'Always hot, always live':[1] Computer-mediated sex work in the era of 'camming'

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Abstract

'Sex work' and sex workers have been constituted in conflicting and contradictory ways, within both academia and wider society. Many theorists argue that sex work is inherently exploitative, although much of this research is predicated on the idea that sex work involves being physically co-present with those who buy it or otherwise facilitate the process. The development of computer-mediated communication and digital technology has led to various new forms of sex work, including 'camming'. In this context, 'webcam models' perform sex acts, often while alone in their own homes or in other private indoor domains, for online audiences who pay them. As a relatively new practice, camming is currently under-researched and under-theorised. This paper will explore some of the ways in which sex work has been discursively constructed and theorised about, as well as the legal context in which it operates, before discussing the practice of camming in relation to these and to recent research. Overall, we argue that camming challenges some of the conventional understandings and critiques of sex work, and that sex work-oriented research should consider more critical perspectives that take into account the hybridity and complexity of contemporary sex work.

Keywords
Camming, webcam models, sex work, labour, computer-mediated communication, digital technology

Constructions of prostitution, sex work and sex workers

Prostitution or 'sex work'[2] is touted as the world's oldest profession, although its manifestations vary across time and context (Foucault, 1978; Weeks, 2002). Currently, there is a tendency to characterise sex work as synonymous with prostitution, even though contemporary sex work encompasses a range of activities and vocations (Sagar et al., 2016). Prostitution refers exclusively to the transaction that occurs when a person engages in penetrative intercourse and/ or other sexual activities (for example, oral sex) with another person for monetary payment (Miller, 2004; Green, 2016). However, even this definition of prostitution has shifted across time. More specifically, being a prostitute has not always been defined by the *act* of selling sexual services. For example, prostitutes in medieval London were referred to as 'meretrices' – a word that was also used to denote women who were sexually promiscuous (Karras & Boyd, 2002). At the time, this meant any woman who had sex outside of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage (Karras & Boyd, 2002). As such, being a meretrix was *identity*-based, and women 'could be arrested for *being* [deemed] a prostitute' (Karras & Boyd, 2002, p. 93, emphasis in original), rather than for *engaging* in prostitution. This perception of sex workers can be read as indicative of the wider social norms and values of medieval society, particularly in terms of women's expected roles in a deeply patriarchal and religious context. Similarly, the way in which sex work and workers are understood in twenty-first century Aotearoa/New Zealand can highlight the range of social dynamics, norms, and inequities present in our own society.

Discursive constructions of sex work are inextricably intertwined with the broader sociocultural positionings of gender, sex, and sexuality. Historically, words associated with sex work have been imbibed with negative connotations, thus leading to recent efforts to utilise less derogatory terminology to refer to workers and the work itself (Kempadoo, 1998; Zangger, 2015). Currently, while the value-laden word 'whore' is rarely used in relation to sex workers – except in the case of workers who use the term as a reclaimed slur (Kong, 2006) – the word 'prostitute' remains prevalent. However, this word also contains pejorative undertones. For example, it is common to claim that one 'prostituted' themselves as a means to an end, usually inferring that one acted 'in a debased or corrupt way for profit or advantage' (Tomura, 2009, p. 52). Given this context, it has become increasingly accepted practice to refer to those who conduct sex work as 'sex workers' (Harding & Hamilton, 2009; Weitzer, 2010), thus removing negative (and often gendered) connotations from the title and emphasising sex work as an *occupation* as opposed to an *identity*. However, it is precisely this removal of negative connotations that anti-sex work researchers protest, and they eschew the term 'sex worker' in favour of 'victims' and 'prostituted women' (MacKinnon, 1989; Farley, 2004; Jeffreys, 2010) to emphasise what they view as the inevitably violent and abusive system of the sex industry.

Other scholars argue that this 'victimhood' terminology contributes to the stigmatisation and dehumanisation of sex workers by discounting their personal agency (Rubin, 1984; Chapkis, 2003; Weitzer, 2010). Furthermore, Farvid and Glass (2014) note that many newspapers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in discussing cases of violence against sex workers, framed these cases as effectively inevitable, with the workers involved depicted as partially 'deserving' mistreatment due to their 'choice' to engage in (dangerous) work. These findings demonstrate a profession bias, where the safety of women during particular kinds of work is seen as unavoidable (Farvid & Glass, 2014). Additionally, Farvid and Glass (2014) stress that the people who actually procure sex are rarely discussed in news items surrounding sex work. This invisibility points to a longstanding double standard within the sex industry where the (typically) men who buy sex are absent from any discussions regarding the industry, while the (typically) women who sell sex are problematised and stigmatised. Overall, sex work, and especially sex workers, continue to be perceived negatively, even in the decriminalised context of Aotearoa/New Zealand (see also other papers in this issue addressing sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand).

Feminist approaches

Sex work is currently approached in a range of ways, both theoretically and legally. Feminist approaches, by definition, strive for gender equity by advocating for the rights of women. However, assumptions around what constitutes 'rights', 'equality', 'agency', and 'power' can differ vastly between different feminist paradigms. For example, radical feminist scholars typically advocate for the abolition of sex work because they see it as exploitative, inherently physically and mentally harmful, and as contributing to further subjugation of women under patriarchy (Barry, 1979, 1996; Dworkin, 1981; Farley, 2004; Hughes, 1999, 2004; Jeffreys, 2008, 2010; MacKinnon, 1979, 1989). Liberal feminist scholars, largely as a response to radical feminist work, argue against the all-encompassing idea that sex work is intrinsically harmful, claiming that the practice can be a source of fun, emancipation, and empowerment (Rubin, 1984; Chapkis, 1997, 2003; Doezema, 2002). It should be noted that the word 'liberal', in relation to 'liberal feminists', is aligned to the idea of individual liberty and the right to make one's own choices (perhaps with a degree of licentiousness in this context). Radical feminists focus less on the individual and seek to focus on dismantling oppressive social structures, arguing that individual 'choices' are inherently constrained rather than 'free' within a patriarchal context.

Marxist feminists view sex work as inherently exploitative due to the oppressive nature of work under capitalism, arguing that sex work cannot be empowering if it is taking place within this economic system (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001; West & Austrin, 2005; Limoncelli, 2009; Beloso, 2012). However, Marxist theorists tend to argue against the abolitionist stance, claiming that sex work should be a safe and viable option, given the material reality of life under late capitalism (Beloso, 2012). Lastly, those we will term 'critical feminists' argue for a dialectical approach, considering the individual subjectivities of sex workers, as well as the social, cultural and economic structures that shape the industry, and their experience within it (Sandy, 2006; Harding & Hamilton, 2009; Comte, 2014; Farvid & Glass, 2014; Connelly, Jarvis-King & Ahearne, 2015). Additionally, 'intersectional feminist' perspectives (Crenshaw, 1991), which seek to critically examine the experiences of women through the consideration of multiple axes of oppression (e.g. race and class), are also included under the aforementioned 'critical feminist' umbrella.

While this is not an exhaustive list of feminist paradigms, the majority of sex work related research tends to fit more or less into one of these categories. It should also be noted that although some identify with 'critical feminism' (e.g., Farvid & Glass, 2014), it is not a term that many apply to their work. The phrase is used here to refer to a *range* of academic works that seek to balance considerations of micro-level subjectivities and macro-level structures, as well as avoiding a rigid pro- or anti-sex work stance.

Legal models

There are four major legal frameworks applied to sex work globally: it is either completely illegal, governed by the Swedish (demand) model, legalised but highly regulated, or decriminalised. Abolition of sex work is the most popular legal model for managing it, and prostitution remains outlawed in most countries worldwide. However, there are increasing calls for decriminalisation, due to a growing awareness of the dangers sex workers experience when operating in an illegal context (Armstrong, 2016). If sex workers fear legal reprimand for the job they have, they are much less likely to seek help from police in situations of coercion and assault (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). They are also much less likely to carry paraphernalia that increase their safety (e.g., condoms and lubricant), but could incriminate them as sex workers (Jayasree, 2004).

One legal approach aimed at addressing the 'demand' for prostitution, while seeking to protect sex workers, is the Swedish/Nordic model (named due to its initiation in Scandinavian countries). Variations of this model have been increasingly implemented in the West, including Canada and Ireland in 2014, and most recently France in 2016 (Månsson, 2017). Under this model, only those who buy sex – as well as other facilitators of sexual services (e.g., 'pimps') – can be criminally charged, but not the workers themselves. The premise behind this model is a desire to reduce the *demand* for sex work, but protect the workers themselves from being criminally charged for conducting the work, thus giving workers greater freedom to pursue legal help in situations of violence and abuse. However, many have argued that the reality of criminalising every person whom a sex worker must deal with on a day-to-day basis means that workers are still driven underground and forced to operate in dangerous circumstances (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013).

Places that 'legalise' sex work (such as Germany, the state of Nevada in the USA, and the state of Victoria in Australia) enforce stringent regulations that can result in workers being charged in situations of noncompliance, including 'no-go zones' and frequent compulsory doctor's visits (Ham & Gerard, 2014). Aotearoa/New Zealand, on the other hand, is in the

unique position of having decriminalised sex work since 2003 (Barrington, 2008), meaning that no person can be charged for performing, buying or facilitating sexual services between consenting adults. The industry is largely left to manage itself, as long as it complies with the law (see Schmidt, this issue, for an in-depth discussion of varying legal models related to sex work within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context).

Many advocates of decriminalisation hold up Aotearoa/New Zealand as the international 'gold standard', claiming that our legal model is the best way to protect sex workers from harm and exploitation (Sanders & Campbell, 2007; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013; Comte, 2013; Connelly, Jarvis-King & Ahearne, 2015). Partially due to this view, as well as to the shift towards more progressive attitudes to sex and the sexual behaviour of women (Brents, 2016), much academic research around sex work has shifted from the abolitionist view of radical feminist authors towards that of liberal feminists (who emphasise the right for people to choose to participate in sex work – and possibly even enjoy it) and Marxist feminists (who emphasise the material reality of life under capitalism and the need for sex work to exist as a viable employment option) (Connelly, Jarvis-King & Ahearne, 2015). The term 'sex worker' is used almost exclusively in these frameworks, with Marxist feminists particularly emphasising the 'work' aspect and liberal feminists condemning the passive, subservient connotations of 'victim'.

However, liberal and Marxist perspectives also theorise about sex work and workers in problematic ways. For example, some liberal feminists have been criticised for claiming that the 'empowerment' of sex workers is possible through the individualistic choice to characterise sex work as fun and pleasurable. This is certainly one way of framing 'the personal is political' in relation to patriarchal exploitation, though it is very much in keeping with neoliberal rhetoric (Beloso, 2012). On the other hand, given that Marxist feminists (like abolitionists) are heavily critical of the current neoliberal capitalist socio-political-economic context, they (unlike abolitionists) emphasise the importance of allowing sex work to occur as safely as possible, given the constraints of our material reality. However, while radical feminists see unequal societal *gender* structures as the main source of inequality when it comes to sex work, Marxists claim that sex work cannot be considered empowering because of uneven and oppressive *economic* structures. So while liberal feminists can be critiqued for not placing enough emphasis on structural issues, radical and Marxist feminists can be similarly critiqued (despite their differences) for minimising individual agency within this context.[3]

It is crucial to note that academic discourses concerning the 'empowerment' of sex workers pertain not only to notions of agency in an *individualistic* sense of 'fun' and 'pleasure' (as per the critique of liberal feminism detailed above). For instance, the experiences of sex workers in India have been argued as illustrating *collective* empowerment (Jayasree, 2004; Swendeman et al, 2015). These authors cite examples of sex worker-led organisations, such as the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, which seek to promote safer sex and better circumstances for sex workers through strategies such as condom distribution, media advocacy, and various forms of peer outreach and education (Jayasree, 2004; Swendeman et al, 2015). Crucially, Swendeman et al. (2015) stress that 'agency may be constrained in some domains of life, but that sex workers are nonetheless capable of making strategic choices that benefit themselves and their families' (p. 1012). As such, these authors (Jayasree, 2004; Swendeman et al., 2015) seek to present a nuanced view of sex work and workers, considering societal constraints while also giving due credence to the agency of the workers involved. Again, for the purposes of this paper, we will consider this a 'critical feminist' perspective.

In an attempt to defuse some of the tensions between feminist paradigms, 'critical feminist' approaches aim to take a more nuanced position between these otherwise polarised camps. This is particularly the case when the research incorporates a participatory approach involving

sex workers, and aims for praxis that seeks to improve their daily experiences (Huang, 2016), while remaining critical of the social, cultural and economic structures that create and maintain inequality, broadly and within the sex industry.

Sociocultural constructions of sex work

The ways in which sex work is discursively constructed in contemporary society is also problematic. For example, 'real' sex is currently defined as penis-vagina (or other forms of bodily) penetration (Green, 2016). This remarkably phallocentric approach leads to categorical issues when jobs commonly described as being within the sex industry involve no penetrative sex (or body contact) whatsoever – for example, glamour models or phone sex operators (Miller, 2004). Indeed, it is notable that phone sex operators are considered sex workers when their sexual organs are entirely unseen, as well as glamour models, whose sexual organs are entirely untouched. By this logic, promotional models (or 'promo girls') should be considered sex workers – akin to glamour models – due to the extent to which they present their bodies in a sexual manner for profit, as well as film and television actors who participate in nude scenes of a sexual nature. Similarly, one could argue that film and television actors who pretend to have sex, or utter erotic lines from a movie script, are essentially performing the same role as phone sex operators – yet they are never considered part of the sex industry.

Some scholars have suggested differentiating between 'direct' and 'indirect' sex work and industries to alleviate some of these categorical issues. Harcourt and Donovan (2005) use 'indirect' to refer to sex work in which prostitution still occurs, but is not the worker's main source of income, or the sex is not 'recognised' as prostitution (e.g., sex for drugs, or the recent phenomenon of 'sugar dating' – see Farvid, Glass, and Henry, forthcoming). However, other scholars use these terms to refer specifically to bodily contact, for example: 'Direct sex work refers to direct genital contact (as when an escort has penetrative sex for a fee); indirect sex work refers to sex work where there is no genital contact' (Jones, 2016, p. 231). This approach allows forms of sex work with similar bodily practices to be grouped accordingly, which, in turn, allows appropriate 'pleasures and dangers' (Jones, 2016, p. 231) to be considered and commented on. For instance, direct sex work involves the possibility of physical/sexual assault, whereas indirect sex work may not, but does include dangers such as 'doxxing' (threatening to publish or publicise the address, telephone number, photos or videos of a person online without their consent, usually as a form of blackmail).

Other scholars have suggested using the terms 'body work' (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Wolkowitz, 2002; Sanders, 2004) and/or 'emotional work' (Hochschild, 1979; Sanders, 2005, Abel, 2011) to refer to different forms of sex work. These terms are widely used to illustrate the employment of the body and/or one's emotional performance as tools of labour. It is crucial to emphasise that emotional labour is highly gendered, with professions that require it (e.g., nursing, teaching, hospitality) tending to be dominated by women (Sanders, 2005). While body work and emotional work are terms that have largely been applied to vocations such nursing or hospitality, 'prostitution is a consumer industry where sexuality is explicitly for sale, but … this is not vastly different from other feminized workplaces where sexuality is capitalized on, not only by female workers but also by employers' (Sanders, 2005, p. 337). Indeed, it can be argued that all work in the sex industry requires both body and emotional work to varying degrees (Sanders, 2005).

The differing ways in which various forms of sex work are constructed relate to the values and moralities evident in any given social and cultural context. For example, stripping is routinely considered sex work, but burlesque dancing is not; similarly, glamour models are

often seen as sex workers, but models who pose nude for 'art' are not. Even though the acts performed in these examples are largely synonymous, those who participate in the latter categories are more likely to be white and middle- to upper-class; it has been argued that they therefore have the privilege of disassociating their identities from the (stigmatised) sex worker category (Evans & Riley, 2013; Siebler, 2013).

Some argue that the categorical differentiation of sex work is based around the *intentions* of the worker. That is, labour that *aims* to induce sexual arousal in patrons is what actually categorises certain work as sex work (Andrews, 2012; Fokt, 2012; Green, 2016). Again, this is difficult to measure, and still creates the potential for contestable definitions – for example, as discussed, actors and models often fit these criteria, but are rarely (if ever) classed as sex workers. Overall, these issues stress the extent to which sex work and workers are fluid categories, and how an in-depth exploration of these and other related 'work' can highlight contradictory social norms, specific power dynamics and various inequalities.

One particularly interesting aspect is the extent to which 'sex work' mirrors a normative heterosexual set-up, but is rarely situated as such. For example, in a 'traditional' heterosexual relationship or marriage, men provide women with economic upkeep and women offer men sexual, emotional and/or domestic upkeep. But as soon as the sexual and/or emotional part of this exchange is formalised as a direct economic transaction, and conducted outside a committed relationship, it is seen as immoral or highly problematic. In this way, sex work both extends and challenges conventional heteronormativity, but is rarely understood as such. This contradiction requires more analysis by feminists as well as by gender and sexuality theorists examining the sex industry.

Technology and sex work

The proliferation of computer-mediated communication and digital technology in the twenty-first century has inevitably affected the way that we have (and buy) sex. While sex robots (electronic, responsive versions of sex dolls) are still in the early stages of development and are not yet commonly used (Scheutz & Arnold, 2016), teledildonics (sex toys that can be operated remotely) are becoming increasingly popular. Some teledildonics technology includes vibrators that can be controlled remotely via WiFi or Bluetooth, or electronically paired 'his-and-her' sex toys which allow (cisgender opposite-sex) partners to simulate 'real sex' by mimicking the sensation of penetrative intercourse in real time with the other's movements (Yaoman & Mars, 2011; Liberati, 2017). While teledildonics are largely marketed to long-distance couples for the purpose of maintaining sexual 'contact' (Lombard & Jones, 2013; Wagner & Broll, 2014), they have also been co-opted by online sex workers to add realism and variety to geographically remote sex work (Paasonen, 2011; Empel & Wagner, 2012).

Traditional sex work has also been altered by digital technology. For example, those who conduct full-service sex work can now find customers by advertising online, without the need for pimps or brothel owners as intermediaries (Jones, 2016). Indeed, social media accounts and 'adult' forums can now be accessed and utilised by sex workers, allowing them to promote their services independently for low or no fees (and therefore to profit as fully as possible from their own labour). Sanders et al. (2018) note that new media facilitate both direct and indirect sex work, with 'direct' constituted by the example above of internet-advertised escorting/other sexual services, and 'indirect' internet-based sex work including a range of services that are entirely mediated, involving no bodily contact whatsoever. Interestingly, these authors argue that phone sex work can currently be considered indirect internet-based work, due to the extent to which the practice now commonly involves the use of new media (Sanders et al., 2018).

One novel form of indirect internet-based sex work is webcam modelling, or 'camming'. Webcam models (also referred to as 'camgirls' or 'camboys', depending on the worker's gender presentation) are people who use webcams to stream themselves stripping and/or performing autoerotic stimulation and/or penetration via sex toys. This work is often performed in the webcam model's own private residence (Bleakley, 2014), where they link into a specific host website (such as My Free Cams or LiveJasmin). Customers who wish to watch webcam models visit such websites and give out virtual 'tokens' (purchased in advance) to see specific acts, or to join the webcam model's private chat room. The tokens used are of certain monetary value and go directly into the webcam model's bank account, after the website takes a portion as their hosting fee (Bleakley, 2014; Jones, 2015a, 2016).

Currently, camming frequently operates in a legal grey area. In some countries, it is explicitly legal (the USA) or legal for the workers (Canada), while in others it is explicitly illegal (Philippines, Turkey) or illegal in some circumstances (Russia allows solo shows, but laws prohibiting homosexuality prevent shows involving multiple camgirls). This is further complicated by patrons of webcam models being spread around the globe, so that popular camming sites, such as My Free Cams, pay models in untaxed income from the USA (Bleakley, 2014). It should be noted that models often block clients from their home countries, in order to maintain anonymity.

Although camming was originally a 'cottage industry', there is growing evidence that this is changing, with some models working in formats closely resembling traditional organised sex work venues (Mathews, 2017). However, this does not mean that these workers are necessarily physically coerced or abused in these contexts – a crucial distinction to make, as it is commonly assumed that camgirls in collective formats (especially when located in Eurasia) are trafficked. As Mathews (2017) details in his study of Filipina cam models, 'the girls' modest studios were often one of several in a house owned by a boss; co-workers may be just five feet away. But these are not the "dens of iniquity" portrayed by the media. Many [models'] bosses were aunts or friends' (p. 165). Of course, exploitation can still occur between friends and family members, but Mathews (2017) stresses that the hundreds of cam workers he interviewed over a period of six years overwhelmingly did not consider themselves to be trafficked or otherwise coerced into performing the work (that is, on an interpersonal level – as poverty can limit their choices).

Research into webcam modelling is relatively scarce, especially when compared to the vast array of sex work-oriented research which has been (and is currently) conducted. However, scholars are beginning to explore the practice theoretically, particularly in relation to camgirls. For example, Jones (2015a) takes an intersectional feminist perspective, discussing the racism prevalent in camming through the exclusion and fetishisation of camgirls of colour. Attwood (2011) has examined camming through the perspective of women's sexual agency. She claims that camming complicates the boundaries between who can be considered an object or a subject, as well as the distinction between public and private. She also argues that it is important to question the extent to which women who 'self-sexualise' in these circumstances demonstrate legitimate agency:

> [Camgirls] are not always or only sexual, though they claim the right to be so in some contexts. Camgirls present themselves as cultural producers, challenging the representation of women as technologically inept and as passive sexual objects. They take on the power relations of looking, defying objectification and experimenting with ways of refusing, commanding and controlling the spectators' gaze (Attwood, 2011, p. 212).

Indeed, many scholars (Dobson, 2007; Russo, 2010; Knight, 2000; White, 2003) focus on camming in relation to ideas of surveillance, panopticism (Foucault, 1977), exhibitionism, and voyeurism, often drawing on Laura Mulvey's (1975) formations of scopophilia and the 'male gaze'. However, not all work on camming is purely theoretical, and recently scholars

have focused on personal interviews with and direct quotes from camgirls to glean a better understanding of their experiences and concerns (e.g., Bleakley, 2014; Jones, 2016; Nayar, 2017).

Most webcam models are cisgender women, largely because popular sites like My Free Cams only allow cisgender women to sign up (and do not permit men to be in the room where a woman is camming on these websites) (Jones, 2016). As sex work in general (including stripping, pornography and full-service sex work) is also dominated by ciswomen (Ditmore, 2011; Nadal, Davidoff & Fujii-Doe, 2012), the gender disparity in online work is representative of the broader gender dynamic evident within the sex industry – where it is mostly men that buy sex and mostly women that sell it. Despite this, it is essential to consider the experiences of gender diverse sex workers, especially given the extent to which queer and transgender sex workers experience violence and abuse in the profession (Sausa, Keatley & Operario, 2007; Nemoto, Bödeker & Iwamoto, 2011). Further inquiry is needed to ascertain the extent to which gender diverse workers can and do participate in camming, and the shape of these experiences.

In this paper, we focus mainly on solo camming and use the abbreviated term 'camming' to refer to this practice. There are various other forms of camming, where more than one person may be present and these parties may be engaged in sex acts with each other. Hence, camming is not always a solitary practice. There are also other forms of 'surveillance entertainment', such as erotic reality shows, that mirror camming, but may involve a household of models interacting in multiple ways. Attractive female gamers may livestream themselves on websites such as Twitch, ostensibly simply to 'game', but with a likely awareness that their popularity and corresponding financial support from their audience stems at least partially from their (self)-sexualisation.

Solo camming itself can involve a wide range of practices with varying and contestable degrees of eroticism. Webcam models can achieve financial success without removing their clothing or performing any sex acts, choosing primarily to dance, read novels and magazines, or simply talk to their audience. Conversely, some (explicit) solo cam performers may categorise themselves as 'exhibitionists' on websites such as Chaturbate, thus preventing viewers in their chatroom from being able to pay them at all. These forms of camming are prevalent and warrant further enquiry; however, in this paper we focus on solo, home-based cam work for profit.

Camming as an area of inquiry

Camming practices challenge academic critiques of sex work that paint the industry as inherently violent and exploitative (Jones, 2016). Abolitionist feminist authors claim that '[t]hroughout history, regardless of its legal status, [sex work] has had a devastating impact on women's health' (Farley, 2004, p. 1097), citing both physical (sexually transmitted diseases, recurring illnesses, infections, pain) and psychological (post-traumatic stress disorder, disassociation, addiction) examples in their research. Because the client and worker are not physically co-present during camming, this poses a challenge to some of these claims. Camming (specifically, the solo home-based version we are discussing in this review) cannot result in many of the physical health effects of full-service sex work, such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, assault, sexual coercion, and rape. Many of the actors typically involved in physical sex work, such as pimps, managers or clients, are cut out of the process of physical contact and in-person payment. Although risks are reduced, the lack of physical contact does not mean that intimidation and coercion cannot occur. There are still possible forms of verbal and psychological abuse, for example, forms of cyber harassment and stalking or threats of doxxing.

It is crucial to note that these safety buffers do not apply when individuals are forced to cam, particularly by traffickers, as physical coercion and intimidation are intrinsic to such situations. More investigation is needed to ascertain the extent to which this occurs on camming websites, as statistics are currently lacking. Investigation is also needed to determine the extent to which aspiring pimps are using such new media technologies to promote (and control) sex workers in a similar fashion to what can occur in physically proximate work. Of course, physical health outcomes can still arise from cam work conducted with partners, and the risk of coercion and assault may be present here as well. A comparative analysis between cam models who work alone and those who work with partners is currently lacking, and would be a useful way to investigate the effects of physical co-presence in sex work. Importantly, it is also possible that mental health issues could still occur due to (or be exacerbated by) camming, either from working long hours alone, or from being in a profession based largely around sexualisation, objectification and/or subjugation (Sanders, 2005). However, specific examinations of the mental health of webcam models are yet to appear.

Additionally, it is essential to note that *new* dangers exist for online workers, such as the difficulty of maintaining anonymity, or being the victim of digitally facilitated crimes (for example, patrons may screen-capture and share camming videos, and/or share them without the worker's consent) (Jones, 2015b). While digital-specific dangers are beginning to be explored in relation to online workers in general (Sanders, Connelly & Jarvis King, 2016) and webcam models specifically (Jones, 2015b, 2016), more research – especially work focused on preventative praxis – is needed.

Camming practices also challenge the current discursive constructions of sex work and workers, an area already rife with conflict and contradiction. Computer technology is the key complicating variable, and the mediation of sex work via new technology requires more attention. While, as previously discussed, a number of scholars have approached the practice of camming from the perspective of panoptic surveillance and scopophilia (Dobson, 2007; Russo, 2010; Knight, 2000; White, 2003), this area still warrants further examination. The notion of the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) is complicated by the self-filmed nature of camming: certainly, camgirls present themselves in objectified and normative ways, but they are *presenting themselves*, and make choices in how they are viewed and portrayed (White, 2003). Although such choices might be dictated by fads or clients' desires, volunteered sexual self-exposure complicates notions of authenticity and ordinariness (Harris, 2004) and blurs the line between 'public' and 'private' (Dobson, 2007).

Camming is notable due to the simultaneous intimacy of the experience (a face-to-face, interactive encounter) coupled with a fully mediated barrier, uncommon in most forms of sex work. Indeed, camming aids in presenting a convincing case for expanding the definitional umbrella of sex work (Green, 2016). As previously stated, if sex work is currently understood as being possible when no one is in the physical presence of the sex worker (as with camming) and the patron's intended arousal is considered the only defining factor, it can be argued that some promotional workers, models, actors, and even hospitality staff are in fact participating in a form of sex work.

Perhaps, as previously discussed, sex work should be referred to as 'body work' (Tyler & Abbott, 1998; Wolkowitz, 2002; Sanders, 2004) or 'emotional work' (Hochschild, 1979; Sanders, 2005, Abel, 2011), thus removing additional stigma (by equating sex work with other forms of body/emotional work) and normalising the exchange of 'sexuality' (however it is defined) for profit. We argue that camming presents a convincing case that body and/or emotional work are *more* appropriate terms than sex work. 'Sex' is a contestable definition grounded in problematic heteronormative ideals (Green, 2016), whereas the use of the body as

a tool of erotic labour in these contexts is indisputable (Jones, 2015a). Doing this also allows us to pay more attention to the kinds of daily 'unpaid' work carried out by many women (or men), often in intimate relationships, that fit the definition of body or emotion work, but fall outside what is considered to be transactional sex work.

Furthermore, while what constitutes emotional work is more ambiguous, perhaps socially and legally grouping professions such as therapy and hospitality with stripping and pornography could prove beneficial to all whose work is encompassed within this realm, allowing the latter to be treated more as legitimate work, while placing more emphasis on the emotional impacts of the former.

It should be stressed that wage labour in general is not necessarily enjoyable or empowering for anyone, let alone sex workers. The widespread contention that sex work is inherently harmful, despite the insistence of many sex workers to the contrary, demonstrates unusually ardent social and legal policing of an industry. Indeed, despite statistics that demonstrate high suicide rates for dentists (Brondani, Ramanula & Pattanaporn, 2014), for example, there is no call to abolish the practice of dentistry. It can therefore be argued that criminalising sex work is likely to have stemmed from a longstanding cultural practice of policing sexuality, particularly women's sexuality, and the social norms around legitimate and moral ways in which sex should be had (Showden, 2012). Overall, camming practices are a particularly salient example of the extent to which 'sex work' is not necessarily what is commonly assumed, providing evidence that the use of sexuality for profit cannot always be monitored (both legally and socially) to the extent that co-present sex work has traditionally been.

As previously discussed, laws surrounding camming demonstrate the conceptual blurring and contradictory attitudes adopted towards different forms of sex work. In the USA, for example, prostitution is illegal but pornography is legal. Effectively, having sex for money in the latter context is acceptable, but soliciting or offering specific sexual services is not – unless it takes place online. Indeed, Bleakley (2014) points out the extent to which camming complicates previously established categories of sex work:

> Camgirls are able to offer the visually explicit content of traditional pornography while allowing for the personal contact and customisation that is usually associated with prostitution; unlike physical sex workers, however, camgirls are protected through the buffer provided by the webcam medium similarly to the passive performance of a stripper (p. 901).

Research also needs to address the extent to which sex work involves a great deal of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979), and what this means for those involved. As scholars have noted, emotional labour is difficult, draining, and can lead to a variety of physical and mental health issues (Pugliesi, 1999; Näring, Briët & Brouwers, 2006; Wagner, Barnes & Scott, 2013). Importantly, this is not specific to sex work – many professions, from counselling to nursing, also involve clients benefiting from an enormous amount of emotional work. Emotional labour in other professions, and in sex work, has been researched extensively (e.g., Sanders, 2004, 2005; West & Austrin, 2005; Murphy, Dunk-West & Chonody, 2015; Mears & Connell, 2016), especially in relation to the ways it is devalued and undercompensated. Given the extent to which, if they want to be successful, webcam models must entertain and establish lasting relationships with their clientele (without the aid of physical touch), emotional labour in camming is an important aspect that should be explored further.

Camming is also a form of labour with issues and concerns similar to those which relate to other creators of 'amateur' online user-generated content. As many authors have claimed (e.g., Terranova, 2000; Coté & Pybus, 2007; Fisher, 2015; Koloğlugil, 2015), the worth of online labour – given the extent to which it is immaterial and less easily quantified (Hardt

& Negri, 2005) – is often underestimated, both by those who create it and those who reap the benefits. This under-estimation may be greater if the labour is considered 'women's work' and already devalued for that reason (Jarrett, 2014; Nayar, 2017). As Nayar (2017) stresses, '[camming] remains largely unrepresented in feminist media and cultural studies exploring the gendered dimensions of Web 2.0 participatory cultures and amateur content creation' (p. 6). Indeed, given that camming is coded as a 'feminine' practice, there is a clear need for further research, with specific reference to academic debates surrounding amateur digital (sexual and emotional) labour.

Conclusion

This paper has called for more research examining technologically-mediated sex work, particularly camming, from a variety of perspectives. While camming and other forms of technologically mediated sex work are relatively new and still-evolving practices, they would be useful to research in a range of disciplines, such as psychology, feminist research, Marxist analyses, surveillance studies, new media studies, and legal studies. Furthermore, as many scholars have argued (Wahab, 2003; van der Muelen, 2011; Dewey, 2013; Gerassi, Edmond & Nichols, 2016), sex work research should involve the voices of sex workers themselves to ensure helpful praxis. As such, ethnographic/auto-ethnographic perspectives and participatory action research involving webcam models would be a useful and ethical addition to the literature.

As we have argued, it is important to remain critical of the practice of camming – giving due credence to the experiences and agency of the workers involved, while remaining wary of structural issues as well as potential exploitation and harm. It is quite possible that as camming and other forms of technologically-mediated sex work become commonplace, conventional (and often dangerous) methods of managing sex work (e.g., pimps and trafficking) will become (re)integrated into the work. This further emphasises the urgency of conducting research around camming, particularly through the involvement of the workers themselves. Perhaps there is potential for collective empowerment practices, akin to that of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (Swendeman et al., 2015) – sex worker-run forums or apps, for example, providing information around conducting online sex work safely, effectively, and independently.[4]

Additionally, it is hoped that further research could take place in (or with reference to) Aotearoa/New Zealand's decriminalised context. First, it will be crucial to explore the extent to which the experiences of sex workers in a decriminalised context differs from those in illegal/semi-legal contexts. Given that solo home-based camming practices are globally similar (always involving a performer, a webcam, an audience, and an internet connection), a comparative analysis between Aotearoa/New Zealand webcam models and webcam models overseas could be a useful way to address the effects (both psychological and material) of criminalisation and stigma, with fewer additional variables to affect the data.

Finally, it is important to research camming in the decriminalised context in order to explore useful methods of protecting the rights and safety of online workers. Since sex workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand are protected under the law and advocated for by the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective, this is the ideal environment to argue for and test out online-specific protections and, potentially, additional legislation. Importantly, a recent UK-based survey of sex workers (Sanders et al., 2018) found that the majority of webcam models also participate in various other forms of direct and indirect sex work. Much in the same way that traditional categorisations of media have been blurred in the age of convergence (Dwyer, 2010), sex work seems to be following suit. Technology is mediating human contact in a variety of forums, but

technologically-mediated sex work is one avenue where research and theory is severely lagging behind. There is a need for future work critically examining internet-based sex work. Firstly, it will help us decipher the specific 'pleasures and dangers' associated with this field of sex work, and the sexual politics and gender power relations involved. Secondly, it will increase understanding and aid in theory development in the area of sex work. Finally, more research will allow us to implement sound praxis, as well as aid in future legal and policy development.

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Notes

1 This is the tag line from: Imlive.com, a popular camming website: https://imlive.com/live-sex-chats/cam-girls/

2 We want to acknowledge here the complexity of these terms and the contentiousness in their exclusive use by various theorists. We argue that within the contemporary sociocultural context, 'sex work' is not necessarily like other work, given the way it is understood socially and managed legally. We also want to steer clear of positioning sex work as an exploitative profession simply because it involves sex, but acknowledge that there is a broader gender dynamic involved around the understanding of male and female sexuality, as well as with most buyers being men and most sellers being women. We also want to acknowledge the agency sex workers can bring to the work and the choices they do make, even if it is constrained by various structural, economic or gender structures (see Farvid & Glass, 2014, for a fuller discussion regarding our approach).

3 We wish to emphasise that although this article takes a 'critical feminist' approach and critiques aspects of other paradigms, many authors referenced within the other feminist frameworks present nuanced and valuable arguments in relation to sex work and workers. The primary author of this article identifies as a Marxist and aligns with the general tenets and goals of the perspective, but argues that a pure class analysis in the context of sex work is too reductive.

4 Some sex worker-run forums already exist and are used for these purposes, but they have yet to be examined academically.

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