in person? “NO! and NEVER!” said one performer on Chaturbate. A few women even wear masks during their webcamming performances.

Performers are advised to take all sorts of steps to conceal their identities and locations. They should remove metadata from their photos, turn off geotagging, block fans from their home cities and regions, use burners phones to set up their accounts, arrange for Amazon gifts to be delivered to third-party services, lock down their social media, and set contact information to private if they register any websites. As many performers say:

- “Your real name is sacred. NEVER reveal it” (*Cat, 2015*).
- “Even one piece of info leaked online can be used by online predators...It would be a fatal mistake to use your real name in the webcam modeling industry” (*Waters, 2017*).
- “Guys will try to seduce you with money and gifts, in a bid to get you to meet up with them, but it’s simply not worth the risk involved” (*Adult Girl Boss, 2022*).
- “Whatever you do, however much you may be tempted, no matter how innocuous it may be and regardless of how confident you feel, never, ever, not in your most carefree moment, ever give anything away which might serve to identify you, your family, your neighborhood, your real-life partner, etc. You do not know who you are dealing with on the other end” (*Harding, 2012*).



Performers on the forum WeCamGirls suggested a variety of measures in the “Safety and Privacy” discussion. Using wigs. Swapping eyeglasses for contact lenses. Applying fake tattoos. Pulling down window shades and avoiding saying things like “good morning” and “good evening,” so viewers can’t identify your time zone. Be mindful of regional clothing, food, and décor. Don’t mention local stores, concerts, or television shows. “Plan what you will do if you are discovered, located, stalked, or outed,” wrote one woman on the forum whose profile included the phrase, “I adore the way it feels to whore.” She continued: “If you can’t think of a way to handle the worst-case scenario STOP webcamming and do something else.”

Performing also has other hazards. One book cautioned against tissue damage from inserting sex toys. An entire discussion took place in 2013 on this very issue on Stripper Web (“anyone’s vagina get sore from camming”). Most sources recommend plenty of personal lubricant. But no amount of balm can ease the psychological anguish of online sexual performing. Again and again, performers remark on the constant abuse hurled by their male audience—and the toll of worrying that one of those men might find a performer’s real name and address. Chaturbate has an online forum for discussing mental health, as well as sex trafficking, as do many other blogs and websites (e.g., AmberCutieForum, O Camgirl, StripperWeb, and WeCamGirls). The Modern Girls Cam Model Guide tells that “Having any kind of adult entertainment job can lead to mental illness. Depression, anxiety and stress just to name a few” (*Siren Cove, 2020*). Interestingly, young Swedish women who sold sex online did so more often when they were feeling depressed, anxious, or suicidal (*Jonsson, Svedin, & Hydén, 2014; see also, Barton, 2021; Sinclair & Jordan, 2022*). Offering naked videos for sale on OnlyFans is, like performing in the sexual webcamming industry, another way of selling sex online.

A final note is that online sex clearly impacts the performers in the same way that it does the men who consume it. They both normalize a false sense of intimacy—the fallacy that a cursory cyber-relationship on OnlyFans or BongaCams is an honest relationship—as opposed to the face-to-face interactions that define human sociality. Those who habitually look to the internet for sex find it increasingly difficult to sustain or even begin relationships in real life. “I prefer internet relationships to real-life relationships,” said one performer (*Kate quoted in McGehee, 2015*). “Most of my friends are on the internet,” said another. “I feel weird in real life now. When I walk around, it feels like a video game” (*Aella quoted in McGehee, 2015*). She said all this, moreover, before the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns.

And that is surely one of the worse dangers and forms of violence from OnlyFans, webcamming, and the other aspects of the pornographic cyber-ecosystem.

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