# “You Can Look but You Can’t Touch”: Women’s Experiences of Webcam Sex Work in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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# Abstract

Sex work is a contested subject in academia, particularly in the realm of feminist research. Many argue that sex work should be recognised as a legitimate and rationally chosen form of labour, and that decriminalisation (Aotearoa/New Zealand's legal model) is necessary to ensure the safety of sex workers and reduce their stigmatisation. However, a prevailing argument remains that sex work is inherently violent and oppressive, and that all sex workers are directly or indirectly coerced into participating in the industry. These arguments have been complicated by digital technologies that allow people to sell sexual services without being physically proximate to clients or pimps.

One example of digitally-mediated sex work is the practice of 'camming', wherein 'webcam models' (or 'cam girls' if women) livestream sexual performances for payment. Camming is relatively novel, and remains underexplored in academia. The experiences of cam girls in the decriminalised Aotearoa/New Zealand context have not yet been explored in any capacity, and will therefore be the focus of this thesis. For this project, I interviewed eight Aotearoa/New Zealand cam girls (aged 22-34) and investigated their talk using critical thematic analysis, while drawing on insights offered by feminist poststructural analysis, to identify common discursive threads in relation to their work and their subjectivities.

The analysis identified that the camming processes and perceptions of the work varied significantly across participants, suggesting that cam work should not be considered homogenous. Camming was also found to be a 'nexus of labour', wherein a great deal of physical, emotional and psychological effort was expended, much of which was uncompensated and took place outside of paid sessions. Finally, participants described appreciating being physically safe but emphasised that camming has its own unique and significant dangers.

Overall, this thesis seeks to challenge rigid definitions of sex work and polarised academic approaches to the topic, adding further research to support sex

workers' rights and highlighting new legal and ethical issues to consider in a new media environment.

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# Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Madeline Henry

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Final ethics approval was granted by AUTEC on 12 December 2016 (reference number 16/430). See Appendix A.

# Chapter One

## Background and Overview

*The world is full of women who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself if they had the chance. Quit dancing. Get some self-respect and a day job. Right. And minimum wage, and varicose veins, just standing in one place for eight hours behind a glass counter bundled up to the neck, instead of naked as a meat sandwich. Selling gloves, or something. Instead of what I do sell. You have to have talent to peddle a thing so nebulous and without material form. Exploited, they'd say. Yes, any way you cut it, but I've a choice of how, and I'll take the money.*

- Margaret Atwood, 'Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing', 1995[1]

### 1.1 Introduction

'Sex' is a concept loaded with contradictions, cultural baggage, and passionate opinions about who should do it, in what way, and in which contexts. Those with traditional viewpoints may claim that the only correct and appropriate sex is penile-vaginal intercourse between two married cisgender heterosexual adults, preferably for the utilitarian purpose of conception. However, this is not – nor has it ever been – the only way that we have had and understood sex. Rather, people across history and cultures have explored sexuality in ways beyond monogamy, heterosexuality and binary classifications of gender, with the norms and values of their practices being largely dependent on the environment they happened to be taking place in (Phillips & Reay, 2002).

For instance, sex for 'compensation' (or the selling of 'sexual services') has been practiced and understood in a range of ways, involving people of varying genders, sexual orientations, and levels of prestige (see Section 1.2). It should

[1] See Chapter 2 for the rationale behind the inclusion of this extract.

be noted that scare quotes are used around the words above to indicate that – like sex – the meanings of these words are not fixed, and their commonly-presumed definitions prove vague and contradictory upon further inspection. Much as the word sex may not only refer to penile-vaginal intercourse (it could refer to anal penetration or oral sex), compensation may not only refer to money (it could refer to gifts or a place to sleep), and sexual services may refer to anything from intercourse to dancing or talking (the latter being two practices that are not always necessarily sexual).

In 21st century Western society, previously held norms around sex, compensation, and sexual services have been challenged. Countries such as Canada, the United States and Aotearoa/New Zealand have now legalised same-sex marriage and intercourse, particularly penile-anal sex between two people with penises (often called 'sodomy'). The recent popularity of 'sugar babies'[2] have spurred debates about whether non-monetary compensation for sexual services can still be considered a form of sex work (Motyl, 2013). Streaming technology and smart phones have even challenged the idea that sex necessitates physical co-presence, with phrases like 'Skype sex', 'dick pics' and 'sexting'[3] becoming increasingly common lore (Johnson, 2016). Now, sexual services are readily accessible online via chat rooms, pornography websites, and – as this thesis will discuss in detail – 'cam girls'.

The term 'cam girl' has been used to refer to women and girls who use webcam streaming technology to undertake a variety of practices, with the practices themselves often being broadly referred to as 'camming' (Bailey & Kerr, 2007; Bleakley, 2014; Jones, 2016). It is unclear exactly when these terms were first

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[2] Sugar babies are (usually younger) people who use the Internet to find and facilitate relationships – which may or may not involve intercourse – with (usually older) people who compensate them in some way, such as fancy dinners, travel or new clothes.

[3] Skype sex refers to people using the application Skype to stream each other masturbating at the same time, thus having a simultaneous sexual experience 'with' the other person(s). Dick pic is slang terminology for taking a photo of one's penis and sending it (digitally) to another person. Finally, sexting is a portmanteau of the words sex and texting, and refers to the practice of sending sexually explicit or suggestive messages to another person.

introduced or by whom, and they have since been used to refer to people who conduct a range of webcam-mediated activities – some sexual, others not necessarily so. For example, some consider the first cam girl to be American university student Jenny Ringley, who in 1996 set up a webcam in her dorm room, providing the Internet with a feed of her daily activities via her website 'Jennicam' (Bailey & Kerr, 2007). While her recorded activities were often mundane, the feed also captured her when naked and/or having sex, which arguably facilitated a great deal of her popularity (Bailey & Kerr, 2007). This practice is sometimes referred to as 'lifecasting': a form of 'mediated exhibitionism' that may *feature* sexual content (if it happens to occur within the webcam's line of sight), but is ostensibly not *designed* to be a sexual performance (Jones, 2010; Maguire, 2018).

Ringley stopped lifecasting in 2003, but since then, 'cam sites' – websites that *specifically* and *explicitly* serve to facilitate livestreamed sexual performances for profit – have become increasingly popular. According to a Newsweek investigation in 2016, "the money generated by cam sites is … possibly upwards of $2 billion annually … [and] the now global industry boasts an average of at least 12,500 cam models online at any given time and more than 240,000 users" (Rabouin, 2016, para. 9). On cam sites, cam girls[4] stream themselves conducting a live sexual performance (e.g., stripping or masturbating), usually in their own bedrooms, for an online audience who pay them.[5] Cam sites thus serve as an intermediary, providing workers with a hosting website, a large potential client pool, and payments into their online bank accounts in exchange for a cut of the model's profits (Bleakley, 2014).

[4] Cam sites may also feature 'cam boys', or 'webcam models' of other genders. This thesis will only focus on the experiences of women who do these practices, and these women will be referred to as cam girls.

[5] Camming can also take place in organised, brothel-esque contexts. However, this thesis will only focus on camming that takes place in private, independent settings.

Cam girls (specifically, women who work on cam sites) have received significant attention in the media recently, and have been featured in a range of news articles, exposés, and a Netflix documentary released last year (Livingstone, 2017; Holden, 2018). This media attention has been critiqued, particularly by cam girls and other sex workers who claim they have been unethically portrayed (Livingstone, 2017; Stolworthy, 2017; Cauterucci, 2017). For example, in the previously mentioned Netflix documentary ('Hot Girls Wanted: Turned On'), pornography actress Gia Page (a pseudonym) had her Facebook profile displayed, which included her legal first and middle names. Two other women had their camming livestream featured as part of a montage, without their permission being sought beforehand (Livingstone, 2017; Stolworthy, 2017). The filmmakers did not apologise or remove any of the offending footage, claiming that Gia Page consented and signed the necessary release forms (Stolworthy, 2017). They also stated that the two other women streamed themselves on a public application, meaning their use of the footage was covered on the grounds of 'fair use' (Livingstone, 2017; Cauterucci, 2017).

However, these women argued that the legality of the filmmakers' choices was not the issue. Rather, their problem was that the filmmakers were more concerned about presenting their chosen narrative than prioritising the privacy and anonymity of sex workers, who can often be stigmatised for participating in the sex industry (Livingstone, 2017; Cauterucci, 2017). The two women whose livestream was featured emphasised that Netflix has a global audience of millions, whereas their usual audience was much smaller and therefore less likely to lead to them being 'outed' as sex workers in their personal networks (Cauterucci, 2017). The women involved also said it was ironic that the filmmakers claimed that their priority was illuminating online sex work practices that may be concerning or dangerous, while arguably putting online sex workers in *more* danger by increasing the likelihood of them being stalked and harassed (Cauterucci, 2017).

The popularity of camming, coupled with the example discussed above, leads us to consider two issues. Firstly, that camming warrants further academic

inquiry, as it is new and under-examined (Jones, 2016; Nayar, 2017) and encompasses a range of noteworthy social, economic and legal considerations (see Section 1.6 for more detail). Secondly, that inquiry should be undertaken with more prioritisation of the perspectives and wellbeing of those who conduct the work than has been done thus far (Jones, 2015a; Cauterucci, 2017). In this thesis, I aim to achieve the latter by thoroughly exploring the social context in which cam girls operate, to illuminate potential origins of stigma towards sex workers and contextual factors that may lead women to pursue sex work, despite being socially marginalised for doing so. I will then analyse cam girls' personal evaluations of cam work with these contextual factors in mind.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the ways that sex work and sex workers[6] have been socially, discursively and legally constructed, with emphasis on the Aotearoa/New Zealand context and Western society more broadly. I will then discuss 'technologically-mediated intimacy' (Hurst, 2014; Farvid & Aisher, 2016) and the sexual practices facilitated by new media[7], focusing on the form of sex work that this thesis will explore in depth – camming. Finally, I will explain the areas of consideration, rationale and aims of the thesis, finishing with an overview of each chapter.

## 1.2 Social perceptions of sex work(ers)

While prostitution[8] is not a culturally universal phenomenon, varying practices of exchanging sexual acts for material benefit have occurred around the world since the beginning of human society (Tomura, 2009). Additionally, the ways that sex workers themselves have been conceptualised – that is, their "role and social

[6] I will use the term 'sex work' to refer to the selling of sexual services and 'sex worker' to refer to the people who use their own bodies to provide these services. See Section 1.3 for information about other categorisations and the reasoning behind my decision to use the above terminology.

[7] 'New media' refers to digital and Internet-based forms of communication.

[8] I will sometimes use the words 'prostitute' and 'prostitution' for the purposes of this thesis, due to a need to occasionally refer to the legal definition of the specific practice insinuated by this word. However, my preferred terms ('sex work' and 'sex worker') will be used whenever possible.

status" (Tomura, 2009, p. 52) – depends heavily on the legal context they operate in (Schmidt, 2017). In this section I will focus on the Western societal context, particularly in relation to Aotearoa/New Zealand, and discuss the ways in which sex work has been historically constructed.

### *1.2.1 Historical context*

In Western society, sex workers have ranged from being celebrated, tolerated, and condemned, with the latter view remaining prominent today (Minichiello, Scott, & Cox, 2017). Two factors have been consistently shown to affect these perceptions. Firstly, the extent to which prostitutes have been viewed favourably has been class-based, with those from poorer backgrounds who pursued the work out of financial necessity being frowned upon, and those from higher-class backgrounds who served noblemen and elites being granted considerably more social status (Wedum, 2014). For example, scholars have claimed that in Ancient Greece, those dubbed 'hetaira' were educated and independent workers who were lauded for their ability to provide *intellectual* stimulation as well as physical (Katz, 1992). Conversely, 'pornai' were usually said to work on the street or in public brothels and possess significantly less social capital, often being classed on an equivalent level to slaves (Kurke, 1997).

Norberg (2013), in her review of sex work in the medieval period, made similar class-based observations. She claimed that prostitutes in the Middle Ages were tolerated and rationalised as providers of a necessary outlet for men's 'sinful lust' in a way that was, at the time, more acceptable than masturbation (Norberg, 2013). When prostitution became criminalised, arguably due to the proliferation of syphilis (see Section 1.2.2), sex workers soon became socially condemned. However, Norberg (2013) noted that in 16$^{th}$ century Rome, a type of high-class prostitute emerged: the 'courtesan'. Similar to hetaira, courtesans were said to come from wealthy backgrounds, be revered for their ability to "carry on conversation and act appropriately" (Norberg, 2013, p. 397), and were often hired for long-term engagements. Notably, courtesans could evade

"interference and imprisonment" (Norberg, 2013, p. 398), unlike their poor, brothel-working counterparts.[9]

Secondly, prostitution has been heavily gendered in the Western context (Farvid, 2017). While Ancient Greece serves as a notable exception in this regard, as young boys engaged in prostitution at a comparable rate to women, it has always been primarily women who sell sex, and primarily cisgender men who buy it (Weitzer, 2005; Abel, Fitzgerald, & Brunton, 2007). Scholars have thus argued that negative perceptions of sex workers partially stem from negative perceptions of *women* – specifically, women who engage in sexual activities outside of accepted norms (such as monogamous/ married contexts typically permitted by various religions) (Comte, 2014). For example, within Christianity, several passages in the New Testament of the Bible emphasise that women should be modest and chaste, primarily focused on child-rearing, and live to serve men without question (Woodhead, 2004). Ironically, it is perhaps partially *because* Western cisgender women have for so long had the social positioning of breeding cattle (Webb, 1992) that many have chosen to capitalise on the one aspect of their selves that is consistently valued: their sexuality (Kandiyoti, 1988).

### *1.2.2 Sex as risky business*

Researchers have argued that shifts in attitudes towards sex work have occurred concurrently with the adoption of other social ideals, such as the regulation of bodies for religious or sanitary reasons. As an example of the latter, syphilis became a widespread health issue in Europe by the early 16th century, which corresponds with the abrupt criminalisation of prostitution (Norberg, 2013). Luddy (2013) argued that the sudden spread of venereal diseases across Europe was a key causal factor in prostitution becoming regulated, which led to sex

[9] I will sometimes refer to 'women' and 'men' in an essentialist way, implying that these categories only refer to those who exhibit 'female' and 'male' phenotypic traits. I believe transgender people should be encompassed and considered within the gender categories they identify with. Unfortunately, this is often not reflected in the literature, and I must sometimes summarise the points of the authors as they are presented, despite their limitations. However, I will specify when I am referring only to cisgender people.

workers needing to comply with examinations and registration processes or risk criminal punishment. This marks a shift in the supposed reasoning behind the condemnation of sex workers in Western society. Although prostitution had largely been criticised from a religious perspective, social disapproval could now also be based on the idea that sex workers were 'vectors of disease' (Butcher, 2003).

The perception of certain kinds of sex as sites of potential risk has carried through to today, and was arguably exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic that occurred in the United States in the 1980s (Shoveller & Johnson, 2006). This epidemic further justified the perception that sex workers and LGBTQ+ people are *inherently* "'at risk' or 'risky' to the population" (Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018, p. 155), regardless of the safety precautions they may take when participating in sexual activities. For example, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, people who engage in paid sexual activities (being or seeing a sex worker) are prohibited from giving blood (New Zealand Blood Service, 2018). The blood donation eligibility criteria do not exclude those who have engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse (unless it was man-to-man), meaning that sex workers (and gay men) are constructed as having intrinsically riskier sex even if barrier methods are consistently used (Shoveller & Johnson, 2006; Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018).

### *1.2.3 The sexual double-standard*

To use the common idiom, it takes two to tango, yet the men who buy sex are rarely considered responsible for their part in the sexual exchange (Farvid & Glass, 2014). Instead, the women who sell sex are the ones subjected to marginalisation. For instance, in Victorian times, sex workers were characterised as 'fallen women' who had sacrificed their 'purity', while the men who bought their services were not considered responsible for the 'great social evil' of prostitution (Walkowitz, 1982). Additionally, despite syphilis being non-existent in Europe until crew men from the Americas arrived, the prostitutes they infected were blamed, quarantined and prosecuted (Norberg, 2013).

Despite religious-based discourses on gendered relations receding in recent years as more science-based perspectives have been adopted, the idea that women should be less sexual than men remains prevalent (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999; Roberts, Kippax, Waldby, & Crawford, 1995). This has been justified through evolutionary psychology, particularly as epitomised by the work of Darwin (1871). According to Darwinist theory, cisgender women's biological nature (specifically, carrying and birthing their young) means it is rational for them to be innately 'choosy' with their sexual partners, while cisgender men have the advantage of being able to freely 'spread their seed' about the populace (McCaughey, 2008). This essentialist argument is still widespread, and is used to justify sexual freedom for men, while condemning the same in women (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994; García-Favaro, 2015).

Scholars have claimed that these perceptions have led to (and are symptomatic of) 'the sexual double-standard', wherein sexual behaviours are judged differently for men and women (Farvid, Braun, & Rowney, 2017). Farvid and Glass (2014) argued that this sexual injustice has persisted in the realm of sex work, with criminalisation of the practice historically being placed on women who sell the sex, rather than the men who buy it. Although the legality of prostitution is shifting, the recent usage of the framework in which the *buyer* is criminalised and *not* the sex worker (see Section 1.4 for more detail) arguably still perpetuates this double-standard (Carline & Scoular, 2015). Specifically, in this context, women who sell sex are constructed as victims who need to be saved – 'fallen women', essentially – rather than people making a 'rational choice' (Chapkis, 1997) to pursue sex work.

### *1.2.4 Whore stigma*

Erving Goffman (1963/1986), whose conception of stigma is widely referenced in sex work literature, argued that one's occupation contributes strongly to the way that one is perceived, and how one is then treated based on this perception. He also coined the term 'spoiled identity' to refer to those whose status has been 'ruined' by their behaviour – specifically, those who "exhibit socially undesirable attributes that taint, spoil, or blemish their identities" (Tomura, 2009, p. 53). Like

Goffman, Tomura (2009) strategically employed words that imply not only a lessening of value, but a sense of visible defect – words one might use to refer to rotting food, stained clothes, or pockmarked skin – to emphasise that stigma has social consequences akin to being physically repellent.

Hammond and Kingston (2014) further explicated that the "behaviour and activities of female sex workers … is generally thought to be immoral, anti-social and deviant" (p. 331), emphasising that the normative perceptions of *women's* sexuality (as discussed in the sections above) contribute to the stigmatisation of sex work as a profession. The stigmatisation of sex workers, especially women, is often referred to more specifically as 'whore stigma' (Comte, 2014). Here, the value-laden word 'whore' has also been used strategically to epitomise the spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963/1984) that comes with being a sex worker.

#### *1.2.4.1 Stigma and violence*

There is ample evidence that sex workers are disproportionately victims of assault, rape and murder, usually by those who seek or facilitate their work (e.g., clients and pimps), but also those personally known to the worker and members of law enforcement (Sanders, 2004b; Deering et al., 2014; Connelly, Kamerāde, & Sanders, 2018). Additionally, most people who conduct sex work are women and/or LGBTQ+, individuals who are already disproportionately victims of hate crimes and sexual violence (Edwards et al., 2015; Reuter, Newcomb, Whitton, & Mustanksi, 2017).

Some scholars have argued that sex work carries more risk for assault and rape because of its physically sexual nature, coupled with the social and physical power imbalance in favour of cisgender men (Farley, 2004; Jeffreys, 2010). Others have claimed that violence usually stems from stigmatisation, with sex workers being widely regarded as 'lesser' than other humans and therefore more 'disposable' (Sanders, 2004a, Ham & Gerard, 2014). The latter argument may also indicate why media coverage of violence against sex workers tends to de-personify (e.g., by referring to them only as a sex worker and not by their name) and 'victim-blame' them (e.g., by framing the violence as inevitable or as

something to be expected due to their line of work) (Farvid & Glass, 2014; Strega et al., 2014).

The argument that stigma adds to a context that facilitates violence may explain why sex workers are often harmed by those they know personally (outside of the sexual exchange) and social elites who have enough status to 'get away with it'. For example, Deering et al. (2014) found a range of evidence suggesting that the primary perpetrators of physical and sexual assault against sex workers are often police, political officials and intimate partners. Furthermore, Shannon et al. (2009) found that of the 237 Canadian sex workers they interviewed, "prior assault by police had the strongest correlation with both sexual and client perpetrated violence against female sex workers" (p. 5). The scholars suggested that police-inflicted violence had the add-on effect of increasing the likelihood that sex workers would experience future violence because of their fear of being caught by or reporting new assaults to the authorities (Shannon et al., 2009).

It should be noted, however, that the above studies focused on the experiences of sex workers in illegal or semi-legal contexts. There is evidence that the decriminalisation of sex work can mitigate these issues – primarily because police lack the power to blackmail workers, and potentially also because the stigma is softened in contexts wherein sex work is recognised as work (Armstrong, 2016).[10]

## 1.3 Discursive constructions of sex work(ers)

The way we understand sex work cannot be separated from language and representation around sex and women's sexuality (Foucault, 1978; Brewis & Linstead, 2000a; Scoular, 2004). In this section, I will discuss some of the ways that sex work and sex workers have been discursively constructed in Western

[10] The forms of stigmatised treatment sex workers experience under different legal frameworks will be discussed in more detail in Section 1.4.

society, the context for these constructions, and the implications for those who conducted (or currently conduct) sex work in these contexts.

### *1.3.1 Historically*

As previously discussed, sex workers in Ancient Greece were referred to by two names, hetaira and pornai. The etymology of these terms – hetaira, from the Greek word meaning 'companion', and pornai, from the Greek 'to sell' – further emphasise the status delineations between these two classes of sex worker. Additionally, Karras and Boyd (2002) noted that the word used to categorise sex workers in medieval London ('meretrix') was also used to refer to women who were considered sexually promiscuous. As such, the word was not strictly tied to sexual exchanges and was akin to the word whore, in the sense that it broadly referred to women who participated in socially unacceptable sexual practices (Karras & Boyd, 2002). This had the dual effect of equivocating sex work with unpaid sexual activities, while also leading women who participated in any kind of sex outside the monogamous marital context to be criminalised under the law (Weeks, 2002).

However, discursive categorisations of sex workers may not be as straightforward as some historians claim. For example, Leslie Kurke (1997) argued that there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that hetaira and pornai were diametrically opposed categories – rather, it is more likely that they were different words used by different people to refer to sex workers in general. Kurke (1997) explained that this is *in itself* indicative of the power of discourse, with scholars falling into the trap of taking language "too literally [and assuming] that literary texts offer an unmediated reflection of ancient realities" (p. 107). She further emphasised that discourse is a place where "ideology is forged" (Kurke, 1997, p. 107), both within the studied texts and the subjective interpretations of the researchers themselves, and that academics should practice reflexivity when conducting analyses of texts.

### *1.3.2 At present*

Although the word whore is now largely considered derogatory (Karras & Boyd, 2002), the word 'prostitute' remains commonly used to refer to sex workers. This is a subject of debate, with many in the industry finding the word prostitute offensive (Zangger, 2015; Green, 2016). As Tomura (2009) discussed, prostitute is also used to refer to "a person who acts in a *debased* or *corrupt* way for profit or advantage" (Tomura, 2009, p. 52, emphasis added). According to Tomura (2009), this contributes to the perception of prostitutes as being "sexually, morally and socially inappropriate and … [un]worthy of human dignity" (p. 52), much in the same way that the word meretrix did.

Given this context, there has been a recent shift towards describing those who engage in sex for payment as 'sex workers' (Doezema, 2001; Harding & Hamilton, 2009). As Zangger (2015) emphasised, eschewing the labels of whore or prostitute – which, by the nature of their definitions, ascribe negative connotations to women who participate in sex work – can highlight that "sex work is an income-generating activity or a form of labour that can be performed by anyone" (p. 9). This change in discursive categorisation gives space for those who sell sex to not have it considered (by themselves or others) as the "sole defining activity around which their sense of self or identity is shaped" (Kempadoo, 1998, p. 3).

One issue with sex worker (as a label) is its lack of specificity. The word prostitute refers unambiguously to those who sell physically co-present sexual activities, whereas sex worker may refer to a variety of activities within the broader sex industry, such as stripping and acting in pornographic films (Green, 2016). Moreover, as previously discussed, compensation may not only refer to currency, which further complicates what society (and the law) considers sex work. As an example, if non-financial compensation and sexual services beyond intercourse count as sex work, that means that sugar babies should be considered sex workers, even if they do not receive a specific monetary amount for a specific sexual act. However, sugar babies are rarely referred to as such, although this has been debated (Motyl, 2013).

It should be noted that 'sugar relationships' (Motyl, 2013) are also referred to in the literature as 'compensated dating', defined by Swader and Vorobeva (2015) as "a material exchange for sex that does not [necessarily] include monetary payments, yet includes monetary gifts" (p. 323). Assuming the definition of 'gift' can be expanded to include meals and leisure activities, and that the non-financial compensation argument discussed above can be considered valid, it can then be logically stated that many supposedly not-for-profit heterosexual dating arrangements are a form of sex work (Swader & Vorobeva, 2015). Indeed, some have posited that sex work is an extension of traditional marriage, as both involve "the exchange of a woman's (sexual, emotional and domestic) labour in exchange for a man's financial upkeep" (Farvid, 2017, p. 29). However, the idea that heterosexual relationships and sex work are synonymous does not align with the ideologies discussed in this chapter thus far (wherein the former is accepted and the latter is not), and it is likely not categorised in that way for this reason (Cahill & Sowle, 1996; Bernstein, 1999).

## 1.4 Legal status of sex work(ers)

Sex work has been and remains outlawed in most countries, though the particulars of how each law is enforced differs widely. For example, the meretrix of medieval London was considered a criminal, though it was "a status offense … [she] could be arrested for *being* a prostitute" (Karras & Boyd, 2002, p. 93, emphasis in original) rather than because of the *act* of prostitution (exchanging sex for money). Currently, most countries that outlaw prostitution specifically ban the practice of exchanging physically co-present sexual contact for money – however, this can lead to legal inconsistencies given the conceptual slippage of what constitutes sex, sexual services and compensation (Green, 2016).

For example, pornography also involves people exchanging physically co-present sexual contact for money, but it is often socially privileged above prostitution and receives greater legal leeway (Tyler, 2015). Indeed, some countries that outlaw prostitution also have a booming legal pornography industry, such as the United States (Tyler, 2015). On the other hand, human

trafficking and forced prostitution is universally illegal, but sex workers who travel to conduct sex work in other countries can often be considered 'trafficked' even though they may travel voluntarily for the financial opportunity (Chapkis, 2003; Outshoorn, 2005; Comte, 2014).

In this section, I will describe the four main legal models used to regulate sex work in Western countries, explaining how each framework functions, the rationale behind it, and the consequences of it. I will then discuss the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand's sex work legislation, focusing on our unique decriminalisation framework and the ways in which 'whore stigma' is both mitigated and maintained under this model.

### *1.4.1 Popular frameworks that govern sex worker behaviour*

As I have explained elsewhere, prostitution law tends to operate under one of four frameworks: "it is either completely illegal, governed by the Swedish (demand) model, legalised but highly regulated, or decriminalised" (Henry & Farvid, 2017, p. 115).

Many countries, such as Russia, prohibit prostitution entirely. In these contexts, buyers, sellers and facilitators of sex work are equally culpable under the law, which tends to be justified on moral and/or religious grounds (Scoular, 2010). This model is often criticised by sex work activists and feminists because it has been argued to exacerbate violence and negative treatment towards sex workers (Sanders & Campbell, 2007). For example, if a sex worker in an illegal context is raped, they are likely to avoid reporting it to the police for fear of being charged for soliciting (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). Sex workers operating in these contexts are also likely to avoid carrying condoms (which mitigate risks such as pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases) for fear of incriminating themselves (Jayasree, 2004).

Some countries employ what is often referred to as the Swedish or Nordic model, as it originated and continues to be enforced in countries such as Sweden, Iceland and Norway (Zangger, 2015). This model only criminalises buyers and facilitators of sexual services, leaving sex workers free from being

charged for selling. This framework is driven by feminist ideals, and is designed to protect sex workers and allow them to seek the help of authorities if they are trafficked or assaulted (Abel, 2010). However, the Nordic model arguably operates under similar paternalistic assumptions as the illegal model – specifically, that sex work is inherently 'bad', and that people who buy sex are predatory and should be prosecuted (Comte, 2014). Despite this, the Swedish/Nordic model is being "increasingly implemented in the West, including Canada and Ireland in 2014, and most recently France in 2016" (Henry & Farvid, 2017, p. 115).

Prostitution is legal country-wide in some areas (e.g., Germany), while other countries have only legalised prostitution in certain states (e.g., Nevada in the United States). Under this model, it is legal for people to participate in sex work, but only if it is conducted in accordance with certain rules and regulations (Barrington, 2008; Abel, 2010). For example, the state of Victoria in Australia requires sex workers to "obtain a medical certificate every six weeks … monthly swab tests and quarterly blood tests" (Ham & Gerard, 2014, p. 303) or they can be criminally charged. Furthermore, because legalisation only allows licensed and regulated sex work, those who solicit on the streets or in unlicensed brothels may still be reported and targeted by police (Abel, 2010; Ham & Gerard, 2014). As such, while buyers, sellers and facilitators of sex work *can* operate under this framework without being prosecuted, it may stigmatise and criminalise others.

Currently, Aotearoa/New Zealand is the only country in the world that has decriminalised prostitution (Barrington, 2008; Zangger, 2015; Armstrong, 2017). An explanation of this framework and its implications will be discussed in the following sections.

### *1.4.2 Sex work law in Aotearoa/New Zealand*

Laws and social conceptions of sex work have shifted significantly since the colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand in the late 18$^{th}$ century. According to Barrington (2008), prostitution initially thrived during the colonial period due to a comparative lack of women and an abundance of newly-arrived men, money

and alcohol. It was not until 1869 that the Contagious Diseases Act was passed, stemming from the widespread social panic around the uptake of venereal diseases, both in Europe (as previously discussed) and Aotearoa/New Zealand (Jordan, 2005; Zangger, 2015). This legislation "empowered police to apprehend any woman identified as a 'common prostitute' and have her regularly examined for signs of disease" (Dalley, 2000, p. 587). As such, sex workers were considered responsible for the spread of sexually transmitted infections while those who sought their services were not seen as carrying any responsibility, once again demonstrating a sexual double-standard (Jordan, 2005).

The next notable piece of legislation passed in relation to sex work was the 1978 Massage Parlours Act. The Act was a response to the increasing number of 'massage parlours' that served as socially acceptable guises for indoor sex work (Abel, Fitzgerald & Brunton, 2009). At this point in time, the 1961 Crimes Act had already made activities such as soliciting and running a brothel illegal (though not the act of *buying* sexual services, making Aotearoa/New Zealand operate as a sort of reverse-Nordic model). The Massage Parlours Act contributed further to the marginalisation of sex workers by, for example, forcing those who worked in 'massage parlours' to hold licenses, meaning that "records of all names and other personal information of sex workers were registered on a police database … [and] never removed" (Zangger, 2015, pp. 28-29). Furthermore, anyone convicted of a sex work-related crime was barred from working in any 'parlour' ever again, leading many of those charged to turn from indoor sex work to street-based work (Jordan 2005; Zangger, 2015).

In 1987, the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC) was established to advocate for sex workers' rights and to actively include sex workers in the process for legislative change (Jordan, 2005; Abel, Fitzgerald & Brunton, 2009; Farvid & Glass, 2014). The NZPC criticised the laws surrounding sex work, arguing that they promoted a sexual double standard by criminalising the workers and not the buyers, and that they actively prevented sex workers from having basic "occupational health, safety and well-being" (Farvid & Glass, 2014, pp. 47-48). It was through the efforts of the NZPC – in collaboration with

activists, legislators and members of parliament – that the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) was developed. Eventually, after much debate and a one-vote majority, the PRA was implemented in 2003, leading to the decriminalisation of sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Jordan, 2005; Armstrong, 2017).

The PRA not only eradicated all previous laws concerning prostitution and erased the criminal records of those who had been charged under the old model (Farvid & Glass, 2014), but ensured "sex workers were entitled to the same employment rights and responsibilities … as any other working person" (Zangger, 2015, pp. 33-34). This legal framework remains in place today, meaning that no Aotearoa/New Zealand citizen or permanent resident over the age of 18 can be charged for buying, distributing or conducting sex work (Armstrong, 2017).

#### *1.4.2.1 Decriminalisation versus legalisation*

Decriminalisation is often incorrectly conflated with legalisation (Zangger, 2015), thus creating the impression that other countries such as Germany and the Netherlands operate under the same legal framework as Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, as previously discussed, the legalisation models currently employed by various countries and states around the world involve strict rules and regulations (West, 2000; Comte, 2014; Ham & Gerard, 2014), many of which create barriers for sex workers to operate safely. Aotearoa/New Zealand, on the other hand, "does not promote the implementation of a framework controlling and managing the provision of services, [instead operating] under similar regulatory models as any other industry" (Zangger, 2015, p. 17).

It should be noted that there are still issues with Aotearoa/New Zealand's sex work laws. For example, it is not 'full' decriminalisation, because "it prohibits migrant sex work as an anti-trafficking measure" (Armstrong, 2017, p. 69). Because of this, prostitution is the only form of work people visiting Aotearoa/New Zealand on temporary visas are banned from doing, and they can therefore be charged and deported if caught soliciting (Armstrong, 2017). Despite this, Aotearoa/New Zealand's framework is still by-and-large considered the least restrictive model for sex workers to operate under, and many

researchers claim that decriminalisation demonstrates the greatest evidence and potential for reducing the stigma experienced by sex workers, while also generally improving their welfare and safety (Sanders & Campbell, 2007; Barrington, 2008; Connolly, Jarvis-King & Ahearne, 2015).

*1.4.2.2 Stigma in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context*

Our unique legal model has made Aotearoa/New Zealand a site of academic interest, leading scholars to investigate the extent to which decriminalisation has mitigated violence and/or stigma against sex workers (Abel, 2010; Zangger, 2015; Armstrong, 2017). It has been found that, generally, sex workers are more comfortable selling sexual services in this country for the following reasons:

1. They can go to the police for help without fear of being criminalised themselves,
2. They can work in comfortable, safe, and 'above-board' brothels, and
3. They can justify their work to others as a legitimate, taxed form of employment.

However, research has shown that conducting sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand can still come at great personal and social cost. While decriminalisation has been shown to have a positive effect on the social status of sex workers (Abel, Fitzgerald, & Brunton, 2007) people in Aotearoa/New Zealand reportedly still shame, abuse, and otherwise react negatively to those who conduct the work (Zangger, 2015; Armstrong, 2016). Furthermore, violence against sex workers still occurs, and it is possible that the persistence of stigma may prevent Aotearoa/New Zealand sex workers from seeking out social, legal, and medical counsel in these instances (Zangger, 2015; Armstrong, 2016). Armstrong (2017) also emphasised that sex workers on temporary visas are not protected from stigma because they are still unable to conduct the work legally under the current framework, citing examples of migrant workers who were exploited, mistreated and blackmailed because of this.

Furthermore, Bruckert and Hannem (2013) stressed that Aotearoa/New Zealand's decriminalised framework still contains remnants of moralistic

concerns that contribute to and maintain 'whore stigma'. For example, Section 16 of the Prostitution Reform Act prohibits using violence to compel people to enter the sex industry even though assault is already illegal, making it redundant to mention at all. This demonstrates the still-present assumption that sex work and violence go hand-in-hand, and that sex workers are "hyper-vulnerable to exploitation" (Bruckart & Hannem, 2013, p. 60). Ultimately, Bruckart and Hannem (2013) argued that Aotearoa/New Zealand's decriminalisation laws are an important first step in reducing *structural* stigma, with *symbolic* stigma (formulated through discourse and demonstrated in the writing of the law itself) still needing additional prioritisation and inquiry (Farvid & Glass, 2014).

## 1.5 Sex (work) in the new media age

The discussion above almost entirely centres on sex work that occurs in physically co-present contexts. This is unsurprising, given that sex itself has been discursively constructed and experienced as a physical act between two (or more) people. However, new media have altered the ways in which we 'have sex', which can now occur in digital contexts with no physical contact or co-presence (Farvid, 2016; Sanders, Scoular, Campbell, Pitcher, & Cunningham, 2018). In this section, I will explore the ways that 'intimacy' has manifested online, the assimilation of technologically-mediated intimacy into sex-related realms, and how sex work now operates with and through the Internet and digital technologies. Finally, I will discuss camming and the relevance of cam girls as an area of academic inquiry.

### *1.5.1 Technologically-mediated intimacy*

The Internet allows for communication on a global scale, with people being able to form relationships with those they have never met 'in the flesh' (Farvid, 2016). Initially, the extent to which intimacy could be formed or sustained online was diminished by the text-based nature of most exchanges, preventing embodied modes of communication (e.g., facial expression or tone of voice) that scholars argue are an important part of developing emotional connection (King-O'Riain, 2015). Furthermore, the exceedingly slow dial-up Internet of the 1990s and early

2000s often resulted in lags, preventing the level of immediacy and mutuality that occurs in physically co-present interactions. Online dating services at this time (e.g., Match.com or OkCupid) were primarily based upon text-based chat, with the ultimate purpose being a physically co-present meet up wherein 'genuine' intimacy could be forged (Farvid, 2016).

However, the introduction of webcams, coupled with the increased accessibility of high-speed Internet, meant that people became able to keep in 'touch' with one another on a nearly immediate audio-visual level. Although online dating remains primarily based upon text-based chat, it is now also mobile via applications such as Tinder and Bumble, allowing potential sexual/romantic partners to find and talk to those who are physically near them with greater ease and immediacy (David & Cambre, 2016). Furthermore, video-conferencing technology – while initially designed for more professional contexts (Kirk, Sellen & Cao, 2010) – quickly became co-opted for private use, "particularly as a method for families, friends and partners to keep in touch while separated" (Henry, 2015, p. 1). Applications like Skype and FaceTime continue to be popularly used for this purpose today, as well as for the facilitation of sexual activities, such as virtually co-present masturbation ('Skype sex' or 'cybersex' – see Farvid, 2016).

New media technologies have therefore been used to maintain pre-existing intimate relationships, as well as to form new ones (usually with the objective of an eventual physically co-present interaction). However, in some circumstances, sexual intimacy takes place entirely online, with no 'end goal' of a physically co-present meeting. The following two sections will discuss some of the ways that paid sexual exchanges occur in partially or fully technologically-mediated contexts.

### *1.5.2 Technologically-mediated sex work*

Sex work is now facilitated by new media in a range of ways. For example, sex workers now often use online mechanisms (e.g., sex-related forums or social media) for advertising. Advertising online can be cheaper than advertising in a

newspaper, or even 'free', though the latter assumes they already have access to the Internet and a computer or smartphone for personal use and does not consider these costs (see below for further discussion of this issue). Internet advertising also allows for a wider reach than newspapers or flyers, thus expanding sex workers' potential client pool (Sanders et al., 2018).

Researchers have found that the efficacy of Internet advertising means that more sex workers are opting to do independent indoor work, as they no longer need to find clients on street corners or rely on brothel owners to find clients for them (Jones, 2015b; Sanders et al., 2018). Independent work can be quite beneficial for sex workers, as they can profit fully from their labour without intermediaries taking a cut (Jones, 2015b). Studies have also shown that indoor sex workers tend to have better health and wellbeing than street-based workers (Church, Henderson, Barnard, & Hart, 2001; Sanders & Campbell, 2007; Connelly, Kamerade, & Sanders, 2018). Online-based advertising can also help sex workers keep their profession a secret, as they can set up advertisements from the privacy of their own homes, and use pseudonyms throughout the entire process. This can help sex workers prevent stigmatised treatment from those in their personal networks and allow them to bypass law enforcement (Jones 2015b, Sanders et al., 2018).

One of the primary concerns in relation to independent sex work is the lack of security or protection offered by brothels or pimps. However, this is contradicted by two factors. Firstly, so-called 'protection' can often be the *source* of violence towards sex workers, especially in illegal or semi-legal contexts (Deering et al., 2014; Connelly, Kamerade, & Sanders, 2018). Secondly, the Internet also allows sex workers to screen clients more efficiently. For instance, they can ask other sex workers on a forum if they have had negative experiences with the person in question, or even investigate the potential client's social media pages to confirm their legitimacy and personal integrity (Jones 2015b; Sanders et al., 2018). Overall, while independent sex workers need to coordinate their own security measures, it can be argued that the facilitation of sex work through

online avenues has a range of benefits for them, including privacy, independence and safety.[11]

Of course, Internet access and facilitating technologies do cost money, and can be a barrier to sex workers being able to take advantage of the above-mentioned affordances. Indeed, it is perhaps partially *because* those who use the Internet to facilitate their sex work already have the capital to afford these amenities that their health outcomes are higher. This 'digital divide' perpetuates socioeconomic inequality between sex workers, as those with access to new media can find and maintain relationships with clients much more easily than those without (Sanders et al., 2018).

The forms of technologically-mediated sex work discussed above are what Sanders et al. (2018) refer to as 'direct' sex work, defined as "commercial sex activities that take place in-person between the sex worker and customer, but that are advertised and arranged online" (p. 15). However, the effects of digital mediation are even more pronounced in the context of 'indirect' sex work – that is, the exchange of sexual services that takes place entirely in an online context (Sanders et al., 2018). This can take a range of forms, such as being a (smart)phone sex operator or selling amateur pornography, with one of the most popular professions in this field being camming.

#### *1.5.2.1 Camming*

Webcam modelling and camming have been referred to in the media and academic literature in different ways. The use of webcams for livestreaming purposes is often broadly referred to as camming, regardless of whether the person in question is performing sexual services for payment. For example, Bleakley (2014) describes cam girls as "young women that operate their own webcams to communicate with a broad audience online, *often* [but not

[11] Sections 1.5.2 and 1.5.2.1 are intended to be broad introductions to (and explanations of) forms of online sex work, and the reasoning behind the pursuit of the practices. As such, the reported dangers and disadvantages of these forms of sex work will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

necessarily] engaging with sexually explicit behaviour in real-time in return for financial compensation" (p. 89, emphasis added). Other authors refer to webcam-facilitated sex work more specifically as 'adult webcam modelling' (e.g., Jones, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Nayar, 2017). Recently, authors have taken to referring to webcam-facilitated sex work simply as '[web]camming' or 'webcam modelling' (e.g., Henry & Farvid, 2017; Sanders et al., 2018), especially as these terms are commonly used in the media and by cam workers themselves (Sciortino, 2018).

In this thesis, I will refer to camming as the practice that occurs in cam site-mediated contexts, and cam girls as the women who do this form of work. I will also include cam girls who work *outside* hosting cam sites, but still livestream sexual performances that are arranged as an explicit financial agreement between them and a client (see Chapter 4 for details about the range of ways this can occur). I specifically focus on paid sexual exchanges because this aspect is vital to my analysis on constructions of sex work and sex workers. Thus, while other academics who have explored camming in unpaid or lifecasting contexts (e.g., Knight, 2000; Senft, 2008; Russo, 2010; Booth, 2010) have primarily focused on philosophically exploring the practice against theories of exhibitionism, voyeurism, and 'the male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975), I aim to take a more critical look at the practice in relation to the socio-political context it takes place in.

As such, while others may refer to someone like Jenny Ringley as a cam girl, I would instead refer to her as a lifecaster. However, it should be noted that Jennicam was "free of charge … [until] it was necessary for [Ringley] to charge a fee in order to maintain the equipment necessary to facilitate the live feed" (Bailey & Kerr, 2007, p. 131). Given that she received money from those who likely enjoyed seeing her naked and having sex, she could arguably be considered a sex worker. However, in this case and others, the lifecaster is not paid to perform *specific* sexual acts for payment, and the *intention* of the lifecaster is (supposedly) not to sexually gratify their audience. This means – as per the widely-held definitions of sex work discussed previously in this chapter

– that Jenny should not be considered a sex worker and/or a cam girl (by my definition), though I will again emphasise that this is complex and contestable terrain.

Camming, as I will define it, is quite different to other forms of sex work. If it occurs in the home and is done independently, it does not involve physical co-presence with pimps or clients.[12] This means that the kind of violence sometimes described as unavoidable in sex work is far less likely to occur during the exchange (Jones, 2015b; Henry & Farvid, 2017). Furthermore, cam models often bypass anti-sex work laws, likely as an oversight given the novelty of the practice. As Stuart (2016) outlines regarding recent anti-pornography legislation in the United Kingdom, "[the] laws focus on recordings, rather than live streaming; in effect, they turn a blind eye to webcamming. This creates something of a paradox: performing an explicitly pornographic act via a webcam carries no repercussions, but if the same show is recorded and uploaded, the performer can be liable" (para. 8).

As the above section outlines, camming provides the conditions of possibility for sex work to be conducted safely and profitably. However, Stuart (2016) also stresses that "portraying the webcamming industry as a sort of online utopia for sex workers does not show the whole picture. There are dangers, too" (para. 12). As such, illuminating both the 'pleasures and dangers' (Vance, 1984) of camming will be the goal of this thesis.

## 1.6 Areas of consideration, rationale and aims

Technologically-mediated sex work is becoming increasingly popular, with online-based advertising, self-made pornography and camming serving as accessible and profitable avenues for many people to pursue. Sex work is one

[12] As previously noted, this thesis will only explore the experiences of solo cam girls in private contexts. Further research around other forms of camming should be explored elsewhere (see Chapter 7).

of the few industries where women earn substantially more than men (Mears & Connell, 2016) because they are not 'locked out' as they might be in other high-paying jobs in their chosen fields. As previously mentioned, online sex work arguably lessens some physical risks, but there is little research that examines the extent that physical consequences of sex work are lessened online and what new dangers may occur in an online environment.

More research is also needed that examines the way that labour is performed in these contexts. For instance, many scholars have discussed the prevalence of emotional labour in the context of sex work, particularly when the sex workers in question are women-identified and are performing stereotypically feminine labour (Sanders, 2005; Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006; Pinsky & Levey, 2015). Others have explored labour in digital realms (e.g., online 'gift economies' and 'amateur' user-generated content), but very little work has examined the conflation of these two forms of immaterial labour, as camming arguably does (Nayar, 2017). As such, it is important to ascertain the extent to which online sex work is a) fully compensated and b) recognised as 'work' by those who perform it.

The extent to which traditional gender dynamics persist in new forms of sex work is also vital to consider, especially given that academic debates about sex work have tended to be concentrated within feminist research (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Until now, this research has been almost entirely predicated on the assumption that sex work takes place in a material context, with buyers and facilitators (e.g., pimps, pornography directors, strip club owners) being physically co-present with sex workers at most or all stages of the process. As such, it is necessary to investigate the extent to which these arguments now need to be modified because of digitally-mediated sex work, and further, whether conventional understandings of 'sex' and 'sexual services' should be updated as well.

Finally, the Aotearoa/New Zealand context remains essential to consider in relation to sex work. While there are still problems even under our decriminalised model, it has been argued by sex workers and researchers that stigma has lessened in this country (Zangger, 2015) and it is therefore worth examining the

extent to which the subjective perspectives and experiences of sex workers operating here (even in an 'indirect' online context) have been affected by our legal framework.

With this background in mind, this research project seeks to address some of these considerations and gaps in the scholarship by critically examining the ways that Aotearoa/New Zealand cam girls describe their experiences in the industry, with emphasis on their perceptions of agency, gender relations, labour, and risk (emotional, physical, social and legal). More specifically, my research seeks to examine the following four questions:

1. What are women's experiences of camming in Aotearoa/New Zealand? What do they like and dislike? Are there things they would like to change, and if so, why?
2. How is camming constructed by participants when it comes to safety and danger, and in relation to physically co-present sex work?
3. How is camming constructed by participants as labour? Is it depicted as easy or hard? Is it constructed as fairly compensated, lucrative, or exploitative?
4. Is camming constructed by participants as empowering or disempowering, both in the sense of a) gendered relations and b) the technological affordances of the practice?

By unpacking these questions, first by interviewing participants and second by analysing those interviews thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I have two primary aims:

1. To examine the underlying themes present in participants' talk, and how these views are accepted, negotiated and/or rejected when discussing the work and their own subjectivities.
2. To prioritise the described experiences of sex workers as the primary source of data, the findings of which will be the basis for actionable recommendations.

## 1.7 Organisation of the thesis

In this chapter, I have contextualised my topic against a background of sex and sex work, emphasising the range of legal and discursive inconsistencies, the pervasiveness and effects of stigma, and the significance of both Aotearoa/New Zealand and digital mediation as areas of inquiry. I have also explicated the research questions, rationale and aims of this thesis, which are focused on highlighting the distinctive perspectives of online sex workers in a decriminalised social context, as well as issues and themes relating to their safety and wellbeing.

In **Chapter 2**, I will broaden the contextual background to consider aspects of how 21st century Aotearoa/New Zealand operates socially, politically and economically. Specifically, this includes the exploration of a range of research into globalisation, capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy, and how these socio-political structures and norms manifest both online and in sex work-related contexts. I will then summarise the overarching ideologies of different feminist approaches to sex work and sex workers, before ending with an explanation of my own critical feminist standpoint and the rationale behind it.

Next, **Chapter 3** will explain the methods employed to conduct the research for the purposes of this thesis. This involves an explanation and justification of my epistemological and methodological standpoints, the approaches used to collect and analyse data, and reflexive considerations of the process of participant recruitment and my position as primary researcher.

I begin my analysis with **Chapter 4**, which is a broad overview of camming practices as described by participants. This chapter includes details of how often participants tended to work, how much they tended to make, and how they tended to go about the general process of 'camming'. I also discuss the circumstances that led to variations in their usual procedures, including the different factors that would affect their ability to conduct the work, and the ways in which different media formats (e.g., Snapchat or Skype), client requests and cam site 'cultures' were shown to affect their performance strategies.

**Chapter 5** is specifically focused on participants' descriptions of labour. I reason that camming can be conceived as a 'nexus of labour' in which a range of effort is expended, much of which is immaterial and feminised. I will then claim that despite some of the labour that occurs in the camming session being characterised as easy, fun and well-compensated, any labour that is not easily quantified (e.g., emotional labour) and/or occurs outside the livestream (e.g., preparing the body or messaging clients) is not fully recognised as work and is largely uncompensated. Furthermore, I will argue that the 'safety work' conducted by participants to alleviate risk takes up an enormous amount of their time and energy, and is almost entirely a protection strategy from stigma towards sex workers and non-monogamous sexually active women in general.

In **Chapter 6**, I extend my analysis to examine the subject positions that were taken up by participants in the camming context. Here, I will argue that the overarching 'cam girl' subject position is split into four distinct subjectivities: the 'cam persona' (the hypersexual performance directed at clients), the 'puppet master' (the savvy entrepreneurial woman who strategically manipulates clients for maximum profit), the 'woman next door' (the participant's relaxed and explicitly non-sexual presentation), and the 'anxious subject' (the participant's unsettled and complex interpretation of herself in relation to the psychological effects of camming).

Lastly, **Chapter 7** will provide a summary of the results of my analysis and contributions I have made to the literature, while also outlining and providing justification for the limitations of this thesis. I will use these limitations to stress the need for further research in this area, before outlining recommendations that I intend myself and others to action in the future.

# Chapter Two

## Socio-Political Context, Research and Perspectives

### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided the historical background and terminological clarifications needed for the reader to engage with the rationale and aims of this thesis. In this chapter, I will expand my review of the literature, contextualising Aotearoa/New Zealand and sex work in relation to our current socio-political context. I will then explain the ideological underpinnings of feminist research in relation to sex work, justifying my own standpoint – 'critical feminism' – in response to the argued shortcomings of other paradigms.

### 2.2 Setting the scene: The social, political and economic context of 21st century Aotearoa/New Zealand

Aotearoa/New Zealand, despite having unique legislation in relation to sex work, operates in a very similar social, political and economic context as other Western countries such as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. This context includes deeply entrenched structures such as globalisation, capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy. These structures are essential to consider in relation to my investigation and analysis, as they not only shape the ways in which sex work is understood, but the ways in which sex workers are permitted to operate – legally, morally and materially.

#### *2.2.1 Globalisation*

Globalisation refers to the variety of societal changes that occur through the sharing between, and interdependence of, countries around the world (Wonders

& Michalowski, 2001; Altman, 2004). These changes occur on several levels. They may be economic – through trade, or the extension of markets to new areas – or ideological, such as the sharing of cultural practices and ethics. Globalisation is also entwined with capitalism (see Section 2.2.2), with many globalised activities operating for profit and the sale of commodities (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). Furthermore, the Internet has been a major contributing factor to the furthering of globalisation in the 21st century, given the speed with which "peoples, ideas, trade, and money" (Altman, 2004, p. 64) can now be moved from place to place.

Technologies that facilitate global communication have led scholars to reassess the notion of the 'public sphere', a term coined by Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) that he uses to refer to an area wherein citizens can openly discuss issues of social and political importance. Although Habermas initially implied the public sphere to be a physical space, recently scholars have argued that social media constitute an online public sphere, where people from across borders and backgrounds can 'come together' to debate significant societal matters (Papacharissi, 2002, 2010; Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010). This alleviates a critique of the original public sphere, as initially the only people considered citizens (and thus able to participate in discussion) were land-owning male citizens in Western countries such as the United States and England, preventing those in other social, geographical and economic categories from contributing to discussion (Fraser, 1990).

Additionally, Habermas (1962/1989) originally delineated between 'public' and 'private' spheres, arguing that the latter should be a space outside of political and social interference. However, this served the dual purpose of excluding women as *bodies* (as they were usually physically relegated to domestic spaces) and excluding women's *interests*, which were considered 'personal' matters and therefore politically irrelevant (Fraser, 1990; Juffer, 1998). Now, new media have made the home an avenue for open communication, thus blurring the previously distinct boundaries between public and private (Papacharissi, 2002, 2010). The Internet has also allowed those who are relegated to the private sphere, or who

are otherwise excluded from having their opinions heard by the public at large, a means to access information and communicate with relative equity and the option of anonymity (Papacharissi, 2002, 2010). This is notable in relation to my project, which seeks to explore the extent to which sex work (a usually private activity) can be considered 'public' in livestreamed online context, and to what extent women doing online sex work can be empowered by the affordances offered by an online public sphere.

#### *2.2.1.1 Globalisation and sex work*

Globalisation affects the selling of sexual services in a range of ways. The sex industry has greatly expanded under this model, with many consumers of sex engaging in 'sex tourism' to other countries where sex work is either cheaper, easier to find, more 'exotic' (usually based on stereotypical assumptions about race), or a combination of the above (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). Furthermore, many workers are now migrating to other countries to participate in overseas sex markets. In some cases, this occurs out of choice, with people preferring to conduct sex work in areas where they can make a higher profit (Limoncelli, 2009).

However, this practice is not always consensual, in which case it is referred to as 'sex trafficking' as opposed to sex work (Chapkis, 2003). Indeed, it is crucial to note that the prevalence of trafficking has primarily occurred due to the ease with which it can operate under globalisation (Altman, 2004). The notion of choice in the context of cross-border sex work is a complicated one, as many sex workers choose to migrate *technically* of their own volition, but make the choice largely because of poverty and financial constraints that would prevent them from choosing other forms of work and/or staying in their home countries (Wonders & Michalowksi, 2001; Sandy, 2006). Because of this, migratory sex work should always be contextualised, as the motivations behind the practice are far from uniform.

Sex work has also become global in the sense that sexual services are able to be bought and sold between people who live in different areas of the world, via

the use of the Internet (Jones, 2016; Sanders et al., 2018). However, this has led to certain complications. For example, policing 'indirect' sex work such as camming, is difficult because the client, sex worker and website owners may live in different countries with different legal frameworks. Indeed, as Sanders et al. (2018) note, "[we] currently know little beyond anecdote as to how digitally mediated forms of sex work are policed" (p. 125). Furthermore, the globalised nature of online work means that the actions of particular countries can have a ripple effect, as shown this year when the United States passed a law banning the advertisement of online sexual services (Cole, 2018a). This led to the closure of several popular websites that had facilitated sex work around the world for years, causing many to lose their client-base and primary source of income, including decriminalised sex workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Robinson, 2018).

### *2.2.2 Capitalism*

Capitalism refers to the economic system in which the 'means of production' (Marx, 1867/1906) are controlled by individuals or companies, rather than those who do the producing. Workers under capitalism, referred to by Karl Marx (1867/1906) as the 'proletariat', sell their labour for a wage, the value of which is a portion of the profit made from the sale of whatever commodities the worker generated. In this system, the government is supposed to have less influence on what is produced or the value of commodities – instead, the market (people who consume commodities under this system) determines value, based on aspects such as availability and desirability of the commodity in question (Marx, 1867/1906). However, government intervention fluctuates under capitalism. For example, after the economic depression of the 1930s, market competition was more restricted and the state provided a high amount of welfare (Ongley, 2013). In the current context, capitalism operates under a neoliberal model (Cotterell & van Randow, 2016) the details of which will be discussed in Section 2.2.3.

Capitalism is now commonly referred to as post-Fordist (De Peuter, 2014) with scholars emphasising that the kind of work that initially characterised the system has since changed drastically. For example, automation has rendered much

assembly line and industry labour redundant (Srnicek & Williams, 2015). This, coupled with the 2008 global financial crisis that resulted in the loss of millions of jobs, has led to what Standing (2011) terms 'the precariat': a portmanteau of 'precarious' and Marx's 'proletariat'. According to Standing (2011), those who occupy this category lack the level of job security, guaranteed income and relationships with co-workers that used to characterise the working class. Instead, the precariat must take on a range of insecure casual contracts and unpaid internships, thus preventing them from being able to rely on salaries, union benefits or collective action.

Relatedly, labour has become increasingly immaterial, with the kind of workers described above tending to rely on selling their knowledge-based and digital-oriented skills. As such, scholars have also coined the terms 'cognitariat' (Berardi, 2005) and 'cybertariat' (Huws, 2001) to refer to workers who produce 'cognitive labour' (e.g., thinking about a range of complex literature and composing a paragraph that attempts to summarise their ideas concisely) and/or 'digital labour' (i.e., creating or manipulating online content) (Fuchs, 2014). Because these kinds of labour do not result in a physically separable product, they are more difficult to quantitatively value, which makes them easier to exploit for profit (Lazzarato, 1994; Fuchs, 2014). This is only furthered by the extent to which computers, the Internet, and social media are associated with 'play', so that many who work in these arenas have their labour uncompensated or undervalued based on the assumption that it was 'leisure' for them, not work (Taylor, Bergstrom, Jenson, & de Castell, 2015).

#### *2.2.2.1 Capitalism and sex work*

Capitalist society has changed the ways in which sex workers operate. Brents and Sanders (2010) argue that because society has also become more secular, "traditional sexual values [are] increasingly questioned or rejected. The market takes these opportunities … and seeks to exploit any changes in sexual values" (p. 45). Aotearoa/New Zealand is a more secular country than most, with 41.9% of the population claiming to have no religious affiliation and this number passing into the majority for those under the age of 35 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

This is just one factor contributing to the 'commodification of sex', a feature of contemporary society that has become increasingly prevalent under capitalism (Gottdiener, 2000). Scholars argue that rather than treating sex as something to purely be viewed through a moral lens, capitalism allows for sex to instead be viewed as another commodity to buy and sell (Brents & Sanders, 2010). These changes have facilitated and even encouraged the prosperity of sex work, which is now referred to as 'the sex industry' – indicating its large scale and commercialised nature (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007).

The pursuit of sex work has also been furthered by the extent to which 'ordinary' work has become increasingly inaccessible, with Brents and Sanders (2010) noting that "[even] middle-class workers in First World countries find themselves turning to sex work for a liveable wage" (p. 46). Indeed, for those in the precariat, online sex work (both direct and indirect) is an oft-chosen avenue. Firstly, it is often highly profitable and flexible enough to work around erratic schedules (Jones, 2015b). Secondly, the potential stigma and criminal ramifications of being a sex worker can be mitigated through anonymity strategies (e.g., pseudonyms and coded advertising) and by conducting the kind of indirect work (e.g., camming) that tends to be more socially and legally tolerated than work that involves sexual intercourse or touching (Jones, 2015b). Finally, the Internet-based nature of the work is well-suited to those who produce cognitive or digital labour, as the practice usually involves managing social media, photo and/or video editing, and online advertising (Nayar, 2017; Sanders et al., 2018).

### *2.2.3 Neoliberalism*

While other Western countries were quicker to adopt and embrace the principles of neoliberalism (Ongley, 2013), it became a prominent feature of Aotearoa/New Zealand society by the mid-1980s (Cotterell & von Randow, 2016). As opposed to the post-depression era of the 1930s where a more regulatory welfare state was embraced, the neoliberal model is predicated on the idea that individuals should be granted the 'liberty' to control their own affairs with as little government intervention as possible (Taylor & Grey, 2014; Cotterell & von Randow, 2016).

Neoliberalism is both economic (e.g., through the embracing of the 'free' market, privatisation, and tax cuts) and ideological, with the latter occurring through the broad-scale societal emphasis on being a responsible, self-made citizen who need not rely on government handouts for success (Story & Jankowski, 2015; Cotterell & von Randow, 2016). As such, neoliberalism has mainly resulted in increased freedom for businesses, while simultaneously fostering an environment where supportive social policies are nixed under the guise of "individual liberty and responsibility" (Brents & Sanders, 2010, p. 46).

Scholars claim that neoliberalism is maintained through the surveillance of the working class (Coleman, 2004; Wacquant, 2010; Maki, 2011). Although this appears oxymoronic given the model's supposed emphasis on liberty, it is argued that because neoliberalism benefits capitalists who can exploit workers without significant government intervention, surveillance is a way of ensuring these workers are unable to challenge the status quo (Coleman, 2004). One example of this is the increased scrutiny of welfare recipients, often referred to in the Aotearoa/New Zealand media as lazy 'dole bludgers' (Archer, 2009) who spend the tax money of those who work for a living. This discourse is used to justify increased regulations, tighter eligibility restrictions, and the encouragement of citizens to report those who they suspect are committing welfare fraud – all of which remain common practice in Western countries (Maki, 2011).

Additionally, the impacts of 'dataveillance' (broadly defined as the collection and/or monitoring of online data) have been examined with interest by surveillance scholars as of late (Van Dijck, 2014; Lupton, 2016). While globalised 'public sphere' interaction via the Internet may paint an optimistically democratic picture, dataveillance allows citizens deemed 'threatening' to be tracked and have their personal information accessed with ease (Van Dijck, 2014). Digital technologies also facilitate surveillance of the *self* – for example, by encouraging users to record their fitness via smartphone apps, market their personal 'brand' via social media, and spend time monitoring their *own* online footprint and privacy settings (Lupton, 2016; Sanders, 2017). The latter is a particularly salient

example of neoliberalism, as the implication is that people victimised by dataveillance are the ones at fault for not being more 'responsible citizens'. Overall, online self-surveillance serves neoliberalism by negating the government's need to look after the health and safety of their citizens – instead, they can (and should) handle it themselves.

#### *2.2.3.1 Neoliberalism and sex work*

Brents and Sanders (2010) claim neoliberalism has created the perfect environment for the sex industry to expand and flourish. Our increasingly secular capitalist society has already led to a questioning of the moral judgments surrounding sex and sex work, and the rhetoric of neoliberalism has created an environment where "personal choice is elevated to a moral right … the content of the choice is irrelevant; it is the right to choose that matters" (Brents & Sanders, 2010, p. 46). Most obviously, this applies to those who buy sex – but crucially, this applies to those who sell sex as well. Story and Jankowski (2015) note that women are disproportionately affected by neoliberal policies given that they are statistically more reliant on welfare and, on average, make less money than their male counterparts (see Section 2.2.4). Given this context, and coupled with the neoliberal ideas that individuals can make their own choices and *must* make their own success, many women may turn to sex work "as a route to financial stability" (Story & Jankowski, 2015, p. 59).

The surveillance concerns discussed above are particularly salient when applied to sex work. For example, Wright, Heynen and van der Meulen (2015) note that closed-circuit television (CCTV) is used to monitor and punish Canadian street sex workers, with this use of the technology being justified as a way of promoting public safety. They argue this involves contradictory discourses, as "sex workers [are constructed] as 'victims' to be afforded community protection, but also as threats against which the boundaries of community need to be secured … [currently] it is the latter narrative that dominates" (Wright, Heynen, & van der Meulen, 2015, p. 265). The irony of this approach is that, as previously argued, harms against sex workers (e.g., stigmatised treatment and negative health outcomes) are exacerbated by heavy monitoring and regulation. This policy is

also reflective of the sexual double standard, as buyers are not targeted in the same way (Wright, Heynen, & van der Meulen, 2015).

Furthermore, Sanders et al. (2018) note that Internet-based indirect sex workers have their privacy and safety compromised by digital surveillance. Although government interference with online sex work is, at this stage, less prevalent, "early evidence suggests that police departments [in countries such as the United States] will create operations to target online sex workers" (Jones, 2015b, p. 565). Currently, the more concerning factor is the impact of dataveillance conducted by fellow civilians. For example, scholars have found that webcam models often have their livestreams 'capped', meaning that they are recorded and saved without their consent (Jones, 2015b; Sanders et al., 2018). Capped videos can then "be sold [to pornography websites] without the performer's consent or the ability to negotiate compensation for further distribution of the recording" (Jones, 2015b, p. 565). Additionally, capped videos and/or the digitally-accessed personal information of online sex workers can be used to blackmail or harass them, a practice referred to as 'doxing' (Jones, 2015b; Sanders et al., 2018). Thus, while indirect sex work can be considered 'safer' than direct sex work on many levels, digital surveillance methods can compromise the privacy and anonymity of online workers, opening them up to social and legal consequences.

### *2.2.4 Patriarchy*

Broadly speaking, 'patriarchy' refers to a social system wherein men hold most of the economic, political and social power (Kandiyoti, 1988; Blackett, 2016; Sanders, 2017). It is an older system than capitalism or neoliberalism, and as such, the ways in which patriarchy manifests has and continues to shift in relation to the broader cultural context in which it operates. As discussed in Chapter 1, patriarchal norms have long been justified through religious discourses and biological essentialism (Comte, 2014; García-Favaro, 2015). These norms systemically disadvantaged women for centuries by locking them out of the public sphere and preventing them from accessing basic rights (e.g., education, voting) that would have provided them agency and dignity on par with

men. Despite the range and magnitude of changes in Western society – including increased secularisation, a greater focus on individual liberty, and the successes of feminist movements – white cisgender men are still the citizens provided the most social, political and economic opportunities (Feagin & Ducey, 2017). Additionally, cisgender men are also permitted the most autonomy and choice in relation to their own bodies and behaviour (Onuekwe & Okam, 2017). As such, gender parity has not been reached.

One of the ways that patriarchal inequality manifests is through gendered violence. Scholars have noted that women remain disproportionately subject to physical and sexual assault, which tends to be perpetrated by cisgender male family members and intimate partners (Bohra et al., 2015). While violence against women in the private sphere has gained visibility since second wave feminism, it has now been made even more 'public' through the Internet and social media, as made evident through the #MeToo campaign (Farvid, 2018a). However, gendered violence nevertheless remains prevalent and can often be dismissed as inaccurate, unimportant or the fault of the victim themselves (Easteal, Holland, & Judd, 2015). Furthermore, violence against women can be perpetuated *through* digital media. Henry and Powell (2015) refer to this as 'technology-facilitated sexual violence', claiming that practices such as 'revenge-porn' (distributing privately-taken sexual images of women on online public forums) and 'cyber-stalking' (akin to 'dataveillance') may not be forms of physical violence per se, but they can nevertheless lead to 'embodied harms' such as psychological trauma.

Inequality can also be demonstrated through the 'gender pay gap', a term used to refer to the difference between the amount of money working women make compared to working men. This 'gap' continues to persist in men's favour – last year, for example, Aotearoa/New Zealand women made 12.71% less than men (Pacheco, Li & Cochrane, 2017). The lack of compensation women receive for their work also occurs in the private sphere, with Aotearoa/New Zealand women doing an additional 123 minutes of unpaid (usually household) work per day than their male counterparts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development, 2018). As Jarrett (2014) notes, "it often seems as if immaterial labour was only 'invented' when it moved out of the kitchen and onto the Internet" (p. 15), and while the uncompensated labour common to workers under post-Fordist capitalism is notable, it is also important to stress that women are likely additionally affected for this reason.

#### *2.2.4.1 Patriarchy and sex work*

Cisgender men (being those who tend to have higher social status and income) are the primary buyers and controllers of sex work, and women (who have been sequestered out of respected and high-paying arenas of life) are the primary sellers (Farvid, 2017). While few argue against the idea that sex work both demonstrates and perpetuates problematic patriarchal values and relations (i.e., women being sexually acquiescent to men), many also note that there is not really much sex workers can do about this (Minichiello, Scott, & Cox, 2017; Raguparan, 2017). Chapkis (1997), for example, argues that sex work should still be presented as an active choice made by women – but a 'rational' choice as opposed to a 'free' choice, because of the constricting nature of neoliberal capitalism and patriarchal relations.

Additionally, some argue that the traits women are socialised to possess (e.g., being sexually appealing, nurturing men's needs) can be used to their advantage in the realm of sex work (Sanders, 2005; Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006; Raguparan, 2017). This is in line with Kandiyoti's (1988) conception of the 'patriarchal bargain', which she defines as the methods different women use to benefit from patriarchal gender norms. For example, Sanders (2005) noted that her participants described learning how to "[fake] orgasms and sexual excitement" (p. 330) by watching heterosexual pornography and sex scenes on television, which they would then imitate for clients. Importantly, she stresses that her participants *overtly* and *consciously* "manipulate[d] aspects of heterosexual femininity in order to capitalize from this financially" (Sanders, 2005, p. 336). According to Kandiyoti (1988), despite unequal social expectations restricting and disadvantaging women as a collective, these norms can be used strategically in individual contexts – especially, as illustrated above, sex work.

Yet, in doing so, sex workers reproduce such traditionally desired feminine acts, complicating the political meaning and outcomes of such manipulation.

#### *2.2.4.2 Postfeminism*

The above arguments are partially justified through a currently prevalent form of patriarchal ideology – specifically, the idea that feminist efforts are no longer necessary because women have already achieved equality, and we are therefore 'post' feminism (McRobbie, 2007; Gill, 2007, 2009). Scholars such as McRobbie (2007) and Gill (2007, 2009) claim that postfeminist rhetoric is intrinsically related to neoliberal rhetoric which, again, places the responsibility for one's actions on the individual, as opposed to broader structural systems. According to McRobbie (2007), postfeminism has also led to a subject position that she terms 'the phallic girl', a woman who "emulate[s]" male behaviour" (p. 733) by being overtly sexual in a way that lacks shame and assumes full agency. She argued that phallic girls present themselves as though they have the upper hand over men in some contexts, specifically through their ability to use their sexual charms to "play [men] at their own game" (McRobbie, 2007, p. 733) – akin to the strategic behaviour of sex workers discussed above (Sanders, 2005).

Blackett (2016) also claims that postfeminist discourse thrives in neoliberal Aotearoa/New Zealand due to the "commercial co-optation" of feminist goals which allow "some women (predominantly [white], middle class, ablebodied) to enter public spheres such as commerce and politics … [inspiring] a plethora of popular media stories about 'successful' women leading their (consumerist) lives" (p. 40). The overarching view is that Aotearoa/New Zealand is a country where women can run businesses or become the prime minister, so the goals of feminism are not relevant in this country. However, Blackett (2016) points out the fallacy of this viewpoint by highlighting the statistics providing evidence about a continued gendered inequality in Aotearoa/New Zealand (see also Farvid, 2018b). Aotearoa/New Zealand women are therefore likely to be constrained by poverty and a lack of job opportunities, but expected to make any choice necessary to become financially independent.

Postfeminist discourses arguably contribute to the extent to which sex work can be considered a logical option for women in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Sex work is well-paid, suited to women's socialised traits, requires no qualifications, and there is consistently high demand for workers (Mears & Connell, 2016). Furthermore, given that sex work is decriminalised and gender inequity is no longer constructed as an issue in this country (Blackett, 2016), becoming involved in the sex industry may be increasingly considered a strategic and autonomous decision divorced from structural oppression. While these points are not entirely without merit, I will nevertheless argue – based on the socio-political factors discussed above and the feminist perspectives discussed below – that they lack crucial critical reflection in relation to structures of gender, sexuality, and work in the current sociocultural, political and economic context.

## 2.3 Feminist approaches to sex work

Sex work research, much like the work itself, varies widely. Throughout most of the 20th century, sex work was often studied in a medical context, accompanying the moral panic around extra-marital intercourse and the spread of venereal diseases (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Since the late 20th century, sex work research has become increasingly dominated by the social sciences, considering the sex industry in relation to broader structural systems such as capitalism and patriarchy, as well as ideas around the coercion, consent, and agency of the workers involved (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Sex work researchers tend to apply a feminist paradigm to their work (Connelly, Jarvis-King & Ahearne, 2015), and the specificities of these will be discussed in the following sections.

Firstly, I wish to explain the logic behind the ways I label and summarise these paradigms. Feminism is a movement rife with contradictions and inconsistencies, and feminist academic research is no exception. As such, the categorisations I present are unavoidably reductive, and may not encompass the full scope of perspectives from the scholars cited and within the paradigms themselves. I believe that feminist scholars have conducted invaluable research in this field, and the critiques I present are not of individuals – rather, I seek to

critique ideological inconsistencies and problematic trends in sex work-related research more broadly.

Like other sex work-focused academics (e.g., Abel, 2010; Zangger, 2015) I first delineate between radical feminism (not to be confused with 'sex radical feminism', its philosophical opposite) and liberal feminism. While the former is relatively ideologically straightforward, the latter can encompass a range of perspectives ranging from 'sex-positivity' to scholars who focus primarily on legal equity (Showden, 2012). Generally, I present liberal feminism as akin to 'choice feminism', wherein the overarching aim is to provide women with the necessary 'liberty' to do what they wish with their bodies without inference.

The final two paradigms are identified as 'Marxist feminism' and 'critical feminism'. The former is conceptually on-par with Abel's (2010) description of 'sex worker rights' approaches, wherein sex workers are presented primarily as *workers*, and praxis is centred on providing them with the same health and safety rights as any other labourer. I chose to categorise these scholars as 'Marxist' to emphasise their core ontological perspective, which is class-focused and based on a critique of the capitalist economic system.

Finally, the approach I dub 'critical feminism' is, firstly, not to be confused with 'gender critical feminism', which argues against the inclusion of transgender women in the feminist movement and is ideologically aligned with radical feminism (Kolysh, 2016). Rather, those I consider 'critical feminists' (see Farvid, 2017) aim for a more dialectical approach than the former paradigms, giving due consideration to the awareness and agency of sex workers while also remaining 'critical' of the systems and ideologies that constrain and enable various forms of sex work practice, one that is never completely 'free'.

### *2.3.1 Radical feminism*

The radical feminist perspective is epitomised by the collective works of Barry (1979, 1996), Dworkin (1981), Farley (2004), Hughes (1999, 2004), Jeffreys (2008, 2010) and MacKinnon (1979, 1989), all of whom argue for the abolition of sex

work, particularly prostitution and pornography. Radical feminists claim abolishing sex work is necessary because:

1. sex work is mentally and physically harmful to women,
2. sex work perpetuates women's sexual objectification and subservience to men, and
3. any form of legalisation or decriminalisation is "based on the idea that prostitution is an inevitable form of behaviour" (Jeffreys, 2010, p. 214).

Indeed, radical feminists particularly reject the latter, claiming it is based on assumptions of "a universal, natural (masculine) impulse that … requires, and will always require, the outlet provided by prostitution" (Pateman, 1999, p. 57). In their view, this assumption perpetuates harmful and unequal gender norms and socially permits men to justifiably 'use' women for sex.

In the view of radical feminist scholars, sex work is a symptom of patriarchy, and therefore inevitably results in the subordination of women involved. They claim that it is an extreme version of previously discussed hetero-patriarchal ideologies, wherein women are expected to be sexually subservient to men. For these reasons, radical feminists often refuse to use the term sex worker, preferring terms such as 'victim' or 'prostituted woman' to indicate a lack of true agency on behalf of the workers who participate in the industry (e.g., Farley & Barkan, 1998; Hughes, 2004). Scholars of this paradigm may also refer to sex work as 'rape' or 'paid rape' due to what they consider the impossibility of giving 'true' consent to sex work that takes place in a patriarchal capitalist context (MacKinnon, 1989; Farley, 2004).

Many radical feminist researchers have queried sex workers about instances of violence and abuse, as well as their quality of personal relationships, self-esteem and general mental health (Bellhouse, Crebbin, Fairley & Billardi, 2015). As previously stated, sex workers have disproportionately poor health and wellbeing, so radical feminist researchers aim to illuminate these issues and provide recommendations to alleviate the problems (Farley & Barkan, 1998). However, radical feminists tend to equate their findings – which are often both

legitimate and deeply distressing – to the work *itself*, rather than due to external factors such as disadvantaged social status of women, the persistently negative attitudes towards sex workers that results from stigma, and the difficulty of conducting the practice safely in illegal or semi-legal contexts (Story & Jankowski, 2015). Notably, Aotearoa/New Zealand's decriminalised context is rarely used as a point of reference, with feminists in this paradigm tending to argue against *legalisation* (as it operates in Germany or the Netherlands) as a catch-all concept to support their claims that sex work is problematic in any context (Weitzer, 2009, 2010).

Sometimes radical feminist scholars specifically speak only to street-based sex workers in places where sex work is illegal (e.g., Farley & Barkan, 1998) – a demographic which is far more likely to have negative experiences in their line of work than, for example, an indoor escort in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Brewis & Linstead, 2000a; Zangger, 2015). They also tend to question street workers more than in-house (brothel) workers, despite statistics demonstrating the latter are the majority and can therefore be considered more indicative of the experiences of sex workers (Weitzer, 2009). As Abel, Fitzgerald and Brunton (2009) argue, it is likely the "criminalisation of sex work or sectors of the sex industry [that] has profound negative impacts on the lives and health of sex workers" (p. 529) rather than the practice of sex work inherently.

Radical feminists do address legitimate problems with the sex industry and the indisputably negative experiences that many sex workers face. However, their stance on abolition is often primarily predicated on 'moral outrage' (Story & Jankowski, 2015) towards the practice as a whole, with those in this paradigm generally refusing to account for the individual decisions and circumstances of sex workers, and claiming that sex work is both unnecessary and exploitative in all contexts.

### *2.3.2 Liberal feminism*

Liberal feminist perspectives on sex work are often positioned as a response to and, in many ways, the antithesis of radical feminist approaches. Scholars

working in this paradigm argue that radical feminist discourses surrounding sex work refuse to acknowledge the agency of the women involved, thus serving to *perpetuate* essentialist notions about gender through their assertions that women are unavoidably victimised and unable make an 'informed decision' to work in the sex industry (Weitzer, 2010). Generally, liberal feminists tend to argue in favour of legalisation or decriminalisation, either based on the idea that women have the right to choose to do what they want with their bodies and for work, or because they believe that wilfully pursuing sexual experiences can be 'empowering' for women (Showden, 2012; Henry & Farvid, 2017).

Liberal feminists tend to focus on the ways that sex work can be beneficial for women. The more 'sex positive' or 'sex radical' of these scholars argue that sex work can be empowering, encouraging women to "claim and explore desire, pleasure, and explicit sexual knowledge" (Showden, 2012, p. 6), thus challenging and undermining traditional notions of women's sexuality. Others focus more on the independence that women can gain from doing sex work out of choice and for their own benefit. For example, Williamson and Folaron (2003) found that many of their participants celebrated the financial security that came with sex work, leading them to "believe in their ability to *control* and *influence* activities in their lives in a way they previously had not been able" (p. 276, emphasis added).

Unlike radical feminist research, these scholars tend to employ semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (Williamson & Folaron, 2003; Huang, 2016) – a methodological approach which allows for more freedom in topic choice and provides more space for participants to discuss their personal thoughts and opinions (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2007). Liberal feminist work also marks a discursive shift in academic writing through the employment of the term 'sex worker' (as both a genderless and active signifier) and even the subversive re-appropriation of terms such as 'prostitute', 'whore' and 'slut' in some sex-positive work (Kong, 2006).

However, despite liberal feminist research providing a much-needed perspective on sex work, it can be critiqued for a similar reason to radical feminist work –

claiming that sex is inherently pleasurable and/or 'empowering' is just as prescriptive and all-encompassing as claiming it is inherently victimising (Story & Jankowski, 2015). Additionally, liberal feminists can be criticised for playing into "the popular uptake of neoliberal freemarket ideologies" (Beloso, 2012, p. 49), in the sense of defining empowerment as occurring simply through 'choice' (in line with postfeminist rhetoric) without considering the social, cultural, political and economic context that shapes such choices.

Furthermore, Showden (2012) argues that we should be wary of "[assuming] that putting a positive spin on sex acts makes them resistant" (p. 8), claiming that liberal feminists should remember that "sex alone will not be sufficient to challenge the social order of gender nor the dominant discursive paradigms of sexuality" (p. 11). Indeed, many of these scholars do not give much consideration to the extent that social constructions of gender and sexuality (as discussed in this and the prior chapter) make sex work a fraught domain for women. The 'restrictive' and 'coercive' factors should therefore also be considered from an ideological perspective (e.g., the social pressure of conforming to gender norms), not just a legal or material one (i.e., whether sex work is decriminalised and profitable).

Finally, Kong (2006) emphasises that liberal feminists' tendency to assume sex workers' actions are inherently political (in the sense of being deliberately subversive) is problematic. Specifically, he claims that this view disregards "the actual complexity of a prostitute's experiences" (Kong, 2006, p. 413), turning the worker into a 'symbol' as opposed to a human being who may pursue the work for a range of circumstantial reasons – some coercive (e.g., urgently needing to pay the rent), and some banal (e.g., boredom or curiosity). As such, I intend to argue that a more nuanced approach than either radical or liberal feminism is needed to understand the complex and contradictory experiences of those who participate in the sex industry.

### *2.3.3 Marxist feminism*

As opposed to radical or liberal feminist viewpoints that tend to claim that the exploitation of sex workers occurs primarily due to patriarchal systems, Marxist feminists argue that sex workers should be understood as exploited for their labour under the current capitalist framework (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001; West & Austrin, 2005). While Marxist feminists do not deny the presence of gendered oppression, they argue that patriarchy as it currently exists is perpetuated by capitalism and therefore should be analysed from this vantage point (Beloso, 2012).

Despite this key difference, Marxist feminists do share similarities with the other paradigms. For example, like radical feminists, Marxists agree that exploitation is unavoidable in sex work due to the overarching social, political and economic structures in which we currently live (Limoncelli, 2009). Indeed, some radical feminists even identify as Marxists themselves (see MacKinnon, 1982). However, most Marxist feminists oppose the abolitionist position, with Beloso (2012) summarising the hypocrisy of the stance: "[A] radical abolitionist feminist such as Donna Hughes makes an excellent living … with her research funded … while the [sex workers] employed in the massage parlours she helped shut down … endure forcible unemployment, detainment, deportation, and incarceration" (p. 64).

Marxist feminists also agree with aspects of liberal feminism, particularly the position that painting sex workers with the same 'victimhood' brush is inaccurate and limiting given the vast range of perspectives and positions sex workers can occupy (Limoncelli, 2009). Additionally, Marxist feminists typically use the term 'sex worker', emphasising the labour aspect as being key to analysis (Beloso, 2012). Unlike liberal feminists, however, Marxists do not view sex or sex work as a potential site of individual empowerment – in their view, as long as sex workers (and women in general) operate within the capitalist framework, true empowerment is by definition impossible (Limoncelli, 2009).

A focus on class also provides room to theorise on the experiences of those who are not cisgender women, especially as other gender identities also suffer negative experiences in the sex industry (Wonders and Michalowski, 2001). As

such, a Marxist feminist perspective can emphasise the crucial differences in experiences of sex workers and the variety of contexts which lead to their participation in the work. Indeed, as Bernstein (2007) examines, middle-class sex workers are increasingly becoming involved in the sex industry. This phenomenon can be better understood by considering the social impact of neoliberal capitalist policy rather than through the broad application of gender oppression under patriarchy (Roberts, Sanders, Myers & Smith, 2010).

The extent to which varieties of legalisation are being applied globally means that brothels are increasing in profit and influence (Brents & Hausbeck, 2007), another important site of investigation which requires a capitalism-oriented framework. As Taylor and Grey (2014) emphasise, class analysis is disappearing from academic studies in and on Aotearoa/New Zealand society – perhaps not coincidentally since the rise of neoliberalism – and it is crucial not to disregard the effects of the political economy when considering issues of exploitation, oppression and labour.

#### *2.3.3.1 Emotional labour*

While material labour tends to be the focus of Marxist critiques, the immaterial labour (Lazzarato, 1994) – or, more specifically, the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) conducted by sex workers is an important area of consideration. Emotional labour is defined the effort some workers must expend to "induce or suppress feeling in order to … [produce] the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 1983, p.7). It should be noted that Hochschild (1983) delineates between 'emotional labour' and 'emotion work', with the former occurring in the workplace and the latter referring to the use of these strategies in unpaid interpersonal contexts (e.g., counselling a friend or boosting the ego of a romantic partner).

Hochschild (1983) argued that to be a successful flight attendant, one must not only do physical and mental labour (for example, moving food carts and coordinating emergency landings) but *emotional* labour as well – in this case, being a cheerful, reassuring presence to make customers feel safe and welcome

on board. Emotional labour can be difficult and draining, but is rarely recognised (or properly compensated) as a legitimate form of work. This is something that becomes particularly obvious when considering the overlap in positions that are dominated by women which also require a great deal of emotional labour, such as nursing, teaching, and of course, sex work (Sanders, 2004a).

As many scholars argue, sex work is a particularly significant example of often difficult and often gendered emotional labour (Brewis & Linstead, 2000b; Sanders, 2004a, 2005; West & Austrin, 2005; Mears & Connell, 2016). The emotional labour performed by those in the sex industry can vary depending on the role and the persona being employed by the worker. For example, Deshotels and Forsyth (2006) noted that their stripper participants employed 'strategic flirting', which the authors define as specific behaviour tailored to each customer designed to make the clients feel 'special' and draw the greatest income possible. Similarly, Bernstein (2007) found that her escort participants simulated intimacy (referred to by the author as the 'girlfriend experience') to regular customers to encourage the patron's long-term investment, both emotional and financial.

Stereotypical assumptions about emotional labour are flipped in the case of professional dominatrices, who must "express emotional displays such as indifference or displeasure" (Pinsky & Levey, 2015, p. 438) to please their customers. Sanders (2004a, 2005) claims that emotional labour is also used as a defence mechanism by sex workers, through methods such as humour and coding the work as a performance akin to acting. These studies indicate a key issue in sex work research: to what extent do sex workers sell a part of *themselves* to be "consumed along with [their] services" (Brewis & Linstead, 2000b, p. 171)? Do sex workers only "sell a service or something more intrinsic to her (or his) person" (West & Austrin, 2005, p. 138)? If so, what are the psychological consequences of this?

While I have encompassed this section within the Marxist feminist paradigm, it should be noted that the concept of emotional labour *problematises* the notion of analysing sex work from a pure political economy perspective. Indeed, both

gender and psychological factors are intrinsic to the way in which this form of work operates and how those who perform it are exploited. This therefore indicates a need for research which is both aware and critical of the *range* of structural issues at play (not just the radical feminist focus on gender, or the Marxist feminist focus on class), while also considering the subjectivity of individual sex workers and their experiences (as is arguably overemphasised by liberal feminist scholars).

### *2.3.4 Critical feminism*

The primary issue with the many feminist perspectives on sex work is their essentialist nature, characterising sex work as either 'good' or 'bad', sex workers as either 'empowered' or 'exploited', and men and women's sexuality as 'fixed' or inherently 'different'. Critical feminism aims for a more nuanced and complicated approach – respecting the awareness and agency of the workers involved without sacrificing a critical perspective in relation to harmful practices and ideologies (Comte, 2014; Connolly, Jarvis-King & Ahearne, 2015; Farvid & Glass, 2014). Importantly, rather than attempting to legitimise or delegitimise the industry (Farvid, 2017) or decipher the 'right answer' in relation to sex workers' empowerment and/or oppression, critical feminism embraces the complex and contradictory nature of managing one's choices and selfhood under structural constraints.

Although both radical and Marxist feminism provides useful analyses in relation to the exploitation of sex workers, critical feminists argue that it is important consider the perspectives of sex workers without also assuming their freedom and empowerment (à la liberal feminism). This is illustrated well through Harding and Hamilton's (2009) choice to refer to their participants as "working girls" (p. 1119). The authors argued that adult women sex workers referring to themselves as 'girls' is a complex choice, simultaneously indicating vulnerability, ironic empowerment, voluntarism and coercion (Harding & Hamilton, 2009). Ultimately, Harding and Hamilton (2009) decided to adopt the phrase within their own research, both to overtly reference this complexity, and to respect the rights of their 'working girl' participants to define themselves as they chose.

Many critical feminists employ research methods that allow for the greatest possible insight into the personal perspectives of their sex worker participants. This may include in-depth interviews, ethnographic studies, and participatory action research, the latter being a method that actively involves participants "in the design and research process, the analysis of the results and releasing of data, and implementation of action-oriented solutions" (van der Muelen, 2011, p. 374). Some notable critical feminist research includes the work of Dodsworth (2014), who drew upon the subjective accounts of 24 sex worker mothers to examine the "management of dual and threatened identities" (p. 99) that occurred through participants' occupation of 'opposed' social categories. Sandy (2006) also found that their Cambodian sex worker participants required a framework outside of the "voluntary/forced prostitution dichotomy" (p. 449), arguing that their participants' experiences indicated constraints, self-determined choices, and multiple identities and subjectivities.

Critical feminist standpoints are also common in the realm of online sex work-related research, with scholars like Jones (2016) exploring the simultaneous 'pleasures and dangers' (Vance, 1984) of camming. Similarly, Nayar (2017) emphasised the ambivalent subjectivity of cam girls who attempt to simultaneously present themselves as 'professional' and 'amateur'. As these scholars have argued, a critical perspective is key when investigating sex work in an online context, being that it is so novel, immaterial, and rife with contradiction (Jones, 2016; Nayar, 2017).

#### *2.3.4.1 Intersectionality*

Critical feminists also place much emphasis on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), a concept that refers to the way in which various identities (e.g., gender, sexuality and race) "operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2). This is particularly relevant in the context of sex work for two reasons: firstly, because it indicates the extent to which categories such as gender and class cannot be understood separately (as both intersect in varying ways to form distinct levels of oppression); secondly,

because it indicates the need to consider categories *beyond* gender and class, to glean a greater understanding of the experiences of individual workers in different contexts (Story & Jankowski, 2015).

For example, as Limoncelli (2009) discussed, "across countries, racism and prejudice in the sex trade leads to the overrepresentation of women of colour at the bottom, most dangerous levels" (p. 266). Furthermore, the experiences of transgender sex workers are often some of the most violent and abusive, and indigenous women are overrepresented in sex worker populations, both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and globally (Crosby & Pitts, 2007; Zangger, 2015). However, this is not to immediately victimise those who occupy these categories – as Raguparan (2017) argued, many of her sex worker participants were aware of and took advantage of the fetishization of their race for maximum profit. This can perhaps be considered an example of *colonial* patriarchal bargaining, which one of her participants described as "hack[ing] capitalism" (Raguparan, 2017, p. 71) – a discursive choice that, incidentally, connotes the potential power of computer-based resistance.

## 2.4 My approach

In this thesis, I aim to take a critical feminist approach, drawing on feminist poststructuralism and critical theory (see Chapter 3). I will do this by prioritising the perspectives and opinions of my participants, while also remaining critical of the ways their positions may be informed and constrained by the structures and ideologies discussed thus far. I do not seek to uncover the 'right answer' – rather, I seek to use my participants' words and the knowledge I have gleaned from the research process to find areas of meaning and consequence, both overt and covert. My primary goal is to broadly examine Aotearoa/New Zealand women's descriptions of camming, and to use the results of my assessments to justify calls for further research and actionable recommendations centred on improving the lives of sex workers.

It should be noted that the importance of reflexivity is emphasised by critical feminist scholars. As Zheng (2013) argues, "it is critical that researchers engage

in an ethical practice of reflexivity during research and writing, to make transparent … how their positionality shapes their relationship with research subjects, and how their values and beliefs inform their interpretation and writings" (p. 53). Emphasising my own standpoint in relation to the research is therefore important to my approach, and I will endeavour to do this in the following chapter.

Critical feminism also informs my choice to begin this thesis with an excerpt from the poem 'Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing' (1995) by Margaret Atwood. The included stanza touches upon many of the issues mentioned in this chapter, including the reproachful anti-sex work attitude of researchers and society at large, and the argument that much other work under capitalism can also be considered exploitative and physically painful. Additionally, the author makes the choice to centre the (fictional, in this case) voice of the sex worker herself, who rationally argues that she has the right to pursue the work on her own terms. (And what could be more "*nebulous*" and "*without material form*" than the performance of a cam girl?)

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a broad contextual background of the social, economic and political factors that shape discourse in 21st century Aotearoa/New Zealand. These factors were then explored in reference to sex work, especially in the online context, to explain the ways in which the practice is shaped by current social expectations and structures. Finally, key feminist paradigms were discussed and critiqued in relation to their views on sex workers, with my personal critical feminist standpoint being explained and justified according to my research aims and rationale.

In the next chapter, I will explain the method used to conduct the research used in this thesis, including my epistemological and methodological standpoints, recruitment strategies and limitations, the process of transcription and analysis, and a reflexive section on my position as a researcher.

# Chapter Three

## Methodology and Method

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodological approach and other tools used in this thesis will be outlined. I will begin by identifying and explaining the epistemology and methodology used in this project, which are critical realism and an exploratory qualitative framework, respectively. Next, I will discuss details in relation to participant demographics, recruitment and ethical concerns. I will then outline the methods of data collection and analysis, before finishing the chapter with a reflexive consideration of my position as the researcher of this project.

### 3.2 Epistemology

The word 'ontology' is used to refer to what 'truly' exists (i.e., reality and the nature of the world) (Braun & Clarke, 2013). 'Epistemology', however, refers to ways that ontological phenomena can be interpreted and understood by human beings – essentially, the extent to which we can "provide answers to the question, 'How, and what, can we know'?" (Willig, 2013, p. 4). Scholars have argued that it is essential for academics to declare and justify their epistemological position, meaning the philosophical standpoint from which their 'knowledge claims' are presented (Patnaik, 2013).

The epistemological stance of this thesis is critical realism. This approach is characterised by the work of Roy Bhaskar (1989), who sought to present a perspective beyond that of 'naïve' realism which is the assumption that our observations are an unmediated depiction of reality, and interpretivism, which is the assumption that our observations are fully mediated by personal interpretation and not representative of a shared external reality. Bhaskar (1989) argued that scientific methods and cause-and-effect measurements should not

be entirely abandoned, because he maintained that there is an external world that exists regardless of human thought and interpretation (Houston, 2001). However, a critical realist perspective also accepts that "all knowledge is a product of its social context" and because of this, "the human subject, including the social researcher, can never fully gain a totally accurate picture of the social world" (Houston, 2001, p. 852). As Braun and Clarke (2013) summarise:

> Critical realism [is] like looking at a view where the only way to see it is through a prism, so what is seen is nuanced by the shape of the prism (the prism is history, culture, etc.). If you could just get rid of that prism, you'd be able to see what lies behind it (the truth), but you can never get beyond it. (p. 28)

The critical realist perspective posited by Bhaskar (1989) categorises reality on three ontological levels: the empirical (phenomena that influence humans, directly or indirectly), the actual (all existing phenomena, including those which may not affect humans), and the causal (phenomena that directly lead to events occurring) (Houston, 2001; McEvoy & Richards, 2006). A critical realist standpoint postulates that causal mechanisms may never be fully understood, given the limited knowledge and skewed perspective of human beings, but can nevertheless be discerned and predicted with sufficient accuracy through the application of empirical investigation and theory (McEvoy & Richards, 2006).

Critical realism is considered a useful framework for the purposes of this thesis because it posits that social norms and structures affect the extent to which we understand and experience the world, which is still considered an external reality that materially affects people regardless of their social conditioning. As discussed in Chapter 1, research has shown that sex work and sex workers have been associated with a range of social meanings and connotations depending on historical, political and economic context. However, the research presented in Chapter 1 has also demonstrated the extent to which sex work has been shown to have recurring material consequences (e.g., assault, burn out), suggesting that a fully interpretivist viewpoint may be inadequate. Because of these factors, I will use a critical realist perspective to pinpoint recurring themes in participants' talk. I will then explore the extent to which these themes

challenge or adhere to the theory and social structures outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, and the potential material consequences that may occur based on the descriptions provided.

### *3.2.1 Theoretical underpinnings*

Critical realism is inspired by, and often associated with, critical theory. Critical theory is a branch of philosophy concerned with the critique of society, as well as 'praxis' (actionable methods of improving the world, based on the formulated critiques) (Horkheimer, 1972). Scholars in this discipline usually argue that ideologies or widely-held social values and norms, maintain uneven and exploitative structures of power and domination, and should be challenged and dismantled for the sake of collective human welfare and liberation (Horkheimer, 1972; Held, 1980; Agger, 1991). This philosophical perspective, coupled with my critical intersectional feminist standpoint (see Chapter 2), influenced the epistemological approach I employed throughout the writing of this thesis.

During the research process, I was also influenced by feminist poststructuralism, which follows the epistemological perspective of poststructuralism but is specifically focused on issues related to gender, feminism and women's rights (Gavey, 1989). One of poststructuralism's key theoretical tenets is that power-based social relations can be illuminated through the examination of discursive constructions and practices. In this sense, a poststructuralist framework is useful for the purposes of feminist inquiry, as language can be focused on and analysed with the express purpose of illuminating gendered power relations (Gavey, 1989). A feminist poststructuralist perspective allows for examining complexity and contradiction – considering the ways that women are constrained by patriarchal power relations, but also how they may actively challenge dominant discourses and practice agency (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 2007).

Because of my interactions with cam girls, conversations with the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective, and my critical feminist standpoint (see Chapter 2), it was imperative that my participants not be portrayed purely as victims of 'false

consciousness' (Agger, 1991) with a lack of critical awareness about the issues that arise when conducting sex work in a neoliberal capitalist patriarchal system. Instead, I strategically employed elements of critical theory and feminist poststructuralism to bridge the gap between macro- and micro-level social relations; giving due credence to the awareness and autonomy of the women involved in my study while always considering the constraining effects of the wider social structures at play.

## 3.3 Methodology

Braun and Clarke (2013) define 'methodology' as the overarching framework that shapes and informs research practices. I employed an 'exploratory qualitative' methodological approach in this project for two key reasons. Firstly, my epistemology is centred on acquiring knowledge (to the greatest extent possible) for critical, emancipatory purposes. As such, I believed that the most effective way to understand the experiences of cam girls in Aotearoa/New Zealand would be to allow them to provide their own perspectives on the practice – an unavoidably qualitative approach. Thus, I would direct the line of questioning to align to their own interests and concerns (see Section 3.7). Secondly, there has been very little research on the subjective experiences of cam girls in any geographical context, and this is the only existing academic research on cam girls from Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is therefore only sensible to consider this project 'exploratory', as the subject in question has never been investigated before. However, I wish to emphasise that the theoretical underpinnings addressed in the section above, as well as the critical feminist viewpoint explained in Chapter 2, led me to primarily focus on issues that I felt required critical examination and praxis.

### *3.3.1 Rigour*

As Finlay (2006) notes, "one of the biggest challenges confronting qualitative researchers is how to assure the quality and trustworthiness of their research" (p. 319). This is especially crucial in relation to my project, given that I have taken an exploratory approach to a previously unexamined area of inquiry. Finlay

(2006) notes that criteria used to ensure rigour in quantitative studies (research based on numerical and/or statistical data) should not be applied to qualitative studies (research based on observational and/or interview-based data), because elements such as reliability, validity and generalizability cannot be achieved in the same ways. As such, she outlines five dimensions that qualitative researchers should seek to achieve and apply to their work to ensure the data gathered is indicative of rigour (quality and trustworthiness): clarity, credibility, contribution, communicative resonance, and caring (Finlay, 2006).

'Clarity' refers to the extent to which the research "make[s] sense" (Finlay, 2006, p. 322), which I have achieved through the coherent and logical presentation of the data analysed and themes developed, coupled with an explanation of the methods used and their theoretical underpinnings. 'Credibility' refers to the extent to which the findings and conclusions made are "plausible and justified" (Finlay, 2006, p. 322), which I have ensured through the repeated inclusion of direct quotations from participants, and the consistent linking of arguments to pre-established theory. 'Contribution' refers to the extent to which the research seeks to provide helpful change and/or critical guidance, which I have accomplished through my examination of a group of people previously unexplored in academia, and my inclusion of recommendations that lay out potential praxis. 'Communicative resonance' refers to the extent to which findings are "sufficiently vivid or powerful … challenging unthinking complacency … [with knowledge claims] tested and argued in dialogue with others" (Finlay, 2006, p. 322). I have achieved this dimension by presenting data that challenges commonplace understandings of sex work and sex workers, with findings and conclusions that have been thoroughly discussed and debated with my supervisors, other academics and the participants themselves. Finally, 'caring' refers to the extent to which the researcher has shown "respect and sensitivity to participants … [and] concern for the impact of the research" (Finlay, 2006, p. 322), which I have ensured by approaching the research in line with detailed ethical guidelines (see Section 3.6) and the reflexive consideration of my position as researcher (see Section 3.9).

### 3.4 Recruitment

Initial contact with participants occurred either through word of mouth or advertising. Flyers were physically distributed around Auckland City, including Auckland University of Technology (AUT), The University of Auckland (UoA), sex toy shops, and Karangahape Road.[13] Flyers were also shared digitally via social media and various online forums – for example, Reddit and Adult Forum.[14] Digital posts on my personal social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) were made public and repeatedly re-posted by myself, my primary supervisor and members of my personal network, many of whom live in other areas around the country. Such distribution allowed for a national and even international reach, which aided in my recruitment of participants located outside of Auckland. The study was to follow a first-come, first-interviewed basis, with the aim of recruiting 10 to 15 participants.

However, the recruitment process proved to be more difficult than initially hoped, and the data set was reluctantly narrowed down to eight. After several months of advertising the research, these eight were the only people who volunteered and followed through with an interview. During the recruitment process, I was informed by participants and Amber Cutie[15] forum users that I would be exceptionally lucky to find 10 or more Aotearoa/New Zealand-based cam girls, as none were aware of that many existing. Some of the participants

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[13] Karangahape Road (or 'K Road') is a street in central Auckland that features many sex-related businesses, such as strip clubs and sex toy shops. It is also commonly frequented by street sex workers.

[14] Reddit is a popular and globally used online forum with a variety of 'subreddits' focused on specific areas and topics. I posted on the Aotearoa/New Zealand subreddit and another used by sex workers to share experiences and advice. Adult Forum is an Aotearoa/New Zealand website used for by both escorts and clients to share reviews and participate in sex work-related discussions.

[15] Amber Cutie is an online forum where sex workers can chat and give each other advice about the industry. I posted on this forum for recruitment purposes and eventually became engaged in conversation with a range of cam workers from around the world. (While their words are not used in this thesis for analytical purposes, I would like to note that they provided me with helpful advice and information for no compensation, and I am very grateful to them for using their time and effort to educate me.)

theorised that this would be due to increased efforts at anonymity in a small country, with cam girls tending to employ 'geoblockers' to prevent Aotearoa/New Zealand-based users from seeing their streams, and some even pretending to be Australian to bolster the façade.

Numerous conversations were carried out with potential participants and their acquaintances, which (if all followed through) would have allowed the participant pool to reach the originally desired quota. There were several occasions where potential participants either declined to be a part of the study from the beginning, or pulled out of the research after expressing initial interest. Based on the research explored in Chapters 1 and 2, I theorise that most of these people were unwilling to participate not only due to perceived risks around confidentiality (i.e., that they would be 'found out' as sex workers by their personal networks and subjected to the associated stigma), but also because of suspicion that academics who conduct sex work-related research may do so with a patronising and/or abolitionist perspective.

As an example of this, I contacted an Aotearoa/New Zealand cam girl on Amber Cutie on the recommendation of another participant. She replied that she "had enough negative experiences participating in studies, articles etc. that I'd rather just speak with my own voice, on my own platform rather than participate in things like this".[16] This sentiment was echoed by those in my participant pool, with some asking whether I was a 'SWERF' (Sex Worker-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) before agreeing to be interviewed. For instance, the following excerpt is from an email Mina[17] wrote to me after I asked if she would like to get involved:

> My main concern is not wanting to lend my voice to any project that is openly anti-sex work at its core. I want to be able to be honest about the good and bad aspects of the work without worrying that it will end up

[16] The person who wrote this message did not consent to having their details used for the purposes of this thesis, so I have chosen not to reference their username and the date the personal communication took place to protect their anonymity.

[17] 'Mina' is the pseudonym of one of the participants in this study. See 'Table 1: Participant Demographics' for the full list of pseudonyms and participant details.

> being cherry picked to contribute to an anti-sex work narrative. I don't mean to be rude in saying this, I just want to be clear on what I am potentially signing up to (Mina, personal communication, March 23, 2017).

I theorise that much of the hesitance of potential participants to get involved with my research is a consequence of sex work-related research with abolitionist aims. Indeed, the 'SWERF' perspectives discussed in Chapter 2 dominated academia for decades, and it is understandable that those who choose to be involved in the sex industry would be cautious.

Given that Aotearoa/New Zealand has decriminalised sex work since 2003, I had initially hoped that stigma would be lessened and recruitment would be easier in this country than other areas in the world. However, the persistence of sex work-related stigma even expanded into my own life, an experience that is apparently common for sex work researchers (Hammond & Kingston, 2014). As an example of this, I received concerned emails from an AUT security representative about the recruitment posters I had posted around campus, claiming that they feared someone may have been attempting to 'deface' the university. I was later informed that the security team had even called the AUT Ethics Committee to inquire about the legitimacy of my research. These events occurred despite my poster including confirmatory information such as my ethics approval number, my university email, and the names of my AUT-based supervisors. Indeed, the assumption appeared to be that my posters were a prank, or perhaps a more sinister attempt to entrap cam girls.

My experience above echoed an experience that a participant, who was a part of a collective of cam performers at one stage. This participant (Michelle) said she put posters up around her university to recruit students for her cam girls' group, but they were immediately taken down. A representative from her university even threatened to ban her from campus if the posters were put up

again.[18] Student Job Search also refused to put up an advertisement for her cam work, citing an intentionally vague policy to review 'adult industry' jobs on a case-by-case basis.[19]

Overall, while issues with participant recruitment limited the data set, the experiences that occurred because of these issues demonstrate the impact of camming and sex work-related stigma *in and of themselves*, which is the reasoning behind the inclusion of the details in this section.

### 3.4 Participants

Participants sought for this project were required to identify as women, be aged 18 or over, speak English confidently, and either cam in Aotearoa/New Zealand currently or have done so at some point in the last year. However, over the course of data collection I found these conditions to be too restrictive, and through the advice of the participants, I broadened the search to include those who do not *identify* as women but who *perform* as women when camming, as well as anyone who has cammed in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the last five years.

No family, close friends, or students (past or present) of myself or my two supervisors were allowed to participate to prevent any potential ethical quandaries related to power imbalances and coercion. Finally, participation was entirely voluntary, and it was emphasised in the information sheet provided to participants that no incentive to participate (e.g., a monetary reward) would be provided. However, a 'koha' (gift) donation of a $30 grocery voucher was given at the end of each interview as a gesture of thanks.

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[18] It should be noted that this email exchange was forwarded to me as proof, but I have chosen not to name the university for confidentiality reasons.

[19] Student Job Search (SJS) is an Aotearoa/New Zealand-based website that allows employers to specifically advertise positions to university students. Their sex work policy is not publicly displayed on their website, and was instead explained to Michelle via email correspondence. After Michelle's interview, I spoke with an SJS representative on the phone, who provided me with the same information.

The participant pool is comprised of eight people total. Participants were aged between 22 and 34 years old (*M*=25) and cammed for periods ranging from six-seven months to six-seven years. The most common year of activity for the participants was 2015, with some mentioning that this was because audience (client) numbers were particularly plentiful during this period.[20] All identified as cisgender women and European/Pākehā, and all were tertiary-educated. Five participants were based in Auckland, and three were based elsewhere in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Six participants no longer work as cam girls, and two participants still did at the time the interview took place.

Most participants (6 out of 8) identified as either bisexual or pansexual. While demographic statistics of sexuality can range drastically, recent statistics indicate that Aotearoa/New Zealand women who identify as bisexual and/or pansexual are only approximately 2.1% of the national population (Greaves et al., 2017) so the majority number was surprising. This disparity may have been a statistical coincidence given the small sample size, or a result of snowball sampling in my personal networks, given that many of my acquaintances identify as LGBTQ+. However, a recent survey of over 600 sex workers by Sanders et al. (2018) found that many of their respondents (41.8%) identified as bisexual as well. This additional evidence indicates a need for specific research examining bisexuality in sex work, as none currently exists.

The following table details the demographic information provided by participants:

[20] This information was obtained from informal conversation with participants before or after interviews took place. Participants also noted that audience numbers have since 'died down'. Future research is needed that historically quantifies cam site web traffic to discern the extent to which the user base has declined.

***Table 1: Participant Demographics***

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender identity | Cultural identity | Sexuality | Time working |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Serena | 22 | Female | European | Bisexual | 1 year (2015) |
| Amy | 22 | Cis woman | South African / Pākehā European | Bisexual | 1.5 years (2014-2015) |
| Raye | 24 | Female | European | Straight | 1 year (2015) |
| Lita | 26 | Cis female | NZ European | Pansexual | 6-7 years (2009/2010-interview) |
| Mina | 26 | Female | NZ European | Bisexual | 2.5 years (2013/2014-interview) |
| Amara | 27 | Female | European / Pākehā | Bisexual | 6-7 months (2015) |
| Michelle | 34 | Female | NZ European | Straight | 4 years (2012-2016) |
| Trista | 23 | Female | European / Pākehā | Bisexual | 2 years (2014-2016) |

*Note.* Categorisations for gender identity, cultural identity, and sexual orientation were copied verbatim from participants' written or oral descriptions. 'Cis' is shorthand for 'cisgender'. 'NZ' is shorthand for 'New Zealand'. 'Pākehā' is the Māori word for non-Māori and/or European-descended Aotearoa/New Zealanders. Both 'pansexual' and 'bisexual' mean a person who is attracted to people whose gender identities are the same or different to their own. '[YEAR]-interview' means the participant was still working as a cam girl when interviewed. '[YEAR]/[YEAR]' means the participant was unsure of which year they began working. All pseudonyms are character names from the 1995 English dub of anime series 'Sailor Moon', for no particularly meaningful reason.

## 3.6 Ethical issues

The standard ethical considerations in relation to participant research were considered: informed consent, risk of harm, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Participants were protected from deceit about the nature of the research through the provision of a detailed information sheet and consent form (explained in further detail if requested by participants), allowing them to be fully aware of what they were participating in and consenting to (see Appendix B). They were also protected from harm by ensuring their privacy through pseudonyms and the erasure of identifying interview data, such as places of work or location of residence.

Participants were not coerced into participating in any way, as they had to willingly volunteer for the research and were not told they would receive compensation for their time.[21] Participants were reassured about power imbalances (e.g., my ability to potentially breach their confidentiality or misrepresent their perspectives) and encouraged to speak up if they were uncomfortable at any point. They were also given full permission and encouragement to refuse to answer any question or drop out altogether prior to a pre-determined date (which they were informed of and consented to).

Given that this project focuses on participants discussing their experiences and involvement in a heavily stigmatised industry, further ethical issues were also taken into consideration. For example, it was hypothesised that participants may experience a level of embarrassment or discomfort when discussing the more explicit details of their work. While I have repeatedly emphasised that sex work itself is stigmatised, it should be noted that related activities such as nudity and masturbation are viewed negatively as well, especially when practiced by

[21] My belief that sex workers' labour should be fairly compensated is fundamental to my research aims, and I was initially hesitant to approach the interviews in this way. However, I eventually decided that this would be the most ethically justifiable way to approach recruitment to prevent incentivising participation. I explained this to participants after each interview and provided them with as much compensation as I could practically spare from my research funds.

women (Salter, 2016). As such, it was expected that participants may feel discomfort speaking openly about their experiences in sex-related realms. I therefore looked for signs of discomfort and if any participant seemed uneasy, I would ensure they were fine with continuing.

Despite these concerns, it was found that participants were relatively open and enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. I theorise that this is due to each participant choosing to join the project of their own volition, rather than due to financial need or incentive. Indeed, many participants told me they relished the opportunity to openly discuss their work without fear of judgment or paternalistic concern.

Another issue that required further consideration was the possibility that some of the participants might like to seek help and advice in relation to their line of work. As such, an information sheet detailing support services including free counselling, the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective, and the local women's refuge was provided at the end of each interview in case participants wished to seek any of these services. I also sent follow-up information regarding counselling and legal services to a participant who was experiencing online harassment (see Appendix B).

I felt it was important, however, not to appear condescending or imply that any of the participants were ignorant or victimised. Because of this, I tried to make sure participants knew that I believed they were capable of finding these resources themselves, and that my provision of this information was primarily to fulfil the usual ethical requirements of interview-based research – especially on sensitive topics.

Finally, the research design of this project specifically seeks to benefit the lives of the participants and other cam/sex workers. I aim to do this by prioritising the aspects of the practice the participants spoke of as important or notable, and formulating conclusions and recommendations based on this information. Because of this, I endeavoured to treat participants with the greatest respect, especially in terms of their intelligence, agency and personal opinions on the

topic at hand. I also made it clear that the participants' comfort was more important than any data they may provide, which I hope ensured good faith towards myself and my research aims.

As other researchers have emphasised, it is of prime importance for members of socially marginalised groups to have influence on and benefit from any academic research they may be involved in (Dewey & Zheng, 2013). The influence of participants was welcomed in the early stages of research, and I hope that the outcome of the study will prove useful to them and other sex workers who read or hear about the work, especially as this is a key aim of critical feminist research (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 2007). After submission, I will send a report summarising my findings, conclusions and recommendations to participants, and encourage them to disseminate the report in their personal networks and engage in discussion with me about the results.

### 3.7 Data collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the participants, either in person (at the AUT city campus, or in one case the participant's home) or via Skype (usually with both myself and the interviewee physically located in our own homes).[22]

Interviews ranged from approximately one to two hours, sometimes depending on factors such as time constraints (e.g., the participant needing to go to class or work) or the rapport between myself and the interviewee. Generally, however, interviews ended after all my questions were asked and/or covered by the participant, and the length of the interview depended on the amount of information they wished to offer. It was found that Skype interviews tended to be shorter and provide less detail. This was partially due to issues with the

[22] One participant, Trista, was unwilling to travel to AUT for the interview because she was chronically ill at the time. She told me she would feel safest and most comfortable if the interview was conducted in her own home in the presence of a mutual friend of ours. Upon consulting with my supervisor, I obliged to prioritise her health and wellbeing.

technology (e.g., lagging and sound problems), but I theorise that this may have also been due to a lack of rapport-building and intimacy stemming from a lack of physical co-presence between myself and the participants (King-O'Riain, 2015).

Interviews were considered ideal for the purposes of this study because they provided in-depth personal accounts of the experiences of women from a relatively unmediated vantage point. The semi-structured verbal nature of the interviews also allowed responses to be more free-form and on the spot which is often considered preferable in critical feminist research frameworks over written responses (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2007). Each interview was therefore guided by the participant to the greatest extent possible, allowing them to focus on the topics they felt were most pertinent in relation to their own experiences, and brush over topics that they had little-to-no connection to. Although I had my own set of questions and research interests, participants were able (and encouraged) to direct the conversation to areas they found important and interesting, which sometimes led to unexpected results.

The interviews conducted with participants were transcribed verbatim in an orthographic style (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). This means that features of the talk such as laughter, filler noises such as “um” or “uh”, and emphasised words were included during the transcription process. One interview was fully transcribed by myself, and I also transcribed portions of several others. The remainder of the transcripts were completed by hired transcribers under strict rules of confidentiality (see Appendix C).[23] After the process was completed, I double-checked each transcript to ensure the data was accurately interpreted

[23] I initially planned to transcribe all the interviews myself, but was prevented from doing so because of time constraints. At this point I contacted the AUT Ethics Committee, who informed me that external transcription would be an acceptable minor change and would not require an official amendment to the original application (see Appendix A). Each participant who had yet to be transcribed was then contacted to request their permission for external transcription, and all provided their explicit consent.

and presented in the correct style, and then removed any names and identifiable information.

Data excerpts are presented in the analysis chapters in quote form, with "…" being used to denote data that has been removed for clarity or brevity. Words that have been verbally emphasised (i.e., said loudly or forcefully) are underlined. Commas are used to denote pauses and question marks are used to indicate a verbal upturn, rather than for grammatical purposes. Any participant talk referenced in the analysis chapters will be italicised and presented in quotation marks (if under 50 words) or in a separate single-spaced paragraph (if over 50 words).

## 3.8 Method of data analysis

The method used to analyse the transcribed data was 'thematic analysis', in line with the definition and process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, 2013). Broadly, "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), though the specific tools and processes used to develop themes may range depending on the researcher's epistemological perspective and the type of data in question. As Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise, it is essential for thematic analysts not to present themselves as passive 'excavators' of themes that emerge, unmediated, from the data set. Instead, researchers should consider themselves an active part of the analysis process – "[acknowledging] their own theoretical positions and values" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80) and their impact on the themes created and conclusions made.

I used thematic analysis to identify discernible patterns in participants' descriptions of camming. Initially I focused on some practical themes (e.g., earnings, frequency, processes) to pinpoint similarities and differences between participants' experiences (see Chapter 4). However, because my epistemological stance was informed by critical theory and feminist poststructuralism, I then purposefully coded the data in relation to participants' experiences of labour as per Marxist and critical theory (see Chapter 5), and their

subjectivities in line with feminist poststructuralist writing and frameworks (see Chapter 6). As such, I consider my approach a combination of 'inductive' (data-driven and not guided by pre-existing assumptions, to the best of the researcher's ability) and 'theoretical' (driven by the researcher's specific theoretical interest) thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, my approach was more focused on the development of 'latent' themes, as opposed to 'semantic' (explicit, surface-level), because I primarily sought to "examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

The following section will outline the process I followed to thematically analyse the transcribed data, in line with the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarisation with the data: To complete this step, I listened to each interview recording repeatedly, transcribed at least a section of most interviews (and proof-read/edited all externally transcribed portions), read and re-read each transcript, and made a range of preliminary brainstorms in relation to my initial interpretations of the data.

2. Generating initial codes: This step involved the development of preliminary 'codes' or to put it another way, noticeable patterns repeating across the data set. I began this process by printing each transcript and using different coloured pens to highlight trends, writing down specific wording for codes to create consistency during the next part of this stage. I then specifically coded each transcript in Microsoft Word with review comments (using the consistently-worded codes developed earlier), so that they could be searched across documents later.

3. Searching for themes: During this stage, I made several documents and wrote down summaries of recurring themes that I consistently noticed in the interview transcripts, making sure to include relevant examples from the data or to note down page numbers where relevant quotes from the transcripts could be found.

I used the printed and highlighted transcripts discussed above to facilitate this process, cutting out sections with scissors and experimenting with different groupings.

4. Reviewing themes: At this point, several of the themes I had developed proved either inconsistent, irrelevant, or were able to be merged. This stage of the analysis process involved refining the themes – removing extracts that did not fit or effectively portray the points being made, and reworking themes that were unclear or conceptually overlapped with others. At the end of this phase, I had a succinct range of themes that encompassed the areas that were relevant to the aims and theoretical underpinnings of the project.

5. Defining and naming themes: In this stage, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that themes should be 'defined and refined' by "organising them into a coherent and internally consistent account, with accompanying narrative … [identifying] what is interesting about them and why" (p. 92). This may include the identification of sub-themes that can be used to structure and organise particularly large or complex themes. To complete step five, I considered the 'story' I was trying to tell (Braun & Clarke, 2006) about my data, and how to organise my analysis accordingly. For instance, during this stage I decided that before I presented the reader with deeper analysis, a broad and surface-level thematic introduction to camming practices should be outlined to ensure understanding and clarity ('telling the story').

6. Producing the report: Finally, step six involved the writing of the analytic chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis). This stage involved extensive revision – reorganising and reintegrating data into different sections, rewording themes for narrative clarity, and the reluctant removal of themes that were not seen to sufficiently "capture the essence of the point [I was] demonstrating, without unnecessary complexity" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). The most pertinent findings and implications of each analysis chapter were then summarised and written for the purposes of the conclusion chapter (see Chapter 7).

## 3.9 Positioning the researcher

I am a bisexual[24] Pākehā cisgender woman in my mid-twenties, positioning me as similar to most of the participants in terms of age and cultural, gender and sexual identity. Given that I am demographically on par with the participants, I theorise that they may have felt more at ease and open to discussing their experiences – and indeed, some did assure me that this was the case. I will note, however, that my not being a sex worker may have been a barrier to fully understanding participants' experiences, and I regret that this study was unable to more fully involve the participants as fellow researchers. However, I am a proponent of the '(co)production' of knowledge between researchers and sex workers (Berger & Guidroz, 2014) and I believe that my position and experience as an academic has its own separate and important value.

I have never worked any jobs commonly placed under the sex worker umbrella (e.g., camming, stripping, pornography, or escorting) and I would therefore not assign myself the identity label of 'sex worker' or claim to be privy to their specific experiences. However, I would still argue that I have participated in activities (both paid and unpaid) that are similar to those assigned the label of 'sex work' – only these activities are *not* labelled as such, and I theorise that I was not stigmatised for that reason. As other sex work researchers have discussed in relation to their own experiences (Zangger, 2015) I have never had sex for money, but throughout my life I have engaged in sexual activities for other material benefits (e.g., drinks, a place to sleep, or a ride home). While I did not overtly request these benefits or frame the experience as an exchange, I nevertheless engaged in these practices primarily to attain them. Upon reflection, I believe the only key difference between these activities and sex work is the lack of an explicit verbal or written agreement qualifying the exchange,

[24] I only disclosed my sexual orientation to participants who also identified as pan- or bisexual, usually during the interview process when asking about the extent to which they felt their sexual orientation affected the way they approached sex work. I did this to build mutual trust and as a form of LGBT+ solidarity.

and I question the extent to which these practices can (or should) be considered markedly different.

Additionally, I did casual paid work as a 'promo girl'[25] during my undergraduate degree – a job which, somewhat ironically, I found through Student Job Search (the same service that refused to put up a camming advertisement for Michelle). This position usually involved dressing provocatively and flirting with patrons, which is in many ways on par with camming practices, though with the added danger of often being physically proximate to intoxicated older men. However, promo girls are socially divorced from the sex worker category, and therefore privileged above other forms of sex(ual) work (Henry & Farvid, 2017).

Through this position and part-time retail work, I honed the ability to conduct sexualised emotional labour (Sanders, 2005; Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006) for tips and higher sales. I still find these skills advantageous in a variety of contexts, both paid and unpaid.[26] Again, I would argue that employing sexual labour for profit is sex work by definition, but this remains socially contested. Overall, as a feminist, an academic and a labour rights advocate, I find these inconsistencies and hypocrisies irritating and harmful, thus informing my interest in this project and the topic of sex work as a whole.

## 3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the epistemological standpoint of this thesis, presented the participant demographics and justified my research approach, including ethical considerations and recruitment methods. I also explained the

[25] Promo girls are young women hired to promote products and companies, usually at events. In my experience, promo girls are expected to be sexually attractive (in line with current social norms – e.g., thin and long-legged). I was personally expected to present myself in a stereotypically feminine manner, both physically (e.g., by wearing make-up and high heels) and in disposition (e.g., by acting giggly and flirtatious).

[26] I am choosing not to provide examples of ways I have done and continue to do this, lest I offend any colleagues and acquaintances who may read this. (Also, these strategies are less effective if made explicit, and I wish to continue my own form of patriarchal bargaining.)

transcription process, participant quotation presentation, and the method of critical thematic analysis I used to interpret the data. Finally, I situated myself as a researcher in relation to the participants and the project as a whole, with the intention of providing insight into my personal standpoint and the extent to which it shapes my 'knowledge claims' (Patnaik, 2013).

In the next chapter, I will provide a comprehensive overview of participants' descriptions of camming, including the reported frequency of sessions, financial earnings, general procedures, and contextual factors that would lead to variations in their usual process.

# Chapter Four

## The Nature and Process of Camming

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine participants' descriptions of the camming process. First, I outline participants' reports of the frequency of camming (Section 4.2) and the amount of money they earned (Section 4.3), while exploring the range of factors that affected these aspects of the work. Next, I describe the general process that participants followed when conducting cam sessions, before discussing circumstances that led to variations in their usual procedures. Finally, I will examine how the medium used to facilitate the session – for example, a hosting cam site, or a Skype call – was described as affecting the participants' style of performance, the clients attracted, and their financial success (or lack thereof).

### 4.2 Frequency

On average, most participants described camming for approximately two or three hours per session, three to five times a week. Every participant also reported frequently adjusting their camming hours depending on a range of factors. What was considered 'more' or 'less' time working varied across participants – for some, 'less' would mean not camming at all for weeks at a time, while for others 'less' meant working two or three times a week instead of five. Some participants reported camming less if they were particularly busy with other work or study, or if they were experiencing burn out. Conversely, participants reported camming more when they needed more income than usual (e.g., to pay a bill, or after losing other employment) or when wanting to take a break from another job (e.g., minimum wage hospitality, or in-person sex work).

Participants noted that camming could be conducted at any time and available customers were almost always online, which gave the job an appealing level of flexibility. Because of these affordances, it was found that participants' work schedules varied widely. However, participants also noted that regular clients tended to expect them to be online at the same times on the same days, which lessened the extent to which they felt they could work at their personal convenience. Furthermore, participants stressed that most of their audience tended to live in particular countries (usually Australia or the United States) and would log on at particular times (usually in the evening on weekdays) so the time zone and personal schedules of most of their customers needed to be considered. Therefore, while it is possible to cam sporadically, participants emphasised it is unlikely that they could do so with financial success, and they tended to work a semi-regular schedule for this reason.

### 4.3 Earnings

The reported earnings of cam work varied across participants. For example, Serena reported making about $400 New Zealand dollars (NZD) a week via My Free Cams (MFC)[27], plus $100 NZD via PayPal[28] (her compensation method for independent Skype sessions with clients) and gifts (usually items she would list publically on an Amazon Wish List[29] linked on her MFC homepage). She emphasised, though, that her earnings varied and were based on "*luck*", meaning how many customers were online and how willing they were to pay for her services. According to Serena, "*there were some weeks where you could*

[27] My Free Cams is a popular cam site, providing models who use the service with deposits into their bank account that are equivalent to their earnings (acquired through an online token system, with each token being worth a certain amount of United States dollars).

[28] PayPal is a website that facilitates an online exchange of currency without needing to provide the person sending money with the bank account information of the person receiving it.

[29] Amazon is a web-based retailer that allows users to create a 'wish list': a publically-accessible registry of items available on the website that can be bought and sent to the person who made the list.

*make, like a hundred dollars and there was some weeks where you could make, like, eight hundred*".

Other participants had a monetary quota they aimed to achieve every day or week. For example, Mina aimed to make $200 NZD a day, and would therefore perform as many daily $100 United States dollars (USD) cum shows[30] as necessary. Importantly, the cam site she used, Streamate, takes 65% of earnings. She would therefore only receive $35 USD in take-home money per $100 USD show, making her cum show routine span four or five performances per day, depending on the currency exchange rate at the time. It should be noted that the amount of time it would take per show to meet this quota ranged, so I could not determine her average hourly income. Shows were described by all participants as ranging so broadly that none spoke of an average hourly rate, and the financial instability associated with this factor was usually discussed as something that prevented them from relying on cam work as a steady form of revenue.

All participants noted that camming was not their only source of income. They either earned additional money from other work and/or sex work, or they had access to a government supplement of some kind (e.g., a student allowance, or a sickness benefit). Some participants described having brief periods where camming was their only source of income, but it was usually said to be far too precarious to do exclusively all the time. Indeed, Standing's (2011) conception of the 'precariat' is in line with participants' descriptions of their social and economic standing as a cam girl. Participants spoke of the job as a form of informalised labour, and camming was either discussed optimistically as independent and flexible, or critically as exploitative and financially unstable.

## 4.4 General process and performance style

[30] Cum show is a commonly-used name for a session in which a cam model, upon reaching their financial goal, performs sexual acts on themselves until they 'cum' (reach or fake an orgasm).

Most participants described having a typical camming procedure that was loosely adhered to. Before they began livestreaming, some participants would advertise the upcoming session on their social media profiles, constructed 'in character' as their cam persona (see Chapter 6). This might include putting a 'Tweet' on their Twitter profile[31] or sending a 'Snap' to regular clients via their Snapchat account.[32] These posts would provide potential clients with information about where and when the planned cam session would take place (e.g., My Free Cams in one hour's time).

The performance style used in the camming sessions themselves varied across participants. For instance, Serena described putting up a 'banner' (a message typed by the model which could be seen in the chat box by clients) advertising what she would do for however many tokens: "*It's twenty tokens, for you to spank yourself and it's like, a hundred tokens for a flash and … ten tokens for you to blow a kiss*". She would then livestream herself in her bedroom, where she would play music, make conversation, perform various sexual acts and verbally state her thanks to those who 'tipped' her (gave her tokens). She would also mention on the banner how many tokens it would take before she would do a cum show, after which her session would usually end.

Lita followed a similar routine, but noted that she tended to reply to clients via the typed chat feature as opposed to via spoken words, often turning her audio off. She reported doing this because "*most of the time they just want to make fun of the [Aotearoa/New Zealand] accent*" instead of getting 'straight to business' (offering her tokens for sex acts). This experience also indicates the globalised nature of the practice. While Lita did not block local IP addresses from being able to access her livestream (a feature on cam sites that was used

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[31] Twitter is a social media website, allowing users to publically post photos, videos, links and text-based messages. A Tweet is a short message or status update posted on Twitter, sometimes with an attached photo or video.

[32] Snapchat is a smartphone application, allowing users to send photo/video-based content to other users. A Snap is a photo or short video sent via Snapchat, sometimes with an attached message.

by most participants), she noted that only approximately 25% of her clients lived in Aotearoa/New Zealand, meaning that most of her audience were situated in English-speaking countries with a discernibly unalike accent (e.g., Canada or the United States).

Other participants gamified their camming sessions using chance and themed activities. For instance, Amy described rolling a die or picking a number out of a bag, with each number corresponding to a sexual act that she would do after being given a specific number of tokens. As she further illustrates, "*sometimes I might [write a client's username] on my body, or … take off one piece of clothing, um, so that … tends to go on for quite a while, 'cause it's quite fun*" (Amy). Raye, who followed a similarly game-based method, also described the process as "*fun*". Some of Raye's activities included painting pictures with her breasts, cooking naked, and putting shaving cream on her nipples, which she would light on fire for the amusement of her clients (she quickly reassured me, "*it doesn't hurt … you like, flick it off*").

Notably, Raye was the only woman interviewed who did not masturbate or perform other sexual acts beyond caressing her body while camming. As she worked primarily as a stripper, she described following the same protocol in terms of what she would and would not do for clients. Some of her clients were already regulars of hers from the strip club where she worked, but she described amassing a sizeable camming client base despite her refusal to participate in cum shows (which typically gained other participants the most money and followers). However, unlike the other participants who used cum shows as their 'grand finish' – signing out after a usually faked orgasm – Raye's methods did not have as clear of an ending point: "*So you just close it off [when you feel like it]. You'll be like, 'eeehh, I'm going now'*".

### 4.5 Variations in process and performance style

This section will explore some of the factors that made participants alter their process and/or performance style from the general format discussed in the section above. These factors include the number of people watching the

participant's show, what they assumed certain audiences wanted to see, where they were physically located when the show took place, how much money they wanted to make, and the specific medium they used to facilitate the encounter.

Audience numbers, whether large or small, were described as affecting the participants' performances. For example, a particularly small audience was described as inspiring less effort, whereas a large audience (or one comprised of mostly regulars) was generally described as more "*exciting*" and "*social*" (Serena). It should be noted that what participants considered 'large' or 'small' was subjective and dependent on their usual level of popularity. Raye, for example, described having an average of 150 people in her room at a time, while Lita said her usual number of viewers ranged between 7 and 20. Amy said her low was around 10 and her high was around 100, and Serena said that she could go from about 30 people in her room to thousands.

The assumed sexual proclivities and income level of clients were other factors considered by participants. For example, some clients preferred a more submissive persona, others a more dominant one, and others had very specific, uncommon or taboo fetishes.[33] If the client in question was a particularly generous tipper, or offered a large amount of money for a preferred act, it was found that participants would be more likely to alter their persona to suit them. Alternatively, if the client seemed unlikely to compensate them enough, often participants said they would not bother with them and continue a show with their usual persona.

Michelle said that she "*[became] really experienced in, like sexually profiling people and they could just say one thing to me and I'd know what they want and … the role to play*". She further explained that she often had clients with

[33] The terms dominant and submissive refer to whether the participant depicted themselves as being *in* control of their client, or as *being* controlled by their client. For example, if presenting as dominant, the participant might verbally humiliate the client or give instructions they would be expected to follow. Conversely, if submissive, the participant might humiliate or harm themselves (e.g., spanking with a paddle), or allow themselves to be controlled in some capacity (e.g., via a Bluetooth vibrator operated remotely by the client).

paedophilic or incest-related fantasies, some of whom were reluctant to state that overtly, and she would notice their tendencies and tailor her cam persona to fulfil their preferences. Michelle would also provide more attention and enthusiasm to clients who seemed likely to pay her more, noting that she ended up with several clients who were "*really wealthy, really successful, [even] really famous*". Indeed, Michelle and a number of other participants claimed there was a significant overlap between clients with taboo kinks and clients who were willing to pay more, so these were the clients Michelle strategically made the most accommodations for.

It should be noted, though, that potential income was sometimes described as less important than participants' personal moral principles. Serena, for instance, refused to pretend to be underage no matter how lucrative the offer, reporting that she did not want to engage with or encourage paedophiles. However, she was willing to participate in kinks that she found amusing or innocuous, such as wearing multiple sanitary liners at a time ("*he wanted me to wear like, six of them*") or pretending to be a dog ("*twenty minutes, just like, on the floor, barking*").

The physical location participants worked in was another factor that could lead to changes in their approach. Every participant worked from the home they were living in at the time, but their circumstances ranged from living with parents, living alone, renting with flatmates, and sharing a bedroom with a partner. For example, Serena stated that she initially cammed out of her parent's home without their knowledge. She therefore needed to avoid raising suspicion, and described instances such as telling her parents that the packages she received from clients under her cam name were for a friend who had an address that was difficult to deliver to.

Another participant, Amy, reported that she cammed in a flatting situation with people who were aware and accepting of her work, and she therefore did not need to expend effort to keep her activities secret. However, Amy noted that the peak hours for her to make money – approximately 11:00pm to 2:00am Aotearoa/New Zealand time – still required her to be conscious of the people

she lived with: "*everyone's asleep I have to do my job when everything's like, quiet … I wish I could do it at like nine, ten … in the morning everyone's out (laughs)".* Amy also noted that this constraint affected her choice of cam persona (see Chapter 6), which invariably had to be submissive because "*dominatrix type work is quite hard when you can't be loud … I can't be like, 'get on the ground motherfucker!'*"

Conversely, participants who cammed in homes where they lived alone or only with romantic partners did not describe having either of these issues, and said they were usually able to cam wherever, whenever, and as loudly as they wanted to. These participants still had certain limitations, though – Lita, for example, stated that she had to avoid camming in her bedroom because her pet cat tended to walk past the screen or pull out her power plug. It should also be noted that every participant who reported having a romantic partner claimed to be open about their cam work to them, though they described needing to expend additional 'emotion work' to keep their partners content (see Chapter 5).

As discussed in the preceding section relating to frequency and earnings, the desired income for participants ranged depending on factors such as whether they had bills to pay, or whether they had additional income they could rely on. For example, Raye said that "*if it was really slow at the [strip] club I would pick up my camming hours*", and Trista would increase her hours for short periods of time when experiencing burn out from physically co-present sex work (escorting). None of the participants described committing to living purely on camming, and as Amy noted, "*I'm just wanting to survive from week to week. I think women who that is their sole income … approach it in a completely different way than I did*".[34]

[34] Further research is needed to compare the methods of those seeking a living income solely from cam work.

The following sections will discuss some of the key differences and similarities in the participants' described experiences based on the specific medium used to facilitate the session.

### *4.5.1 Using cam sites*

Each cam site was described by participants as having different "*cultures*" (Serena, and Mina). These cam site cultures included the 'girl next door' look and persona prioritised on My Free Cams and LiveJasmin, and the sexual free-for-all facilitated by sites like Chaturbate and Streamate. According to participants, these expectations needed to be considered and abided by to achieve financial success. The following sections examine some of the most frequently discussed cam sites.

#### *4.5.1.1 My Free Cams*

My Free Cams (MFC) was the most popularly used site amongst those interviewed, with six out of eight participants (Serena, Amy, Raye, Lita, Mina and Trista) using the service at some point in their camming career. The site's tag-line is "the #1 free adult webcam community", though according to global web traffic statistics, MFC is actually the fourth most popular camming site, below Chaturbate, LiveJasmin and BongaCams ("Adult Camming Sites With The Most Traffic", 2018).

Participants who used My Free Cams reported that it was popular enough to ensure a consistent client base, and that it was an efficient way to find clients who would be willing to participate in external Skype-based exchanges (see Section 4.5.2 for more detail). Participants who did not use MFC said it was either because they wanted to focus primarily on selling short videos via Extra

Lunch Money[35] as opposed to livestreaming (Amara), or it was avoided *because* of its popularity in an attempt to preserve anonymity (Michelle).

The first week as a model on My Free Cams was described as "*so important*" (Amy). According to participants, MFC models are tagged with a 'new model' banner during their first seven days of work and advertised near the top of the homepage. This was described as a crucial time because this was when new models could be seen by the most members, establish a client base and raise their CamScore. Serena reported regretting the way she handled her first week, because she did not have good equipment at the time – "*everyone was typing like, you're so blurry, I can't even hear you*" – which prevented her from 'taking advantage' of the added publicity.

Participants who used My Free Cams said only certain kinds of hair, make-up, outfits and bodies were considered 'acceptable' by clients and other models. Serena described MFC as "*a weird like [beauty] pageant or something*", in that it was primarily populated by "*girls with long hair and … perfect bodies*" who would compete for the "*monthly title of Miss My Free Cams, [which would be given to] the person that has the highest CamScore*".[36] Amy agreed that My Free Cams encouraged pageant-esque norms of female appearance, noting that MFC models were almost all "*femme*[37] *and skinny and white*", with Serena adding that "*there were hardly any of like, the top models that I would consider like, curvy*".

[35] Extra Lunch Money is a website that facilitates payment for online content (e.g., pre-paid cam sessions or bespoke pornography). Extra Lunch Money does not host livestreams on the site itself, instead serving to facilitate contact and payment between buyers and sellers.

[36] A MFC model's CamScore is automatically calculated based on the number of tokens she earns over a certain period of time, the length of which is not made clear to models or clients.

[37] Femme is a term that refers to people who present a stereotypically 'feminine' appearance. The application of this term is subjective, but is often applied to those who wear make-up, dresses or other womanly accoutrements.

Amy described her own body as somewhere between BBW[38] and the average My Free Cams worker: "*BBW [models are] probably like double my weight and that's the most of it, like there is not that many people who are my weight category which is fat but … [more] curvy or soft*". However, Amy argued that this gave her an "*advantage*" on MFC, as her body occupied a niche category between two 'extremes' that was sought after by several clients. Conversely, Mina said she was less popular on MFC than she could have been because of her body, which was also not skinny but not heavy enough to be considered BBW: "*I'm not the most marketable … I'm plus size and I have tattoos … all the top models [were] petite, pale, brunette, young … [the] girl next door*".

The "*girl next door*" is a slang phrase with varying definitions. Solomon, Ashmore and Longo (1992) define the girl next door as a woman with "a natural, un-made up appearance and simple attire" (p. 25), while Rossi (1975) defines the girl next door in terms of personality, as a woman that is "cheerful … safe, familiar, and ultimately boring" (p. 92). Perhaps unsurprisingly, websites with user-generated definitions tend to describe the girl next door in relation to how she makes men feel. According to TV Tropes, the girl next door is a woman the "male protagonist might have known when growing up, and whom he might like without feeling intimidated" ("Girl Next Door", n.d., para. 1), while the top Urban Dictionary definition claims she is "unspoiled by other men and so sweet-natured it almost frightens you to think of her in explicit sexual situations. Almost." ("girl next door", 2005, para. 1-2).

Broadly speaking, then, the 'girl next door' matches participants' descriptions of successful MFC models: feminine-presenting and easy to 'get along' with, thus fitting Christian norms of womanhood both in appearance and demeanour. Notably, Amy always presented as submissive, which may explain why she found success on My Free Cams despite having a 'non-normative' body (in the sense of what is considered 'normal' on MFC). However, Mina has tattoos and

[38] BBW stands for Big Beautiful Women. The acronym is generally used to refer to sex workers who weigh more than those commonly portrayed in pornographic media.

always presented as dominant when camming, because she said even attempting a submissive persona caused "*a disdain that's visible on my face*". Given that the most prevalent recurring theme in definitions of the girl next door is 'non-threatening', this may explain why Mina was not as "*marketable*" on MFC.

#### *4.5.1.2 Chaturbate*

Despite being the most popular cam site globally ("Adult Camming Sites With The Most Traffic", 2018), Chaturbate was not commonly used by participants. However, it was often discussed as a basis of comparison to the sites participants preferred. For example, Serena described Chaturbate as "*very different [from MFC] … far more strictly, um (pause) sexual*", while Raye laughingly commented "*Chaturbate's gross*", later recommending that I not visit the site myself to research it.

Participants claimed the "*gross*" and "*sexual*" culture of the site stemmed from the lack of stringent rules compared to other cam sites. For example, people of any gender can cam on Chaturbate, while My Free Cams only allows cisgender women to be models. Chaturbate also allows couples of any gender to engage in sexual intercourse on cam, whereas MFC only allows registered cisgender female models to cam together ("Rules For Models", 2018). Generally, participants reported that Chaturbate clients cared less about establishing a relationship with a 'girl next door' and more about seeing graphic content, in real time, with sexual acts on request.

Participants also said that many cammers on the site opted for a setting that prevented people who watched them from being able to pay them: "*you can choose … to be Chaturbating, which is when you can get, um, tipped and earn money … [or] you can just put Exhibitionist and people can just watch … there's some old people that do that*" (Serena). Serena repeatedly emphasised that users of Chaturbate are "*old*" or "*older*", differentiating between those who find success as paid cam models – young, attractive, and entrepreneurial women like herself – and those whose success stems primarily from their willingness to work for free and their enjoyment of being watched during sex.

However, Mina theorised that the purely sexual (or more mutual) practices that take place on Chaturbate are "*healthier*" than paid camming:

> *Mina: I have a friend … she works on Chaturbate, and apparently if you earn money on there you can spend it on others … she was like 'I just get paid to then go and watch other models' … so you're just working to trade your porn, essentially … It's like a nice little organic system that she's got going on, she's no interest in making it a job … that's the difference, she loves going online, she loves all the guys, because … she only does what she wants … so, that's the best way really, the healthiest way to do it long term.*[39]

In the above extracts, Serena and Raye tacitly categorise Chaturbate's free exhibitionist camming as sad, disgusting and/or bizarre, indicating a preference for My Free Cams' paid communication-based camming. Contrarily, Mina categorises exhibitionist trade-based camming as "*nice*", "*organic*" and "*healthy*", situating paid communication-based camming as sad, disgusting and bizarre precisely *because* of the 'paid' aspect. These descriptions indicate that motivations to pursue camming (and perceptions of what kind of camming is 'better' and 'worse') range, and that cam site-based camming is far from uniform.

#### *4.5.1.3 Other cam sites*

Participants used a variety of other cam sites during their time in the industry. For example, Amy used LiveJasmin when not using My Free Cams, Mina and Michelle primarily used Streamate, and Amara mostly opted for My Girl Fund. These cam sites have similarities and differences which were found to be more or less suited to each participant, such as remuneration, which could range from 50% of earnings (MFC) to 65% (Streamate). In these instances, participants described weighing up the costs and benefits of the site and whether the

[39] In this extract, Mina suggests the existence of an online pornography 'gift economy' (Hellekson, 2009) where sex work is provided for free without the explicit expectation of reciprocity. While notable, this is an occurrence that has yet to be examined academically and should be investigated in more detail elsewhere.

increased business and/or higher overall pay was worth the cut taken by site owners.

Cam sites were reported to have similar policies for public and private sessions. For example, public sessions on most cam sites allow casual viewers to watch and participate in a chat room without a set fee per minute. Conversely, private sessions are generally paid-per-minute, require a verified account, and cannot be accessed by passing members of the public. However, there are variations across platforms – for example, some sites allow models to prevent those without verified accounts or pre-bought tokens from interacting with the model via chat. This was referred to as 'muting' guests and was said to be common practice on My Free Cams. Other sites, such as My Girl Fund, do not allow the users to talk to *each other*, thus lessening the extent to which a client community is able to form.[40]

Further to this, some sites do not allow any sexual acts to occur in public chat, such as LiveJasmin: "*so if they wanted [cum shows] they'd have to pay per minute, and take you private … it was a more like a business model [than My Free Cams]*" (Amy). As such, despite LiveJasmin taking a higher percentage cut than MFC (60% as opposed to 50%), Amy could still profit more on the former from paid-per-minute private sessions. However, as Amy detailed, these sessions weren't exactly lucrative, as customers tended to want to get off – both figuratively and literally – as quickly as possible:

> *Amy: If you're not that popular you can't charge like high amounts per minute so it'd be like … three or four American dollars per minute um, which after like sixty percent taken off is like, fuck all like (laughs) if you are only getting like ten minutes … you're not gonna like … take between thirty forty minutes … they want a quick orgasm.*

[40] Numerous participants indicated the extent to which relationships formed between the clients *themselves*, especially given the chat-room format of cam sites. Further research is needed that specifically explores the experiences of those who buy the services of cam models.

The different rules and regulations of each cam site were also argued by participants as contributing to the type of clients likely to pursue cam workers on each website:

> *Amara: [On] My Girl Fund you get paid messages as well … there's much more of a chat component I guess than a lot of other sites, so a lot of people looking for girlfriend experience stuff in particular would use that site.*

It was reported that cam sites like Streamate do not enforce stringent rules around fetishes, whereas sites like My Free Cams have guidelines (e.g., no incest-play or urine shows) which can, if disobeyed, lead to the model being banned from the site. According to participants, it was therefore far more likely that fetishists and otherwise highly sexual clients would show up on websites like Chaturbate and Streamate – "*[they're] much more 'wham bam thank you ma'am'*" (Mina) – whereas sites like MFC and My Girl Fund would tend to attract those seeking a 'deeper', more communication-based relationship with a cam model.

### *4.5.2 Conducting independent sessions*

Every participant reported also doing cam work without the use of a cam site, usually through a free-to-use social media application like Skype or FaceTime. In these circumstances, clients were usually described as regulars who solicited the participant (or were solicited *by* the participant) for personal contact information. While sharing an email address or phone number is a bannable offense on most cam sites, it was said that there are methods of doing so undetected (e.g., by coding an email address in a way that is unlikely to trigger bots[41] or the attention of the site's moderators). The model and client would then contact each other to agree upon the amount of time and money (e.g., 60

[41] Bots are software that can be coded to pick up on certain kinds of text and number combinations.

minutes on Skype for $180 NZD), and the session would take place after the client put money in the participant's bank account or PayPal.

These sessions were often described as preferable to those that took place on cam sites. For example, Serena reported that insisting on a certain amount of time (enforcing a minimum of 30 minutes was apparently common practice) prevented the quick "*not worth it*" private sessions she experienced on My Free Cams. Amy also described independent camming as a win-win situation, because she could make the per-minute price cheaper for the client while making more money herself by bypassing the intermediary, thus "*profit[ing] fully from the fruits of [my] own labour*".

However, independent work was also described as having its drawbacks. For example, Trista reported that she often got deceived ("*scammed*") into providing services for free when conducting the work outside of the regulated cam site environment. Scamming via independent sessions was described as occurring for two main reasons. Firstly, participants needed to handle the financial exchange themselves, which often involved dealing with foreign currency and unfamiliar bank transfer applications. Participants reported that some clients would take advantage of their confusion and inexperience by misleading them into believing that money had already been transferred for their services, but the funds had not been processed by their bank yet. (To clarify: These clients did not actually pay, and evidently did not plan to.)

Participants also noted that using PayPal as a payment method, while convenient, could be exploited by clients who used the site's clause forbidding sex work-related transactions to get the money refunded back to them. This was described as a drawback specific to online sex work, as those who also participated in offline sex work reported that the latter transactions tended to involve receiving cash up front.

### *4.5.3 Media convergence*

Finally, many other forms of media were used to either link clients to the participants' cam pages, maintain relationships with clients, or sell additional mediated sexual services (e.g., sexually explicit photos or videos).

Social media were used by many participants as a way of interacting with clients and advertising future cam sessions, because as Trista noted, "*it's really annoying having to use the email system on the [camming] website so [I'd] use Snapchat instead*". Many participants reported that they maintained either an Instagram, a Twitter, a Facebook, a Snapchat, or some combination of these applications. Participants also noted that all their social media accounts were in the name of their cam persona (see Chapter 6), thus requiring their performances to span beyond the paid camming sessions. Serena said this went as far as requiring her to own two phones, "*one camming phone and then one [Serena] phone*", and that she would regularly text her clients and interact with them, in character, via her social media accounts.

Snapchat particularly was widely used by participants, not only to advertise cam sessions on host websites, but to maintain relationships with regulars – for example, by sending flirtatious Snaps to their accounts every so often. Further to this, participants said they would sell subscriptions to their Snapchats for a certain amount of money. This was apparently usually done via PayPal, though Snapchat also has a payment system called Snapcash that could be used as well. However, it was reported that it would need to be used discreetly, as selling sexual services using Snapcash is against Snapchat Terms and Conditions ("Snap Inc. Terms of Service", 2017).

Lita noted that for a period she was more financially successful through Snapchat subscriptions than her cam site, theorising that "*people want something they can access on their phone at any time as opposed to sitting at home in a room with a computer*". This seems to indicate that despite camming being a form of sex work that is convenient in the (static) private sphere, there may be impetus for the accessibility and availability of more public (but likely hidden) mobile contexts.

Additionally, Trista reported selling sexually-explicit photos and videos via the Snapchat application itself:

> *Trista: You get it done a lot quicker [than camming] … it's like ten seconds so you'll send like a minute and you'll go like 'here's everything, now you buy me this off Amazon' or actually make it the other way around first, they always have to buy or pay first.*

Many participants, using the same cam persona and sometimes the same host websites (e.g., Extra Lunch Money), would also sell bespoke pornography.[42] While this cannot be considered camming, and nor can any of the above practices (as the services sold were not livestreamed), the creation of bespoke pornography and the strategic employment of multiple media platforms was nevertheless referred to as a usual part of the camming experience by most participants.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a comprehensive background of camming practices, as described by participants. This included general procedures, how often each participant cammed, how much they tended to earn, and variables taken into consideration when undertaking the process. This section serves the dual purpose of contributing to a broader and more detailed academic understanding of what camming entails, and to provide the reader with sufficient context to engage with the remainder of the analysis and discussion.

In the next chapter, I will delineate between the categories of labour involved in the camming process, examining the ways that different sub-types of labour were described by participants and discussing the potential implications.

[42] Bespoke pornography refers to the creation of sexually themed videos created for clients' specific requests.

# Chapter Five

## Camming as a Nexus of Labour

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will be organised into four sections to differentiate between types of camming-related labour described by participants. These sections are labelled 'physical labour', 'digital labour', 'emotional labour', and 'safety work'. It should be noted that other labour-related terms used in relation to sex work (e.g., body work, sexual labour, affective labour) are analytically encompassed within one or more of the above categories and will be considered accordingly.

Each labour-type will first be defined and explained in relation to examples provided by participants. Then, participants' described perceptions of the prevalence and difficulty of the labour-type in question will be discussed. Finally, I will examine the extent to which participants recognised the labour-type in question as a form of *work*, or whether it was discursively categorised as effort that did not require recognition and/or compensation. By doing this, I seek to explore whether all of participants' camming-related labour was recognised and valued to the same extent. Overall, I argue that camming is a 'nexus of labour', wherein several different kinds of effort are expended.

### 5.2 Physical labour

In this section, I will refer to 'physical labour' as work performed on or with the use of participants' external bodies.[43] Physical labour conducted by participants

[43] For the purposes of the analysis, it should be noted that this section does not include embodied labour that can be encompassed under the category of emotional labour (e.g., smiling and laughing).

ranged from sexual acts (e.g., masturbating, sucking sex toys, spanking and stripping) to 'prep work' done to their bodies before camming performances took place. General features of bodily preparation were consistent across participants, including applying make-up to conceal acne and enhance their eyes and lips, and dressing in revealing clothing. However, the specificities of sexual acts and other forms of body preparation varied, as will be discussed below.

Some participants described physically presenting themselves as what they thought would be sexually attractive to a broad range of potential clients. For example, Trista dressed as "*a schoolgirl which was probably the most popular, a maid, um, a normal bikini, a lot of guys just liked that and then a um, secretary*" – typical pornography outfits chosen by Trista for their widespread appeal. Other participants described wearing clothes and make-up that were different to most cam girls on the site they worked on, to "*stand out*" (Amy) to potential clients perusing profiles on the homepage. Amy also described strategically using her bodily presentation to cultivate an impression of authenticity: "*not like … lots of makeup and really like sexy, sexy clothes, like it's pretty much just me in my bedroom*". Thus, while Amy's process required less physical labour than other participants (who spent substantial time and effort putting on elaborate outfits and make-up), her physical presentation method arguably involved more cognitive labour (i.e., planning and research) than those who imitated pornography actors and other cam girls. This demonstrates a finding that will be reemphasized throughout this chapter – that different 'labour types' shifted and correlated to varying degrees in the camming context (Nayar, 2017).

As previously discussed, sexual acts performed by participants ranged in 'explicitness', with some routinely performing penetrative, fully-nude cum shows (e.g., Serena, Amara, Mina, Michelle) and others eschewing vaginal penetration in favour of talking, dancing and 'gamified' activities (e.g., Amy, Raye). While Michelle described being well-compensated and popular with clients for the cum shows she performed, in hindsight, she argued that 'cum show-free' camming

would have been a better way to make money and accumulate loyal followers without risking her physical and emotional wellbeing:

> *Michelle: [The thing] which <u>does</u> actually make more money and is so much easier on you, and that is … just <u>talking</u> camming? … [Cam girls who do this don't] hurt their body and they don't leave themselves open to [blackmail] so that is what you should do.*

"*[T]alking camming*" was Michelle's description of cam work that does not involve any masturbation and/or penetration, where the model primarily speaks to their client (like Raye). As Michelle illustrated, most cam girls unavoidably "*hurt their bodies*" because they spend much of their time vigorously rubbing and penetrating their genitals, mouth and/or anus with sex toys. This 'self-harm' (for lack of a better term) is caused both by the frequency of the actions and the forcefulness they are expected to do it with. As Mina described, "*[clients] wanna see the biggest toy possible, [and] they wanna see it <u>slammed</u> all the way in*", with Amy further explaining that "*the way [clients] want anal [penetration] to happen is really <u>aggressive</u>, like, no lubrication no protection, they just want you to <u>ram</u> [the toy] up your ass*".

Michelle argued this 'self-harm' is unnecessary because camming's primary drawing point is the communicative aspect, and clients are willing to pay most for cam models who provide sustained and believable emotional labour. However, while Michelle describes "*talking camming*" as "*easier on you*", other participants said that they found the complex emotional labour needed to portray an 'authentic' persona more tiring than physical work (see Section 5.4). Michelle's perspective is unsurprising, though, as she reported that her cum shows were recorded without her consent, distributed on pornography websites, and later used as blackmail by an ex-partner (see Section 5.5). Thus, despite Michelle reporting that she achieved significant financial success from cum shows, she ultimately did not recommend her physical labour methods, presenting cum show-oriented camming as more 'pain' (physical and social consequences) than 'gain' (monetary reward).

Overall, while the processes and perceptions of performing sexual acts varied across participants, these efforts usually resulted in the most financial compensation and recognition as *work*, both from clients and the participants themselves. This is partially due to the nature of the cam site token system, which provided participants with specific amounts of money for specific acts (or in Amara's case, specific videos – see Section 5.3). In this sense, the exchange of physical labour for financial compensation was explicit and straightforward in the camming context. Furthermore, in terms of 'gain' (monetary reward) for 'pain' (effort), physical labour was usually preferred over immaterial practices (e.g., digital and emotional labour) as it was easily quantifiable, and significant earnings could result from acts that were described as easy, unskilled, and even "*fun*" (Amy, Raye).

However, the labour involved in body preparation did not receive the same explicit compensation and recognition as sexual activities. It seemed to be expected that cam girls would always present themselves to clients in full make-up and sexy clothes, and participants never described clients paying them for this labour specifically. This is not exclusive to camming, though, as scholars have found that women in a range of workplaces consistently put unpaid time and effort into their physical presentation (e.g., shaving, wearing make-up, 'doing' hair) (Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Wolkowitz, 2002). It should also be noted that participants discussed body preparation as something that aided their ability to 'get into character' – a process they viewed as positive and helpful in the camming context (see Section 5.4) – so describing this as purely exploitative or unrecognised by participants would not be entirely accurate.

## 5.3 Digital labour

As explained in Chapter 2, 'digital labour' is a term used to refer to effort expended in an online context, usually in relation to the creation of content on social media (Fuchs, 2014). This form of labour is generally categorised as 'immaterial', despite the intrinsically material nature of using one's body to

labour with tools such as computers, because it does not produce a separable material commodity that can be bought and sold (Lazzarato, 1994).

Participants employed digital labour in the camming context in a range of ways. One example was the maintenance of reliable high-speed Internet, which usually involved the need to monitor and troubleshoot connective problems. Notably, this aspect of participants' labour was made especially strenuous in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, because "*[we have] constant issues with the internet, which I think is a major New Zealand cam girl issue*" (Mina). As Lita lamented, "*you have to have a really fast, Internet connection [when camming] and mine … is constantly cutting in and out [and] if it cuts out you lose everything that is proposed in the chat room*". Mina described this happening to her as well: "*I'd do [cum shows] and if my broadcast failed, which it often did … you forfeit…. the money that you made*". This finding demonstrates the extent to which digital work may be needlessly laborious in camming contexts – particularly for those who do not have certain pre-existing resources (i.e., the ability to afford or access high-speed Internet) – and may even result in the loss of earned profits.

Participants also described needing to maintain an aesthetically appealing and well-organised online profile on their cam site of choice, which would be routinely accessed by clients. Serena noted that this was a form of labour that "*I didn't even think about beforehand … you have a page, and, um (pause) you have to make it look as nice as possible and do like, graphics … it's so time-consuming*". Amara also noted that this involved her needing to employ her prior knowledge of HTML[44] – "*like [I did when I used] MySpace[45] back in the day*" – to edit her cam site profile to a sufficient standard. Indeed, digital labour was a particularly prevalent part of Amara's experience, as she spent most of her time

[44] Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is used to code and construct websites.

[45] MySpace is a social media website that requires the use of HTML to customise. It was particularly popular in the mid-to-late 2000s.

selling bespoke pornography (specifically requested videos) to clients. Broadly describing this labour as "*admin*", Amara reported carrying out the following:

> *Amara: So you've got the aspect of making custom videos for specific clients, but then you make really general videos that you can list on your page as well, for anyone that is passing through … you have to list them and describe them, and add video screenshots and so on yourself …you do all that and [then come] up with good descriptions [for the videos] … so yeah a lot of time in that … and then there's … getting paid and accessing your money, dealing with systems like Payoneer*[46]*, who were the pay-out company for … Extra Lunch Money, and it took a couple of months just to establish my account properly with them, and then managing … getting the money to a New Zealand bank account, so yeah, that side of it as well.*

As Amara detailed, the digital labour conducted in relation to camming included the process of learning how to conduct online bank transfers and navigate unfamiliar systems, which invariably involved a great deal of time and research that was not directly compensated.

Further to this, many participants maintained social media pages in character as their cam persona (see Chapter 6). This often correlated with the physical labour discussed in the prior section, as social media messages (e.g., Snaps to clients, or Tweets to advertise future sessions) usually involved participants taking photos and videos of themselves. As Raye explained, "*on Snapchat [clients want you to] update a new story and pictures … and I'm like in fat pants … I don't want to put makeup on and take a picture and take it off again … the dedication's too much*". Indeed, a recurring theme within participants' descriptions of digital labour was the extent to which this work required perpetual maintenance, usually outside of paid sessions. Raye differentiated this from her experiences of stripping, where she emphasised she was able to "*turn up … do your thing … go home, doesn't matter, you're done*". Overall, participants tended to agree that "*the social media side of things … is pretty much a part-time job in itself*" (Lita).

[46] Payoneer is a website that facilitates online financial transfers, similar to PayPal.

Digital labour was often discussed by participants as difficult and time-consuming, and was therefore recognised as a form of expended effort (i.e., labour). However, no participant ever mentioned being compensated for this work specifically (e.g., having a client pay them for the time spent coding their profile or editing a video), with the work instead being characterised as effort that was either unavoidable or could indirectly result in greater profits (e.g., attracting more clients because of a well-made profile). This 'free labour' (Terranova, 2000) can therefore be considered exploited in the same ways discussed by 'cognitariat' and 'cybertariat' scholars and other theorists of 'immaterial labour' (Berardi, 2005; Huws, 2001; Fuchs, 2014). Participants emphasised that when other cam girls consider their earnings, they should "*spread it across the whole week instead of just that few hours [in the chat room] … [you might say] 'aw yeah I made heaps!' … [but] actually no, that two hours [you] spent prepping … it's counted in that and the conversations and everything*" (Raye).

## 5.4 Emotional labour

Another form of immaterial labour performed by participants was emotional labour, which refers to efforts expended for the purposes of creating emotional responses in paid work settings (see Chapter 2).[47] Participants' examples of emotional labour in cam work were prevalent and wide-ranging, including efforts such as pretending to be aroused, trying to make themselves *actually feel* aroused, pretending clients were funny and interesting, remembering personal details about regular clients, and the maintenance of a consistent and believable cam persona (see Chapter 6). Much of this labour can be categorised as 'ego

[47] As explained in Chapter 2, emotional labour refers to the kind of affective work that occurs in paid contexts, whereas emotion work refers to the same kind of labour that occurs in interpersonal settings (Hochschild, 1983). While this thesis does not have the capacity to explore the emotion work participants performed in their personal lives (e.g., reassuring their friends of their safety, attending to the insecurities of their partners, educating their acquaintances about camming), this kind of labour was prevalent and occurred largely because of their participation in cam work. As such, I recommend that further inquiry be taken in this area.

work', a term derived from O'Brien (1994) which he uses to the describe the emotional labour nurses would direct towards their male patients to boost their self-esteem (e.g., engaging in sexual banter and making them feel attractive). However, emotional labour was also found to be internally-directed, with participants making sustained efforts to experience feelings that they would not otherwise while camming.

As is consistent with prior literature focusing on the subjective experiences of sex workers (Vanwesenbeeck, 2005; Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006; Abel, 2011), these participants also described 'dissociating' while camming to keep their 'authentic' reactions and feelings about the work separate and invisible to clients.[48] For example, Lita reported that camming was "*complete dissociation*" for her, while Raye referred to the experience implicitly: "*It would always be at … the end of the camming session, you're kinda like, 'what just happened?' Because you mentally block it out, 'cause it's kinda, you try to separate it out from everything else.*" Generally, participants tended to refer to dissociation as a strategy used to facilitate 'surface acting', preventing them from a) being emotionally vulnerable to clients and b) needing to alter their 'authentic' feelings about the work.[49]

Many participants said that labour that involved surface acting was preferable to labour that involved 'deep acting', due to less psychological consequences and exhaustion occurring through the former. For this reason, many participants described preferring primarily physical labour-based camming (e.g., cum shows) to primarily emotional labour-based camming (e.g., 'talking camming') because it was easier to do the former while maintaining their 'authentic' internal thought

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[48] I use the term dissociation in the psychological sense, referring to the process of 'detaching' oneself from feelings (physical and/or emotional) which would otherwise be present in the given situation.

[49] I differentiate between surface acting (performing reactions while inwardly maintaining one's own emotional state) and deep acting (allowing one's own emotional state to be changed to produce genuine reactions), as per Hochschild's (1983) analysis in relation to emotional labour and emotion work.

processes and emotional reactions (i.e., surface acting). In some ways, camming was described as helping to facilitate surface acting, as the mediated nature of the practice prevented the same degree of sustained empathetic response necessary when interacting with a physically proximate human being: "*you don't see them … [there's] degrees of separation from what you're actually doing*" (Raye).

However, other participants argued that the process of camming – particularly attempting to maintain a convincing and likeable cam persona – involved repeated and sustained deep acting. This was described as leading to 'blurring' of the cam persona and the 'real' self, wherein the participant felt they were not unattached enough and were thus unwantedly exposing themselves (emotionally) to clients. Serena said that this experience was so unpleasant that it was a causal factor in her leaving the profession: "*it was bad … there wasn't enough separation between like, my cam persona and myself*". Notably, it was found that this blurring could, reluctantly, lead to emotional attachment to clients. As Serena described, "*sometimes, guys would like, just randomly stop talking to you and start tipping other girls and you'd be like, 'aw what's wrong'… it's like a mini break up*". Trista also illustrated this feeling of rejection:

> *Trista: There was two guys that I got along really well with and um, I made a lot of money from them … [but after] two or three months [they both made up] an excuse that they just can't do it anymore and I just knew it was bullshit, and … I'm angry at the fact that like, I'm not making money now because you were my main source of income, but also like, I wasted all that time on you, and like, you're just like lit- I dunno, like I'd just get so pissed off at like these, fucking cunts … you feel really used.*

Here, Trista describes feeling anger at clients who would 'use' her for her services, despite her own constructed persona and strategies to manipulate clients for maximum profits (see Chapter 6). While other participants described appreciating straightforward interactions with clients wherein the sexual exchange was explicit and devoid of emotion, others (like Trista) described struggling with these interactions, resenting when their emotional labour went uncompensated or unreciprocated.

Furthering this, Amy explained that camming often necessitated an "*uncomfortable*" amount of deep acting for her:

> *Amy: I find it's really easy to zone out when I was doing a sexual performance. Um, it's easier to have like a script for myself, um, and it didn't, need anything from me, but the emotional side required me to extend my- my ego of my camgirl performance … I really … pushed the limits of that, and like, I kind of would, begin to blur, what actually then felt like me, like myself [Amy] or my camgirl alter-ego … and, that made me uncomfortable and that was really exhausting.*

Here, Amy emphasises that she found camming-related emotional labour not only psychologically damaging, but "*really exhausting"*. This sentiment was echoed by Serena, who stated: "*it was really exhausting, having to be like this sexual, thing all the time … always just having to be, like, on in terms of your* personality". As previously discussed in relation to digital labour, this exhaustion was furthered by the extent to which emotional labour was reported as needing to be *perpetually* performed, often outside of compensated sessions. Participants reported 'nurturing' their regulars by sending them personalised text messages or Snaps throughout the day (digital labour), which also involved the inclusion of body preparation strategies (physical labour). This uncompensated ego work was constructed as simply being expected, much like body preparation, in a way that was typical of interactions with men in general:

> *Amara: The performing itself is easy … but it's the, I guess liaising? With clients or possible clients … I still felt like I had to, y'know, do all those normal, social niceties and be really polite and, ended up kind of engaging in all this, emotional, like, labour? For men? And, it was that part that got really exhausting rather than the actual performative part.*

Emotional labour was also constructed as essential to ensuring repeat business with clients, so 'opting out' was never described as an option, even if the work was tiring or psychologically damaging:

> *Amy: It's like two am and I'm like, 'I need to go to sleep, I'm really tired' and [the client is] like 'no, but we're chatting we're having such fun' and I'm like 'well, I'm not really … this is my job' … I can't say 'I don't enjoy*

> *this' because then they won't come back, and so you gotta really really sensitively like, kind of broach the whole thing.*

Overall, emotional labour was presented as the most vital form of labour conducted when camming. It was also usually described as the most time-consuming and draining form of labour, with many participants noting that they became 'burnt out' or quit the work because of how tired it made them. It was highly recognised by participants, to the extent that many referred to it explicitly as "*emotional labour*" (Amy, Mina, Amara). This kind of work did not tend to be specifically compensated (e.g., they did not receive money from clients for laughing their jokes), though it was often spoken of as indirectly leading to significant financial gain (e.g., receiving gifts or repeat sessions from clients whom they sufficiently nurtured). Consequently, participants' descriptions of "*really exhausting*" (Serena, Amy, Amara) emotional labour run contrary to the prevalent media depictions of camming as 'easy' and 'fun' (Sciortino, 2018) and further indicate the extent to which immaterial labour can be just as (if not more) strenuous as physical work (Fuchs, 2014; Abel, 2011).

### 5.5 Safety work

'Safety work' is a term coined by Kelly (2016) and used by Vera-Grey (2016) to describe the efforts made by women to prevent being victims of assault and harassment. While Vera-Grey (2016) primarily uses 'safety work' to refer to strategies undertaken to ensure physical safety, I will use this term to refer to labour conducted by participants to attempt to protect their physical *and* psychological wellbeing. It should also be noted that all safety work conducted by participants can be encompassed within the three previously discussed categories of labour, but rather than this labour seeking to produce profit, it specifically sought to ensure the participants' safety.

Many participants conducted safety work designed to prevent clients from finding and harassing them in 'real' life. For example, participants often reported that they would claim to be Australian or live in a different city in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and put work into developing and convincingly acting their 'back story'.

This strategy was described as preferable to refusing to provide any personal details at all, because it was less likely to rouse suspicion from clients. Other examples of physically-protective safety work included cropping or blurring their face in uploaded photos (Trista), camming in dimly-lit rooms and wearing wigs (Lita), and employing a pseudonym (all).

While much of this safety work aided in ensuring clients would not track the participants down, this was also a broader anonymity strategy to prevent those in participants' personal networks from learning about their cam work: "*[there's] a little bit of … insecurity about people from New Zealand finding [you], 'cause you're always like 'shit, is my dad going to find out?'*" (Raye). These strategies had their disadvantages, however, as many participants emphasised that the less details cam girls shared, the less popularity they would have with clients:

> *Trista: You get a lot of girls who … actually do a lot better because … if you've got your face right there, and [the customer can] see it … rather than a blurred photo and [the customer might] go "I dunno if she's hot, but I can see that she is" … I wouldn't take that risk because it would just be too easy to screenshot and … say if I wanted … just one day I became Prime Minister of New Zealand like … it would be out like straight away, I guarantee on someone's computer somewhere, there is naked videos of me or naked photos. It is guaranteed that.*

Here, Trista emphasises the extent to which her safety work was centred around stigma avoidance and attempting to manage her 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963/1986), even though "*because of the nature of the online work, it's going to be lurking in the background … you can't wipe it clean. If you [do escorting] … there's no footprint. But with camming there's always a digital footprint*" (Mina).

In the above excerpt, Trista described 'capping' (having photos/videos saved by users) as unavoidable, and that even despite her safety work, it is "*guaranteed*" her privacy is already compromised. Indeed, much of the safety work participants reported undertaking was to find and remove capped videos. For example, all participants described regularly searching on various websites for their usernames, physical attributes and/or assumed pornographic

categorisations: "*people call me a MILF*[50] *… like, in this video I'm twenty-two and I don't have any children*" (Mina). If any capped videos were found, participants reported that they would then file DMCA takedown requests[51], which could be successful, though Serena noted that "*they can very easily be ignored, especially if the servers were in a place like Cyprus or something, where they don't, they don't really have (laughing) laws about intellectual property*".

Michelle's experience with capping was particularly significant, which she emotionally expressed to me during the interview:

> *Michelle: I wasn't careful enough, and then I found last year another really horrible video of me had been uploaded and it had been up there for four months and ten thousand people had seen it … ever since then I've just been petrified like I immediately quit [camming] and now, videos keep going up of me (crying) every now and then and like, one of my boyfriends found out about it and he's extorted me, threatening to tell everybody my cam name … videos go up of me and I can get them removed but he can like, take a photo.*

As Michelle emphasised, once photos and videos were capped and uploaded, they could be seen and privately saved by thousands, potentially even millions of individuals. Thus, even if participants undertook the vast amount of safety work needed to remove all evidence of themselves from the Internet, it was still probable that some users had saved the content on their offline hard-drives and could either re-upload it or use it to 'dox' (blackmail) the participant.

Because of the extent of camming-related safety work, many participants expressed a preference for physically co-present sex work such as escorting – but, notably, only in the decriminalised Aotearoa/New Zealand context. As Trista explained:

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[50] MILF stands for 'Mum/Mom I'd Like/Love to Fuck' and is a common pornography category.

[51] Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) Ltd. is a private company who contact websites with requests to take down copyrighted content on behalf of those who seek their services.

> *Trista: I wouldn't do webcamming [again but] I'd do escorting again … in New Zealand it's just like, a lot safer … there's a [brothel] literally at the top of my road where I … used to work … but I can go back whenever I want … it's run just by women and you're constantly surrounded by women [and] they're all really nice and, there's security and it's safe, whereas like in England, I would go out and the only, security I had was my boyfriend … I'd just text him like, 'I'm going here for this long, if I don't come back? Call the police.' That was my security.*

Mina had a similar perspective, describing Aotearoa/New Zealand as "*safer*" and expressing fear of doing sex work while in the United States, even though her work did not involve sexual intercourse and was therefore legal: "*I went to [Los Angeles and] there were clients who wanted to book me for domination … I just ended up cancelling all of them because I was like, I just don't want to take any kind of risk over here*". Indeed, the globalised nature of camming is vital in relation to safety work, because "*there are laws [in Aotearoa/New Zealand] to protect us … I'm in a very safe place, whereas on cam the moderator for the websites are overseas, they don't give a damn*" (Lita). This appears to indicate that the laws for Aotearoa/New Zealand sex workers do not (or cannot) be applied to Aotearoa/New Zealand cam models, either because foreign moderators have no need to adhere to the specific protections in place in this country, or because prosecuting those outside of the Aotearoa/New Zealand context is too difficult.

Despite the numerous issues outlined above, camming also offered advantages that would not be possible in direct sex work contexts. The most apparent of these was the lack of physical co-presence with clients, which participants – particularly those who worked other jobs in the sex industry – described as a welcome change from environments that could put them at risk for sexually transmitted infections and assault. Participants reported feeling 'empowered' by the mediated nature of camming, such as Serena ("*it feels powerful when all these people want you and you can literally just, turn off your camera*") and Raye, who preferred camming to physically co-present work for this reason:

> *Raye: The power is in your hands, if you don't want to take your top off, you don't take your top off … even if someone tips you … you can still be*

> *like 'well, sorry, no, I don't feel comfortable doing that so, joke's on you' … I mean, stripping, I know particularly in New Zealand, first song dress off, second song, top off, third song undies off, regardless of there's one person there or, two hundred people … whether people are tipping or not, so the control isn't in your hands.*

Another aspect of camming that prevented the need for additional safety work was 'geoblocking', a feature available on most cam sites that allowed participants to block users from specific countries. Participants often reported using the feature to block Aotearoa/New Zealand, and described feeling relieved that people in their personal networks were less likely to 'stumble upon' their cam streams because of this. It should be noted that this was not a foolproof measure, as Raye mentioned, "*[I] used to have New Zealand blocked for MFC [but] you could always change the VPN*[52] *so … I would have people from Wellington and stuff*". However, in relation to both capping and geoblocking, participants reported feeling like there was 'safety in numbers', in the sense that "*I just take solace in knowing that there is just so much content …that mine is so (laughing) minis- miniscule … just [a] grain of sand [on a beach]"* (Amy).

Additionally, while cam sites were resented for taking a cut of participants' profits, they were also appreciated for mitigating some of the safety work that occurred when camming independently (via Skype or FaceTime):

> *Serena: Even though you don't make as much money through My Free Cams, I feel like it's just, so much safer like, you don't have to deal with the money, like (pause) the person actually has to have the money to do it … through Skype it's tempting to be like, 'aw you can just pay me later' … But, y'know, there's definitely no guarantee of that.*

Serena further detailed how her 'temptation' to be charitable to clients was used against her in the case of a person with whom she did multiple "*super graphic*" Skype sessions. This person paid and subsequently removed the money from

[52] Virtual Private Network (VPN) technologies allows users to circumvent geoblocking, and is often used to access censored or country-specific content (e.g., television shows that can only be streamed in the United States).

her PayPal account (see Chapter 4), ultimately leaving her uncompensated for her labour. Serena's description also indicates the complex process of weighing up emotional labour (to entice clients) and safety work (to keep them at arm's length), as Trista described: "*you have to constantly … think about what you're saying … you're playing them and they're also tryin'a play you … there's so much mental work involved to make sure that … you're not gonna get, you know, scammed by these dudes*".

Overall, safety work was recognised by all participants as a major aspect of camming, though it did not tend to be constructed as labour, and it was never described as something that could be compensated or 'opted out' of. As Vera-Grey (2016) suggested, safety work is a form of labour that is often invisible not only because it is habitual, feminised and immaterial, but because it is *preventative*. Essentially, it is difficult to measure or categorise work that specifically aims to *not* produce a result, especially as one cannot prove that this work prevented a hypothetical occurrence (e.g., taking a longer route to avoid a potential attacker in a dark alley). Indeed, participants often 'victim-blamed' themselves ("*I wasn't careful enough*"), implying that safety work was something they should already know how to handle effectively, rather than a form of effort expenditure that could be avoided if clients were more respectful and stricter online safety measures were in place.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the prevalence, difficulty and recognition of four types of labour that participants described performing in camming contexts: physical labour, digital labour, emotional labour, and safety work. This section serves the purpose of illuminating the extent to which the efforts expended by participants were shown to span beyond their paid sessions, and the extent to which these efforts can be characterised as 'invisible', immaterial, feminised, and exploited.

In the next chapter, I will examine the most salient features of the subject positions discussed and 'taken up' by participants when camming.

# Chapter Six

## Constructing the Cam Girl

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the primary subject position taken up by participants within their constructions of camming, which I will broadly categorise as the 'cam girl'. However, this overarching subject position was a split subjectivity, consisting of four distinct facets. The first was the 'cam persona', who was invariably hypersexual, coquettish and one-dimensional in behaviour. The second was the 'puppet master', the strategic agent behind the cam persona who skilfully adjusted their performance according to clients' supposed preferences. The third was the 'woman next door', a more 'realistic' presentation of the girl next door character – easy-going and relatable, but not in a way designed to be sexually appealing to men. Finally, the fourth position – the 'anxious subject' – was constructed as fragile and guarded, and in many ways the antithesis of the cam persona. In this section I will unpack these facets of the cam girl, focusing primarily on the broader discourses participants drew upon when discussing their occupation of each sub-position.

### 6.2 The cam persona

Almost every participant interviewed (except one – see Section 6.2.2) reported that they actively cultivated and maintained a specific cam persona. The cam persona was described as a character participants would 'put on' whenever they interacted with their audience, tailored both to the desires of their clientele and their own physical, social, and mental strengths. Participants emphasised that this subject position was not the 'real' them – rather, it was described as a character they created, purposefully designed to attract regular and/or high-

paying customers. The following sections will discuss two notable themes within this positioning.

### *6.2.1 Always up for it*

When occupying the cam persona, participants described presenting themselves as perpetually hypersexual, or in Trista's words, "*acting that you're (sarcastic sexy voice) really like horny and you really want his dick*". Serena described this performance in similar terms, noting that "*when you're camming, you, just ooze this like, sexual persona, and … you love sex twenty-four-seven … [you're just] sex girl!*". Participants noted that clients usually requested penetrative acts (e.g., circluding[53] a dildo with their mouth or vagina) and that they would pretend to find these acts exciting and sexually satisfying, even though they usually did not. Indeed, this presentation was always described as an exaggeration and often even a complete fabrication of their actual levels of arousal during camming, or their sex drive/sexual preferences more generally.

It is possible that participants' hypersexual, penetration/circlusion-focused style of performance was inspired by (or expected from clients because of) mainstream pornography norms. Women in pornography tend to be perpetually 'ready to go' and enthusiastic about having sexual intercourse with whoever the man is, no matter what he looks like or the extent of their prior relationship (Gurevich et al., 2017). This is a simplistic depiction of women that eschews real efforts men would likely need to make (such as establishing mutual attraction and 'setting the mood') to facilitate their partner's sexual arousal (Spišák, 2017). Many have argued that hypersexual depictions of women are a reflection of patriarchal and postfeminist discourses in contemporary society, wherein women are expected to submit to and fulfil men's sexual desires, but are

[53] In a Mask magazine article in 2016, Bini Adamczak introduced and defined the term 'circlusion'. It is the opposite of the word penetration, in the sense that the tube or hole (in this case, the mouth or vagina) is signified as active – it is pushing *onto* a phallic object, rather than being pushed *into*. I use this term here both because it is more accurate (the participants' sex toys are not conscious) and as a reminder of the way in which language is constructed to present the phallus as inherently dominant and the vagina as submissive.

portrayed as enthusiastically choosing to do so for their own pleasure (McRobbie, 2007).

While the cam persona was invariably hypersexual, this positioning would fluctuate between participants in other ways. For example, participants' personas were either described as dominant or submissive, never 'neither' or 'in between', though the role they chose was subject to change (see Chapter 4). Some participants primarily employed a dominant persona, such as Amara and Mina. Amara reported choosing to be dominant because her clients usually requested that style of performance, but noted that she was not very dominating in "*real life*". Contrarily, Mina elected to do a dominating performance because she claimed to be incapable of acting submissive convincingly, and because being dominant allowed her to be "*[intolerant of] male ignorance … openly … and not have to worry, because they are like 'you're right women <u>are</u> better'*".

Most participants chose to present their persona as sexually submissive, and generally reported doing so because it was preferable both for themselves and their clients. Amy noted that "*submissive is easier because it … feels more natural and in our socialised role … to be coy and have the man telling me what he wants".* This is in line with Antevska and Gavey's (2015) discussion of the popular male dominant/female submissive paradigm in pornography, which they note was described by their cisgender male participants as 'normal'. The authors' findings suggest the persisting dominance of previously discussed patriarchal discourses, wherein men are 'in charge' and women are expected to 'serve' them by approaching sex in a way that is focused on their pleasure (Antevska & Gavey, 2015).

However, while fewer participants consistently employed a dominant persona, most still reported performing as dominant on several occasions at the request of many different clients. As discussed above, participants suggested they mainly preferred submissive personas because they were accustomed to being subordinate to men, and it was more effort to present a convincing persona if it differed significantly from their usual habits (see Chapter 5). Amara noted that "*most [client] requests were looking for a [submissive] thing or some form of*

*domination*", suggesting that the male dominant/female submissive paradigm need not always be the case – but the dominant/submissive paradigm more broadly *did*, at least in the camming contexts experienced by participants.

It is notable that participants were always expected to be either dominant or submissive, indicating that eroticism based on less extreme power differentials were not considered desirable or marketable to clients. This may support the arguments of some sex-positive feminists and pornography researchers – that power and lack of power are sexually arousing in and of themselves, and are not necessarily contingent on which gender occupies which role (Barker, 2013). Indeed, participants often theorized that some of the more unexpected requests they received (such as Serena being asked to act like a dog) were fundamentally based on clients either wanting to feel in or out of control. The above findings suggest that assuming sex worker/client dynamics tend to be dominant/submissive purely due to essentialist gender norms is not a complete analysis, and that further research is needed in relation to power dynamics in camming contexts.

### *6.2.2 The real cam girl*

One participant (Raye) explicitly countered the cam persona subjectivity, reporting that she did not represent herself any different when camming. Raye asserted that she was "*terrible at being fake*" and therefore refused to 'put on' an alternate persona when interacting with clients: "*I was never like 'I'm going to like absolutely ride you' … [instead] I'm like, 'you know what I did today? I took my dog for a run'*". She also reported that she refused to take more money than she felt she was owed for the effort she expended, which in her words was often "*very little*" (Raye). She explained her rationale in further detail in the following excerpt:

> *Raye: I wanted it to be real, I didn't want to be … this princess [that] everyone pampers … I'm like 'this is me, this is what you are going to get, I'm not expecting any more', and that I think is why my regulars like me … like yes, they would tip me money offline and stuff like that … [but] it wasn't like I was hounding them all the time like, 'I want this new thing from*

> *Amazon!' So that's kind of why people were quite relaxed … I knew there was people who would often be in my room and wouldn't tip but I know if they got a little bit extra or something that month then they'd be like … 'here you go' and I'm like 'thank you so much', like, you earned that money … you worked hard to earn that money whatever you were doing … why should I … [but then] I'm like hang on I'm working like I should be like (clicking fingers) parsel, parsel.*

Unpacking this excerpt, it seems that several discourses and counter-discourses are at play. Firstly, Raye described wanting to be perceived as "*real*" and not a "*princess*", positioning herself as a phallic girl in the sense of rejecting 'feminine deference' (McRobbie, 2007). She also drew upon a neoliberal discourse of egalitarianism, assuming an equal socio-financial playing field between herself and the men who pay for her services. Her talk can be considered indicative of ego work (see Chapter 5), because she intentionally presented herself as in no way 'above' her clients, which could have opened her up to being resented for this positioning. Notably, she then commented that this positioning is incompatible with the nature of capitalist work (wherein the worker is expected to be cut-throat in their pursuit of income), but still chose to orient herself in the previously discussed ways.

Here it seems that Raye is still presenting a persona, but a different *kind* to most other participants. While she did not present as hypersexual (which was furthered by her refusal to masturbate on cam – see Chapter 4), she still presented in a way that was highly grateful to, and seemingly caring towards, her clients. This is well fitting with the 'girl next door' personality type, which, as previously discussed, is a position clients were said to find desirable.

Overall, it seems that Raye primarily rejected the 'puppet master' positioning (see Section 6.3) by implying that her cam performances were not consciously strategic for maximum earnings, and were instead genuine interactions. However, whether Raye intentionally attempted to convince her clients that she was more authentic than other cam girls, or whether she *truly felt* she was and therefore described herself in this way accordingly, is irrelevant to the extent that

it contributed to the same result: her popularity with clients and her financial success as a cam girl.

## 6.3 The puppet master

The puppet master facet of the cam girl subject position was constructed as savvy, calculating, and 'in control' of both the cam persona and the clients they performed to. The following sections will discuss two ways in which this subjectivity was presented.

### *6.3.1 A strategic performer*

Participants reported that they were able to convincingly present themselves to clients in a manner different to their 'usual' way of acting. According to some participants, financial success was often predicated on how good of an actress they were, and they further argued that cam girls were unlikely to develop a following unless they could seem to be genuinely engaged and enjoying their time in the chat room.

While maintaining this act was occasionally described as difficult, especially on days when participants were not in a good mood or did not like the client(s), this was also said to be surprisingly unchallenging: "*The bar's pretty low … you can be so ridiculously fake and guys are like 'oh my god', they are just idiots*" (Mina). Here, the savvy and agentic nature of the puppet master subjectivity is demonstrated through Mina's assertion that she could easily fool her gullible "*idiot*" clients into thinking her performance was authentic. As an example of client gullibility, Amy noted that when she began camming "*I was a virgin [in the sense that] I never had penetrative sex*" and she was unwilling to penetrate herself vaginally in her shows. As such, Amy described tactically feigning pleasure and enthusiasm for deep throating[54] sex toys so she could avoid other

[54] Deep throating refers to the practice of fellating a penis or other phallic object to its full length (meaning that the phallus is, quite literally, deep in the facilitator's throat).

practices without sacrificing financial success and popularity with clients (who, as previously stated, often requested some form of penetrative/circlusive act).

Indeed, participants often described being aware of stereotypical gender norms and employing them strategically for profit. When Amy discussed electing to deep throat, for example, she emphasised that she viewed camming as a "*condensed version … of some really patriarchal relations*" but argued she was making an informed choice to capitalise on them. Indeed, Amara reported appreciating that when camming, "*I could get paid for that kind of performative labour that I used to do for men anyway*", thus taking some form of power back from disempowering circumstances, which was also presented as enjoyable. This was another feature of the puppet master subjectivity – that tricking men, or "play[ing] them at their own game" (McRobbie, 2007, p. 733) was a positive feeling that could be gleefully relished.

The examples discussed above can be seen as indicative of the patriarchal bargain, wherein repressive gender norms are used to attain power in individual contexts (Kandiyoti, 1988). Participants' hypersexual performance style can also be considered a 'rational choice' (Chapkis, 1997) to perform behaviour they may not like or do in their 'real' lives, because acting in this way was described as preferable to having no money or working elsewhere. Overall, participants avoided framing themselves as victimised in these contexts, emphasising that no one was forcing them to perform in these ways, though living in a capitalist system was in itself coercive. This again demonstrates the puppet master positioning, as control over the (admittedly constrained) situation is ultimately implied to be in their hands.

Every participant interviewed used a different name than their own when camming and conducting other sex work. Although this was usually described as being done to keep their 'real' identities secret, it was also described as a strategy that aided in participants being able to convincingly perform in character:

> *Trista: The name kind of defines you? So picking the name for me was … the most crucial part, and for a long time I went by [old sex work name] and I remember thinking like, 'that sounds like a porn star that's so hot' … you usually have to start it with the same letter of your actual name … so when they say it you don't go 'what? That's not my name' … but then I met this girl who was really hot and … making a ton of money and um, her name was [new sex work name]? … I was like 'oh I'm gonna steal that name' and then I just like <u>became</u> her … when I changed my name … all of a sudden it was like 'fuck yeah, confidence'.*

In this excerpt, Trista implies that the process of choosing a pseudonym is powerful and important, strongly affecting the extent to which she, as puppet master, could effectively play (act) her cam persona and play (fool) her clients.

Initially, Trista said that she chose a name based on it sounding like a stereotypical "*porn star*" name, saying that defining herself as such (and being called that name by clients) enabled her to perceive herself as a sex worker and more comfortably occupy that persona. She also indicates, though, that she felt she had to use a name that sounds like her given name, because she thought it would be too difficult to respond to a name that sounds nothing like her own. This relates to another viewpoint expressed by many participants: firstly, that the process of 'splitting' between subject positions is not easy, and secondly, that it is perceived as impossible to *fully* split the cam persona from one's 'real' self (see Section 6.3.2).

### *6.3.2 A natural performer*

Participants often said that they cultivated a persona that drew upon aspects of their 'real' selves (i.e., choosing to be dominant or submissive based on their 'natural' personality traits) with alterations made to suit the assumed desires of clients. For instance, participants often described presenting themselves as charming and conversational, but never too clever or political: "*<u>me</u> … except without like, any opinions*" (Amy). As Lita further noted, "*[clients] don't want someone who's [more] educated so I can't talk about my book collection*", with Amara clarifying that "*[clients] actually like the <u>idea</u> of an intelligent woman, but never intimidatingly so*".

As per the previous discussion of women in pornography, it seems clients preferred a persona that was completely engrossed with *their* interests – not only sexual, but intellectual as well. However, it was vital that the cam persona did not challenge clients' opinions or perceptions. This can again be considered a form of ego work (O'Brien, 1994) wherein the participant sought to make clients feel like successful men in the patriarchal framework: both sexually desired by and intellectually superior to women.

Participants also described exaggerating supposedly desired traits in a similarly non-threatening way:

> *Amara: I kind of had to pretend to be like, really into Adventure Time and the Alien movies, and I mean I do love the Alien movies but, you know, the conventional nerd shit, 'cause a lot of guys like that and it gets you business.*

Harkening back to the concept of the girl next door, participants implied that other features of this stereotype were desirable traits to portray when camming (e.g., well-read and with good taste – but, crucially, never as good as the man's). This was further employed in contexts where participants offered the 'girlfriend experience', where participants would present themselves in character as the client's girlfriend (e.g., offering the client details about the minutiae of their day or pretending to plan their lives together). Indeed, participants noted that girlfriend experience sessions required a particularly strategic performance in which they attempted to come across as authentically as possible while simultaneously altering their 'authentic' behaviour in the 'desirable' ways discussed above.

Amy described occupying a submissive persona as "*easier*" because it is "*more natural*", suggesting that regularly employing a cam persona that is significantly different from one's usual presentation is harder work (see Chapter 5). As previously stated, this may be partially why submissive performances were so commonly employed by participants, even if they were also concerned about perpetuating gendered power inequities. Again, it seems that in a camming context, patriarchal bargaining is considered the right choice: it is easier, more

profitable, and allows women to 'play men at their own game' (McRobbie, 2007). However, the 'upper-hand' is only gained in a personal profit-based context, and while participants are aware of this, they do not seek to challenge the status quo.

Given this range of factors, my choice to refer to the puppet master as a 'natural' performer has numerous meanings: referring to their skill at conducting a believable performance, their preference for presenting themselves at least partially in ways that they would 'naturally' behave, and to the desirable connotations of 'natural' as a word, in the sense of referring to someone unpretentious, unperturbed, and 'chill' (in the colloquial sense of the word).

## 6.4 The woman next door

The 'woman next door' was depicted as a more accurate or 'feminist' version of the girl next door. In this positioning, participants depicted themselves as naturally having various features of the girl next door personality (e.g., low-maintenance, easy-going, with a good sense of humour). However, they explicitly and unapologetically rejected the male-oriented aspects of the girl next door by presenting themselves as lacking sexual desire and sensuality, a theme that will be expanded upon in the section below.

### *6.4.1 Not really that sexual*

Participants often described themselves as not very sexual people, or even "*quite asexual*" (Lita). This was usually referenced in relation to camming, with participants stating that the work either "*completely … killed my sex drive*" (Raye) or that it made them realise how unsexual they 'naturally' were, especially compared to the assumed sex drives of clients and other cam models.

Further to this, participants said they were less 'sexy' or 'sensual' than their personas, with Serena and Raye, for example, both emphasising their preference for wearing "*fat pants*" and no make-up rather than their cam outfits. It can be argued that participants' association of sexuality with elaborate gender performance (e.g., being clean-shaven and made-up) is indicative of patriarchal

discourses that perpetuate the idea that women are aroused by looking arousing to men, rather than via their own gaze or preferences (Mulvey, 1975).

Perhaps relatedly, then, participants said that the process of camming involved too much self-monitoring for them to be able to 'let go' to the extent that they could achieve orgasm. For instance, Serena, after stating that she never experienced genuine sexual pleasure while camming, explained that during the process "*you're [too] worried about the lighting and the angles and … how many people are in your room*". Additionally, Amy noted that "*the way [clients] want to see you masturbate is not how I would masturbate in private, it's very on display and … very much like you're posed to have heterosexual sex*".

As Amy's quote illustrates, 'monitoring' the performance spanned beyond simply making sure the livestream was high-definition and well-lit; much like pornography actors, participants noted that they were expected to masturbate in ways that catered to the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) as opposed to ways that are physically enjoyable. This may again be reflective of the prioritisation of men's sexual enjoyment over women's, and the extent to which women are expected to gain sexual satisfaction either from situations that only men would find pleasurable, or from men's pleasure *itself*. Indeed, Mina described resenting the pornography-inspired expectation to:

> *Mina: Really annihilate your genitals and bend yourself into a pretzel and hurt yourself and choke yourself [when camming] … [it reinforces] bad male sexual behaviour [when you're] faking orgasms, when you're doing stuff that is genuinely not pleasurable … I just feel like stopping what I'm doing and saying 'do you guys know, have you ever touched a woman before? Do you have any understanding of how the female process of sexual arousal and climax works, because this is not it.*

In this instance, Mina describes knowingly succumbing to the patriarchal bargain (because while she *feels* like stopping what she is doing, she does not). However, she implied that there was little to be gained from attempting to educate strangers on the Internet, and that it was possible she would lose her following if she did. Once again, it seems the only 'rational choice' participants felt they could make was one that did not jeopardise their job, no matter how

irksome the work became. This indicates the underlying presence of the 'anxious subject' (see Section 6.5), who would never explicitly state to her clients that she found them sexist or sexually inept, because losing the work was constructed as too risky.

However, Amara did note that the process of camming helped her realise how performative she was in her personal life (when having unpaid consensual sex with men) and that due to camming, she's since become "*less sexually performative just in my general sex life … I think [camming] was positive in that sense*". Thus, by commodifying and exaggerating her sexuality when working, Amara argued that she became able to discern the extent to which her sexuality was *already* commodified and exaggerated, and she reported being much more focused on her own sexual fulfilment than she was before she began camming.

Despite Amara's arguably empowering experience, the woman next door (or who participants claimed they 'really' were) was generally portrayed as not sexual 'enough'. The scale of normalcy was constructed so that the cam persona performance (and the expectations of clients) was – usually implicitly – discussed as the 'correct' or 'standard' level of sexuality, with everything else as deficient in some way. Examples of this are Raye stating that "*if you watch me on a normal day I'm not sexual at all*", or Amy describing herself as "*highly unsexual in most areas*". Here it seems that participants are constructing sexuality as necessary and expected in all arenas of daily life, even if these arenas have no reason to be sexually arousing to the participant.

Indeed, scholars have argued that mainstream pornography norms have resulted in the sexualisation of otherwise innocuous acts and situations (Tyler & Quek, 2016), which may be reflected in the views of participants discussed above. This also appears to be reflective of the postfeminist ethos, wherein both men *and* women perceive female sexuality as "[resembling] – what do you know! – the pneumatic, take-me-now-big-boy fuck-puppet of male fantasy" (Turner, 2005, para. 11). Notably, while participants' described lack of sexuality was generally laughed off, there was an underlying fear (the 'anxious subject')

demonstrated in the perception that they (the 'woman next door') were unusually sexually deficient.

## 6.5 The anxious subject

An underlying subject position to all other positionings – to varying extents – was the 'anxious subject', who was on guard and concerned about the potential implications of doing cam work. In this context, I use the term 'subject' to convey a double-layered meaning. Firstly, 'subject' implies that the participants were not sexual objects, and made their own 'rational choices' (Chapkis, 1997) in relation to camming. However, this also connotes the extent to which they were 'subjected', against their will, to experiences that triggered feelings of anxiety (e.g., doxing and capping – see Chapter 2). This wording is intentionally contradictory to convey the complex subjectivity of this positioning, which will be illustrated in more detail in the section below.

### *6.5.1 Psychological ambiguity*

Many participants described struggling with different mental illnesses (usually depression and anxiety) and some participants reported that they felt that camming either caused or exacerbated their condition(s). For example, while every participant expressed feelings of fear about having their anonymity threatened by capping and doxing, Michelle's experience in this context was particularly significant (see Chapter 5). Michelle reported that she has developed post-traumatic stress disorder and serious anxiety problems due to her experience with online blackmail, going as far as to say, "*I feel like my life is ruined*".

However, Michelle repeatedly emphasised during the interview that she enjoyed the work itself ("*it was fun … I had all this money coming in and met like, lots of nice people*"), and even appreciated the opportunity to be a 'safe' outlet for people with incestual or paedophilic fantasies ("*it gets it out of their system … I had lots of regular, freaky, customers that all had different things they needed to satisfy … I think that it works*"). The stigma associated with the work, though,

was emotionally devastating: "*I'm just like, living in fear now and I feel like I'm gonna be for the whole rest of my life*" (Michelle). This is in line with the arguments of numerous sex work researchers, who argue that the effects of stigma are the root of sex workers' disproportionately poor health and wellbeing, as opposed to the work itself (Tomura, 2009; Huang, 2016).

Indeed, camming was referred to as *aiding* some participants' abilities to live comfortably with their (pre-existing) mental health issues. For instance, Amara reported having a cam girl friend who suffered from anxiety problems, and that this friend appreciated that camming allowed her to work from home. Indeed, Amy (who has issues with anxiety and depression) argued that camming was "*survival sex work*" for her in many ways, as she did not feel mentally capable of working long hours at a minimum wage job to support herself while studying full-time. This suggests that the 'anxious subject' is both hindered *and* helped by camming, and constructing camming purely as a site of fear and risk does not reflect the range of participants' experiences.

Amy and Mina maintained that camming was a way to 'opt out' of the kind of low-wage labour currently prevalent in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which they both 'endured' before choosing camming as a more lucrative, less time-consuming, and 'easier' option. As Mina illustrates in her own words, "*why should I have to struggle for the sake of it, because it's what you're <u>supposed</u> to do … [what is] this concept in society that suffering is <u>good</u>? That suffering has <u>value</u> … Why should I <u>not</u> take the easy way?"* Overall, Amy and Mina argued that neoliberal capitalism – wherein the 'precariat' are expected to seek drudgerous work to prove their moral worth as citizens (Standing, 2011) – is detrimental to one's mental health even if otherwise neurotypical. Indeed, both referred to work in this context as "*slavery*", implying coercion and despondency.

More broadly, some participants said that camming had a positive effect on their sexual confidence and overall self-esteem. As previously discussed, Amara argues that her camming experiences helped her recognise the gendered emotional labour she was performing and then pursue more egalitarian sexual experiences. Other participants, such as Amy, Raye and Trista, say that their

success in the industry (and the extent to which clients would fawn over them) raised their confidence and allowed them to see themselves as more sexually desirable than they did previously:

> *Amy: I've always felt like really low self-esteem, like really struggled with my weight … camming was like a first taste that people could find me attractive … and I've missed it, when I haven't been doing it so regularly … I notice my self-confidence is going down and my ability to see myself as a sexual person has gone down because camming like really validated that.*

Amy did not construct her body as 'normative' (in the sense of what is normal in pornography/on cam sites) and described having difficulty finding herself sexually attractive. Here she depicts her camming experience as 'validating', and that losing the work from her life has led to her confidence "*going down*", implying that it is 'draining' out of her and that camming 'fills' it back up. This suggests that camming practices can, in some ways, have beneficial or healing effects. Indeed, Trista described being uncomfortable with her body until she began working in the sex industry:

> *Trista: I didn't show my boobs to um, any boyfriend until I started working … with guys I was really self-conscious … and now I can like walk around naked in front of like anyone and I wouldn't care.*

Much like Amara and Amy, Trista indicated that she viewed herself as more sexually confident than she was prior to camming and other sex work. However, immediately after the previous excerpt, she continued:

> *Trista: I remember like, when you're at high school the worst thing is like for a guy to say is 'she was shit in bed' and … like, that would never happen to me 'cause I'm <u>not</u> … and also like when you get all this attention from guys as well … it almost makes your confidence go up like, 'I'm not actually as ugly or fat as I thought' and so then you're like 'oh I <u>am</u> hot' and so then yeah, you get that confidence, you feel sexier than you probably normally would.*

This quote indicates a postfeminist mentality on a range of levels. For one, it is presented as preferable and *less* stigma-inducing for women to have had

enough sex to be good at it, as opposed to antiquated religion-based discourses wherein women are expected to be chaste and sexually restrained (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999; Roberts, Kippax, Waldby, & Crawford, 1995). For another, Trista emphasised the extent to which her self-confidence was based around how she was perceived by men, both in relation to her attractiveness and her competence at sexual activities. This indicates that – despite the positive feelings expressed by Trista and Amy in the extracts above – men's sexual goals were still being prioritised, with participants' self-esteem stemming primarily from living up to these goals.

Trista's perception was also echoed by Raye, though more reflexively. Raye described enjoying the compliments she would receive when camming but also said it was a "*double-edged sword*": she felt "*good*" and "*powerful*", but was simultaneously aware that a) the attention was "*superficial*" and b) that she was risking her social status by participating in a "*stigmatised industry*". She thus indicated the extent to which her self-confidence and general self-perception were predicated on the opinions (or potential opinions) of those around her, and the extent to which she felt the stigma posed an 'identity threat' (Goffman, 1963/1986; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Raye therefore demonstrated elements of the 'anxious subject', with the potential social ramifications of being a sex worker – and indeed, an inappropriately sexual woman – preventing her from embracing her enjoyment of the practice entirely.

It should also be emphasised that some participants cited camming as something that unquestionably lowered their self-confidence. Lita, for example, reported that she found clients to be incredibly judgmental: "*they expect everybody to look the same, like the same body shape … really good at make-up … and if you don't quite meet that then they fall on you like a pack of wolves*". However, she argued that this is specific to camming, and that the escorting clients she was physically co-present with were "*just grateful for someone there … [plus] they see you beforehand, so they book you because of the way you look … [camming clients] shop around*" (Lita). For Lita, then, presenting herself to a group of anonymous and potentially cruel clients when camming brought out

the 'anxious subject', whereas escorting clients made her feel more relaxed and accepted.

Other participants were unsure of the extent to which camming affected their mental health or self-esteem in general. For example, Serena used to suffer from anorexia, and was in this condition during her time as a cam girl. She stated that she found it difficult to discern the extent to which camming helped or hindered her illness, or whether it had a positive or negative effect on her self-esteem more generally, though she emphasised that she did not feel as though she has any "*ongoing effects from camming*" (Serena). Similarly, Amara noted that traumatic experiences in her childhood led to her seeking male validation and prioritising male pleasure, and while this made her more skilled at camming, camming itself did not necessarily lead to or further perpetuate this behaviour.

## 6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the four subject positions taken up by participants during the process of camming: the cam persona, the puppet master, the woman next door, and the anxious subject. I then explored the similarities and differences between the ways participants constructed their performances, and the extent to which broader socio-political structures and constructions of sex work may have informed these choices.

In the next chapter, I will conclude this thesis with a summary of the results, contributions, limitations, and potential for future research in this area.

# Chapter Seven

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin with a summary of the findings, considering the relevance and implications of themes induced from the data. I will then outline the contributions and limitations of this thesis, providing justifications for the latter before addressing the potential for further camming-related research and broader social recommendations. Finally, I conclude with a brief poetic analysis to broadly encapsulate the arguments presented.

## 7.2 Summary of findings

In this section, I will summarise the three prior analytic chapters, discussing the most salient results and their implications.

### *7.2.1 Camming is a diverse and multifaceted practice*

Even within the small and demographically similar group of participants interviewed, camming practices differed considerably from woman to woman. There were variations regarding the amount of time spent camming, when camming was performed (i.e., what days or times), or the amount of income acquired. The procedures undertaken during cam shows were unique to each participant, and would often be adjusted depending on a range of variables (e.g., financial needs, client preferences and the 'culture' of each particular cam site). These findings support the arguments of many researchers and activists in relation to sex work more broadly (Roberts, Sanders, Myers, & Smith, 2010; Dodsworth, 2014; Raguparan, 2017): camming was not found to be a

homogenous practice, and the experiences of women who did it depended on a broad range of contextual factors. It was both useful and lucrative, yet challenging. This is in line with the critical feminist perspective I exercised during the writing of this thesis, and I therefore argue that camming researchers should be wary of categorising the work in an all-encompassing manner, instead focusing on the individual experiences of those who do the work.

Furthermore, I theorise that while the experiences of cam girls are diverse and contextual, they are diverse and contextual *in similar ways* to those of physically co-present sex workers. For example, 'direct' sex workers (Sanders et al., 2018) also cite their work as flexible, with financial earnings also often depending on luck (e.g., a large audience at the strip club, or a particularly well-paying escort client) (Kong, 2006; Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006). Camming processes and performance methods are wide-ranging and dependant on the preferences of clients (e.g., wanting the worker to mimic a dog) and the worker themselves (e.g., refusing to masturbate) – but so too are the processes and performance methods of independent sex workers such as escorts and dominatrices (Pinsky & Levey, 2015). As such, I argue that the experiences of cam girls can be encompassed within prior theory and research in relation to physically co-present sex work, and that previous literature remains relevant and applicable to online indirect contexts, though with additional consideration of the implications of digital mediation.

It was also found that participants rarely solely engaged in livestreamed cam work, with many also conducting various direct (physically co-present) and indirect (virtually co-present) forms of sex work such as bespoke pornography, stripping and escorting. Hence camming was not an 'alternative' to co-present sex work, but an extension of it. Furthering this, participants used a variety of media within the 'character' of their cam persona (e.g., Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook) to interact with customers and provide additional paid and unpaid content. These findings indicate two factors – firstly, that women may pursue several different forms of work in the sex industry, and it should not be assumed

that indirect sex workers do not also experience direct sex work factors and consequences (or vice versa).

Secondly, these findings indicate the extent to which 'sex work' and 'cam work' are restrictive classifications, and require the inclusion of additional practices. For example, the creation of bespoke pornography for camming clients was considered common practice, and spoken of by participants as doing 'cam work' despite the content not being livestreamed. This supports points made in Chapter 1 in relation to the ambiguous and changeable nature of language and practices of sex work. Sex work-related classifications should be continually reassessed to more broadly encompass the range of labour that occurs in these contexts.

### *7.2.2 Camming encompasses several forms of labour*

The analysis presented demonstrated that camming was a 'nexus of labour', wherein a range of physical and psychological efforts were expended by participants. These efforts included physical 'body work' (Wolkowitz, 2002), digital labour (Fuchs, 2014), emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and safety work (Vera-Grey, 2016). While specific aspects of camming were described by participants as 'fun' or requiring little effort for high financial reward, much of participants' labour practices were not fully recognised or compensated. Thus, despite the work itself appearing to be relatively simple and financially rewarding, the combined efforts required to cam successfully often made the work more 'pain' rather than 'gain'.

I argue that the 'invisibility' of participants' immaterial and unpaid labour was partially due to the work being 'feminised' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2013). The unpaid labour the women engaged in is generally expected of women in other workplace settings – for example, wearing make-up and making clients feel interesting and desirable. As Nayar (2017) has previously argued, "aspects of [cam] work intertwine with demands and conditions of women's work in domestic and service settings, reinforcing sexual divisions of labour that rely on women's emotional reserves" (p. 13). As such, it was found that participants

described having no choice but to engage in such efforts, particularly due the aesthetic, sexualised and embodied nature of the work. Essentially, if the women wanted to success in the business of camming, they could not 'opt out' of making themselves look a particular way. In addition, they were required to engage with the clients in an inauthentic manner (while making it appear authentic), often stroking their egos or lying about how desirable they were. This is ultimately the business of sex work in a capitalist service industry, providing the client with what they ostensibly want, even if it goes against the grain personally and politically.

The above finding is consistent with other researchers' work on emotional/feminised labour in sex work contexts (Sanders, 2005; Pinsky & Levey, 2015). However, I theorise that the invisibility of cam girls' labour was further exacerbated by much of it being online and immaterial (i.e., digital labour), and therefore difficult to track and quantify. Indeed, it was found that extensive knowledge of digital practices (e.g., using HTML, troubleshooting Internet connectivity issues, navigating online payment systems, editing videos) was needed to conduct cam work safely and successfully. This finding again challenges the prevalent media depiction of camming as an easy and unskilled type of work (Sciortino, 2018) and may explain why participants tended to have pre-existing proficiencies in this realm from personal media usage.

Notably, it was found that the Aotearoa/New Zealand context was specifically relevant in relation to cam girl labour. For example, participants often described being disadvantaged by the poor Internet speed and connection still prevalent in this country. Furthermore, conducting in-person sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand's decriminalised framework was described by many participants as 'safer' than camming. Participants argued that in-person sex work can take place in women-dominated, secure, legal environments in this country, whereas camming involved dealing with overseas clients and moderators who were either not subject to the same legal expectations or could not be easily prosecuted. It was also emphasised that in-person sex work was more ephemeral, whereas

camming could potentially lead to capping and future social consequences, and many described preferring the former for that reason.

Other participants argued that camming was a safer form of labour than in-person sex work, and described feeling 'empowered' by the mediated affordances of the practice (e.g., turning off the computer or blocking users/countries). Generally, though, participants described camming as an unexpectedly unsafe practice, particularly due to their experiences of scamming, doxing and capping. While participants mentioned employing safety work to prevent stalking, harassment and scamming from clients, it was often referenced in relation to attempting to maintain anonymity in their personal networks. As such, safety work was largely a tactic against *stigma*, and the most traumatic experiences described by participants were those that involved being 'found out' by friends and family. This finding provides further evidence to support the argument that the psychological and social harms of stigma are deeply distressing to sex workers, and may be considered more 'dangerous' than physical risks (Tomura, 2009; Minichiello, Scott, & Cox, 2017).

### *7.2.3 Camming requires the negotiation of multiple subjectivities*

It was found that the 'cam girl' subject position was multifaceted and required the simultaneous negotiation of different (and often contradictory) subjectivities, and that participants' complex experiences of situating themselves in relation to the practice further supports the need for a critical feminist perspective on sex work (Henry & Farvid, 2017). I therefore argue that camming researchers should view the practice intersectionally, considering the contextually specific 'pleasures and dangers' (Vance, 1984) experienced by each cam girl, and the extent to which their choices are simultaneously agentic and constrained by social structures (e.g., capitalism and postfeminist rhetoric).

Furthermore, I argue that it is vital to maintain this critical approach when approaching issues of safety and risk in relation to camming practices. While the participants' descriptions of the dangers of doxing and capping support the findings of other scholars (Jones, 2015b, 2016; Sanders et al., 2018) and suggest

the need for greater legislative protections (or greater enforcement of existing protections), it should be emphasised that doxing and capping were constructed as dangerous because they would (or could) result in stigmatisation. Specifically, the experience of being doxed or capped was not *itself* described as harmful, other than the extent to which it reduced the amount of money participants could earn (as their labour was shared without compensation amongst those who could otherwise pay for their content). Rather, the harm was primarily said to emerge from the negative social stigmatisation and treatment that could (or did) result from participants' sexual performances being viewed by their personal networks. This provides further evidence in support of the argument that effects of stigma can be the most dangerous aspect of being a sex worker (Tomura, 2009; Minichiello, Scott, & Cox, 2017).

The findings discussed in Chapter 6 also suggest that camming may be a 'rational choice' (Chapkis, 1997) for young Aotearoa/New Zealand women to pursue. While it is not without potential ramifications (as addressed above), it was often described as preferable compared to entry-level minimum wage work in hospitality or retail environments. Participants reported that their preference for cam work was not only due to the material benefits (e.g., flexible hours, higher earnings for less time worked) but the emotional benefits as well, with many stating that their mental health issues and low self-esteem were improved because of the work.

However, a critical perspective again remains crucial in this regard. Firstly, participants situated cam work as *comparatively* superior to harder, lower-waged labour – but no participant described any job they had ever worked (in and out of the sex industry) as without significant drawbacks. This supports a Marxist reading of labour under capitalism as inherently alienating and exploitative, and that sex work is not immune to this, though it should remain accessible as a 'rational choice' given the lack of preferable alternatives (Chapkis, 1997; Beloso, 2012).

Secondly, participants' improved self-esteem was often predicated on the extent to which they felt men viewed them as sexually attractive. While I argue

that this is not inherently problematic – it is a common human practice to seek positive reinforcement of one's looks and charm (Noles, Cash, & Winstead, 1985) – it is nevertheless problematic in the contemporary context given the extent to which women remain socially valued and judged based on their appearance (Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Barker, Gill, & Harvey, 2018). This suggests that feminist perspectives remain important in camming contexts, and that exploring the effects of male validation on cam girls' self-esteem may require further inquiry.

Furthering my feminist critique, it should be emphasised the hypersexual performance employed when occupying the 'cam persona' suggested that participants were influenced by (mainstream) pornographic norms of women's behaviour and appearance. These norms were seen as what clients desired and may have been identified as the standard of what constitutes sexiness. Although notable, I will again argue that this conclusion may be overly one-dimensional. Firstly, participants described knowingly and strategically employing stereotypical gender norms for profit, which is in line with the findings of other sex work researchers (Sanders, 2005; Raguparan, 2017) and the theory of the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti, 1988). Additionally, participants emphasised that they were often requested to 'dominate' clients, suggesting that the male dominant/female submissive paradigm (Antevska & Gavey, 2015) may not always be applicable in camming contexts. This finding also provides further evidence to support the argument that power dynamics may be arousing in themselves, and that sex work (to an extent, under constrained social circumstances) may hold the potential for traditional gender dynamics to be challenged and subverted.

## 7.3 Contributions

In this thesis, I situated my research against a wide-ranging background of literature, providing ample context with which to interpret the findings. Firstly, I explored the history of sex work, illuminating the range of social and legal constructions that shaped the perceptions and practice of the work in

Aotearoa/New Zealand and Western society more broadly. I then discussed the implications of new media and technologically-mediated intimacy, before explaining and summarising online sex work both in terms of current practices and academic research of the topic thus far. I then provided a thorough background of the social, economic and political context of twenty-first century Aotearoa/New Zealand, suggesting the extent to which various discourses and norms may affect cam girls' experiences and perceptions of the work. Finally, I summarised and critiqued the ideological underpinnings of a range of feminist perspectives on sex work, providing evidence to support my stance and aims as a critical feminist researcher.

My primary contribution, however, is the provision of a perspective previously unexplored in an academic context: women's experiences of camming in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This was a strategic choice that led to additional evidence to support the need for further revision of Aotearoa/New Zealand's decriminalised model, with specific protections for online sex workers, to mitigate some of the dangers described by participants. Furthermore, these findings indicate that stigma towards sex work and sex workers is still prevalent in this country despite our legal model, suggesting that further efforts are needed that specifically address negative social attitudes towards sex workers and 'inappropriately' sexual women more broadly.

I provided a range of details about camming practices, which I argue remain insufficiently explored academically at this stage. For example, participants' use of a range of different media platforms to facilitate their work (e.g., Snapchat) is notable and only briefly touched upon by other researchers (Nayar, 2017; Sanders et al., 2018), and comparisons of the 'cultures' of a range of different cam sites are otherwise unexplored academically. I also illuminated a range of contextual variables that may affect the experiences of those who conduct the work (e.g., financial necessity and 'burn out'), which may be referred to and considered by future researchers in this realm. Finally, I provided additional evidence that immaterial labour, especially that which is stereotypically 'women's work', is insufficiently recognised and valued (Nayar, 2017). By

examining a form of work that encapsulates an unusually large range of labour types, I discerned various ways that different forms of labour are disproportionately recognised and compensated – a line of inquiry that may prove useful to other researchers.

## 7.4 Limitations

This project is limited by a range of factors, many of which were unavoidable given the limited scope of Master's theses. Firstly, only eight participants agreed to be interviewed. Although a small participant pool, the length of the interviews and the richness of the data collected mean that the findings are still notable and an impetus for further, more specific and/or wide-ranging research. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, the lack of cam models willing to participate in the research may indicate a) the extent to which Aotearoa/New Zealand cam girls prioritise anonymity, and b) collective resentment towards paternalistic sex work-related research, both of which can be considered findings in and of themselves.

Additionally, those who did participate were demographically similar, and I was therefore unable to present information about the experiences of cam girls who are not relatively young, white/Pākehā, cisgender, able-bodied and tertiary-educated. While it is possible that cam girls who occupy these demographic categories are the statistical majority in this country, this cannot be ascertained without further research and analysis (e.g., a national survey).

This project is also limited by the lack of statistics and quantitative details gathered and provided (e.g., specific earnings). Again, this was partially due to the scope of my thesis, but also because my methods were intentionally exclusively qualitative to focus fully on the described subjective experiences of women who did cam work. Indeed, it was found that participants often had difficulty remembering exact details about their work, further limiting my ability to produce specific numeric averages. This may indicate that other researchers in this area could benefit from working with cam site owners to access more concrete data (e.g., user demographics and average earnings).

I also chose to focus on a very specific form of camming (i.e., solo and home-based). While camming is mostly a 'cottage industry', it should be noted that the work is increasingly taking place in organised, brothel-esque contexts in many areas of the world (Mathews, 2017). Cam girls may also mainly work with one or more other models who are physically co-present with them. While some of my participants dabbled with paired camming, they worked (physically) independently most the time. Thus, my analysis is based on the experiences of women who were almost always physically alone when working, and is limited in that respect. Further research is needed that focuses on the experiences of cam workers who are often or always physically co-present with cam-brothel owners and/or other sex workers, as their experiences affect the extent to which camming can be considered a (physically) safer and less coercive form of sex work.

Finally, given that all the interviews took place in 2017, I was unable to provide any findings that relate to recent law changes that may have affected Aotearoa/New Zealand cam girls, including FOSTA/SESTA[55] and Patreon's[56] recent suspension of many online sex workers' accounts (Cole, 2018b). Preliminary research and media reports suggest that this may soon be a pertinent area of inquiry, as I will discuss in more detail in the section below.

## 7.5 Potential for further research

The findings of this project suggest a range of potential areas for further academic inquiry. Firstly, cam models who occupy other demographic

[55] The Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) are two bills that were recently passed into law in the United States. It is now illegal for US-run websites to 'knowingly' facilitate sex trafficking, meaning that several websites used by sex workers to advertise have shut down to avoid potential legal action, as they could be charged if traffickers ever used their sites.

[56] Patreon is a crowdfunding website with guidelines around 'adult content' that have tightened in the last year, leading to many sex workers having their accounts (and primary source of income) suspended.

categories (e.g., men, transgender people, differently-abled people, people of colour) are likely to have vastly different experiences to those described by the participants in this project, and should receive specific and specialised inquiry (i.e., consideration of the stigma experienced by transgender people and ways in which this may manifest in a camming context). As Jones (2015a) noted, the "affordances of online sex work presented in the existing literature are highly racialized and not evenly felt", and she emphasised the need for research that considers how different intersections of oppression "impact the wages, work experiences, and conditions of labour for all online sex workers" (p. 796)

Relatedly, this thesis was unable to explore the participants' high instances of bisexuality/pansexuality, a demographic discrepancy also noted in the recent sex work survey conducted by Sanders et al. (2018). Scholars have found that bisexual/pansexual women are disproportionately victims of physical and sexual violence (Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013) and given that the same is found of sex workers (Sanders, 2004), this may be a particularly pressing subject to investigate. Additionally, scholars have suggested that bisexual/pansexual women experience greater feelings of isolation and depression than heterosexual and homosexual people, which has been argued to stem from stigma (Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013). Again, given the levels of stigma experienced by those who do sex work, the experiences of bisexual/pansexual women sex workers may indicate a 'double-dose' of social marginalisation, and specific support may be needed for these women.

Of course, the Internet-based context of camming presents specific dangers (e.g., scamming, doxing and capping), many of which have already been addressed academically (Jones, 2015b, 2016; Sanders et al., 2018). While these remain important areas of discussion, it is also vital to address the recent law changes mentioned in the section above (e.g., FOSTA/SESTA). The legislative changes implemented this year in the United States are already being found to affect the health and wellbeing of online sex workers around the world, including Aotearoa/New Zealand (Robinson, 2018). Journalists and researchers have

found that the closure of popular, globally-used websites such as Backpage[57] and the 'personals' section of Craigslist[58] have led previously indoor workers to seek street-based work out of desperation, which may have already resulted in the assault and murder of many (McCombs, 2018). As such, it is imperative that those who conduct camming-related research in the future place due emphasis on the effects of these laws.

A comparative study of webcam models in different legal contexts may also prove relevant, especially in areas of the world where sex work is more punitively monitored. This may also be an effective way of exploring the extent to which legislation affects stigma towards sex workers, as while physically co-present sex work is usually more criminalised than online-based work (Jones, 2015b; Sanders et al., 2018) negative perceptions of sex workers may socially disadvantage those who do cam work, even if their specific work is not illegal. Furthermore, it may also be useful to examine the mental health and experiences of burn out (Vanwesenbeeck, 2005) in cam workers specifically, especially in comparison to those who do only physically co-present work, as well as those who do both (direct and indirect).

Finally, camming suggests the need for revised theoretical perspectives on sex work. Feminist approaches thus far have been predicated on the assumption of physical co-presence and the lack of digital mediation. As such, it is possible that recently developed approaches such as 'xenofeminism' (Cuboniks, 2018) and 'feminist new materialism' (Pitts-Taylor, 2016) could be useful in this realm, as both seek to explore ways in which technology and/or social constructions have embodied, material effects (while rejecting the fixed, essentialist perspectives of much radical feminist theory). The technology involved in cam work cannot be separated from one's experience of the practice, and feminist

[57] Backpage was a classified advertising site that was used by sex workers around the world. After FOSTA/SESTA was passed in 2018, the website closed down to avoid legal pursuit.

[58] Craiglist, like Backpage, is a classified advertising site. Both sex workers and clients often used the 'personals' section to advertise or request sexual services.

readings that focus purely on the 'natural' body or social/discursive constructions may therefore no longer be sufficient.

## 7.6 Recommendations

Apart from the need for additional research (as detailed above), I would also recommend the following:

1. The New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC) and/or Netsafe[59] provide resources specific to Internet-based sex workers, such as information about how to file Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedowns of capped videos, or how to legally proceed after being doxed or scammed.
2. An Aotearoa/New Zealand-based application and/or website, ideally designed and run by the NZPC and/or sex workers, that provides sex workers with a space to safely advertise direct work and conduct indirect work (e.g., camming), thus preventing sites and applications run in countries with other legal frameworks from negatively affecting sex workers in this country.
3. The New Zealand Government provide funding for a) the NZPC and/or Netsafe to offer free legal and online services to aid and protect online sex workers who are victims of scamming, doxing and/or capping, and b) to offset the costs of producing/running the website/application discussed above.
4. The New Zealand Government introduce a public health initiative designed to educate the Aotearoa/New Zealand populace about the dangers of stigma and the importance of treating a) sex work as a legitimate profession, and b) sex workers with care and respect.

## 7.7 Conclusion

[59] Netsafe is an Aotearoa/New Zealand-based not-for-profit organisation who provide advice to those affected by online harassment (e.g., revenge porn and bullying via social media).

> *Not that anyone here but you would understand. The rest of them would like to watch me and feel nothing. Reduce me to components as in a clock factory or abattoir. Crush out the mystery. Wall me up alive in my own body. They'd like to see through me, but nothing is more opaque than absolute transparency. Look – my feet don't hit the marble! Like breath or a balloon, I'm rising, I hover six inches in the air in my blazing swan-egg of light. You think I'm not a goddess? Try me. This is a torch song. Touch me and you'll burn.*

I would like to end this thesis as it began – with an excerpt from Margaret Atwood's 'Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing' (1995). Here, the sex worker depicted again expresses her distaste for those who make simplistic and paternalistic proclamations about her and her work ("*Crush out the mystery*"), their lack of empathy ("*watch me and feel nothing*") and their objectification of her body (*"Reduce me to components*"). She describes herself as unable to be destroyed by the touch of men or the views of those who dislike or pity her, portraying herself as all-powerful and immaterial ("*my feet don't hit the marble … Like breath or a balloon, I'm rising*"), and implying that her physical nudity does not equate to emotional vulnerability ("*nothing is more opaque than absolute transparency*"). Finally, she claims the poem is a "*torch song*", twisting the meaning of the phrase (a woeful lament of unrequited affection) to express scorching fierceness ("*Touch me and you'll burn*") – a fitting assertion, given that efforts to manhandle a performing cam girl would result in a fist through a hot screen. All in all, it is hoped that at this stage, the reader will "*understand*".

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# Appendix A: Ethics Approval

**AUTEC Secretariat**

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

12 December 2016

Pani Farvid
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Pani

Re Ethics Application: **16/430 You can look but you can't touch: Women's experiences of webcam sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 12 December 2019.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 12 December 2019;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 12 December 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: mahenry@aut.ac.nz; madeline.v.henry@gmail.com; Sharyn Graham Davies

# Appendix B: Tools

## Participant Information Sheet

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

7th November 2016

**Project Title:**

"You can look but you can't touch": Women's experiences of webcam sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand

**An Invitation:**

Hi! Firstly, thank you for contacting me and expressing an interest in getting involved with my research project. My name is Madeline Henry, I'm a postgraduate student at AUT and I plan to turn this project into my Master's thesis.

This information sheet serves as an invitation for you to participate in a confidential interview with me about your experiences as a cam girl. I'm aware that there is a lot of stigmatisation around camming and sex work in general, so I completely understand if after reading this sheet you decide not to participate. I want to emphasise that your involvement in this research will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. That is – if you want to get involved, it should only be because it interests you, not for any other reason.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

I want to explore the experiences of cam girls in New Zealand. In doing this, I hope to not only add to a relatively new area of research, but also allow cam girls themselves (i.e., you) to voice their opinions and experiences. Academic research about sex work tends to make judgments without giving the people involved with the work itself the chance to voice their perspectives. I find this problematic. With my project, your viewpoints (should you choose to participate) would be hugely beneficial.

I should note that the main purpose of this research is to use it to form a Master's thesis. I may also use data from the research in conference presentations, journal articles and/or other academic publications/presentations. To clarify, your information will be 100% confidential – I will refer to you by a fake name and take out or change any identifying information from your interview.

**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You were identified either because you saw one of my recruitment posters and sent me an email to get in contact with you, or because you were in the personal network of another participant and heard about this through word of mouth. You should also be 18 or over, identify as a woman (or present as a woman when camming), and either currently cam as a source of income or did at some point in the last five years. It should be noted that we would prefer that any students (past or present) of myself or either of my supervisors (Pani Farvid and Sharyn Graham-Davies) do not apply. This is to ensure the wellbeing and security of our students and prevent any harmful power imbalances between us and our participants.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you wish to participate in this research, please email me back a signed consent form in the next week. If you got into contact with me via email, I will have attached the consent form along with this information sheet. If you got into contact with me in a face-to-face context, I will ensure one is provided for you before any research commences.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced removal of your data may not be possible, so please keep this in mind before you accept.

**What will happen in this research?**

Your part in this research will consist of a single one-on-one interview. All you will have to do is meet with me at a convenient prearranged time (either at AUT or via Skype/FaceTime) and talk to me for around about an hour. The conversation will be recorded on a digital recording device and later transcribed by me so I can use your quotes and ideas as the basis for my research.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

Firstly, I can guarantee there won't be any physical discomforts or risks. However, we will be talking frankly about your experiences when camming, which has the possibility of making you a bit embarrassed or uncomfortable. Your comfort will be the first priority, so please keep in mind that you will be more than welcome to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview entirely if you wish.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

The interview should be a very relaxed atmosphere – I'm only interested in your experiences. First of all, I will organise a place and time to meet you based on whatever would make you the most comfortable (it's up to you). I want to stress that if you become uncomfortable during the interview, you are more than welcome to change the topic, refuse to answer any question at any time, and/or drop out of the study altogether with no questions asked. Finally, I will provide you with a list of different support services at the end of the interview, just in case any issues come up that you want to address.

**What are the benefits?**

I want to emphasise that there are no direct benefits to participating in this research project. However, you will have the chance to share your experiences and opinions on your line of work in a way that will contribute to a new and understudied area of research. You will have the chance to discuss the aspects of your work that *you* feel are the most important, and address issues such as stereotypes and misconceptions. I also hope that you will be able to learn something from me through the experience (both through our discussion and later if you choose to receive a copy of the research findings) and use this newfound knowledge and reflection to your advantage. You may even find the interview fun and therapeutic, especially if you don't usually discuss camming with your friends and family.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

I will ensure your privacy is protected in three key ways:

1) I will assign you a pseudonym (fake name) that I will refer to you as in my research,

2) I will alter or remove any obviously distinguishing parts of your interview (i.e. references to close friends, where you live or what you look like) and

3) I will ensure that only myself and my supervisors (Pani Farvid and Sharyn Graham-Davies) have access to the data and your contact details.

All data from this project will be destroyed after six years.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

I'll need about an hour of your time for the interview, but you should also take into account travel time to and from the AUT campus (City or North, depending on your personal preference).

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

I will give you a week to think about it, then I'll send you another email if I don't hear back before then.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You can receive a summary of my research findings if you tick the 'yes' box on the consent form.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Pantéa (Pani) Farvid, *pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz*, 09-921-9999 ext. 7326

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 09-921-9999 ext. 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this information sheet and a copy of the consent form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

***Researcher Contact Details:***

NAME: Madeline Henry

EMAIL: *mahenry@aut.ac.nz*

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

NAME: Dr. Pantéa Farvid

EMAIL: *pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz*

PHONE: 09-921-9999 ext. 7326

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *12/12/2016*, AUTEC Reference number *16/430*.**

# Consent Form

*Project title:* ***"You can look but you can't touch": Women's experiences of webcam sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand***

*Project Supervisor:* ***Pani Farvid***

*Researcher:* ***Madeline Henry***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 7th November 2016.
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.

I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ○ No ○

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's contact details :

.....

.....

.....

Date: .....

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/12/2016***

***AUTEC Reference number 16/430***

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

**New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC)**

About: "The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective advocates for the rights, health and well-being of all sex workers. We provide specific information to people who are thinking about sex work or have just started. There is also information for more experienced sex workers. If you are a sex worker, we would love to hear from you, whatever your background. We have community bases throughout New Zealand."
Website: http://www.nzpc.org.nz/
Phone: 09 366 6106 (Auckland)
Email: auckland@nzpc.org.nz

**Lifeline**

About: "Lifeline Aotearoa's telephone counselling service provides 24 hours a day, 7 days a week counselling and support."
Website: http://www.lifeline.org.nz/
Phone: 09 522 2999 (Auckland)
0800 543 354 (Outside Auckland)
Email: info@lifeline.org.nz

**Youthline**

About: "Youthline works with people from all walks of life, from all cultures and with all sorts of things going on in their lives. This can be anything from just wanting to talk something through (big or small, via TXT, email or phone), to working face to face with a young person or even their whole family. We also work with a really wide range of issues, from relationship stuff (boyfriends/girlfriends/friends/family/work etc.), emotional stuff (feeling down, grief and losing someone close to you, going through tough times), to helping connect you with services or help in your community."
Website: https://www.youthline.co.nz/
Phone: 0800 376 633
Email: talk@youthline.co.nz

**Women's Refuge New Zealand**

About: "We are an independent, bicultural community organisation and have support services designed especially for children, young people, Māori women, Pasifika women and migrant and refugee women. We also assist lesbian women, older women and women with disabilities. You can contact us at Women's Refuge to get help and advice about talking to friends or family members you worry are being abused emotionally, physically, sexually, spiritually or financially."
Website: https://womensrefuge.org.nz/
Phone: 09 378 7635 (Auckland)
Email: info@refuge.org.nz

# Appendix C: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreements

## Confidentiality Agreement

| | |
|---|---|
| *Project title:* | ***"You can look but you can't touch": Women's experiences of webcam sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand*** |
| *Project Supervisor:* | ***Pani Farvid*** |
| *Researcher:* | ***Madeline Henry*** |

- ✓ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ✓ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ✓ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: .....

Transcriber's name: PATRICK USMAR

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

Date: 9/10/17.

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Pani Farvid: pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz

Madeline Henry: mahenry@aut.ac.nz

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/12/2016***

***AUTEC Reference number 16/430***

*Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form*

# Confidentiality Agreement

*Project title:* ***"You can look but you can't touch": Women's experiences of webcam sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand***

*Project Supervisor:* ***Pani Farvid***

*Researcher:* ***Madeline Henry***

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- ○ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ○ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ○ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: .....

Transcriber's name: Tane Pamatatau-Marques

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

0211 33 0007

t.pamatatau@gmail.com

Date: 11/10/17.

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Pani Farvid: pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz

Madeline Henry: mahenry@aut.ac.nz

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12/12/2016***

***AUTEC Reference number 16/430***

*Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form*