

Performing Sexuality, Monetizing Intimacy and Branding the Self –

*An Analysis of OnlyFans Content Creators and Their
Interactions with Subscribers*

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Master's Thesis in Screen Cultures UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Department of Media and Communication

June 1st, 2023

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Abstract

Sex is a complex human behavior that involves not only physical pleasure and procreation, but also emotional connections, psychological effects, and the fulfillment of desires and fantasies. The porn industry has long leveraged technological advancements to shape societal views on sexual behavior and expectations. However, in the realm of selling pornographic content today, creating an online persona and branding the self is just as significant as it is on other social media platforms. It plays a crucial role in gaining a micro-celebrity status and amassing a dedicated following. OnlyFans, as a distinct online platform, combines authenticity, expertise, and entertainment to sell sexual content, with the personal connection between creators and subscribers being its primary appeal. This shift toward a more personal and interactive form of pornography allows fans to engage with creators and participate in crafting their own sexual fantasies. Content creators on OnlyFans employ strategies reminiscent of mainstream media, including social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and entertainment platforms like Netflix and HBO. They also utilize techniques akin to influencer marketing and reality TV production strategies. This study comprehensively analyzes how OnlyFans content creators develop their online personas, interact with subscribers, and how these interactions reflect broader cultural attitudes towards pornography, technology, and sexualized media in the 21st century. The objectives of this study are to explore the branding strategies and persona-building tactics used by OnlyFans content creators, examine their engagement strategies to foster intimacy with subscribers, and understand the larger cultural attitudes and industry context surrounding OnlyFans. Furthermore, this research investigates the impact of OnlyFans on sexual behavior and the formation of online relationships in the digital age.

Acknowledgement

As a scholar researching the OnlyFans platform, I emerged myself deep into the world of pornography, an experience that provided a unique opportunity for exploration and analysis. However, throughout my research, I also encountered relentless targeted advertising from algorithms and cookie settings generated by my intensive research activities. These advertisements ranged from online courses targeting individuals struggling with porn addiction to invitations for exclusive ‘Eyes Wide Shut’ ceremonies worldwide. Similarly, during my engagement on the OnlyFans platform, I experienced an unexpected continuous influx of mass-produced messages from the content creators I had subscribed to, which created an unusual sense of proximity. Despite the persistent marketing strategies employed to present products as essential and desirable, I maintained a scholarly perspective, remaining focused on my research. I did not develop an addiction and did not go to ‘Eyes Wide Shut’ ceremonies. The subscription period was concluded satisfactorily, although I still receive mass-produced messages from content creators wanting me back on the platform. Nonetheless, this engagement provided a valuable opportunity for academic exploration and analysis.

I am deeply grateful for the invaluable support I received throughout this study. My husband, Lucian, provided unwavering support, engaging in countless conversations and offering insightful feedback on my work.

Furthermore, I extend my most profound appreciation to my supervisor, Steffen Krüger, whose knowledge, guidance, and support have been vital in shaping this study. As an expert in fields within Screen Cultures, he has provided valuable insights and perspectives that have enriched my research and helped me to delve deeper into the topic at hand.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Pasi Väliäho, Timotheus Vermeulen, Taina Bucher, Jon Inge Faldalen and Kim Wilkins, for their knowledgeable and stimulating courses, which have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of Screen Cultures.

Lastly, I acknowledge the invaluable resources that informed this research.

Scholarly works, articles, and online sources have greatly enhanced the understanding of sexualization of culture and society, intimacy, online platforms, and the ever-evolving landscape of digital pornography. I appreciate the contributions of authors and publishers to the

academic discourse within these fields, as their work has played an essential role in shaping my research journey and expanding my knowledge of Screen Cultures.

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Introduction

The porn industry has continuously embraced new publishing technologies quickly, leveraging advancements to meet customer demands and shape perceptions of sexual behavior (Hebditch, 1988; Silver, 1997). Today, pornographic platforms are flourishing in the digital market, and OnlyFans is one of the latest additions that explores the interactive and intimate aspect of the sale. OnlyFans has emerged as a contemporary version of digital pornography that cultivates users' desires concerning voyeurism and personal interaction. However, the concept of authentic appearances and interactions on the platform reflects strategies used by content creators in social media, where intimacy and the idea of a close and personal relationship between content creators and followers play a vast and unprecedented part in consumption. This liaison is recreated in the world of digital pornography, where intimacy and personal content, combined with soft pornographic portrayals, can be more sought after and rewarded than just explicit pornography. Hence, OnlyFans has changed the buying and selling of sexual services by encouraging content that suggestively expose intimate and personal experiences and thoughts. OnlyFans content creators additionally opens the possibilities for fans of achieving involvements on the platform that can create the illusion of authentic boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. In order to foster these types of relationships, OnlyFans inspires creators in their guidelines to send messages unsolicited to fans to continue established dialogues by, e.g., remembering the fan's birthday. The content creators are also encouraged to, e.g., remember the children's names of a fan or a doctor's appointment in conversations to make it personal and intimate (Bernstein, 2019.) Yet, what is it that consumers might not be aware of concerning the so-called "intimate" aspects of the platform?

Understanding the dynamics of interactions on new social media platforms requires recognizing that natural "relationships" between individuals cannot be assumed solely based on personal autonomy. These interactions are shaped by carefully designed modules implemented by companies, aiming to encourage continued engagement and potential addiction without users fully realizing the mechanisms at play (Chun, 2016.) One sales strategy employed on the OnlyFans platform is the automation of messages, where content creators often have a standard message for new fans or subscribers. These messages can be customized to appear as personal as possible, introducing the content page and the offerings. However, once a subscription to a specific content creator is established, these automated mass-produced messages are sent through the system and presented as personal messages in the fan's inbox. These messages

often take the form of questions, addressing subscribers by name to create a personalized and engaging experience, much like how influencers and celebrities use personal inquiries to captivate their followers. Furthermore, the direct address by name creates the impression that content creators have a personal interest in their fans.

Additionally, OnlyFans frequently advertises job opportunities for employers who are expected to engage with fans through entertaining conversations, answering questions, flirting via text, and upselling customers. In this scenario, OnlyFans provides storylines, scripts, and content, but the employers are expected to exhibit flexibility in their chats (Freelancer, n.d.) Additionally, various companies, such as Diva Influence Consultancy, have entered the market, specializing in assisting creators with self-promotion and image-building. These companies offer services that manage most of the communication between creators and their fans 24/7, even introducing the option of integrating chatbots into the dialogue. One of their packages includes “creating the ultimate girlfriend experience” (Diva Influence Consultancy, n.p.) These advertisements raise questions about the mechanisms underlying the platform and the extent to which multiple employers operate behind the scenes of certain content creators. Nevertheless, the sales strategies developed to emphasize the personal and intimate aspects of the platform are also apparent in other aspects of its layout and functionality.

OnlyFans shares several similarities with social media platforms, including the ability for content creators to build and manage their own web pages. Like many social media networking platforms, OnlyFans allows creators to design their private pages where they can distribute their unique content and set prices. The pricing advice provided by OnlyFans encourages creators to choose from a standardized price list. Additionally, accessing content on OnlyFans requires a subscription, like other social media platforms that offer limited visibility options for individual profiles. This stands in contrast to prominent porn sites such as Pornhub, where scripted studio porn production videos coexist with amateur content, and access to the website or a specific creator’s content is possible without a subscription. Hence, subscribing to a specific creator on OnlyFans implies the idea of a more intimate relationship between the content creator and the subscriber, as the content is not accessible to everyone.

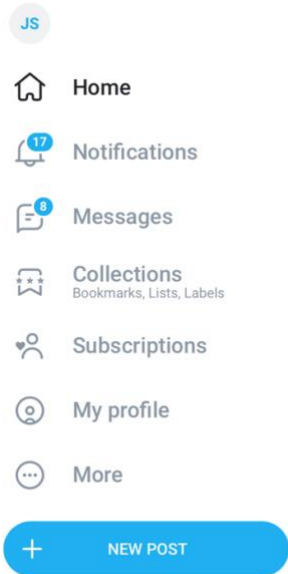
The design and layout of the OnlyFans web page bear similarities to platforms like Facebook and Instagram, both in terms of functionality and design. These resemblances could create a sense of familiarity and normalcy for potential users of OnlyFans. However, OnlyFans stands

apart as a platform where bloggers, influencers, video gamers, musicians, actors, celebrities, models, chefs, fitness instructors, sports athletes, fashion stylists, interior designers, gardeners, and dog trainers can share their entertainment and expertise alongside eroticism, soft porn, or pornography. Recognizing familiar creators from other platforms can similarly generate a sense of curiosity. Equally fans may experience a connection to a content creator in terms of the expertise these content creators offer.

Moreover, on OnlyFans, creators can cultivate intimacy with their fans by encouraging them to share or participate in the making of their sexual desires and fantasies. This allows creators to provide tailored content that can be communicated and purchased via messages, live streams, videos, pictures and locked content. This intimate connection between creators and fans can be a powerful marketing tool, as fans may feel a sense of exclusivity and connection to the creator. By examining how intimacy is enabled on OnlyFans, I aim to provide insights into the changing landscape of establishing online relationships.

Describing the interface of the OnlyFans platform

The interface of OnlyFans is in its designed and color choice primarily similarly to Facebook. Upon logging in, users are taken to their home screen to view their subscriptions, notifications, and messages. The main menu is at the left side of the screen and includes options such as Home, Notifications, Messages, Subscriptions and Profile Picture.



A search function appear at the top right corner after a subscription of a content creator is established. However, to search for a specific creator, the fan needs their

exact account or artistic name. In the “Subscribing to OnlyFans” section of the Method part, I am elaborating on the search function on the platform as it is integral to the users' experience navigating the platform.

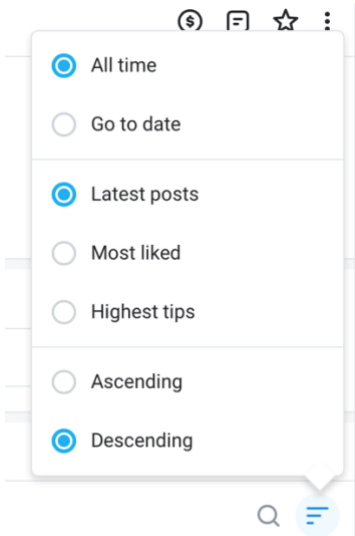
Finding a profile

There are two search functionalities available.

1. Once you have subscribed to an account, paid or free, and have an interaction with a model, a search icon will appear on your Home page.
2. If you know the exact username of the person you are looking for, you can find them by going to onlyfans.com/<insertusernamehere>

Figure 1 Retrieved from OnlyFans guidelines/subscriptions

However, the Profile section on the home page of OnlyFans displays the user’s personal information, including their picture, bio, and subscription status. The subscription page displays the content of the fan’s subscribed creators, organized in a grid-like format with a preview image and title for each post. The creators can be added to a “favorite” list. The platform’s homepage displays a customized news feed based on fans’ subscriptions where fans can scroll through daily posting from their subscribed creators. Users can similarly view creator profiles by accessing their main page to see all their content. In that respect, a research function allows fans to search for posts by date, highest tips, most liked etc.



The OnlyFans platform also includes a “Following” section that lets fans keep track of their favorite creators and receive notifications when they post new content or go live. When a creator is online, fans can see their status and engage with them in

real time through messaging or live streams. Notifications alert users of new messages, content updates, and subscription renewals that are set to renew automatically if not actively deactivated by fans. The Messages feature lets users communicate with their subscribed creators through a private messaging system. Users can send text messages, voice messages, and images and receive mass-produced and private messages from creators.

Background information on OnlyFans

The British-owned company OnlyFans was launched to a global market in 2016 as an online subscription-based platform and app where adult entertainers can earn money on sexual content. The subscribers of the platform-specific creators can pay for the ability to see photos, videos, and live streams. Users can further pay one-time tips on customized content and pay per display on locked content. However, content creators earn money from users who subscribe to their sites monthly. Meanwhile, there are two commonly seen features on the OnlyFans platform that fluctuate from similar pornographic platforms that is that in addition to profiting from imaged-based material, content creators can earn money by communicating with their subscribers. In that framework, OnlyFans, as a standard setting on the web page, reminds subscribers that the ones that pay the most in tips are prioritized concerning message responses.

Another feature that sets OnlyFans apart from other pornographic platforms is that creators are encouraged by OnlyFans creators' guidelines to produce content to monetize on expertise through, e.g., cooking, lifestyle, fitness, music, and make-up advice. Respectively, creators are highly encouraged in the creators' guidelines to implement the sales strategy that influencers and celebrities use on other social media platforms (OnlyFans Guidelines, n.d.) Correspondingly, OnlyFans has emerged as a new digital social media phenomenon thriving in commerce that interweaves sex work, companionship, entertainment, expertise, erotica, and pornography.

The platform OnlyFans experienced a surge in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, largely due to the challenges of engaging in physical intimacy. However, the platform attracted not only sex workers and adult film stars but also a diverse range of celebrities, influencers, actors, musicians, and sports athletes. Not all these creators on OnlyFans offered explicit sexual content, with some categorizing their work as "nude" or lingerie related. Nevertheless, this approach to selling various forms of content on a platform primarily known

for adult content sparked significant public discussions. These debates, highlighted by journalists such as Jones (2020), Friedman (2021), and the TV program NRK Debatten (2021), shed light on the evolving dynamics and broader societal implications of OnlyFans, particularly its intersection of commerce, content creation, and social norms. Public discourses similarly emerged regarding the advertising strategies employed by content creators on OnlyFans, which involved promoting their profiles through mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. These advertising practices raised concerns about minors and young adults being exposed to inappropriate content and potentially being enticed to join OnlyFans without fully understanding the nature of buying and selling sexual content. Politicians voiced concerns about the platform, emphasizing the need for young creators to comprehend the long-lasting consequences of their digital content, including the potential for leaks that could harm their careers and futures (TV2 Nyheter, 2021). Accordingly, the emergence of OnlyFans in today's technological landscape raises concerns about privacy, exploitation, and inappropriate content reaching vulnerable audiences. However, understanding the factors behind the platform's rise can provide insights into changing dynamics of online interactions, the impact of technology on building online identities, the shifting boundaries between public and private spaces and the evolving perception of intimacy. This nuanced perspective can contextualize OnlyFans within the broader socio-cultural landscape. Hence, the public debates and discussions surrounding OnlyFans demonstrate the value of understanding the motivations behind its usage and the broader societal implications it presents.

Existing scholarship and research

Existing scholarship and research on the OnlyFans platform offer valuable insights. Rouse et al. (2021) delve into the phenomenon of Cosplay on Demand, exploring the interplay between Instagram, OnlyFans, and gender dynamics, focusing on the gendered Fantrepneur. Slippert (2022) examines the role of "Platform Pimps" within the Porn-opticon of OnlyFans, analyzing the company's impact on content creators and subscribers. Litam et al. (2022) investigate the sexual attitudes and characteristics of OnlyFans users, uncovering their motivations and behaviors. Cardoso and Scarcelli (2021) investigate the experiences of individuals engaged in sexualized work on OnlyFans, illuminating the challenges content creators face in this domain. Ryan (2019) emerges as a significant source in this study focusing on male sex workers and their strategic utilization of netporn to transform their social media profiles into economic assets. Ryan also explores the unique role played by OnlyFans content creators, which

streamlines the interactions between sex workers and their followers, facilitating the monetization of intimate content. Furthermore, Ryan (2019) analyzes OnlyFans' socio-cultural implications and user experiences based on interviews with content creators.

This study offers a different angle by focusing on intimacy and its connection to the OnlyFans platform by uncovering how creators build their internet personas and establish and monetize intimate relationships with their subscribers through various means, such as personal storytelling, surveys, polls, hosting QA sessions, live streams, providing customized content, and frequent interactions. By examining the implications of this transactional intimacy model on OnlyFans, the study raises questions about the intersection of marketing, fantasies, desires, and sexual content. It contextualizes OnlyFans as a phenomenon within the broader framework of the sexualization of culture and society. Drawing on the perspectives of scholars such as Paul Ryan and examining different forms of interaction on social media platforms, the study seeks to understand how the interplay between intimacy and sexuality is manifested and articulated specifically on the OnlyFans platform.

Research Question

This study examines the creation of intimate and sexual relationships between OnlyFans users and content creators as a relatively new online phenomenon. It explores this relationship against theoretical constructions and understandings of the sexualization of culture and society, analyzing different forms of interaction on social media to see how the interplay between intimacy and sexuality is being enacted and articulated on the OnlyFans platform. Questions I am concerned with are: What is the specific “platform vernacular” of OnlyFans? What differentiates the platform from others regarding the offering, circulating, and selling of sexual content? Furthermore, why do some OnlyFans users see what they do on the platform as not exclusively buying or selling sex?

Method

I chose to examine the OnlyFans platform due to the media attention it received, with debates and articles raising concerns about its potential harm to individuals, the self-promotion tactics used by OnlyFans creators on social media, and the shared content by world-renowned celebrities. Against this backdrop, I wanted to contribute to new research. However, as I delved

into my study of OnlyFans, I realized that examining online pornography platforms required a more comprehensive understanding of the current technological, social, and cultural landscape as it sheds light on the intricacies of content creation and consumption in the digital era. Additionally, by examining OnlyFans content creators, I wanted to explore the underlying mechanisms that shape these social interactions, the construction of online identities, and the psychosexual effects of these interactions.

Paasonen (2011) highlighted the challenges of studying the pornographic industry due to its constantly evolving nature, as technological advancements and cultural shifts continuously transform the online porn scene. Despite these changes, as she noted, specific themes, conventions, and styles persist. However, recent search indicate that individuals today seek more authentic and diverse portrayals of sexuality when consuming pornography (López, 2020). As Ryan (2016) notes, this has led to a growing demand for paid content that caters to these preferences, such as that found on the OnlyFans platform. Therefore, research in this area can provide insights into individuals' content creation and fans preferences, which can inform policies and practices related to online communications.

Online (auto)ethnographic studies as a methodology

During this research, my primary objective was to closely observe the content within the OnlyFans platform. To achieve this, I employed an online (auto)ethnographic approach, which provided me with firsthand experience of how it can be to participate in the activities on the platform. However, it is important to clarify the nature of my involvement within the platform. I primarily focused on observing and analyzing the content on the platform and the received content in mass-produced messages from content creators. I did not engage in private communications with creators, nor did I actively participate in polls, surveys, or direct interactions. My aim was to immerse myself in the platform's culture and become familiar with its distinctive vernacular, enabling me to understand the motivations and experiences of the users who engage with the platform.

This methodological choice aligns with the works of scholars such as Annette Markham whose book, 'Internet Inquiry: Conversations About Method,' (Markham et.al, 2008) emphasizes the reflexive nature of the researcher's role and explores the complexities of studying online communities, highlighting the significance of actively engaging with the digital environment to

uncover rich and nuanced understandings. Hence, I integrate an online (auto)ethnographic approach into my research on OnlyFans which allowed me to analyze the content and interactions on the platform while gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and practices of content creators and subscribers on the OnlyFans platform.

Subscribing to the OnlyFans platform

By subscribing to the OnlyFans platform, it became evident that the user experience is influenced by the way individuals can navigate the platform. Notably, users who subscribe to specific creators through other social media platforms may encounter a different experience compared to those, such as myself, who enter the platform without any preconceived preferences. Additionally, the platform's search functionality, albeit limited, plays a significant role in shaping the user experience. In this respect, the search capability on OnlyFans is confined to locating creators solely based on their account or artistic name. Consequently, potential subscribers seeking creators with specific appearances or interests may find it more advantageous to seek out these individuals through alternative networks, thereby potentially having a different user experience. However, platforms like Pornhub offer a more expansive range of options aligned with the search term, providing immediate access to content consistent with the user's preferences.

While investigating the search function on OnlyFans, I attempted to search using the term 'Milf.' However, the search yielded no results, indicating the absence of users explicitly associated with that specific term. Nevertheless, I observed the emergence of suggested creators who appeared to cater to an older demographic over time. In this context it is important to note that the platform's presentation of suggested creators is limited to three options at a time, and the search process itself is characterized by sluggishness. These observations underscore a fundamental disparity between OnlyFans and traditional pornographic platforms. On OnlyFans, subscribing to creators seems to foster a sense of connection, akin to getting to know the creators before encountering curated pornographic material. This deliberate pace starkly contrasts the immediate gratification often associated with traditional pornography, where instant access to explicit content takes precedence.



No users found

Upon creating my account, I was directed to the platform's main page, which had a layout like Facebook's web page. Initially, the content presented to me seemed to cater to both male and female audiences, with primary football and yoga-related content dominating the platform. However, as I explored suggested content creators I could subscribe to, the platform began presenting a more diverse range of content. I came across profiles dedicated to meditation, gardening, cosplay, video gaming, dance classes, and accounts offering dating and relationship advice. In that respect, it became evident that the system had likely discerned my gender as a female subscriber, thus tailoring the content suggestions accordingly. This discovery added another layer of intrigue, as I recognized the platform's ability to curate content based on user preferences and characteristics. However, it became apparent that most of the suggested accounts were primarily targeting male audiences, which left me with lingering questions about the underlying algorithms and their specific mechanisms. In this case, since I have no prior interest that aligned with those presented to me, I assumed the appearance of content in the suggested accounts may have been influenced by various factors like general popularity and engagement levels of those content categories among other users, similarities in profiles or interests with other users who engage with such content, or occasional diversification attempts by the platform to introduce new content to users.

Unsubscribing from content creators on the OnlyFans platform

In examining the subscription process on the platform, it is equally important to consider the experience of unsubscribing. Upon wanting to discontinue the subscriptions, I encountered several challenges navigating the process, and in order to prevent automatic renewals, I had to proactively seek information on how to deactivate the subscriptions within the platform. However, once the subscription was deactivated, I received a barrage of automated messages from the creators. These messages consistently highlighted the content I was missing out on and extended special discount offers to entice me to reconsider renewing the subscription. This post-unsubscription engagement raises questions about the retention strategies employed by creators which are facilitated by the platform and the potential impact on users' decision-making processes.

Analyzing content creators on OnlyFans: A Hermeneutic examination with an inflection of Discourse analytical approach for Close Textual and Visual Analysis

However, as I engaged with the content, the platform's algorithms built on my interactions to suggest similar content aligned with my "interests." This made it challenging to determine which content creators to analyze. After seeking advice from my supervisor, I decided to concentrate on creators with the most extensive following and earnings. These data are available to the public, which allowed me to search for specific creators using their OnlyFans account name. However, I soon discovered that many of these creators had garnered a massive following due to their established media persona, and as a result, they only needed to invest minimal effort into branding their OnlyFans internet persona.

Hence, I employed a broader approach to address this methodological limitation by expanding my analysis to include content creators with smaller followings. Specifically, I homed in on those who had invested considerable effort in developing their brands to attract customers to augment their earnings. Following an extended observation period, I identified several content creators who specialized in selling services related to gardening, meditation and yoga, and video gaming and cosplay portrayals, which I subsequently classified into three distinct categories for analysis. By including a variety of creators, I aimed to capture the nuances and diversity within the OnlyFans platform and its content ecosystem. The selection of smaller accounts provided a

more comprehensive understanding of the platform's culture, encompassing creators with different levels of influence, engagement, and niche content.

Moreover, it is important to note that this approach is exemplary, and case based. The selected content creators and their categories were chosen as illustrative examples to analyze the distinct categories of content and interactions on OnlyFans. These categories were not exhaustive but served as focal points for deeper analysis and exploration within the platform.

Another significant challenge I faced while analyzing OnlyFans content creators was protecting their anonymity. While well-known creators with large followings have had their OnlyFans account names published in the media, it is important to adhere to the ethical standards of the University of Oslo (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, n.d.) These standards prioritize the protection of research participants' identities and confidentiality. Moreover, respecting privacy and anonymity are crucial in ethical research, especially in sensitive contexts like the pornographic industry.

However, ensuring the anonymity of creators with smaller followings from diverse groups on OnlyFans was a more significant challenge. To overcome this, I combined several accounts into three distinct categories to identify recurring themes and patterns to conduct a thematic analysis. This approach involved systematically organizing and interpreting textual and visual data to uncover patterns and insights related to my research objectives. Furthermore, I employed a close textual and visual analysis of the creators' content, examining all text-based (Moi 2019) and visual material (Perkins 1990; Gibbs 2002). Additionally, a hermeneutic reading enabled me to take a more holistic approach to understanding the creators' content by interpreting its meaning within a larger context. In this regard, I applied the hermeneutic circle, as described by Thistleton (2009), enabling me to return to the original material with information to enrich the interpretation. "We cannot arrive at a picture of the whole without scrutinizing the parts or pieces, but we cannot tell what the individual pieces mean until we have some sense of the wider picture as a whole." (Thistleton, 2009, p. 14.)

While analyzing, I implemented a cautious approach to presenting the content creators material. In the study, I present only their text-based material and instead of sharing screenshots of visuals, I focus on providing detailed descriptions of their visuals when analyzing their material.

By adopting this method, I aimed to maintain the confidentiality of the creators while still exchanging insights into their online presence and ecosystems.

John Gibbs (2002) defines *mise-en-scene* as the arrangement and staging of elements within a frame, focusing on their organization and interrelation. V.F. Perkins (1990) adds that additional contextual factors contribute to the overall meaning and interpretation of the visual content. To provide an illustrative example of how this analysis approach was applied, I will refer to an analysis of the visual content of “Garden Lilly.” During examining her pictures, attention was paid to various elements. This encompassed analyzing her clothing choices, her staging within the frame, her using of props, lighting, location, and camera angles. By closely considering these aspects, an interpretation of the overall aesthetic as a “girl next door” persona was established. However, a hermeneutic reading was employed to fully grasp the significance and cultural connotations embedded in this aesthetic. This interpretative lens facilitated an exploration of the underlying cultural contexts and symbolic meanings associated with the portrayal of the “girl next door” identity. Consequently, by amalgamating the insights derived from the *mise-en-scene* analysis with a hermeneutic approach, a more nuanced understanding of the visual content and its broader implications within the realm of OnlyFans was uncovered.

Informed by Thistleton's idea of hermeneutics, which involves a dialogue between the author's intended meaning and the reader's understanding of a text, and Moi's (2019) suggestion that critical analysis should begin with a sense of puzzlement, I adopted a dialogic approach in my analysis. With a dialogic approach, I wanted to engage the readers in a dialogue where multiple perspectives and voices are actively encouraged and considered. My goal of a dialogic approach in this study was not to arrive at a single, definitive answer or conclusion as Moi suggest, but to create a dynamic exchange of ideas and perspectives that can lead to a deeper understanding. This was especially important to me throughout the study because of the preconceptions and societal judgments surrounding pornography. Adopting an open and non-judgmental mindset allowed me to approach the topic with curiosity, enabling me to better understand the perspectives and motivations of OnlyFans content creators and their fans. This approach facilitated a deeper engagement with the material and a more nuanced analysis of the complex issues at play in the world of pornographic content creation and consumption. Moi argues that by presenting one's response as exemplarily, one can invite others to engage and offer their views, despite individual differences in perspective and experience. Therefore, my approach

aimed to facilitate a dynamic exchange of diverse perspectives, originating from my own sense of puzzlement, as Moi explains.

Thistleton's emphasis on the significance of context in interpreting a text is particularly relevant to the analysis of OnlyFans content creators. Moreover, OnlyFans creators use strategies like those used in creating profiles on social media platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube to build and promote their internet personas. To better understand the motivation behind the creation of these personas and the emergence of the various products offered by OnlyFans creators within a larger context, I have provided in the study the chapter "The Second Self; Motivations and Strategies Behind Personal Branding on Social Media Platforms" prior to the analyses of the content creators. This contextual understanding can, as Thistleton suggests, help bridge the gap between the creators' intended message and our interpretation of it and enable a holistic understanding of the intricacies of human communication and experience, which are central to the interpretation of OnlyFans content. Similarly, to try to grasp the motivations behind fans' interactions on the platform, it is also important to consider the broader picture of the development of socializing and interacting in a digital environment. In other words, as Marquard (1989) argues, understanding the context or framework in which something exists is essential for understanding its meaning and significance. "[O]ne understands something by understanding it as an answer to a question. To put it differently, one does not understand it if one is not aware of and does not understand the question to which it was or is the answer" (p.112.) However, the exploration of content and interactions on OnlyFans necessitated an understanding of the inherent human desires and fantasies that drive individuals to seek fulfillment through digital platforms such as OnlyFans. Moreover, these dynamics raised ethical concerns, underscoring the importance of considering power relations and economic factors in interpreting OnlyFans' content.

To address these complexities, a comprehensive approach was adopted, combining hermeneutics with a discourse-analytical inflection. This method involved closely examining the content's textual and visual aspects while delving into the embedded power dynamics within the platform. Through this lens, I was able to explore how power imbalances and economic factors can shape the landscape of content creation and consumption, shedding light on the broader societal implications of this digital economy.

Intimacy in the Digital Era: Exploring OnlyFans as a platform for monetized connections

As my title stipulate, I explore the evolving concept of intimacy in the digital era and how it is manifested on the OnlyFans platform. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of this concept, I will first examine some existing definitions of intimacy. Subsequently, I will analyze the interactions between OnlyFans content creators and their subscribers to illustrate how intimacy is monetized and utilized on the platform.

The concept of intimacy varies across cultures and religions, and as highlighted by Freud's dictum of 'to love and to work' (2015), emphasizes its significance in mental health. Kanawal et al. (2018) suggest that qualities such as openness, warmth, mutuality, and trust are commonly associated with intimacy. Rubin (1989) explains that intimacy is achieved through behaviors and interactions that foster deep emotional connections, including support, understanding, empathy, and exchanging affection and positive sentiments. These components play a vital role in establishing and maintaining strong emotional bonds between individuals, encompassing emotional and behavioral aspects of mutual care and positive feelings (Rubin, 1989). Intimacy also involves sharing secrets, which enhances trust and deepens connections within relationships (Brody, 1978). Revealing personal information, thoughts, and feelings creates a sense of trust, vulnerability, and exclusivity, strengthening the bond between individuals. However, as Rubin (1989) notes, privacy serves in this context similarly as a protective boundary that allows individuals to maintain autonomy and personal space while navigating the delicate balance between sharing and preserving their personal lives.

In the context of the digital age, Kanawal et al. (2018) argue that meaningful dialogues and interactions, including those qualifying as "intimate," take place on social media platforms. Lemma (2017) suggests that technology has transformed our lives, including our approach to sex and love, challenging traditional understandings of sexuality and intimacy. In this digital landscape, intimacy takes on new dimensions, where electronic means facilitate sexual contact and intimate conversations without the conventional social cues of face-to-face interactions (Lemma, 2017). Turkle (2005) argues that physical encounters can be challenging and leave individuals feeling vulnerable, while interacting in technologic landscape can provide a sense of safety and control over one's identity and presence.

In the context of the OnlyFans platform, understanding how content creators and subscribers engage in intimate interactions while preserving privacy becomes essential. The platform's infrastructure enables individuals to share personal stories, thoughts, and desires, fostering a sense of intimacy. Simultaneously, the digital nature of interactions on OnlyFans enables users to establish boundaries and control the level of disclosure, ensuring privacy. This digital interaction supports a delicate balance between intimacy and privacy, allowing users to forge intimate connections while maintaining privacy being safeguarded behind a screen.

Moreover, the content creators on OnlyFans employ various techniques to cultivate an illusion of trust, tenderness, and caring relationships with their subscribers. Through frequently engaging in conversations, responding to comments and messages, and offering personalized content, creators can bond with their subscribers. Content creators can collaborate with subscribers by fulfilling their requests and producing customized content that caters to their fans desires, further enhancing intimacy and connection.

Equally, to enhance the perception of intimacy, creators can utilize personal appeals in private messages, mass-produced messages, voice notes, and status updates, offering fans a more exclusive experience. Additionally, creators can establish effective "eye contact" by looking directly into the camera in photos and videos, fostering a stronger sense of intimacy and connection. However, it is essential to recognize that payment for these intimate services is a separate topic.

While exploring the concept of intimacy on the OnlyFans platform, it is important to acknowledge that brands have long utilized intimacy to sell products. In their book "Brand Intimacy: A New Paradigm in Marketing," Ntarelli and Plapler (2017) emphasize the significance of emotional connections between consumers and brands, which can be valued, as they argue, billions. They similarly argue that companies must continuously adapt their marketing strategies to cultivate a connection with customers in today's fast-paced and ever-changing marketing landscape as they note. Therefore, the use of intimacy for profit in marketing is not a novel concept and equally extends to the realm of pornography.

However, one intriguing aspect of the marketing strategies employed by creators on OnlyFans is the juxtaposition between engaging in sexual performances while capitalizing on the established intimacy with subscribers and providing intimacy while potentially profiting from

sexual content. In the past, pornography was primarily associated with the consumption of detached and fleeting sexual encounters. However, content creators on OnlyFans offer a unique twist by reintroducing a re-approximation of sex and intimacy.

Theoretical perspectives on Sexualization of Media and Culture, Branding the Self, Technology and Intimacy

This study incorporates the perspectives of several vital voices that have significantly influenced the analysis. These voices have played a central role in shaping the structure and findings of the study. The following section provides a detailed overview of their perspectives and contributions.

Attwood (2017) addresses the mainstreaming of sex and the growing prevalence of sexualization in contemporary Western cultures. Attwood asserts that technological advancements have made pornography and sexually explicit media more easily accessible, blurring the boundaries between mainstream and pornographic content. This societal shift has given rise to what Attwood (2017) refers to as “sexual cyborgs” (p. xiv), where individuals' sexuality becomes intertwined with technology. Attwood (2017) also highlights the interconnectedness of sexualization, the evolving public-private divide, and the emergence of new forms of “public intimacy” (McNair, 2002, p. 98) and a “striptease culture” (McNair, 2002, p. 81). These phenomena underscore a societal inclination towards self-revelation and increased exposure.

The prominence of sexual content in our daily lives is driven by our innate human inclination to pay attention to sexual information (Reichert, 2003). As a result, many contemporary companies adopt an advertising strategy that views sex as a powerful commodity, further amplifying its visibility in society (Reichert, 2003). This commodification of sexuality extends to platforms like OnlyFans and the widespread proliferation of sexual content on social media, where individuals leverage sexual imagery to promote themselves and attract attention in a competitive online landscape.

Abidin (2018) argues that social media platforms have allowed ordinary people to gain popularity and create a sense of belonging through self-branding. This phenomenon is similarly

visible on OnlyFans, where creators strategically share intimate and sexual content to gain micro-celebrity status and financial rewards.

Paasonen (2010) observes a significant shift in the production and consumption of pornography in the digital era, with increased accessibility and democratization of content creation. Paasonen argues that this shift did alter not only the nature of pornography production but also how it is consumed, with most users watching pornographic content for free online. However, free pornographic content remains widely available, yet research indicates that consumers today seek personalized and intimate content (López, 2020.)

Ryan (2016) highlights how influencers and Instagram celebrities use conscious and strategic micro-celebrity techniques to build relationships with followers and promote authenticity. Ryan discusses how social media platforms and micro-celebrity culture have facilitated a new type of sex work that prioritizes the content creator's personal brand and image over the act of performing itself. As a result, as Ryan argues, viewers are often willing to pay for this content rather than seek out anonymous pornographic material for free. Additionally, OnlyFans' emphasis on content creator's individual self-expression aligns with the concept of self-branding as discussed by Abdin (2018). It reinforces the idea that OnlyFans is a unique form of "sex work" centered on personal image and brand building.

Mansfield (2000) argues that the media-savvy world conveys an intensity of emotion through the presentation of various events, driving the economy's graphs by consumer sentiment. Thus, as Mansfield argues, the feeling of what is defined as the "self" can be put in the context of what is experienced as pulsating and emotionally involving. Facebook, Instagram, and OnlyFans are similarly cultivating users' sentiments as the interface of the platform functions is designed so that users are encouraged and supposed to convey how they are feeling. Through polls, stories, and direct messages, users are similarly stimulated to engage emotionally. Hence, the platforms are, with economic interests, driven by individual self-expression and human sentiment. Mansfield's ideas on self-presentation and emotional involvement are central to OnlyFans, as the platform encourages users to present a specific version of themselves and engage emotionally with their followers.

Burkitt's (2008) perspective of the "self" highlights the importance of social interaction and feedback in the formation. This idea can be linked to the role of social media platforms, which

provide a space for users to construct their image and receive feedback from others. As Burkitt suggests, individuals can reflect and reshape their image based on the responses they receive from others. Additionally, constructing an image of oneself on social media platforms aligns with the idea of micro-celebrity, where individuals use strategic techniques to curate their image and gain attention from others. Thus, Burkitt's ideas provide a framework for understanding how social media platforms can influence the construction of the "self" and the importance of social interaction and feedback in this process.

To situate the analysis approach within a broad theoretical framework, it is important to consider the insights put forth by Turkle (2011) regarding the contemporary dynamics of online relationships and intimacy. According to Turkle, many individuals today experience feelings of insecurity and anxiety when it comes to forging intimate connections and as a result, they prefer communication through technology as a means of connecting with others. Turkle (2005) argues that physical encounters can be challenging and leave individuals feeling vulnerable, while interacting in technologic landscape can provide a sense of safety and control over one's identity and presence. Additionally, Turkle (2011) notes a shift in our expectations, where technology is increasingly seen as a source of fulfillment while our expectations of each other have decreased. Consequently, some individuals may prefer to interact through screens rather than in-person, seeking the comfort and control afforded by digital interactions.

These insights from Turkle provide a relevant backdrop for the analysis of content creators on OnlyFans, as the platform's digital nature allows for a curated and controlled form of intimacy that resonates with the societal anxieties and preferences surrounding interpersonal connections.

Lemma (2017) highlights the transformative impact of technology on various aspects of our lives, including our perspectives on sex and love. Lemma argues that traditional understandings of sexuality and intimacy need to be reevaluated considering these technological changes. This notion is particularly relevant when examining the dimension of intimacy in the digital age. In this era, electronic means enable the possibility of sexual contact and intimate conversations without the customary social cues found in face-to-face interactions (Lemma, 2017).

Moreover, intimacy in an online context refers to the sense of closeness and connection that can be established through digital communication channels. Within the framework of

OnlyFans, these digital interactions and forms of communication contribute to creating an intimate atmosphere between content creators and their subscribers. By leveraging various online channels, creators can foster a sense of closeness and emotional connection while redefining the boundaries of traditional notions of intimacy in the digital realm.

Structure

To understand OnlyFans as a platform it is important to examine the platform within the broader context of the sexualization of society and culture. This serves as the foundation in this study for understanding the motivations and construction of the “Second Self” (Turkle, 2005,) as a brand on social media platforms. From there, the study expands to analyzing famous content creators with a large following and smaller niche-based accounts that reflect the platform’s unique culture, and finally, the focus shifts towards exploring fans’ motivations for interacting on the platform. With this structure, I aim to comprehensively understand OnlyFans and its place in the contemporary digital landscape.

Sexualization of Culture and Society

In this section, I look at the development of sexualized content in advertising, media, and social media, the fascination with sex and pornography and its influence on mainstream culture, and how media and social media content influence pornographic content.

Sex is one of the important drives in human life, as we are biologically programmed to have sex to reproduce (McNair, 2002.) Still, sex is so much more and evokes various emotions and interests. Therefore, societies and cultures have developed different concepts concerning how individuals should relate to sexual conduct. Cultural, governmental, religious, hierarchical, and economic interests help to determine sexual politics. In Western cultures and societies, sex has primarily been associated with relationships, intimate encounters, and reproduction. Consequently, some hedonistic sexual practices have been associated with obscenity and shame. Although commercial sex has become associated with something objectifying, the sexual associations with products, places for commercial sex, and the idea of pleasure for an individual’s own sake have become suggestively more present (Attwood, 2009.)

Media and Sex

Sex has always been a relevant topic for cultural and social discourses - a subject that has been present “everywhere” and, therefore, open for discussion and representation. A significant sexual discourse occurred during the sexual revolution in America in the 1960s and 70s. In that conjunction, Harvard sociologist Pitirim Sorok already in 1954 stated a fear of a ubiquitous sex stimulus (Allyn, 2000.)

“We are completely surrounded by the rising tide of sex, which is flooding every compartment of our culture, every section of our social life; Unless we develop an inner immunity against these libidinal forces, we are bound to be conquered by the continuous presence of a gigantic array of omnipresent sex stimuli.” (Allyn, 2000, p.4.)

One of the many outcomes of the sexual revolution, besides fear of sex addiction and a higher divorce rate, was particularly significant for women who, with gained access to birth control pills, could “openly” have sex solely for pleasure. Correspondingly, with economic interests, new commercial target groups were created. The revolution led to many changes in mainstream media concerning sexual exposure and content. Advertising became more sexually suggestive, and authors described sexual content more freely. Women were encouraged to show their “sex appeal,” and mainstream magazines began printing sexually compelling and tantalizing images for male readers (Allyn, 2000.) Sexually stimulating products for women became more visible and discussed in societies in the 1980s. Yet, it was with the introduction of the rampant rabbit vibrator in the TV series *Sex and the City* (1998 - 2021) that this specific product became popularized in mainstream culture. Mainstream chain stores joined sex shops in encouraging female consumers to buy perky sexual paraphernalia, and more elegant chain stores similarly appeared, selling sexy lingerie, toys, and erotica. Burlesque dancing became popular again among women, and pole dancing was reintroduced as a way to keep fit. In this context, pole dancing did not first and foremost represent a means of selling sex. Instead, it became a symbol of physical enjoyment, abundance, and excitement, where women became engaged in an indirect process of sexualization in a way that put skill, strength, and power in focus (Attwood, 2009.)

Along similar lines, towards the end of the 90s, women gained a new identity in the media. Previously, women were mainly depicted as passive objects, while representations of the “new” women became the knowing, active and sexual subjects. Through these media-created

representations of women, younger women were encouraged to play with their sexual power, to be themselves, and to please themselves (Rosalind 2003.) The economic freedom women who worked experienced led to females exploring themselves through a commodity culture influenced by modern neoliberalism, where individuality was focused, and individual satisfaction became a central goal. Hence, a neoliberal post-feminist group became visible where ultra-feminine appearances and women's sexuality highlighted support for the discourse of “empowered beauty” (Gill R and Scharff, 2011.)

With the introduction of the vibrator in different avenues, attitudes concerning sexual self-stimulation and masturbation also became a theme in public discourses. In this context, commentators expressed fears of women’s isolation and addiction to self-satisfaction (Attwood, 2009.) Yet, today, images depicting women achieving orgasms on their own are often used as a representation of self-pleasure and self-care in advertising, television, and film production storytelling.

That sexual pleasure requires a physical partner is, as an idea in sexualized media, disproved. At the same time, the old view that men who masturbate are disordered has persisted to some extent in contemporary media. In contrast, women's self-pleasure practices have a more positive representation, celebrating women's sexuality and selling orgasmic pleasure as a form of empowerment for women. Yet, some negative attitudes are linked to “masturbation,” and the reason is the metaphorical relationship between the consumption of goods and the pleasure of onanism, where the commodity highlights consumer capitalism, driven by individuals' desire for sexual self-satisfaction (Attwood, 2009.) On the one hand, masturbation appears as a self-determent and a self-fulfilling pleasure. At the same time, masturbation can seem isolating and alienating. However, in capitalism, consumers who seek their own pleasure are the “perfect” customer. Consequently, individuals are both encouraged and judged to have “fun” (Smith, Adam, 1759/2002.) This is a topic that applies to all commercialization of sex, where the customer, through various consumer outlets and advertising, is encouraged to buy products for their own satisfaction but, at the same time, is condemned by societies that see this type of attitudes and consumption as wrong or abnormal where physical interaction with people is absent.

The visibility of masturbation has increased across a range of media. For example, mainstream TV shows such as *Men Behaving Badly* (1992–98), *Sex and the City* (1998–2021), and

Desperate Housewives (2004–2012) show male and female masturbation. Also, critically acclaimed films such as American Beauty (1999) and Mulholland Drive (2001) display masturbation pleasure (Attwood, 2009.) Mainstream advertising also presents products such as chocolate (e.g., Troika 2021) and shampoo (e.g., Herbal Essences revitalizing shampoo 1998) with masturbating orgasmic satisfaction.



Figure 2 Commercial for Herbal Essences shampoo, retrieved from YouTube, 2023.



Figure 3 Commercial for Troika chocolate, retrieved from YouTube, 2023



Figure 4 Commercial for Troika chocolate, retrieved from YouTube, 2023



Figure 5 Commercial for Troika chocolate, retrieved from YouTube, 2023



Figure 6 Commercial for Troika chocolate, retrieved from YouTube, 2023

However, visibility has yet little to do with general acceptance, even if the underlying message in these advertisements is that women do not need a physical partner but a designated product to satisfy themselves. While men “need” products that make them feel powerful and attract the attention of women.



Figure 7 Commercial for Calvin Klein, retrieved from YouTube 2023



Figure 8 Commercial for Gucci Perfume, retrieved from YouTube 2023

Consequently, the media has created the illusion that men need a product to magnetize while women can achieve orgasmic pleasure with the product itself. Whether the woman in this setting is portrayed as strong and independent can be debated. Still, these types of advertisements support the discourse of commercials being “light and loose,” a topic to which I will return. Nevertheless, the practice of intercourse is often excluded from the debate in contemporary discussions. Since sex is commonly about relationships and intimate encounters, this message is often hidden with simple concepts in mainstream media as it can be perceived as hedonistic or indecent and, in that connection, become unpopular or regarded as objectified content (Attwood, 2009.)

Today, sex is a powerful tool used to produce content to sell products to all communities and gender groups. Sex is used in advertisements to create attention and attract audiences to TV productions, music videos, films, series, social media, and art. Sexual content gets noticed because people are hardwired to pay attention to sexual information (Reichert, 2003.) As more

companies in contemporary western societies use the advertising strategies of that sex sells (Reichert, 2003,) sex is increasingly more visible in our everyday lives.

Advertisement companies use sex to sell products in different forms. Many brands aim to cultivate a sexy media presence and openly use images in advertising campaigns with explicit sexual content. Other brands are more subtle in style and use strategies and images that imperceptibly send sexual signals that unconsciously affect the recipient. It is also common in contemporary western societies to sell products that traditionally have nothing to do with sex, with a sexual connotation. Yet, it is not only in advertising that sex, sexual fantasies, and sex appeal dominate content production. All media similarly see sex as a commodity that attracts audiences and continuously develops concepts that, on a large scale, contain and display sex. For example, there is a tendency today for entertainment programs to mediate sexual confessions through talk shows like *Let's Talk sex* (2002-), *Between the Sheets* with Josh Macuga (2013-2016), and *Komm Doch!* (2022-.) Programs such as *Ex on the Beach* (2014-2020) and *Dating Naked* (2014-2016) also thrive on sexual confessions.

The confessional, which Foucault first described, has, through these types of programs, become the modern place to discuss sex. Hence, the place of confession is no longer only related to a church or a therapist's couch but to mediated programs (Attwood, 2009.) Consequently, the source of advice for sexual dilemmas and those who construct a sexual lifestyle become, through these programs, the media-created "sex experts." These "sex experts" are participants selected by media production companies to create content that generates public attention. In this setting, a view of sexual practice is often portrayed as play, pleasure, and a form of recreation or competition instead of practice emphasizing reproduction and committed relationships. Yet, sex is often seen as an important influence in the creation and expression of an individual's self (Giddens, 1992.) Therefore, the sexual content to which we are exposed not only contributes to what we buy and watch but could also contribute to how we behave and reason. These media-created relationship depictions act as models for what is socially acceptable and could influence attitudes and behavior. Research shows that greater exposure to sexual content could lead to greater adherence to permissive behavior if one is already predisposed to this type of thinking (e.g., friendly attitudes towards casual sex) (Dillman et. al, 2018.)

However, we are also increasingly exposed to sexualized content through various social media channels. Yet, these exposures in social media are not just a matter of commercial media production and the sale of products. Many people post sexual images and texts for their pleasure and interests, creating a tendency in modern Western societies for sex and technology to be intertwined in a way that turns people into sexual cyborgs (Attwood, p, xiv 2009.) This is not a new phenomenon, as communication technology has been adapted for sexual purposes since the printing press (Attwood, 2009.) Still, has a greater adherence to permissive behavior following various sexual media exposures influenced types of social media content and interaction?

Social Media and Sex

As sex has become more visible in several aspects of modern societies and cultures, its meaning has become more ambiguous and elusive (Levy, 2005.) Over the past decades, a “striptease culture” has emerged where public nudity, voyeurism, and sexualized appearances and bodies are allowed and encouraged. This includes sexualization in art, television, film, documentary, music, fashion, advertising and social media. The different aspects of all these sexual exposures have contributed to changing the boundaries between public and private, and in that respect, a new form of “public intimacy” has developed (McNair, 2002.) This form of “public intimacy” can explain individuals’ desire for sexual self-disclosure and self-exposure (McNair, 2002.) Media and advertising producers set the “standard” in specific areas, and the portrayed “light and lose” view of sex can catalyze individuals to seek transitory and renewable pleasures in everyday life that might reflect actions on social media platforms (Attwood, 2009.)

However, this “sexiness” can also indicate superficial glamour, empty pleasures, and cheap excitement, which cannot be treated as accurate or severe (Illouz, 1999.) Societies can, as a response to the commodification of sex, view these presentations as superficial because of the branding of sexuality, where products represent sex and sexual desires, and the vocabulary is taken from the media and commerce (Attwood, 2009.) Yet, individuals do post sexual content on social media platforms. This may connect with media exposures concerning sexuality, where several industries throughout decades have encouraged especially women to play with their sexual power and feminine appearances. In response, A.C. Grayling already stated in 2002 that “one of the hallmarks of the age is the sexual emancipation of women, whose magazines never fail to discuss aspects of it, and for whom posh sex shops and subtle pornography are now

mainstream” (Grayling, n.p, 2002) In this respect, the influence of women’s sexual liberation in conjunction with how advertising has played on seductive femininity in a commodity culture is visible in some of the content on social media platforms. Images of women with sexualized bodies and alluring expressions are persistently displayed on social media platforms in the same way as content in mainstream media and advertising are displayed.

Another reason for many of the sexual exposures in social media similarly most likely stems from the influence of the pornographic expressions that have been cultivated over the past two decades, particularly in the film, art, fashion, and music genres. Linda Williams (1998) notes how a fascination with pornography began to appear in the late 1980s, when porn became particularly visible in high art, popular culture, Hollywood films, literature, advertising, and vogue. These exposures led to porn chic becoming acceptable and fashionable and losing much of its established taboo characteristics (Williams, 1989.) This view of pornography has spread and persisted in contemporary societies. Therefore, it is not to be ruled out that some sexual exposures could appear today in social media as an attempt to form a specific image with a desire to be sophisticated and trendy.

However, representations on social media platforms are carefully thought through and created with a specific view on how to make an image for self-exposure, branding, and attention. Today there are many opportunities for individuals to create private social media web pages to convey an image of oneself for attention, connections and to sell products. Anyhow, the product is, to a large degree, the self. Hence, the presentation of individuals is essential in promoting what they want to achieve, be it attention, status, sales, fame, work, or followers. Those who create their web pages on social media platforms are thus their own media content producers and can, in that respect, use sexual exposure in the same way as media, music, art, fashion and advertising use sex as a tool to generate attention or increase sales. Another perspective on the reason for the sexualized content in social media is how women’s involvement in feminist discourses has become perceptible in how some females display content that challenges programmed attitudes concerning sexuality and wants to show their bodies without being perceived as sexually quantifiable objects. Yet, what does it mean to be perceived as someone who posts “objectified” content in a twenty-first-century society where sexualized material abounds on several media-based platforms?

In contemporary culture, the term “objectification” brings together issues related to appearance, sex, beauty, body, and social power. Objectification is a term often used in public debates to express concern about oppression, particularly regarding how women are represented and represent themselves (Paasonen et.al, 2020.) One of contemporary culture’s perhaps most famous women known for objectifying herself is Kim Kardashian. Millions of followers on Kardashians Instagram web page are daily served everything from glamor photos to casual selfies where she shows her body with little or no clothes in sexy poses (Paasonen et.al, 2020.) Although many of her followers applaud and admire her portrayals, criticism abounds. Some critics argue that Kardashian has effectively diminished her identity to a single aspect, being seen as nothing more than a superficial sexual object. They similarly argue that she portrays herself to the public in a disempowered manner, adopting a pose that reinforces her perception as a mere object of sexual desire (Paasonen et.al, 2020.)

Irrespective, individuals like Kardashian compete for visibility in a free market, and she as one of many, has found a way to brand herself to find work and gain followers on social media platforms. In this context, Kardashian deliberately positions herself as a commodity, fully aware that sex and intimacy have market value (Paasonen et al., 2020.) This perspective transforms the individual into an object, where intimate exchanges are treated as goods and services. Within the framework of neoliberal markets, this transactional model has become a symbolic of success (Paasonen et al., 2020). Consequently, Kardashian's millions of followers, who idolize her, may be influenced by her materialistic approach and subsequently share sexual content, seeking attention without fully recognizing the commodification of sex and the voluntary “objectification” involved. As a result, distinguishing between erotic or soft pornographic content, such as that produced by Kardashian, and pornography or sex work can be challenging for some social media users.

However, the dominant neoliberal ideology of pursuing individual sexual satisfaction, personal freedom, and economic growth remains prevalent today. Within this framework, content creators on platforms like OnlyFans could seize the opportunity to monetize their erotic content, which they could have potentially shared on any social media platform. Simultaneously, subscribers on OnlyFans can gain easy access to such content without constant reminders of being solely consumers of pornographic material. Consequently, the neoliberal notion of self-pleasure can be realized through technology and is, as many commentators note, often just a mouse click away.

Pornography, Media and Social Media

The availability of sexual content through various media channels is just one aspect of the broader possibilities enabled by technology. Today, numerous platforms offer a range of pornographic materials, including images, video clips, live shows, and voyeuristic webcam sites, for entertainment and arousal. Additionally, some websites facilitate sexual encounters such as cybersex, email exchanges, and chat affairs, allowing individuals to seek temporary “relationships” with sexual partners (Paasonen, 2010.) Meanwhile, the consumption of pornographic material has become more commonplace compared to the past. Attwood (2009) highlights the shift in the portrayal of pornographers, practitioners, and consumers during the 1990s, where they were increasingly depicted as ordinary individuals with flaws and imperfections rather than depraved deviants. A.C. Grayling (2002) observes that in the early 2000s, women emerged as both producers and consumers of pornography, marking a significant departure from the previous dominance of male-produced and male-consumed material. This change reflects a shift in societal attitudes towards pornography, transforming it from a taboo subject to a more openly discussed, accompanied by an increased representation of sexual content in the media (Attwood, 2009.)

Thus, pornography has emerged with connotations that the mainstream capitalist entertainment industry has sought out and therefore developed more intricate and diverse platforms for producing and selling sexual content and services. One of the latest additions in the adult entertainment industry is the pornographic platform OnlyFans that has many similarities with social media networking platforms. However, in the digital pornographic industries, the mediated images, products, and services have a different purpose than the sexualized content produced for media, advertising and social media. The intention for buying and selling sexual services in the pornographic world is primarily arousal. Whereas the practice of intercourse is often excluded from content in media and advertising, intercourse is a central theme in most pornographic content to create excitement. Consequently, both couples and groups can view pornography as a tool for arousal and entertainment. Yet, the assumption is that porn is viewed and enjoyed primarily alone as masturbation potential (Attwood, 2009.)

Masturbation is one of the most common forms of sexual stimulation for individuals and perhaps the first form of sexual pleasure experienced by humans (Attwood, 2009.) Nevertheless, masturbation has historically been a concern for individuals' sexual status, whereas onanism, when not having a partner, is perceived as non-sexual or anti-sexual (Tuck,

2005.) Masturbation has also created concerns about disrupting humans' natural sexual reproductive functions. However, today many people masturbate whether being in a relationship or not. Accurate empirical data on who uses pornography the most is difficult to map, but that porn as a masturbation tool is used among lonely people seems self-evident (Attwood, 2009.)

In the West, the solitary character who uses porn has raised concerns that excessive use of porn can lead to addiction, rape and create attitudes around the alienation of sexual pleasure (Laqueur, 2003.) However, research lacks the basic fact that what unites porn consumers is that they all masturbate (Attwood, 2009,) and therefore, it can be argued that those who use pornographic platforms the most do not have access to physical sex, are not content with the sex they are experiencing or want something more to be sexually entertained and aroused. Consequently, pornographic platforms that have developed opportunities for customers to communicate with content creators in addition to consuming sexual content have generated a possibly perfect tool for the “lonely,” “fantasizing,” or “I want more” designated consumer. A similar concept that exists in sexualized advertising where the “perfect” consumer is the one who seeks their own pleasure and sexual self-satisfaction. On the OnlyFans platform, the customers can ask for customized content and chat with the content creators to their liking, which creates a form of interactive voyeurism which, in this respect, gives an extra touch that customers want to pay for.

Whether authenticity in pornographic content is generally favored among consumers can be debated. Yet, authenticity does influence how the content is experienced. However, the predicaments of what is “real” and not are, in the same way as other media-created content, also present in pornography productions. Types of pornography that can be difficult to distinguish are, e.g., gonzo, mainstream sex blogs, and amateur porn (Attwood, 2009.) Gonzo-style filming is used in the production of porn, where the camera is placed in the middle of a sexual act, making it look like the person filming is participating (Petkovich et. al. 2002.) This effect could remind the viewer of watching amateur content that could be perceived as “real.” This technique of placing the camera in the middle of a sexual act from the audience’s point of view similarly creates the illusion that the spectators are “present” or engaged in the action themselves. The subjective point of view creates a presence on behalf of the spectator where the camera is placed in a position that sexually engage the viewer in the act. For example, a porn entrepreneur is looking directly into the camera while stimulating a person, making it feel like the spectator is

being stimulated. Mainstream sex blogs can be perceived as any other blogs where people are “truthfully” sharing their thoughts and experiences, and in that respect brings the consumer closer to the content creator. Similarly, amateur porn is mainly experienced as real, where an image of so-called authentic people in their surroundings is displayed. That the content is perceived as authentic may connect with how amateur porn is made, where participants film themselves with a poorer filmic quality than larger productions and, in production style, may resemble private content shared on social media platforms. However, gonzo-style productions, mainstream sex blogs, and amateur porn demonstrate the broader process of the sexualization of contemporary culture, which includes ‘private intimacy’ exposed in the public, media exposure of the ordinary lives of celebrities, and preoccupation with mediated sexual confessions (Attwood, 2009.) However, OnlyFans pushes the boundaries of authenticity in pornography by enticing users with intimate dating experiences that are claimed to be so genuine that they can be perceived as “real.” Hence, the platform blurs the line between fantasy and reality, offering content with a heightened sense of authenticity.

Throughout history, there have been several concerns that obscene, pornographic content will invade and take over the mainstream culture. Similarly, there has been a long history of administrative and legal efforts to prevent it from happening (Kendrick, 1987.) Today, it is evident that the influence between pornography and mainstream culture is reciprocal, with both worlds impacting and shaping each other. This dynamic is exemplified by the digital platform OnlyFans, where various elements and content inspired by mainstream social media platforms and commercial practices are seamlessly integrated with pornography, soft porn, and erotica. However, a noteworthy shift can be observed on the OnlyFans platform, wherein the emphasis on the sale of pornography has transitioned from a preoccupation with explicit sexual content or a sophisticated pornographic style to a focus on a pornographic representation where the notion of authenticity has become a central aspect of the marketing and sales strategy. On the OnlyFans platform, a deliberate effort is made to create the illusion of authenticity and genuine interactions. Content creators strive to convey real-life events, thoughts, and images from their everyday lives, fostering a sense of personal care for their customers. However, the primary means of attention and engagement on the platform are through chat-based interactions and image-based content, like how people share and interact on mainstream social media platforms. This emphasis on intimacy and authenticity aligns with the construction of the “Second Self” (Turkle, 2005, n.p) as a brand on social media platforms. Influencers and celebrities on platforms like Instagram employ deliberate techniques to establish a relationship with their

followers, fostering a perception of intimacy and trust to promote authenticity and sell products (Ryan, 2019.) Similarly, content creators and entrepreneurs in the pornographic industry on OnlyFans utilize similar strategies to capitalize on erotic, sexual, and intimate services.

Furthermore, the presence of sexualized content in mainstream media, advertising, music promotion, fashion, and art over the past decades has contributed to a certain normalization and fascination with pornographic content. As a result, the content found on the OnlyFans platform may not be directly perceived as negatively associated with pornography. Additionally, the layout and functionality of OnlyFans resemble popular social networking platforms like Facebook and Instagram, further contributing to its familiarity and inconspicuousness. These factors collectively indicate that OnlyFans has reshaped the perception of porn stars and consumers in the 21st century.

The Second Self; Motivations and Strategies behind Personal Branding on Social Media Platforms

In order to understand better how personal brands are carefully created to attract followers to increase social capital and sales in social media and on the OnlyFans platform, I will, in this part, go more in-depth with how the creation of the second self as merchandise can be constructed. In the book “The second self,” Turkle (2005) looks at how the usage of today’s screen technology affects our awareness of ourselves, each other, and our relationship with the world. Turkle further discusses how we, through computer games and various social media platforms, can construct specific versions of ourselves digitally and interact with other platform users to explore personalities and identities (Turkle, 2005.) Hence, with the term “the second self,” I explain a digital version of individuals that do not necessarily need to correspond with who people are in their proper everyday life. However, in this part, I will explore how social media content creators can transform their second selves into “celebrities” who can build audiences and economic growth. Still, to build a personal life as a brand and convey extensive aspects concerning feelings and personal activities on social media platforms, it is necessary to address questions concerning how the “self” is formed. Precisely, how does one create a specific persona to communicate and excite but also present oneself with specific interests to connect with individuals convincingly?

Mansfield (2000) addresses questions concerning how the feeling of the “self” is formed and how influence from media, society, and politics plays into what inspires our actions and choices. Mansfield likewise reflects on how we present different versions of ourselves depending on whom we interact with, e.g., a boss, colleague, family, friend, a stranger on the street, or someone we are in love with (Mansfield, 2000.) In the same way that individuals present themselves differently depending on their relationship with the person in question, different social media platforms are designed for different presentations and meetings. Facebook was originally a platform for primarily interacting with family and friends (Van Dijck, 2013,) Instagram is more like a glossy magazine for entertainment and self-promotion where individuals create a certain image of themselves with various but often economic interests. LinkedIn is a platform where people mostly make work-related connections (Van Dijck, 2013: 2018.) Content-wise, OnlyFans has few similarities with LinkedIn except for promoting certain businesses. Yet, the OnlyFans platform combines traits of Instagram and Facebook, where entertainment, self-promotion, and intimate para-social relationships are cultivated.

Mansfield (2000) defines the presentation of the “self” as a meeting point between formal and abstract concepts and the most immediate and intense feelings that these meetings evoke. Meanwhile, in the contemporary media-created era, we are consistently exposed to situations where individuals must confess their feelings by being encouraged to, e.g., answer questions in magazines about what they want, surveys on which politicians and parties they like, and focus groups that want answers on what people feel concerning, e.g., advertising campaigns. All media content from televised sports, war, accidents, and crime triggers emotions. Sports athletes coming from the arena after a competition, victims, defendants in a lawsuit after a trial, and survivors of a disaster, are all faced with the same question; what do they feel now? Correspondingly, the mediated news and entertainment we are exposed to are measured based on our social values in satisfaction, enjoyment, what we like, dislike, love, and hate, and what excites and bores us. A world where one once knew oneself in terms of value and identity has, as Mansfield argues, been replaced by a media-savvy world that constantly conveys an intensity of emotion as a result of the presentation of birth, death, survival, crime, consumption, career, trauma, loss and achievement. In that way, the economy’s graphs are driven by consumer sentiment. Correspondingly, the feeling of what is defined as the self can be put in the context of what is experienced as pulsating and emotionally involving (Mansfield 2000.)

Facebook, Instagram, and OnlyFans are similarly cultivating users' sentiments as the interface of the platform functions is designed in a way that users are encouraged and supposed to convey how they are feeling. Through posts, stories, and direct messages, users are similarly stimulated to engage emotionally. Hence, the platforms are, with economic interests, driven by individual self-expression and human sentiment. Authenticity, in this respect, is, as Marwick (2013) explains, largely subjective. However, studies reveal that trust is identified by consistency both in content and how often creators post (Marwick, 2013.) Therefore, the content creator's representation of visual style, tone of voice, and the type of content on the OnlyFans platform should be consistent in addition to posting content regularly to gain trust.

Burkitt (2008), like Mansfield, argues that people become many different things in the presence of different people and that we can become different people alone. However, paradoxically, as he says, we indeed find the "self" in encounters with others where an image of ourselves is mirrored back to us in other people's words, attitudes, thoughts, and perceptions of what we say and how we act. So, to form a unique image of ourselves, Burkitt believes that we must first participate in a world with others where we are exposed to society, culture, and history. Only then can we form an image of whom we want to become, which is the essential question Burkitt argues is necessary to ask in questions concerning the self, and especially the social self (Burkitt, 2008.) In that respect, various social media platforms are the perfect place to construct and control an image of oneself and reflect and reshape identities to adapt to the contemporary capitalist ecosystem (Marshall, 2014.) In the quest to find out whom we want to become or who we are, the feedback and interaction from other social media users can give us an indication. Therefore, as Burkitt argues, the attention mirrored back to us from other platform users is significant. Furthermore, various media outlets are a natural place to search for inspiration concerning whom one aspires to be. In this respect, OnlyFans content creators, authors, and curators of their personal lives interested in economic growth and a micro-celebrity status can turn to celebrities and influencers for inspiration as they have already established a successful persona and brand.

From Micro-Fame to Macro-Opportunities: The Role of Intimacy and Trust in Influencer Marketing on social media platforms

Influencers primarily symbolize personalities who make a living from being celebrities exclusively on the internet. Meanwhile, if these influencers establish a large enough following,

the original micro-fame that arise online can lead to greater fame in other media channels (Abidin, 2008.) However, Instagram and Facebook are two of many social media platforms that offer users strategies for cultivating and growing online followers that can lead to a micro-celebrity status. Profiles on these platforms communicate individuals' life through carefully curated images of a particular lifestyle, personality, and identity. Through built-in technology on these platforms, such as stories, direct messages, and polls, intimacy, and authenticity can be formed between content creators and followers (Abidin, 2008.) Hence, content creators can bring carefully created content to followers daily through videos, images, and text-based material to build a para-social relationship.

This so-called intimate relationship that content creators strategically build leads to trust among followers. Auxiliary, this established trust is what various companies see as an opportunity and a tool to sell their products and, therefore, pay content creators to promote their merchandise (Ryan, 2019.) Most times, these promotions are so subtle that followers feel the decision to use products is solely based on the content creator's taste and interest. Correspondingly, if the content creators' trust is weakened among followers, their credibility and ability to sell products are lost. Therefore, the content creator's identity through brand building and interaction is their most important commodity (Ryan, 2019.) Similarly, I propose that companies can leverage content creators on the OnlyFans platform to promote and sell their products. This notion was supported by the findings from the analysis conducted on the platform's creators. However, it is crucial for OnlyFans' content creators to establish a sense of identity and maintain authentic and intimate appearances to market their diverse range of products and services effectively.

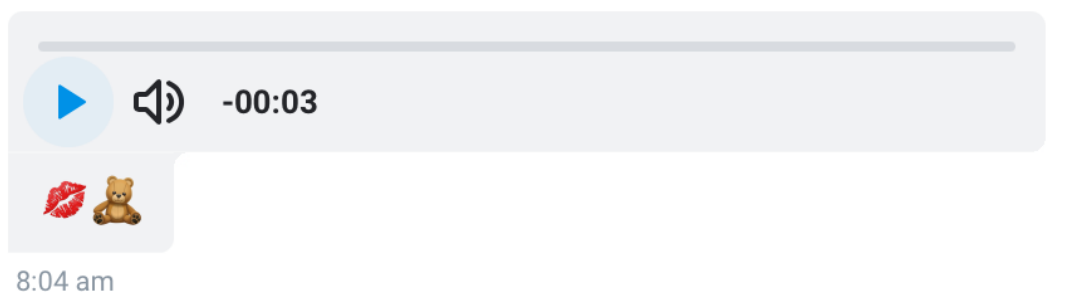
OnlyFans Platform Design and Marketing Strategies: Implications for consumer behavior

In OnlyFans' content creator guidelines, it is emphasized that creators must form an image of their target audience in the same way as influencers and celebrities do before they start producing content. After deciding whom they want to be in that respect, content creators are encouraged to focus on substance that makes their followers feel special and interact with them via personalized messages (OnlyFans Guidelines, n.d) to create a para-social connection.

However, to ensure that the monetary transactions do not get in the way of the feeling of intimacy, OnlyFans' web page is additionally designed so that fans are not constantly reminded of spending money on sexual and intimate services. Contrarily, the online design inspires trust

as it is reminiscent of ordinary social media networking platforms that one can associate with digital companionships and correspondingly appears somewhat non-pornographic compared with other adult websites.

Additionally, the payment system on the OnlyFans platform runs almost imperceptibly in the background, and subscriptions are automatically renewed, identical to other running subscriptions-based platforms such as Netflix, Spotify, and HBO. On these platforms subscribers are automatically alerted through mass produced messages with tips on what to watch and listen to. Similarly, subscribers of OnlyFans are automatically alerted by mass-produced messages from content creators with (new) content. Since the so-called personal inquiry to a user counterpart is one of the leading products that OnlyFan's content creators offer, it is also common for these mass-produced messages to appear in the inbox as voice messages to make it feel more personal and intimate than a text message. These messages may sound the following in a friendly tone. “Hi baby, I just woke up thinking about you,” or “Good morning baby, what are you up to hope you have an amazing day.” Emojis are also used in the communication to emphasize the nature of the message, whether it is, for example, cozy, sexy or surprising.

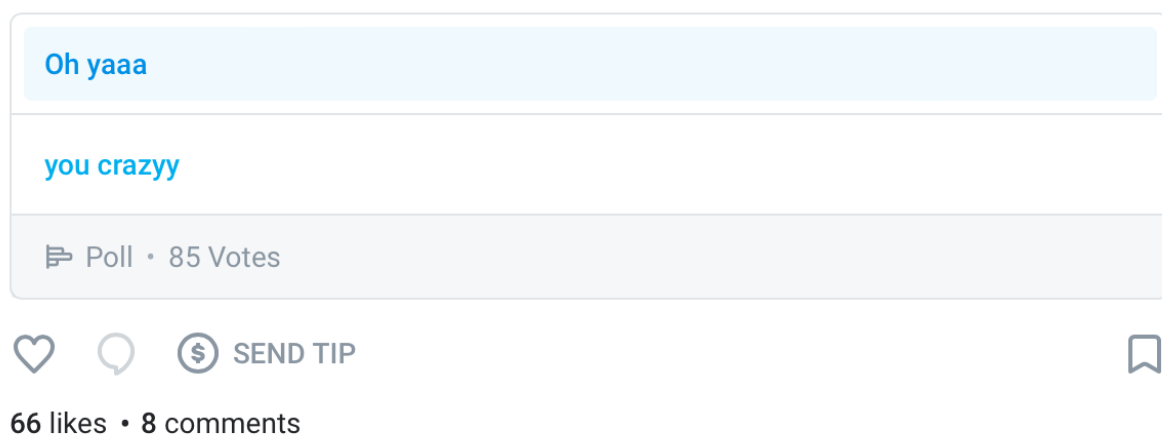


According to Adorno, as explained by Darbyshire (2011,) the mass marketing of various products represents a form of standardization within capitalist societies, employing a uniform formula to appeal to the masses and entice individuals to invest in “false” needs, associating expenditure with happiness. Adorno contended that this marketing approach fosters a phenomenon he termed “pseudo-individualism,” wherein the illusion of choice is perpetuated (Darbyshire, 2011, n.p.) Hence, cultural mass production creates the semblance of free choice within a standardized market.

Consequently, when OnlyFans users receive these personal yet mass-produced messages, they are subtly reminded of the platform's presence. Thus, they may develop an “false” sense of need

or desire for the products it offers, even without actively seeking out the platform at that specific moment. However, it is important to acknowledge that some of these mass-produced messages from creators on OnlyFans can resemble sexting, adopting an intimate and flirtatious tone. Nonetheless, their primary objective is to encourage fans to increase their spending on the platform. These messages strategically employ personalized and seductive content to entice fans into deeper engagement and financial transactions. This practice underscores the intersection of marketing and sexual appeal within the OnlyFans ecosystem.

Another crucial aspect of the OnlyFans platform is the storage of subscribers' credit card information once it is provided during the account creation process. As a result, fans are not required to log in repeatedly to access the offered services or make tip payments, minimizing the constant reminder of spending money on sexual and intimate services. The tip transaction process is similarly discreet, utilizing a button design reminiscent of those used on popular social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to indicate content appreciation or acknowledgment.



The interactive “tip” button on OnlyFans is strategically positioned alongside other instinctive “free” buttons that users can readily press to express their liking or leave comments on content. While the “tip” button explicitly signifies monetary contribution with its dollar sign, users are not required to repeatedly provide their bank details, making it convenient to tip without fully considering the financial implications. From my observations, OnlyFans users can engage with content creators through non-monetary means, such as utilizing the heart-shaped and message buttons. However, by pressing the interactive button with the dollar symbol, users can make payments to receive personalized attention from content creators. This demonstrates how the platform commodifies attention and establishes a transactional relationship between content creators and subscribers.

In the OnlyFans content creators' guidelines it is encouraged that new content creators should, in the beginning, have free profiles to get an opportunity to send mass-produced private messages to subscribers to earn money. The guideline describes this technique as something that can convince people to become fans of their content and eventually develop an additive behavior (Influencer Marketing Hub, n.d : OnlyFans guidelines, n.d) This is the same strategy that content creators and influencers that sell some form of expertise use to hook customers by giving something for free in the beginning with the hope of people becoming familiarized with the content and then eventually paying for more. Yet, irrespective of how the design of the OnlyFans platform affects the sense of intimacy and authenticity among users, content creators with the ability to brand and promote themselves in certain ways has an advantage in capturing audiences (Ryan, 2019.)

Techniques used by celebrities and influencers to create personal relationships with followers on social media platforms

Celebrities that have already attained fame outside of the sphere of the internet by, e.g., achievements, talents, or positions (Abidin, 2018,) have long been leading figures in how to promote themselves on social media platforms to create a new public intimacy while at the same time relying on a practice where they “exploit” their followers for self-branding and commercial opportunities. This habit involves the creation of an interactive engagement and bond between fans where intimacy, authenticity, and access to constant content are presented to a worldwide audience (Marwick and Boyd, 2011.)

In creating an intimate relationship with followers, a backstage glimpse into a “public” figure's private life is often established (Marwick, 2013.) As OnlyFans content creators are encouraged in the platform guidelines to seek inspiration for branding themselves from celebrities (Influencer Marketing Hub, n.d.: OnlyFans Guide, n.d.,) this technique of staging a “backstage glimpse” can be explored on the OnlyFans platform. Celebrities often utilize exposed content to create a more intimate and personal impression, showcasing behind-the-scenes moments such as unadorned, waking-up images (#iwokeuplikethis) or morning routines where they transform their appearance to endorse branded products. This type of content aims to present celebrities as relatable or “normal” individuals engaging in activities like cooking, decorating, and gardening (Ryan, 2019). Such content generates an authentic and genuine connection with followers, as it offers a glimpse into the celebrities' private lives. This differs from the content produced for mainstream media channels, as celebrities themselves create it, bringing their

followers closer to their personal world. These techniques of providing personal experiences and staging backstage glimpses into private lives can be adopted and further developed by content creators on OnlyFans. By offering a similar “backstage glimpse” approach, content creators can appeal to the voyeuristic desires of individuals who seek to peek into others' private lives. This technique creates a sense of intrigue and allows for deeper engagement with the audience.

Another technique that both influencers and celebrities rely on to create a personal relationship with their followers is to “truthfully” share their thoughts and confess. In that respect, celebrities use social media platforms to declare their side of a story that has, e.g., already been discussed in other media channels (Abidin, 2018.) Correspondingly OnlyFans content creators can use the platform to convey their personal life and challenges that they are facing in everyday life to create attention and engagement. An alternative source that OnlyFans content creators can use for inspiration in creating an image of themselves is sexualized content in media, social media, and advertising production. As already discussed, sex sells and OnlyFans is a platform where creators can freely expose sexual content. Hence, utilizing similar techniques employed by celebrities and influencers on a pornographic platform that shares resemblances with popular social networking sites like Instagram and Facebook, content creators on OnlyFans can craft a carefully constructed image of their “second self.” Within this context, they can present themselves as experts in specific areas, offering intimate and personalized lessons. This strategic approach allows them to establish their personal brand on the OnlyFans platform and potentially attain micro-celebrity status.

However, even though ordinary lives are increasingly portrayed on social media platforms, it is not apparent that people can become famous and create an income just because they publish content that seemingly represents their everyday life and certain activities. According to Abidin (2018,) to achieve a large group of followers and fame, individuals must create a form of content that first and foremost captivates an audience (Abidin, 2018.) Therefore, in the next part of my studies, I will analyze the content of some of the currently most popular creators on OnlyFans to understand better how they are extensively using the platform to brand themselves.

Analyzing the Marketing Strategies of Celebrity Content Creators on OnlyFans: Part 1

In this section, I will analyze the content of some of the currently most popular creators on OnlyFans to see how they promote themselves and interact with their fans to monetize. Information concerning content creators who are top earners with the largest group of followers on OnlyFans in 2023 is taken from a survey curated by the website Best Toppers (Besttoppers, n.d.) Although this information is public, I will avoid revealing specific details such as the creators' real names and locations. However, I will refer to gender and the professional sector the content creators operate within as it is relevant data in the examination concerning the type of “expertise” they sell and their celebrity status. Rendering this information, I examine content creators with a large pre-existing fan base that has helped them attract subscribers to their OnlyFans account. Outside this, I will focus on broader trends and themes in their platform's content; thus, the creators' privacy and confidentiality are respected. The following analysis is based on the OnlyFans content of fitness instructor and influencer “Jem,” who has 108K followers, TV reality celebrity “Megan,” who has 1.6M followers; and musician and TV personality “Sam,” with 3.2M followers.

An overall strategy on ordinary social media platforms to entice followers to engage emotionally is sexualized work (Drenten et. al. 2020.) Yet, this approach is especially identified as the core tactic to attract followers to influencers who are categorized as “performers.” (Drenten et. al. n.p. 2020.) These performers are often referred to as adult entertainers, sex workers, and models, which generally build an audience on mainstream social media platforms, as so to redirect their followers to external outlets such as OnlyFans for them to purchase more exclusive content (Clarke, 2019.) Nevertheless, OnlyFans has a wide range of creators who share content on the platform, and the popularity of creators can vary depending on factors such as creators' niche, content quality, and the level of engagement creators have with their subscribers. Moreover, pornography on OnlyFans is commonly intertwined with traits of intimate and emotional labor to engage with fans on a so-called personal level. However, OnlyFans is not solely focused on adult content, and creators can share other products, such as fitness, beauty, and lifestyle, like the content of ordinary social media influencers. So, what factors make the selected content creators currently the most popular on the platform?

The currently most popular content creators on OnlyFans all have distinctive strategies to connect and interact with their fans to increase demand for their products, which are primarily erotic and pornographic material. These strategies of connecting and interacting with fans to monetize are mainly carried out through polls, surveys, live plenary sessions, direct one-on-one dialogues through messaging, personal information, and para-social relational and experiences techniques. Combined with the opportunity to see pornographic content, these strategies can explain why customers turn to these creators on OnlyFans. Many individuals are used to interacting on a perceived personal level to be entertained from mainstream social media platforms while also wanting to see exclusive, pornographic content that most mainstream platforms prohibit. However, a factor contributing to why these content creators have such a large following is most likely linked to subscribers recognizing them from other media platforms, creating curiosity and a desire to see them differently from how they are usually portrayed. In other words, the promise of seeing famous people naked can almost be considered a goal itself. However, I detect a representation of a specific personality amongst the analyzed creators on the platform. Yet, it is essential to state that this study does not refer to an already established image of the creators in media but interprets an image based on what is exposed in the content on OnlyFans.

Inward, I observe that “Jem” has established an image of herself as a sweet, fun girl with lush body parts that she happily shares, “Sam” as an easy-going, laid-back, loving guy that is proud of his body parts, and “Megan” as a mysterious seducer who engages sexually with both women and men. In this framework, the difference between, e.g., Pornhub and OnlyFans is that on Pornhub, consumers can search for the type of content they want to see based on keywords that define a creator’s content like, e.g., “big tits,” “big dick,” and “GG.” However, on OnlyFans, this search engine is not available, and users must find creators they want to subscribe to via other channels, primarily other social media platforms. Hence, the main reason for fans subscribing to a creator on OnlyFans could primarily be based on the content creator’s appearance and identity as seen on other platforms. Therefore, OnlyFans content creators’ image cultivation and promotion start on mainstream media platforms. However, I observe on the OnlyFans platforms that many creators focus more on building a specific identity or image to brand themselves than those I analyze in this part who already have an established media persona. Furthermore, the images or identities I often encounter among creators on the platform focus on, e.g., cosplay, gaming, gardening, spiritual and meditation portrayals. Thus, I will

discuss branding and marketing strategies of these various content creators on OnlyFans more in depth in the second part of this study.

However, despite celebrity status and adult-orientated content, the analyzed content creators for this part have several strategies in common that they use to connect with their fans to monetize. Most of these techniques are crafted as an influencer's marketing strategy. Parenthetically, the first strategy I will discuss is that all the analyzed creators engage with their fans by regularly creating polls and surveys. In this framework OnlyFans is a platform where creators can adapt their content to what their fans desire, contributing to new ways for users to access pornographic material (Lykousas et.al, 2020.) Hence, the creators can use, e.g., opinion polls and surveys to determine precisely what content their fans want and are willing to pay more for and to foster a sense of connection and interaction with fans in their communities.

Content Creation and Consumption on OnlyFans: Exploring the relationship between creators and Fans

OnlyFans goes under one of the platforms classified as a “digital patronage” website on a par with, e.g., platforms such as Twitch.tv, YouTube and Patreon. All these platforms contribute to economic exchange for various types of creative expression where the platforms take a certain percentage (Bonifacio et.al. 2020.) Yet, all creators on these subscription-based platforms depend on loyal fans who support their content to increase popularity and economic growth. OnlyFans stipulates the relationship between content creators and their fans with the prompt, “Sign up to make money and interact with your fans!” This prompt suggests to the creators a form of control, and their fans are simultaneously given the impression of exclusivity and intimacy (Lykousas et.al, 2020.) The name “OnlyFans” similarly suggests exclusivity among the users who subscribe to specific creators while indicating that they admire the person who may resemble a celebrity in their eyes (Rouse et.al. 2021). However, after a creator gets the attention of a user who starts subscribing to their page, to maintain the user's interest, the creator can research and maintain their fans' desires with surveys and polls.

In that regard, by browsing through “Jem’s” feed, I observe that her content has changed over time from initially being mainly focused on breasts and bottoms to today having a greater focus on what she refers to as “camel toe” and “underboob” depictions. After conducting polls and surveys, her content constantly changes, indicating that she listens to what many fans want to

maintain popularity and monetize. “Jem” additionally engages with her fans by creating polls where she lets them decide what to film next, creating a feeling among the subscribers of participating in the production of her acts.

What should I pour all over myself in the shower and film it for you guys? Haha feel like doing some random shit 😏👉

Bottle of strawberry milk	1200
Bottle of Orange juice	271
🗳️ Poll • 1471 Votes	

“Jem” additionally engages with her fans by organizing “giveaways” for so running polls so fans can help her decide what the “giveaway” for the week will be. “Giveaways,” in this context, resembles exclusivity.

What should I give away this week?

Printed mini sexy photos of me taken just for the winner with a personalised note on the back and sent to you	2190
Cash	1197
🗳️ Poll • 3387 Votes	

By examining “Safari's” content, I observe that he has learned through polls that he has many followers who, e.g., want to see his feet. Although he initially focuses mainly on the content that shows his erected phallus covered by garments, he tests the response of his fans through surveys with pictures of his feet, demonstrating a desire to understand and connect with the fans in his community.

I've never been Into feet but if you asked for mine here you go .. rate them from 1-10 and help me understand what you like about them ❤️

He similarly conducts polls to determine if his fans want to see more behind-the-scenes content from his television and music productions or sexual content. Content creator “Megan” equally asks questions through polls about what lingerie or garments her fans would like to see her wearing in her following photo or video session. She also regularly asks her fans through surveys if they are interested in specific things, e.g., if they like her to be dominant or submissive in sexual content or, e.g., if they like to see content with fishnet stockings.

found in my camera roll... thought I'd share 🤗 are you a fishnet fan?

Additionally, she frequently adds another sale strategy to engage with her fans by encouraging them to play online games to access, e.g., her exclusive pornographic content. Although this strategy does not let her fans decide what to see, it could speak to those who like gambling and the opportunity to win something, which engages her fans on another level.



In this framework, “Megan” hosts live sessions where she interacts with her fans and spins the wheel for those who pay. Consequently, “Megan” demonstrate marketing strategies to engage with her fans to monetize on a different level than “Jem” and “Sam.” Moreover, her advanced business strategies are similarly visible in her accounts on OnlyFans, where she has one free account with commercialized erotic and pornographic content primarily made to tease fans to subscribe to her premium account, which has many different subscription bundles. One is a monthly subscription, one for three months, then six months, and another for a year, and the

longer fans subscribe, the more discount they get. However, I observe in the content of the analyzed creators that even if one subscribes to creators who mostly deliver pornographic content, they are also served images and videos with an expression that can be compared to sexualized content that emerges in film, television, and advertising.

The blurred lines between Pornographic and Mainstream Aesthetics

The term porno-chic, as documented by Lynch (2012,) describes how sexual aesthetics change in line with what is temporarily popular in the porn industry. However, some creators on OnlyFans produce content in line with what is aesthetically trending in sexualized media to recreate a porn-chic appearance (Lykousas et. al. 2020.) Hence, this type of content can be perceived as less explicit and sexually suggestive than the other pornographic content which creators similarly share. Respectively, “Megan,” “Jem,” and “Sam” has many erotic and soft pornographic depictions that could be perceived as relatively mainstream in their aesthetic compared to pornography on other digital platforms such as, e.g., Pornhub. For instance, “Jem” has several depictions of herself in a bikini, posing on the beach and in a swimming pool, like how, e.g., Kim Kardashian conveys images of herself on Instagram and in TV productions. Additionally, “Jem” has many depictions of herself jumping up and down in a swimming pool in slow motion, flipping her hair when coming up from under the water, like in scenes from advertisements, movies, and music video productions. “Megan” produces several images of herself posing in lingerie identical to, e.g., commercials for the underwear retail chain store “Ann Summers.” While “Sam” has many depictions of himself shirtless with only trousers or in briefs, where he poses in the same way as men in advertisements for perfume or underwear. However, when this type of content appears immediately before or after explicit pornographic content, it could still be perceived as pornographic as the viewer can interpret it with the same lens. On the other hand, the described content could also present the creators with a halo in line with a model in a glossy magazine, on a billboard, or on a TV screen. This could affect fans psychologically when they watch their pornographic content, as they see not only sex workers but someone they could admire for other reasons.

The Role of Personal connection in eliciting Desire on OnlyFans

Ryan (2016) suggests that “desire” on social media platforms such as OnlyFans is elicited through “knowing.” In this context, he explains that through personal disclosure and

information that the content creators convey, a feeling among users that they know them personally is created, which in turn triggers a desire to see their pornographic content. Ryan further argues that this relationship between content creators and users is why fans pay to see pornographic content on OnlyFans. Because as he points out, the web is flooded with free and anonymous sexual content, so why would individuals pay to see it? Respectively, I observe that the analyzed creators share footage that engages their fans personally, like how influencers and mainstream celebrities share content on their private social media platforms.

In that respect, “Sam” frequently shares behind-the-scenes footage of his music, television projects, and videos from his workout sessions in training studios appealing to fans interested in his career and personal workout routines. “Jem” shares workout videos like those on Instagram, cooking tutorials of healthy meals, and her morning workout routines appealing to fans with similar interests. “Megan,” however, is primarily selling sex and is essentially not sharing her personal life except for updating her fans on where she is in the world and what she will focus on concerning content in the following weeks. In that respect, “Megan” produces content referred to as, e.g., GG (girl on girl), submissive, dominant (sodomasochistic) that appeals to fans with specific sexual preferences. Hence, it is possible that Megan wants her fans to get the impression that the image she is conveying is what she wants her fans to think her life looks like to not fall out of character while playing sex games. However, the creators post content that mixes photos and videos in their news feeds and private messages. This content is primarily erotic and soft pornographic in a personal or commercial setting. Yet, explicit pornographic content is available behind another paywall in locked content posted in private messages and in the news feed where the accompanied text indicates the level of sexual conduct one can expect. Hence, fans could be willing to pay more to see more, as they have already got to know the creators on a so-called personal level which, as Ryan argues, elicits desire.

Creating Para-Social experiences on OnlyFans: Strategies Used by content creators to establish intimacy with Fans

As previously mentioned, influencers employ various strategies to create a sense of intimacy and personal connection with their followers. Content creators also utilize this approach on OnlyFans to foster para-social experiences. The term “para-social interaction” was coined by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe the relationship between a television presenter and the viewer during the 1950s. Their research revealed that despite the lack of mutual interaction, the

presenter's demeanor and presentation style was instrumental in establishing an interactive experience that allowed the viewer to develop an emotional connection that felt personal. Furthermore, Schramm and Hartmann (2008) refer to recent studies that identify para-social interaction as a relationship characterized by a perceived personal connection between performers and viewers, even without them knowing each other in person.

To foster para-social experiences on the OnlyFans platform, content creators like “Sam” employ various strategies to create a sense of intimacy and connection with his fans. For instance, Sam shares videos of himself frying bacon in his underpants in the morning, talking to the camera (the viewer) about how much he likes meat and how it should be cooked, crafting an atmosphere reminiscent of what it might have been like if a fan had slept over and was about to share breakfast. He similarly posts videos of himself driving around in his car, listening to music. At the same time, he occasionally looks into the camera to establish eye contact with the viewer to create a feeling of just hanging out with the viewer or fan. Moreover, “Sam” continuously uses the heart emoji in his written communication with fans and frequently proclaims in his status updates, “I love you all,” to simulate a close, loving relationship.

I miss y'all sending you some love tonight

Content creator “Jem” asks fans somewhat personal questions in her status updates, such as whether she should cut her hair or asking for tips on where to go on holiday. In this way, “Jem” comes across as someone who values or even needs her fan's opinions which helps her to build the impression of a closer relationship. Furthermore, she always calls her fans her tribe, establishing a sense of community, or addressing her fans with “Hi you,” which makes it personal. “Jem” also posts content from her apparent home, which appears untidy, like in an everyday setting framed with her personal belongings. In the pictures she takes in the bedroom, one can see that the bed is not made up, and, e.g., hair ties, socks, a phone charger, and yoga matt, amongst other things, lie on the floor. Pictures from the kitchen similarly show food in the background, such as juice, fruit, and bread, indicating that she spends time in the location. Hence, this content creates a private atmosphere where viewers feel they are in the creator's proper home.

However, Jem's bedroom's mise-en-scene and aesthetics reflect Kennedy's (2022) observations concerning the TikTok trend arising during the pandemic of bored girls dancing in their untidy bedrooms. Kennedy explain the transformation of girls' “bedroom culture,”

(McRobbie and Garber 2006) which was previously conceptualized as a private and safe space without prying eyes or a place that could be judged. Whereas today, through social media, it has become a space with public visibility, monitoring, and evaluation. Kennedy (2022, n.p.) argues that TikTok facilitates, invites, and rewards “the viral spectacle of girls’ bedroom culture.” Correspondingly, “Jem's” mise-en-scene of herself in the bedroom could have been influenced by the viral TikTok trend making it into a commodity on OnlyFans. Yet, consciously or not, she ultimately invites the viewers to surveillance and evaluation.

Contrarily, “Megan’s” filmed locations are constantly changing. The rooms are tidy and impersonal in their representation, like how hotel rooms appear. Perhaps this is done intentionally to build on the image of a “mysterious” fantasy sex character that she frequently promotes.

Handcuffed and helpless! 😞 TIP \$20 for the [FULL BONDAGE BUNDLE](#) 💧👉

However, sometimes she shares in her news feed that she is going for drinks with her family, for example, and fans can message her to get “naughty” pictures. In this way, “Megan” advertises a so-called intimate and exclusive para-social experience between herself and the person who orders this service, who can imagine her discreetly interacting with them in a semi-public space. Similarly, she is in her representation again somewhere other than her proper home, which reflects her image of a “mysterious” fantasy character yet conveying something personal.

out for drinks with the fam. Feel free to tip and I'll send you something naughty
🐱

Furthermore, all the analyzed creators encourage their fans to send them private messages to establish a direct dialog between themselves and their fans to monetize. In this framework, the fans who pay the most tips receive the most attention.

Messages with tips appear at the top of recipient inbox

Type a message...

Check yo DMI respond to every message.. GLAZE IN THE DM ..HIT ME UP

In the context of a marketing strategy and perhaps interest, “Sam” additionally posts polls where he asks his fans how good he is at answering private messages. However, he has 3.2 MILL followers, so there are questions concerning who is answering all these messages.

However, “Megan” and “Sam” also regularly host online Q&A sessions, opening for confession time. The confessional, as already discussed, is similarly a popular theme in TV talk show productions and technique influencers use to establish a connection with their followers. Hence, as demonstrated, the OnlyFans creators use different strategies that reflects mainstream social media and advertising to connect and interact with fans to monetize.

The Intersection of influencer Marketing and OnlyFans: How Creators Use the platform to promote merchandise and collaborate with Brands

An overall strategy amongst influencers is that after establishing a so-called personal relationship among followers to build trust, they start promoting their and other companies’ commodities. Similarly, the analyzed creators on OnlyFans use the platform to promote merchandise. In that respect, “Jem” promotes her collection of workout clothes, “Megan” her lingerie collection, and “Sam” his new records, concerts, and TV production releases.

If you haven't already heard I launched a women's wear range and you can get a huge 50% OFF onlyfans exclusive discount at the checkout using code BFF50
Shop for your wife, girlfriend, sister, momma or Aunty!

Additionally, “Megan” post what she calls vlogs (video blogs) where she, e.g., has a 6-minute video of her 48 hours stay in Vegas. This video opens with her showing the viewer around her hotel room, cutting to filmed scenes of her gambling, drinking, and smoking in casinos in sexy outfits. “Megan” is further displayed sitting in the back of a limo, laughing, and at the end, shooting with pistols and automated guns on a shooting range. Judging by the quality and how this video is produced, it looks like an advertisement for offered services and products in Vegas. Likewise, “Sam” appears to have a collaboration with the brand Mary’s Test Kitchen, as he frequently posts in his news feed pictures merging food with sexual connotations.

Like this if you wanna see me climax!!



Consistency in Posting: A Key Strategy for Building Trust and Income on OnlyFans

As previously discussed, consistency in how often creators post is an overall strategy amongst influencers to build trust and connect with their followers. Regarding the analyzed creators on OnlyFans, I detect the following: “Megan” post every day and sometimes several times per day. “Sam” advertises that he will post every night; however, he always apologizes and explains if he is absent.

I'm sorry yalll I had a hosting last night got lit af and fell asleep today is the day
❤️❤️❤️ I love yalll

By scrolling through “Jem's” content, I detected that she previously posted every day. In contrast, currently, she posts once a month, indicating that she might be occupied with private communication with her fans and, in that way, generates a sustainable income. However, “Megan” and “Sam” additionally send mass-produced private messages once or twice a week, like ordinary influencers, to remind their fans that they are thinking about “you” and what services they are currently offering that “you” do not want to miss out on which, as already discussed, reflects the para-social interaction.

Beyond Influencer Marketing: The Labor of OnlyFans Content Creators and the Paradox of Control and Vulnerability

However, I observe one technique in all creators' content, which is not an overall strategy amongst influencers; yet it could appeal to fans turned on by voyeurism. Voyeurism is often defined as an act without consent where the viewer achieves sexual satisfaction by observing unsuspecting individuals (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) While an exhibitionist can achieve sexual satisfaction by deliberately exposing themselves to others. Koskela (2002) suggests that the "choice to present one's private life publicly can be understood as a form of exhibitionism" (Koskela 2002, p. 206.) Moreover, the technique the content creators use to attain what can be appealing to fans who achieve sexual satisfaction by observing unwary individuals is that the creators' film themselves from specific camera angles that could resemble filmed content from a surveillance camera, where people are often not aware of that they are being filmed. In this respect, "Jem" posts videos of herself, e.g., playing the piano alone in her room in tiny t-shirt and underpants where the camera is placed from a position where the creator is seen from behind, seemingly unaware of the fans' presence as she is occasionally making mistakes while playing. Similarly, "Sam" makes footage of himself training in the gym where the camera is placed at a low angle framing the lower part of the body and between his legs when he is, e.g., doing sit-ups. In these settings, both "Jem" and "Sam" act like no camera is present while they are engaged in their activities. "Megan" similarly produces content where someone is filming her, apparently unaware of the camera's presence walking around publicly in a short skirt, where the viewer can occasionally see that she is not wearing underwear.

Jones (2016) describes how the digital interaction between adult performers and their users creates a psychological barrier that allows performers to feel safe and quickly ignore potential verbal abuse. Consequently, adult performers can experience sexual and relational satisfaction by performing for or interacting with users. Thus, in my observation of the posted content, all the creators are confident in their presentations. Another question is whether the content creators would engage in this labor unless it were behind a paywall on an interactive digital media platform like Facebook and Instagram.

However, Koskela (2002) explains that adult digital performers control their audience under a camera's gaze. Hence, those who perform for an audience on OnlyFans can exercise narrative control, as demonstrated in this study, to monetize from various products. Yet, the techniques

used are mostly a blueprint of Influencers' marketing strategies. Similarly, OnlyFans users are encouraged by the creators' guidelines to exercise these strategies, as the OnlyFans platform has many of the same functionalities that other social media platforms possess, enabling this type of interaction. Respectively, how does content creators with less followers on OnlyFans brand themselves and interact to monetize and how does their content compare to the currently most popular?

Analyzing the Branding and Persona-Building Tactics of Emerging OnlyFans Workers: Part 2

Van Doorn and Velthuis (2018) argue that platforms such as OnlyFans utilize the desire of users for authenticity and intimacy, creating a trade that contributes to a more significant number of newcomers establishing themselves in this segment of the market, redefining the traditional terms that have long been linked to the sex industry. Accordingly, by observing the content of some of the creators on OnlyFans, I detect several creators who sell services such as gardening tips, marriage and dating advice, meditation and dance classes, gaming, and cosplay, peppered with erotic and soft pornographic portrayals. Subsequently, how did this type of content and entertainment related work emerge on the OnlyFans platform?

Several interactive platforms like OnlyFans offer a subscription-based service for creators to share exclusive sexual content with their subscribers. Some examples are Fansly, JustForFans, and AVN Stars. However, OnlyFans is the platform that has excelled in the market as a provider of erotic and pornographic content. One reason for that is that a mainstream audience increasingly began to regard OnlyFans as a pornographic podium after the rapid influx of sex workers starting to adopt the online space as a workplace following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. OnlyFans further became known as a platform for erotic and sexual content after high-profile celebrities showed their interest and commitment to engage in this segment of digital exposures and work (Litam et al., 2022.) Hence, I suggest that the influence of high-profile celebrities committing to the platform has supported the choice of a wider group of ordinary people to establish themselves in the segment of the same trade. Concurrently, OnlyFans encourages content creators to produce entertainment and expertise and market themselves similarly to how influencers and celebrities produce content and interact on common social media platforms. Furthermore, considering that the platform is associated with sex work, I suggest that the media has functioned as a promotion body for OnlyFans by printing

articles in newspapers and magazines highlighting how much money individuals can earn from selling sexual content combined with authentic portrayals, and creating a thrill around the high profiled celebrities that joined the platform. Similarly, the lockdown following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the complications of being physically intimate contributed to a desire among individuals to engage in various forms of digital sex. Hence, by combining these factors, one can assume why individuals might have and still wish to explore the outcome of creating profiles with sexualized content and intimate conversations on and through the OnlyFans platform.

Previously, with the rise of amateur porn on various digital platforms, sex workers trying to survive in an uncertain industry started to use webcam platforms and social media to produce content with the possibility of various “direct-to-consumer” exchanges. (Berg, 2016) In an attempt to maximize income, the webcam industry experienced a massive influx of everything from escorts to strippers and porn workers. (Jones 2015) However, today, with a platform like OnlyFans, I suggest that porn stars, and sex workers face a new competition. This competition comes from a more comprehensive selection of amateur porn workers and other newcomers who most likely would not have established themselves in a pornographic segment without the opportunity to earn money from entertainment and expertise combined with various fetishisms, niche content and soft pornographic portrayals. Respectively, to better understand how some of these new workers operate on the platform concerning sale strategies and image building I will analyze the content of three different accounts focusing on gaming and cosplay, gardening and Yoga and meditation portrayals. In this framework I will examine how these “newcomers” brand themselves and interact with fans to monetize compared to the analyzed famous creators. I will similarly discuss how their depictions compare and differ to what is associated with traditional commercial sex work. Nevertheless, to continue sustaining OnlyFans content creators’ privacy and confidentiality, I will solely refer to the creators as Garden Lilly, Gaming and Cosplay Sally, and Meditation X.

Gaming, Cosplay, and Intimacy: Decoding the Paradoxes of Gaming and Cosplay Sally's OnlyFans Brand

Concerning brand building, I observe in the content of Gaming and Cosplay Sally (hereafter GCS) that she has outwardly made a strategic choice to debunk myths of gamers being

unhealthy, to show off her body, or to inspire other gamers to exercise as she regularly posts images of herself before or after working out.

When a gamer girl also workouts regularly and eats healthy hehe 🧑🎮

Moreover, she presents herself through pictures and text as someone who loves being up all night, gaming, and dressing up, while at the same time, she also loves being in nature by the sea or in the forest.

Me? Stay up late and play Hogwarts Legacy again? Guilty 🧑🎮🏠💜🎮😂
What do you think of this game?

Of all places in nature I always feel the most grounded on the beach💜 what about you?

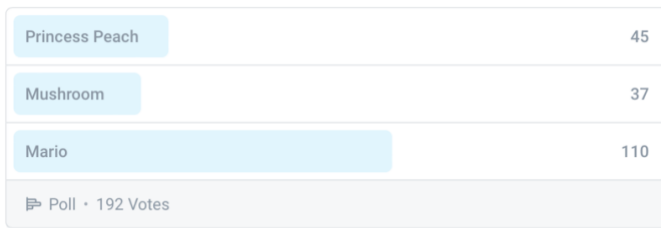
Similarly, she asks philosophical questions in her status update and geeky questions related to cosplay characters or video games to convey a specific personality, connect, and encourage fans to message her to monetize.

Red pill or blue pill? Dm me and I'll tell you my answer 💜

What was your all time favorite video game growing up? 🎮💜
Mine's a tie between, Donkey Kong, Pac-Man, and Mario lol I'm indecisive 😂

One of GS's most significant commodities on the platform appears to be chatting with fans through private messages, as she continuously reminds fans in her status updates that all messages that come through with a "TIP" has a "TOP" priority sort order in her inbox, explaining that if fans want to reach her, they know what to do. Additionally, she offers her fans to watch her game and persistently posts reminders in her news feed for fans to set their alarms (around the world) to follow her live streams. Another commodity is for her fans to see her transform into various characters and interact with other cosplayers in live sessions and posted videos. In that respect, fans can participate in choosing characters she will transform into through polls and surveys.

Which outfit is your favorite? 😍💜



♡ 💬 💰 SEND TIP

119 likes • 2 comments

Thus, like the previously analyzed famous creators, GS interacts with her fans through surveys and polls to determine what they like to see and to create a feeling of them participating in making her content. GL similarly hosts live Q&A sessions for fans to get to know her on a personal level. However, a strategy she implements that is different from the most popular creators is sharing everyday words of wisdom that could potentially uplift her fans' moods and create good vibes so that they continue to buy her products and refrain from canceling the subscription that automatically renews itself if it is not actively turned off. These phrases are crafted as personal thoughts, based on mainstream and commercialized "words of wisdom." I here refer to and compare writings on mainstream products such as pillows and posterboards to decorate a home with or uplifting GIFS to send digitally to friends with philosophical thoughts to remind oneself and others of happiness throughout the day.

I always feel so motivated and inspired on Mondays, like buying a white board and filling it with fun ideas hehe 💡👨🎨

Grateful for what each new day has to offer 💜🙏

Another strategy GS implements that differs from the famous creators is that she frequently shares in her status updates what she calls "fun facts" to give her fans more personal information as a possible strategic move from her side to continue branding herself as a person with skills that other gamers and cosplayers can relate to.

Fan fact... I suck at golf 😂💜

Turns out playing golf games on my PC doesn't help you golf better IRL 🏠🎮

Fun fact: I did my own face paint for Cheshire Cat 😬💜

Simultaneously, as GS engages with fans to watch her play, transform into various characters, chat, and thus monetize, GL continuously conveys presentations of herself to establish a para-social intimate relationship between herself and fans where she, e.g., simulates an impression that she will be a fan's particular person. Still, she distances her authentic self by connecting as a cosplayer and fantasy character.

Let me be you Spidegirl 🕷️🕸️💜

Similarly, she posts videos of herself dancing sensually and semi-naked, flirting with the viewer, yet mainly in cosplay outfits. However, existing costumes of media franchise characters drive Cosplay, and as Brown (2011) notes, all female cartoon characters are highly fetishized, where almost every character is illustrated as an adolescent fantasy of the perfect woman. Hence, when a fan sees GS dressing up in various characters' costumes, dancing, and flirting with them, they do not only see a fantasy character representing the “perfect woman” that they might have admired for a long time. However, her appearing “live” in a fan's news feed as media franchise characters they can interact with creates an illusion with the psychological effect that their fantasy, or even daydream, has come true, leading to a desire to connect. Yet, it is unclear if they desire to connect with the authentic GCS or her as a character. Beyond this, I observe a kind of duplexity in the content of GCS where she performs sensual and erotic related work dressed in costumes. In contrast, when she conveys content from her authentic or private life, she is more moderate in her sex appeal appearance. However, judging by GS's sexy outfits and sensual appearance in her costumes related work, is she selling sexual content?

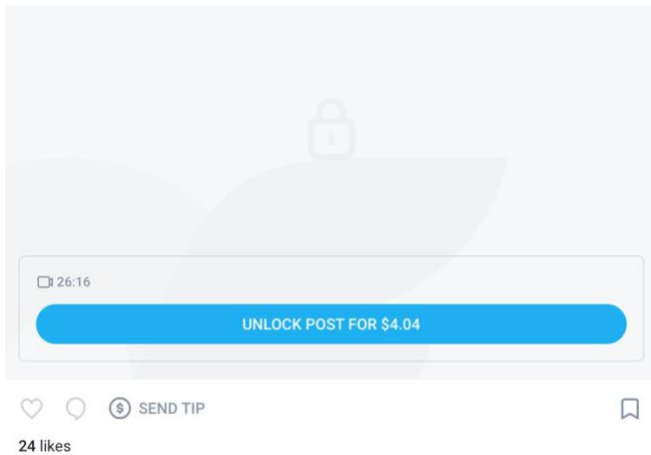
Salter & Blodgett (2017) insist that the hyper sexualization of commercially viable Cosplay is almost inevitable given the hypersexuality of character costumes themselves. In that sense, GS conveys a media-created image of characters through Cosplay, which cannot be considered as selling sex in any other way than that which exists in the media. However, all the posted content of GCS are teasers for fans to want to connect and interact with her. Nevertheless, I observe that GCS does not send mass-produced private messages, which the famous creators do to spark conversation and remind fans of their products. However, this study has not had access to private communications between GCS and her fans, hence what happens in private messages exchanged between GCS and her fans that pay the most is unclear but leading to the question of if fans expect to see more sexual content as they associate OnlyFans with pornography.

Meditation, Sensuality, and Voyeurism: Exploring the marketing strategy of OnlyFans creator Meditation X

Meditation X (hereafter MX) brands herself as someone her fans can chat with through private messages to deepen their skills of meditation, to learn the benefits of energy and sound healing, or talk about what she refers to as “this crazy little thing called life.” MX similarly promises her fans in her status updates that she is always there for them. Like the famous creators, she sends mass-produced private messages. However, her messages are not written texts but voice notes. I interpret the choice to send voice messages as a strategic move on her part, as her primary commodities, mediation, and sound healing, are closely connected to the usage of sound. In MX's messages, she sends affirmations of the day for fans to repeat and other messages concerned about how her fans are doing. Yet, when one hears a person's voice, the message is experienced as more intimate and as a direct address to the recipient. The voice also adds another element to the intensity of emotions, e.g., speaking with a soft voice, deep or high-pitched voice, caring or sad voice, slow tempo, laughing, and so forth. In written messages, these emotions are often made visible with emojis. However, hearing a person's voice with various emotional intensities in a message feels highly intimate and personal. In an analytic framework, Leader (1981) explains that the parameters of an invoker's drive when the object's tool is the voice is on one level to exert sound to be heard but on a more fundamental level to make oneself addressed. In other words, the response from the recipient is the basis for using the voice. Hence, MX's basic idea of using her voice in this context of messaging is for her fans to respond and thus increase sales.

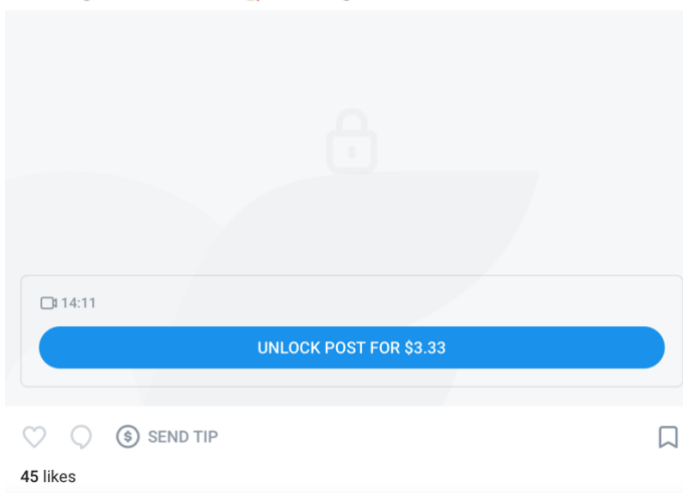
In the voice notes MX talks with a sensual and hypnotic tone of voice where one can hear from the quality of the recording that she uses professional equipment. The videos that she posts are similarly of high production value, where a professional photographer is most likely behind the filming and editing. The videos are edited together with images from several angles framed as, e.g., close-ups and long shots. The images of her sitting and meditating in spectacular surroundings in the mountains, by the sea, or in a forest are edited together with meditative music. The images appear to have been color-corrected. Hence, MX works in a team to produce content for sale on the OnlyFans platform. Thus, all the videos visible in her feed act as little advertising teasers to convince her fans to open the content of locked videos. The text accompanying the videos promises to show meditation techniques and yoga exercises, yet advertised as a video, e.g., filmed in bed.

⭐ One of my favorite places to practice yoga is from the comforts of me bed
😊 Do these simple exercises and stretches before bed to keep the body feeling nice and lose in the AM ❤️ xx Meg



In this particular video, when she, e.g. demonstrates a simple spinal twist, as she calls it, she is lying in bed in her underwear, wearing a blue silk morning robe spreading her legs in positions where the viewer is invited to see her bottom and barely covered-up vagina. Yet, the video is entirely informative concerning how to execute the various exercises. Another example of what is behind locked content is a tour of MX's body tattoos to find as she explains their significance and meaning.

Join me on a 14 minute tour of ALL my tattoos, find out the significance and meaning behind each one 🥰✨ xx Meg




However, even if the videos are locked and enticing in the accompanying text concerning being filmed in bed or showing nudity, there is nothing pornographic about them per se. Yet, the viewer gets a glimpse of nudity in an intimate setting. However, how MX conveys this content leads to questions concerning what she precisely is selling. Though, by presenting herself in

this way, she flirts with the viewer and plays with the idea of sex without compromising herself but keeps the door open for fans to ask for more explicit content. Thus, here videos operate as a teaser for other content that fans can request. These videos could similarly function as an invitation to fans for them to meditate and practice yoga naked together with MX.

Meanwhile, this inherent duality in the content can similarly trigger voyeuristic viewing practices that Johanssen (2019) describes as perverted. In his study of viewer practices concerning the medical reality TV program *Embarrassing Bodies* (Channel 4, UK 2007–2015), he found that many viewers enjoyed watching doctors diagnose and operate on patients' physiques. In this context, some viewers experienced a form of excitement instead of disgust by seeing complex surgical interventions on bodies. Johanssen (2019) conceptualizes this instance of excitement as perverted voyeurism. However, this voyeuristic pleasure also points to a voyeuristic dimension where people feel pleasure from watching content not aimed at sexual arousal (Metzl, 2004.) Similarly, the duality in MX content can be seen as voyeuristic entertainment where the material is seemingly not aimed at sexual arousal but at yoga practices.

Nevertheless, the locked videos' quality is poor compared to the teasers in the news feed, indicating that she is filming these alone with her mobile phone. With the same production quality, MX offers classes in tantric massage, where she promises that a partner will be begging for more if using her techniques. Hence, most of her videos and communication are about the body and soul, eventually leading to questions associated with desire, pleasure, and sex. Thus, one could similarly suggest that MX implements the same strategy of using sex to sell commodities similarly, as sex is a widely used tool to sell products in advertising, TV, and social media. Because, as previously discussed, sex sells.

What is the most attractive part of another person's body? 

As demonstrated, MX primarily sells an experience of connecting with oneself and the universe through meditation, yoga, and healing classes, conveyed with an erotic and sensual aesthetic and sound. Hence, MXs portrayal further points towards a creator strategically creating an intimate relationship with the users where intimacy as a commodity can have a more substantial effect than explicit sexual content.

The Multifaceted Persona of Garden Lilly: Analyzing the Paradoxes in the intersection of the 'Girl Next Door' aesthetic and Cam Girl culture in Lilly's Content

By scrolling through the content of Garden Lilly (hereafter GL), I observe that she conveys an image of a girl who lives in the countryside in a house with a large garden that she looks after and designs throughout the seasons. She posts several informative videos where she gives tips on what to do in a garden to protect plant soil through the winter, how to fertilize the soil and start sprouting in the spring, which plants are best suited where, and what they need in terms of nutrition in the summer, and how to build, e.g., a garden pergola. In how she dresses, she appears as a “simple” hardworking girl in the countryside, giving the impression of “the girl next door” look that some fans can identify with or fantasize about. GL similarly uses little makeup or fancy hairstyles, appearing natural and not scared to make her clothes or hands dirty.

A “girl next door” look describes a female archetype and fashion aesthetic. The term may vary in terms of personal definition. However, women who perform a “girl next door” look often get associated with being natural and unpretentious. This look can evoke nostalgia for some as it can be associated with small towns or a rural lifestyle. The girl next door is also often associated with innocence (McDonald, 2013.) A cliché that is similarly usually associated with the “girl next door” appearance is that she is the caring and sweet girl that someone grew up with as opposed to a wealthy woman with lower morals (Ebert, 2013.) Therefore, within this context, GL presents herself as a symbol of modesty and natural beauty, which can be more captivating to fans compared to the renowned content creators with a substantial following. By embodying the archetype of the “girl next door,” GL establishes herself as someone fans can trust and develop a deeper and more intimate connection with.

Always hard at work in the garden, watch me cut some wood, take measurements, and fill this cute new cedar planter I build today with soil 🌿 these white and tight booty shorts for so dirty by the end... WHOOPS 🍆

However, in every picture posted, GL poses sensually and erotically. Furthermore, when she shows, e.g., how much her plants have grown and how big they have become, the only big thing one notices in the footage is her bottom, which she displays from all viewpoints. In this scenario, e.g., GL strategically employs a camera angle where she positions the camera in the lower

section of the frame, giving the viewer a perspective of Garden Lilly from behind, looking up with a noticeable emphasis on her bottom, while the plants serve as a backdrop.

Concurrently, as she is “hard” at work in the garden, she continuously invites her fans to come and help her out and establishes her by a para-social connection or experience where the fans can, metaphorically from a biblical perspective, imagine themselves in the garden of Adam and Eve eating apples with the temptress GS.

Wanna come help me do some cleaning in the garden?!

Moreover, one of GLs outwardly favorite portrayals when watering the plants is to end up showering herself in a sensual manner, which is similarly an image commonly used in film and advertising productions.

Watering my sunflowers.. opps I seem to have gotten me more wet than my plants!!!

However, GL lives in a country with four seasons. To continue creating content for her fans throughout the winter season, she advertises other products to keep the subscriptions going to continue monetizing.

Summer has come to an end.. but I'll make sure I keep at some cute things here in the colder Canadian months for you, what would you like to see?? Cooking videos? House plants, house cleaning??

Concerning the indoor content she sells, I detect a slightly different portrayal of GL where she comes across as a housewife, e.g., making homecooked food, always inviting to take care of her fans on a seemingly intimate and personal level creating a somewhat girlfriend experience.

If I made you some bread.. would you be happy 😊

Need a morning cup of coffee?? I got you :)

Join me for a homemade dinner :)

These texts are, e.g., accompanied by pictures of GL preparing food in a kitchen wearing a jumpsuit and an apron around her waist. Her footage is framed with several household appliances, pots and bowls to cook in, fresh herbs on the bench, and curtains on the window, denoting being shield from an outside world of stress and chaos. Hence, the mise-en-scene in the pictures GL conveys creates a good and loving atmosphere reminiscent of being protected in a home with a girlfriend or wife wanting to care for her loved one which again reflects the connotations of the “girl-next door” look. Thus, GL is stating her product, a wife or girlfriend portrayal.

One of the most documented requests from clients in the sex industry is the “Girlfriend Experience” or GFE. In this type of exchange, it is common for men to request an encounter that includes an emotional connection and intimacy. (Milrod & Monto, 2012; Stalans & Finn, 2016.) Studies show that GFE is desired by men who want comfort and company (Castle & Lee, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008.) However, in the context of how GLs GFE portrayals is executed one can draw parallels between how a cam girl interact with clients combined with the experience of watching a reality TV cooking show. In this framework I identify a duplexity in the material where the text of GL points towards the equal job of that performed by Cam girls to sell a GFE experience. In contrast, the content of videos and pictures posted from GL preparing homemade food in the kitchen points towards a reality TV cooking program. Hence, by combining these two components in images and texts, a new dimension in selling a GFE is created, which can be experienced more realistic as a specific atmosphere in the mise-en-scene is produced to simulate an experience of being at home with the content creator.

In this context, Johannessen (2019) notes that voyeurism in reality TV shows may relate to two aspects: entertainment and affect. He explains the aspect of “affect” as emotions that might be activated through the exposure of content that stimulates connotations concerning the viewer’s self. Hence, when a consumer sees the footage of GLs GFE portrayals, they might be reminded of their mother’s homemade food (on the countryside) or something they never had yet missed in their childhood. Equally, the portrayals could remind the viewer of just another cooking show

that they enjoy watching for entertainment. Additionally, since this material appears in GL news feed it is available to all fans and not directly ordered by a customer, the fans can get the impression that this content is something that GL provides from her “real” self, and thus a sentence like “Join me for a homemade dinner” could on a para-social level be experienced as an unsolicited invitation straightforwardly to a fan. In other words, in this context, it is not felt as if GL produces content for labor, something that comes out more clearly in Cam girls’ work. Though, in the chapter on fans’ motivations, I will discuss how an illusion of a girlfriend experience is performed on OnlyFans in more detail.

However, GL has several strategies that deviate from the analyzed famous creators to brand herself to monetize. In that respect, much of her work is carried out in mass-produced private messages that she sends out between one to three times daily.

I got something special for you over in the VIP lounge of my garden :) TIP 100 to gain access now!!!






I just sent out a 40 image set to VIP's that includes some really spicy moments! tip 100 to get added to the NSFW vip list!!!

Here GL announces that if her fans pay, they will be added to the NSFW VIP list. NSFW stands for “Not Safe For Work” and is a hashtag often used in social media, online forums, and other digital platforms to signal that the content is graphic, sexually explicit, violent, or contains profanity that could be deemed offensive or inappropriate for specific audiences mainly coined to a workplace. However, as Paasonen et al. (2019) explain, this hashtag was created in connection with the rise of Web 2.0, an era where personal portable devices arose, and points to content that cannot be considered safe for consumption in workplaces and work contexts. As Paasonen et al. articulate, the basic idea around NSFW is linked to insecurity concerning losing one's job and social status, as being caught watching this type of content could lead to embarrassment or being fired. However, as Paasonen et al. further argues, the idea around NSFW can similarly be linked to an unspecified sense of risk in conjunction with being able to see explicit sexual content where the hashtag no longer serves as a warning but as an invitation. Because despite or precisely because of NSFW’s connotations, it appeals as much as it repels. In that way, the tag brings associations to humor, diversion, entertainment, and, not least,

titillation. Accordingly, as Tiidenberg (2016, n.p.) notes, “the choice to heed the label—to hide or ignore—is temporary. It is not rejection but postponement. Warning becomes a promise; fear transforms into excitement.” Hence, by using NSFW terminology, GS advertises the promise of exciting entertainment and similarly builds on her established image of a temptress or seductress who, in turn, tries to entice or provoke fans to join a particular section of the garden where “sinful” events occur.

Additionally, looking at how GS explicit sexual content (NSFW) is only available in “discreet” private messages and not in the “public” news feed reflects Tarleton Gillespie's et al. (2013) observations concerning how pornography was previously marked by strategically keeping x-rated films in the back room of video stores, porno magazines on shelves behind a counter wrapped in brown paper, and pornographic films shown in cinemas or on cable TV after typical bedtime hours. With this type of marketing, the definition of the content-embedded nature of what is morally accepted standards was made visible, yet with an enticing effect. Hence, by advertising x-rated and NSFW content only in messages, GL uses an old technique to emphasize the content’s moral qualities with an enticing effect of exposure to explicit content that can lead to enhanced sexual arousal among fans. Like the famous creators, GL could have posted this content behind another paywall in locked videos where the content would have been immediately available. However, GL sends out the images in private messages after a fan has paid, reflecting the feelings of anticipation and excitement that Paasonen et al. note is associated with the NSFW tag. The strategy of sending out NSFW content in private messages equally reflects the notion of proper “sexting.”

In all, GSs primary commodities, as demonstrated, are sensual and erotic material intertwined with garden tips, housewife portrayals simulating a girlfriend's experience, and NSFW content in the VIP lounge of the “garden” in private messages. However, GS also frequently posts shout-outs where she promotes the commodities of other content creators, which indicates other ways to brand oneself on the platform. However, the particular shout-out which I here refer to, promotes a package of someone not interested in simulating a girlfriend experience which GS offers, but a representation of a “sneaky” wife who is producing sexual content at home while her husband is at work and her children at school. Here, too, one sees the dichotomy in how the message is presented, where GL presents intensive information with a giggling emoji that makes the content easier to take in, and equally defuses its actual moral connotation.

Babe, follow my MILF friend ( 's a  muscle mommy and  sneaky wife who makes  content at home while her husband is at work and kids are at school! 

Furthermore, this shout-out works as the opposite of the image GS establishes as girlfriend and housewife material but could underpin her image as a temptress. Concerning if GL is selling sex, one could say that what appears in her news feed is debatable.

Navigating the Complexities of Sex Work on OnlyFans

Commercial sex, such as stripping, phone sex, and pornography, is included in the term “sex work.” (Ennis et.al. 2019) Yet, when it comes to commercial sex, the boundaries between definitions of certain types of work can often be blurred when entertainment, emotions, and sexuality are part of the job (Linden 2011.) In this context, Kempadoo (2009) uses the term “transactional sex” to describe sex work unfolding in a sexual-economic relationship where sex is exchanged for material goods or benefits such as, e.g., travel, meals, clothes, telephones, or school fees. Cabezas (2009) further notes that concerning sex work, the importance of affection, intimacy, and companionship is rarely mentioned, and to better understand the “complex circulation of sex and affect,” she introduces the term “tactical sex” and emphasizes the importance of solidarity in the relationship, which can eventually lead to something more. Cabezas uses the term “tactical sex” concerning physical relations, where workers receive gifts or other nonsexual goods for companionship. Yet, those who perform tactical sex work tend not to define themselves as sex workers but as “escorts,” “entertainers,” “business girls,” “beach boys,” “friends,” and so on. Nevertheless, as Kempadoo admits, “the notion of tactical sex closely approximates what has been described [...] as transactional sex, even while the definitions of both remain fuzzy” (Cabezas, 2009, p. 15)

By implementing the term “tactical sex” in the digital sphere of OnlyFans, I suggest that the analyzed creators perform what can be defined as a “tactile sex” service where the customers instead of giving goods or nonsexual benefits, pay via a tipping service for a digital companionship. In this context the “tip” donated could serve as a gift. I suggest this by looking at how the creators strategically create an intimate relationship with their fans where intimacy and companionship as a commodity can have a more substantial effect than explicit sexual content. This intimate relation can further lead to the users becoming more devoted to a

particular creator and eventually feeling a form of solidarity which, for OnlyFans' part, manifest as loyal fans that continues to buy the creators products as they are emotionally attached to them. Thus, the analyzed creators could refer to themselves and their work as “entertainers” and “friends.”

However, the boundaries and definitions of the content and whether it is sex work are blurry, especially in the content of GL. The boundaries between what is considered sex work and what is not can often be blurred, especially in the context of sexualized content in mainstream media. The way in which sexual content is portrayed and the intent behind it can similarly be an important factor in determining whether it is considered sex work or not. Meanwhile, in some ways, much of GL's content is like sexualized content in the media and advertising. However, how GL poses in specific footage can be reminiscent of how strippers and porn stars show off to arouse where she, e.g., displays her vagina and breast in what she calls a micro bikini to provoke and arouse sexually. Also, GLs GFE portrayals are confusing as they combine elements in picture and text, similar to the work performed by cam girls, appearing to be “direct-to-consumer,” with content similar to what is produced in reality TV shows for a broad audience. However, the NSFW content in the VIP area of the garden is pornography.

Nevertheless, all the creators have in common that through their sensual and erotic content, they flirt with their fans while opening for and encouraging private communication that can be interpreted as an invitation to request sexual content. Correspondingly, creators can “hide” behind a facade of selling entertainment and expertise. Additionally, due to the assured expertise in meditation and yoga, garden tips, cosplay and gaming, the creators establish credibility and are therefore experienced as authentic individuals with whom fans can build trust. Fans similarly get the opportunity to know the creators better through live Q&A sessions and private communications. Furthermore, status updates conveying the creators' thoughts and posted content from their proper surroundings and homes add to the experience that their portrayals are authentic. Contrarily, in the traditional sex and porn industry, the actors give less or nothing of their private surroundings, lives, and personal thoughts yet show more explicit sexual content primarily made for arousal. Beyond this, the interaction between fans and creators on OnlyFans can on a different level be compared with interactions in gaming environments.

The Intersection of Identity and Imagination: Understanding Flirtatious Play on OnlyFans

Correspondingly, what could be considered in the context of all the analyzed portrayals is the notion of online flirting and play. McRae (1996) defines cybersex in the gaming environment as an erotic interaction between two individuals where their physical bodies never touch. Whitty (2003) argues that cyberspace can be understood as a potential space where people are freed to be who they want to be and to explore their identities. This “space” between the “real individuals” and the “fantasy individuals” she conceptualizes as a potential playground where flirting is a form of play. Whitty (2003) characterizes these intimate relations and the online flirting as a unique opportunity for imagination. Hence, the portrayals of GCS, MX and GL can be seen as a form of flirtatious sexual and erotic play constituting various fetishes and fantasies in combination with sales of expertise. In this framework I suggest both creators and users can find pleasure in these interactions as the platform and the anonymity attainable in the OnlyFans sphere similarly create room for creators and users to obtain their imaginations. Furthermore, as Paasonen (2011) argues, there can be more than sexual arousal to the affective dynamics of pornography which can also be an object of shared curiosity.

The Complexities of Content Creation and Consumption on OnlyFans: The Power Imbalance, Risky Landscape, and Rule 34 Fetishisms

Another aspect that needs to be addressed is how platforms such as OnlyFans has created a new economy around content creation and consumption. In that respect, Nieborg & Poell (2018) argue that platforms such as OnlyFans contribute to societal power imbalance in a hierarchical power spectrum where technology giants and platform operators are at the top, while users end up at the bottom. Meanwhile, content creators, who generate income for platforms, fall somewhere in between. Nieborg & Poell (2018) further argue that these creators operate in a risky landscape and balance between the audience’s requests and wishes and the platform’s guidelines and demands. Correspondingly, creative work becomes cemented in a digital world where OnlyFans as a company is a business intermediary, charging creators and consumers a convenience fee for their transactions on the platform (Nieborg & Poell, 2018.) In this context, content creators oscillating between fans’ wishes and the platform’s guidelines could go out of their comfort zone to produce increasingly spectacular content that captures the public’s interest to monetize, as they are similarly generating income for the OnlyFans company.

However, the platform offers possibilities to explore all kinds of fetishisms. In this context, an internet maxim known as “Rule 34” suggests that any existing sexual fantasies are recreated in the pornographic world. Paasonen (2011) describes “Rule 34” as a maxim signifying that irrespective of how unlikely or unusual the sexual concept is, pornography is either available online or will be. Doctorow (2011) argues that; “Rule 34 can be thought of as a kind of indictment of the Web as a cesspit of freaks, geeks, and weirdos, but seen through the lens of cosmopolitanism, bespeaks a certain sophistication—a gourmet approach to life” (p, 70.) Hence, in this respect the OnlyFans platform can, e.g., resemble a space that offers all kinds of oddities and “risky” labor to capture the audience’s interest and excitement, and at the same time provide satisfaction to themselves and consumers.

An example encountered on the platform in this study that may remind of what Doctorow describes as, “freaks, geeks, and weirdos,” (page, 70) is a creator who advertises himself as a man with a small penis. This content creator proclaims that he aims to reach a female audience and brands himself as a boy who likes to wear women’s lingerie and make an embarrassment of himself. As he describes, the man “with a little dick” wants women to become his fan and make fun of him. However, the advertising strategies and the various products produced by the analyzed creators demonstrate several ways of branding and promoting oneself on an adult-orientated platform to stand out from the multitude of content and thus attract fans. Hence, what are the subscribers’ motivations for becoming fans of certain creators and interacting on the OnlyFans platform?

The Intersection Between Technology, Intimacy, Desires, and Fantasies: Fans’ Motivations for Interacting on the OnlyFans Platform

Today, OnlyFans represents a platform where people can sell and buy access to sexual content online. (Cunningham et al., 2018). However, identifying the users’ sexual attitudes is important for understanding the development in the nature of the sex industry. (Bernstein, 2007; Sanders, 2008) Recent research shows a growing trend among people seeking subscription-based, direct-to-consumer platforms to access erotic and pornographic material. The desire to establish a personal relationship between content creators and users suggests that people today want more authentic representations of people’s actual lives than what is available through more common pornographic platforms (López, 2020.) In this context, I suggest that the reasons why consumers

seek out the OnlyFans platform can be compared to why new types of content creators emerge on the platform. Correspondingly, OnlyFans became associated with pornography after the influx of sex workers during the lockdown following the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the media exposures highlighting celebrities who built and continue to build profiles on the platform created and continue to create curiosity in the public eye as to what content and entertainment the creators on the platform provide. Additionally, since many could not be physically together during the lockdown, they wanted digital meetings that could provide erotic or pornographic experiences. As studies show and López (2020) cited, OnlyFans registrations increased by 75% in two months during the lockdown period. Hence, complications surrounding being physically together similarly reinforced the desire for sex and intimacy. Coalesced with the rise of the new type of workers who established themselves in a new segment that combined the sale of authentic expertise and entertainment with soft pornographic portrayals and sex work, I suggest, resulted in the emergence of a new type of porn consumption.

OnlyFans: A Personal and Interactive Form of Pornography

Customers, patrons, or fans who today continue or are new to the OnlyFans platform could like creators who sell material that can be perceived yet debated whether they are pornographic, be in a state of mind that they are not purchasers of traditional pornography and thus pretend to primarily seek expertise and entertainment laced with erotica and soft pornographic depictions. Being a fan viewing and supporting their favorite creator's (soft) pornographic content could also be understood differently than being a customer consuming anonymous pornographic content. In addition, the advertised sex work and pornography on the OnlyFans platform strategically presents itself as a natural and commonplace activity, effectively minimizing perceived risks through the use of emojis. These emojis, such as giggling faces, teddy bears, and hearts, convey an aura of innocence that serves to neutralize the moral implications associated with the content. Furthermore, these emojis create connotations that position the consumption of the advertised content as non-imperative, suggesting that engagement is optional and discretionary rather than obligatory. As a result, the content becomes more approachable and inviting to potential viewers. Notably, OnlyFans creators employ para-social relational and experiential techniques like those utilized by television producers, social media influencers, and celebrities to captivate subscribers and foster a sense of longing for the fans to immerse themselves in the creators' digital lives.

The most noticeable dynamic concerning the platform's usage, which differs from other pornographic platforms, is that customers can help shape the content depending on how much they interact and pay. On this platform, the customer can contribute to the production through, e.g., surveys and polls. Through private communications and communications in plenum, new themes could emerge, and the creators might be inspired, challenged, or requested different content from their fans than they usually provide. Depending on the communication and how much they pay, the fans can similarly send messages to the creator and talk about their experiences, which may align with the creator's content. Johanssen & Krüger (2022) argue that on a (post-)Oedipal level, individual sexual excitement is made possible due to another or others. Johanssen & Krüger explain that sexuality is similarly about expectations, fantasies, and ideas and how the individual's wishes and preferences match those of others. In a digital framework and on a psychosexual level, these fantasies and expectations weigh as much as the forms and modes in how individuals meet.

In this respect, OnlyFans offers a new way to access pornographic content. Unlike traditional pornography sites where the content is mainly pre-recorded or with one-to-one interactions, OnlyFans features allow fans to participate in creating content and interact with their "favorite" creators differently. This interactive experience offers a more personalized and engaging way to consume pornographic material. Fans can communicate directly with creators, request specific content, and participate in live sessions. This level of engagement and interactivity differs from traditional pornographic platforms and might be why fans seek out the platform. However, this can also lead to fans developing an emotional bond with their "favorite" creators on a psychological level. This reflects Cabezas' (2009) considerations on tactile sex and the complex emotional experiences that can arise from it. The intimacy and personal connection that fans establish with their creators can similarly create a sense of emotional closeness and even dependence.

However, the main attraction to the platform I suggest is the posted material in the creators' news feed which functions as a constant tease where fans are continuously provoked through time by being exposed to layers of sensual and flirtatious content. As previously discussed, Ryan (2016) suggests that content on platforms such as OnlyFans generates a sense of personal connection between creators and users. By disclosing personal information and providing layers of content, creators cultivate a feeling of intimacy that motivates viewers to seek out their pornographic content. Unlike anonymous performers in traditional pornographic media,

creators on OnlyFans construct digital personas that invite viewers into their world and encourage them to form a connection before engaging in pornographic material. Correspondingly, when fans are ready after being exposed to teasing portrayals of, e.g., big bottoms, sexy outfits, and barely covered-up vaginas or phalluses, they request more explicit material desired to experience further arousal or pay for pornography in locked content. Hence, the communication between creators and fans serves primarily as an advertising measure for selling (soft) pornographic material, such as clips or nude photos.

However, on OnlyFans, I suggest that the personal touch of a creator's counterpart is the main product, as creators can directly address their subscribers and learn about their preferences, enhancing the sense of connection and intimacy.

Redefining Pornography: personal Connection, self-Expression, and Intimacy on OnlyFans

Overall, OnlyFans represents a shift in the pornographic industry towards a more personal and interactive form of pornography, where fans can feel a sense of connection with the creators and participate in the creation of their own sexual fantasies, which could also have an enlightening and educational effect. As such, the content that is produced on OnlyFans can be seen as a form of self-expression, with a greater focus on creativity and individuality than traditional pornography. While the content may still contain explicit imagery, the intention could not solely be to stimulate the viewer. In this respect, the dynamic between content creators and fans can create an experience that blurs the lines between traditional pornography and other media and entertainment while creating a space where individuals can explore their sexuality in a supportive and accepting environment. Hence, compared to watching anonymous porn on sites like Pornhub, which can be seen as a one-night stand where the primary intention is to reach climax, interacting with creators on OnlyFans over time allows fans to establish a connection that provides a different feeling when exposed to sexual content. This content can feel more personal and authentic, and the regular updates from creators in a news feed create a sense of ongoing interaction and intimacy with the creator. However, this level of intimacy can also lead to emotional bonds that reflect the complex psychology of sexual fantasies and desires.

Exploring the Authenticity of the OnlyFans Girlfriend Experience: Navigating the blurred lines between physical, virtual, and digital realms

In line with OnlyFans profiles that seemingly show the real lives of creators who can also convey actual knowledge and expertise within their respective fields combined with flirtatious erotic content or pornography, another service has emerged on the platform that builds on the element of authenticity. The service I am referring to here is the sale of a digital girlfriend experience. When a creator and their fan develop some bond of trust and emotion, that connection can be strengthened through financial contributions. Yet, this interaction could blur the line between purchasing sexual content, friendship, or attention that could, for some, be mistaken for love. Recently, a creator shared her experience selling a dating service on OnlyFans during an interview with the Norwegian National Broadcasting Corporation, NRK (2022, Video interview).

“I also sell the *Girlfriend* experience where you buy access to me answering you as if we were in a relationship as if we were going to chat throughout the day...For some, that is all they have. So, it is either that or not talking to anyone and being isolated.” NRK (2022, 07.10.)

The desire for an online connection resembling a girlfriend experience, and the willingness to pay for it, may suggest a need for human closeness that is not being met. This could be due to various reasons, such as geographic distance, social isolation, or a lack of compatible partners in one’s physical environment. Additionally, individuals may seek out online interactions due to a fear of rejection or vulnerability in face-to-face interactions or to explore their sexuality or desires without fear of judgment. However, to explain one aspect of the experience of paying for an online girlfriend experience, I will draw comparisons between virtual worlds and OnlyFans. Both platforms allow creators to share content with fans and engage with them directly. In virtual worlds, users create and interact with avatars in a simulated environment, while OnlyFans creators share digital content like photos, videos, live streams, and messages. According to Lemma (2017), the virtual world is like a copy of the real world but allows desires to exist outside of reality. In this context, if one compares the digital world to the virtual, the feeling of having a “girlfriend” on OnlyFans, allows desires to exist outside of reality, and thus can manifest as an authentic experience in a person’s everyday life, even though it lacks physical interactions. However, since the experience eliminates the body and physical interactions, it is commonly viewed as “inauthentic” and is seen as an escape from reality

(Lemma 2017.) Nonetheless, Lemma contends that the issue from a psychological perspective arises when individuals perceive the virtual as a substitute for reality rather than a space for self-expression or growth (Lemma, 2014.)

Meanwhile, from another perspective on physical presence, Johanssen and Krüger (2022) argue that engaging in specific sexual acts is already a form of virtual reality. According to Lacan, as described by Johanssen and Krüger (2022), sexuality cannot be fully explained through biological processes alone but is also shaped by the Symbolic. Johanssen and Krüger (2022) explain that from a Lacanian point of view, sexuality and arousal can be understood through Symbolic representation of erotic fantasies and various preferences where each partner views the other as an object of their fantasy, and in this setting, both parties are in their imaginary worlds, creating a virtual reality of sorts. Therefore, in this context, one can experience authentic emotions from interacting in a virtual world or have a physical interaction where one enters a “bubble” like a virtual world to fulfill desires. Moreover, the idea of a “digital girlfriend,” as manifesting itself on the OnlyFans platform, could introduce a dimension akin to Sherry Turkle’s (2011) concept of “alone together,” where individuals engage in intimate interactions exclusively through screens, forming relationships without ever meeting physically. Consequently, this raises the question of what constitutes authentic experiences when desires and fantasies manifest, and the line between the physical, virtual, and digital realms becomes blurred.

Exploring the authenticity of OnlyFans and simulated intimacy in the digital age

Though, as discussed, there has been a growing demand for authentic and intimate experiences in the pornographic industry. This trend can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, which made physical intimacy difficult or impossible for many people. As a result, social media platforms have become an increasingly popular medium for interacting and fulfilling one’s sexual desires. Meanwhile, this shift towards digital interaction also mirrors a broader trend of people becoming more comfortable with online communication. Turkle (2011) suggests that many individuals in contemporary society feel insecure in their relationships and experience anxiety around intimacy. As a result, they often turn to technology to connect with others. Turkle (2005) argues that physical encounters can be challenging and leave individuals feeling vulnerable, while technology provides a sense of safety and allows for

control over one’s identity and presence. Furthermore, Turkle (2011) observes that our expectations of technology have increased while our expectations of each other have decreased. Hence, some people could prefer to interact through screens rather than in-person.

As communication via screens becomes increasingly common, the authenticity of representations and experiences on the OnlyFans platform is worth exploring. One primary concern is verifying the identity of the individuals with whom one interacts, mainly via text messages. Researching this topic revealed that certain companies craft customized profiles for OnlyFans creators, particularly those seeking to provide a “girlfriend experience.” For example, the Diva Influence Agency offers a range of packages that include genuine profile creation, content production, authentic conversations, and 24/7 message-responding services, ensuring that “your fans always have someone to talk to” (Diva Influence Agency, n.d., n.p.) This shows that some fans communicate with a persona created by a third party, such as an employer or chatbot. Ultimately, does it matter with whom one communicates if the fan’s desires, needs, and fantasies are met?

DIVA INFLUENCE

The Ultimate Girlfriend Experience

Wherever and whenever, we provide 24/7 services designed to resonate with your audience.

- REAL RELATIONSHIPS**
Authentic conversations to keep your fans engaged and coming back for more.
- ALWAYS AVAILABLE**
No matter the time, your fans constantly have someone to talk to.
- FANTASY FIRST**
Personalized and passionate story-telling your fans care about.
- LEADING LOYALTY**
Optimized to turn followers into fans, and fans into dedicated subscribers.
- BRILLIANT BRANDING**
Getting your unique personality to come across organically and consistently.
- CREATIVE CONTENT**
Platform-specific media management for realistic experiences.

Figure 9 Retrieved from Diva Influence Agency’s web page, 2023

Lemma (2017) notes that our lives have been transformed by technology over the last twenty years, including changes in how we approach sex and love. Furthermore, Lemma argues that to understand these changes in technological culture, we must rethink our traditional understandings of sexuality and intimacy. Correspondingly, intimacy has taken on a new dimension in the digital age, where sexual contact is made possible electronically, and intimate

conversations can occur without the traditional social signals accompanying face-to-face interactions (Lemma 2017.) Furthermore, intimacy on the internet could refer to the sense of closeness and connection that can be created through online communication which can be shared through personal information, engaging in deep conversations, and expressing emotions through text, audio, emojis or video chats.

Meanwhile, imaginary dating experiences are not unusual in today's digitally connected world. The American app Invisible Boyfriend and its sister company Invisible Girlfriend offer users the ability to purchase simulated dating experiences to engage in text conversations with digital partners. The primary purpose of this app is to give users the illusion of being in a relationship, which they can then share with friends, co-workers, and family to make it sound like they have something going on. This service is provided by a company using human workers who text with multiple clients (Smith, Time Magazine 2015.) In China, the online shopping website Taobao offers a service that allows men to purchase the companionship of a girlfriend advertised as “You just spend 20 to 30 yuan (£2-3) to make a single man's dreams come true!” (n.p) This service is brought by female workers who provide wake-up calls, good night calls, and phone conversations where they sympathetically listen to a man’s complaints anytime. (Brown, BBC News 2014.) Hence, the female workers in this context additionally provide a service like the one of a therapist.

Michel Foucault studied how the confessional has changed over time, from confessing to a priest in a church to confessing to a therapist. Fiona Attwood (2009) observes how the confessional shifted from a therapist couch to confessing on mediated talk shows like *Opera* and *Doctor Phil*. Social media platforms later became a popular place for confession, especially among celebrities, as noted by Abidin (2018). However, to confess on the OnlyFans platform may feel more intimate since users can connect with outwardly real people that subscribers can connect with, yet still distance themselves from them via the screen. Hence, unlike the simulated dating experiences provided by apps like Invisible Boyfriend and Taobao, OnlyFans offers a different type of “Girlfriend experience.” As subscribers on OnlyFans have a visual representation of the content creator where fans can form an impression of who they are, including their lifestyle and living situation, reinforces the illusion of authentic interactions. Additionally, the fact that fans are devoted to a particular creator whom they sought out themselves adds to the feeling of exclusivity. Furthermore, OnlyFans creators often send unsolicited messages to their fans, which may be mass-produced but still create a sense of

personal connection. Therefore, if the illusion is convincing enough, fans may not be too concerned about the identity of the persona they are communicating with and confessing to.

Nevertheless, to answer whether it matters with whom one communicates if the fan's desires, needs, and fantasies are met, it is worth reflecting on the cultural significance of the "girlfriend experience" offered on platforms like OnlyFans. While this type of experience is not a new social constellation, it still could represent a willingness to engage in a simulation and a suspension of disbelief in a crucial part of one's life where a connection that is fundamentally transactional in nature could become a way for individuals to cope with the complexities of modern life. This suggests that the "girlfriend experience" appeal may be rooted in a desire for intimacy and connection, even if it is simulated. However, this notion raises broader questions about the role of simulation and make-believe in our lives. The emergence of a norm where purchased simulations of genuine intimacy, commonly taken at face-to-face value as noted by Lemma (2017,) suggests a shift towards valuing experiences that offer emotional fulfillment, even if they are not entirely authentic. This paradoxical situation highlights the increasing importance placed on emotional connections in a society where traditional forms of intimacy and companionship may be challenging to attain or maintain. It also raises questions about the impact of technology on our perceptions of intimacy and authenticity and whether the desire for simulated intimacy is a symptom of deeper societal issues.

According to Freud's (2015) "to love and to work" dictum, intimacy is a fundamental aspect of mental health. Meanwhile, one of the most documented requests from clients in the sex industry is the "Girlfriend Experience." In this type of exchange, it is common for men to request an encounter that includes an emotional connection and intimacy. (Milrod & Monto, 2012; Stalans & Finn, 2016.) Studies show that the Girlfriend Experience is desired by men who want comfort and company (Castle & Lee, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008.) Hence, one of the most sought services accompanied by sex in the industry is men seeking emotional connections and the feeling of being close to the other and understood. However, men may be seeking this type of support and emotional connection more than women because of societal expectations and gender norms that discourage men from expressing their emotions (Addis & Mahalik, 2003.) In contrast, women are often encouraged to express their emotions (Eagly & Crowley, 1986.) Overall, the desire for intimacy and emotional connection is a fundamental aspect of human nature, and it is not limited to one gender or demographic. The popularity of the Girlfriend

Experience in the sex industry and the demographics of OnlyFans users suggest that many people, regardless of gender, seek emotional connections and a sense of intimacy.

Moreover, elaborating on the demographics of OnlyFans users, statistics reveal that the platform's largest user group comprises white, married, and heterosexual individuals that can also be identified as bisexual or pansexual (López, 2020.) This trend may indicate a desire among consumers to explore different aspects of their identity or escape from everyday life, which may not fully meet their expectations regarding intimacy or sexual preferences. On the other hand, many OnlyFans subscribers may interact with creators for entertainment, curiosity, or to experience the thrill of being flirted with.

Concluding Findings: Language and Interaction Patterns in OnlyFans' ecosystem and Scholarly Contributions

To conclude my research, answer my research questions, and highlight contributions to existing scholarship, I will start by answering what the specific “platform vernacular” of OnlyFans is and what differentiates the platform from others regarding the offering, circulating, and selling of sexual content.

Communication, Branding, and Intimacy

Firstly, by utilizing the term “vernacular,” I aimed to identify the unique language and communication patterns employed by users within the OnlyFans ecosystem. This encompassed the interactions between creators and their fans on the platform. Based on my findings, it became evident that the platform vernacular of OnlyFans is shaped by the diverse methods of communication and interaction that align with the platform's functionalities and OnlyFans content creators' guidelines.

After examining the activities on OnlyFans to analyze how creators build their online persona and interact with fans I found that in order to sell pornographic content, creating an online persona and branding oneself are equally significant in the culture of OnlyFans as in other social media platforms. This strategy is crucial in achieving micro-celebrity and building a dedicated following. OnlyFans creators combine authenticity, expertise, and entertainment to sell pornographic content, with the personal connection between creators and subscribers as its primary appeal. This shift toward a more personal and interactive form of pornography allows

fans to engage with creators and participate in crafting their own sexual fantasies. In this respect, OnlyFans offers a new way to access pornographic content. Unlike traditional pornography sites where the content is mainly pre-recorded or with one-to-one interactions, OnlyFans features allow fans to participate in creating content and interact with their “favorite” creators differently. This interactive experience offers a more personalized and engaging way to consume pornographic material. Content creators can directly address their subscribers and learn about their preferences through polls, surveys, and personal messages, enhancing the connection and intimacy between creators and fans.

Content creators' strategic use of their news feeds exposes fans to various personal content, creating a desire amongst fans to continue engaging with the creators' digital lives and activities. The posted material in the creators' news feed similarly serves as an effective advertising tool, with fans continuously being exposed to layers of sensual and flirtatious content that ultimately functions as a teaser for the creators' main product: pornographic or NSFW content that fans must pay more for.

The content that is produced on OnlyFans can also be seen as a form of self-expression, with a greater focus on creativity and individuality than traditional pornography. While the content may still contain explicit imagery, the intention could not solely be to stimulate the viewer. In this respect, the dynamic between content creators and fans can create an experience that blurs the lines between traditional pornography and other media and entertainment while creating a space where individuals can explore their sexuality in a supportive and accepting environment. Hence, compared to watching anonymous porn on sites like Pornhub, which can be seen as a one-night stand where the primary intention is to reach climax, interacting with creators on OnlyFans over time allows fans to establish a connection that provides a different feeling when exposed to sexual content. This content can feel more personal and authentic, and the regular updates from creators in a news feed create a sense of ongoing interaction and intimacy with the creator. However, this level of intimacy can also lead to emotional bonds that reflect the complex psychology of sexual fantasies and desires.

The marketing strategies employed by creators on OnlyFans presents a unique juxtaposition. Creators can engage in sexual performances while capitalizing on established intimacy with subscribers, all while providing intimacy and potentially profiting from sexual content. This introduces a unique twist, re-approximating sex and intimacy. For instance, content creators

like MX utilize enticing locked videos accompanied by suggestive text. These videos offer glimpses of nudity within intimate settings, such as yoga exercises, without being inherently pornographic. However, MX flirts with the viewer, hinting at sexual content without compromising herself while leaving the door open for fans to request more explicit material. This demonstrates the complex nature of OnlyFans' marketing strategies, redefining associations with pornography and introducing a sense of closeness and connection within potentially explicit content creation.

OnlyFans as a platform has transformed attention into a commodity through its “tipping” system. Fans give tips to creators to receive attention, and creators prioritize fans who tip the most, reshaping the dynamics of social validation by commodifying human interaction and relationships. Furthermore, the platform's feature of storing users' credit card information, which is obtained during the account creation process, eliminates the need for repeated entry of card details, thereby reducing customers' awareness of the financial implications associated with navigating the platform. Through this dynamic, the platform reinforces the perception of an authentic connection that is based on a personal relationship rather than simply monetary transactions. However, the “tipping” system similarly operates on a psychological level, which could minimize fans' consideration of the financial implications when paying tips. By strategically placing the interactive “tip” button alongside the instinctive and cost-free buttons for liking and commenting on content, the study suggests that users are more likely to engage in transactions with content creators. Commercializing attention and the market-driven nature of intimate content exemplify a more significant trend of commodifying human interaction and relationships. In the digital age, giving and receiving attention has become a valuable currency, shaping the dynamics of social interaction and influencing how individuals seek connection and validation.

The study revealed that the payment system on OnlyFans operates seamlessly, resembling popular subscription-based platforms like Netflix and HBO. Subscriptions on OnlyFans renew automatically, like how renewals of subscriptions on these entertainment platforms work, and subscribers receive mass-produced messages about new content. Content creators on OnlyFans utilize mass-produced messages to remind subscribers of various products or introduce new ones, like how entertainment platforms notify customers of new movies or series. OnlyFans creators' messages often employ friendly tones, emojis, and even voice messages to create an intimate connection with fans. This personalized, transactional relationship between creators

and subscribers encourages recurring transactions. However, it is important to recognize that mass marketing and mass production may create a false need or desire for the creators' products without active seeking from fans. This finding aligns with Adorno's argument, explained by Darbyshire (2011,) that cultural mass production promotes the illusion of choice and pseudo-individualism, where standardization appeals to the masses and encourages spending on perceived “false” needs.

However, it is also worth noting that some of the mass-produced messages from creators on OnlyFans can resemble sexting, creating an intimate and flirtatious tone. Though, their primary purpose is to encourage fans to spend more on the platform. Hence, these messages strategically leverage personalized and seductive content to entice fans into further engagement and financial transactions. This practice highlights the intersection of marketing and sexual appeal within the OnlyFans ecosystem.

Moreover, these practices contribute to forming a unique communication ecosystem within OnlyFans. By shedding light on the specific platform vernacular, this research aims to provide insights into the dynamics of digital communication and interaction within the OnlyFans platform. These findings contribute to the existing scholarship by deepening our understanding of how language, social interaction, and platform functionalities converge to create a distinct online environment.

The Rise of OnlyFans, the Influence of High-profile Celebrities, media promotion, and the Concept of tactical sex in the Commodification of Intimacy

My research aimed to understand why some individuals on OnlyFans perceive their activities on the platform as more than just buying or selling sex. Notably, OnlyFans gained massive attention following the participation of high-profile celebrities in this realm of digital exposure and work (Litam et al., 2022). The celebrity involvement influenced a broader range of ordinary individuals to enter the same trade. Additionally, OnlyFans encourages content creators to showcase their entertainment skills and expertise, adopting strategies like those used by influencers and celebrities on mainstream social media platforms.

Moreover, given the association of OnlyFans with sex work, the media has played a significant role in promoting the platform. Newspapers and magazines have published articles emphasizing

the potential earnings from selling sexual content, often featuring authentic portrayals and generating excitement around high-profile celebrities joining the platform. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, which posed challenges to physical intimacy, fueled individuals' desire to explore various forms of digital sex. By combining these factors, we can understand why individuals are drawn to creating profiles on OnlyFans, engaging in sexualized content production, and having intimate conversations.

Overall, these influences, including celebrity involvement, media promotion, and the changing social landscape, have contributed to the growing appeal of the OnlyFans platform and the motivations behind individuals' choices to explore and participate in creating sexualized content and intimate interactions.

However, the increasing sexualization in mainstream media has similarly led to a blurring of boundaries between pornographic and mainstream aesthetics. As a result, when fans encounter a blend of sensual and pornographic content, they may perceive creators through the lens of admiration typically associated with celebrities. This psychological impact on fans goes beyond viewing creators as sex workers and extends to seeing them as individuals worthy of admiration for various reasons. Moreover, being a fan viewing and supporting their favorite creator's (soft) pornographic content could also be understood differently than being a customer consuming anonymous pornographic content. In addition, the advertised sex work and pornography on the OnlyFans platform strategically presents itself as a natural and commonplace activity, effectively minimizing perceived risks using emojis. These emojis, such as giggling faces, teddy bears, and hearts, convey an aura of innocence that serves to neutralize the moral implications associated with the content. Furthermore, these emojis create connotations that position the consumption of the advertised content as non-imperative, suggesting that engagement is optional and discretionary rather than obligatory. As a result, the content becomes more approachable and inviting to potential viewers.

Some creators on the OnlyFans platform do not see themselves as exclusively selling sex because they employ strategies that go beyond explicit sexual content. They recognize that intimacy and personal connection can be powerful commodities in themselves. By focusing on the body, soul, desire, pleasure, and sexuality, these creators tap into the broader cultural association of sex as a tool to sell products in various media. For example, MX uses an erotic and sensual aesthetic to offer an experience of connecting with oneself and the universe through meditation, yoga, and healing classes. By strategically creating an intimate relationship with

users, these creators demonstrate that intimacy as a commodity can have a significant impact, sometimes surpassing the influence of explicit sexual content. In this way, they leverage the power of intimacy and desire to create a different experience for their fans on the OnlyFans platform.

However, this study challenges the perceptions of what can be perceived as sex work by presenting the conceptualization of the service provided by content creators on the OnlyFans platform as “tactical sex” work in the digital realm. They are drawing on Cabezas' (2009) perspective on sex work and her introduction of “tactical sex,” emphasizing the importance of affection, intimacy, and companionship in sex work. Cabezas (2009) similarly recognizes the potential for these factors to lead to a sense of solidarity and increased customer devotion that can lead to something more.

"...Amalia Cabezas challenges the concept of sex work as the only viable tool for understanding interactions between tourists and locals in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. She argues that important issues such as affection, companionship, and intimacy are absent in the term's “prostitution” and “sex work”. For this reason, Cabezas chooses to use the term “tactical sex”, which serves as a better means of understanding the “complex circulation of sex and affect”. The importance of gifts is emphasized, as they represent an “important feature of exchange and solidarity” and can transform the sexual relationship into one of courtship and love.” Amalia Cabezas (2009,) *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic*, pp. 120, 122 (Garcia et. al, 2017, p, 9.)

Align with the concept of tactical sex work, I suggest that the creators of OnlyFans can strategically create an intimate relationship with their fans, offering companionship and intimacy as a commodity that fans can pay for via a tipping service that could serve as giving a gift as fans choose how much they want to pay. This intimacy can lead to increased emotional attachment from users to specific creators, resulting in loyal fans who continue to purchase their products or even want to pay for a digital girlfriend experience. As a result, these content creators may refer to themselves as “entertainers” and “friends” or digital “girlfriends or boyfriends.”

However, this finding has significant implications for understanding the digital pornographic industry within the framework of OnlyFans and the role of emotional attachment in creating and maintaining a business model. It contributes to debates concerning the commodification of intimacy and the blurred boundaries between work and personal relationships in the digital age. Furthermore, this concept of tactical sex in the realm of OnlyFans expands the discourse on sex

work beyond traditional notions of exploitation and victimization. It recognizes the agency and strategic decision-making of workers in their service provision. However, there is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the potential exploitation involved in the emotional labor performed by content creators on OnlyFans. Some critics argue that some creators invest significant time and effort in establishing intimate relationships with their fans. Nevertheless, their compensation may not fully align with the hours spent on this type of work (Cardoso & Scarcelli, 2021). Hence, this similarly raises important ethical questions about the fairness and sustainability of the platform's business model.

Intimacy and Authenticity on OnlyFans: Para-social Interactions, Girlfriend Experience, and Technology's Role

I also aimed to analyze how different forms of interaction on social media unfold to see how the interplay between intimacy and sexuality is enacted and articulated on the OnlyFans platform.

In the analysis, I found that content creators on OnlyFans use various strategies to create para-social experiences or interactions with their followers to monetize. Building on Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of para-social interaction, the study found that these interactions are experienced as personal relationships between performers and viewers without necessarily knowing each other. To create such an experience on the platform, content creators like “Sam” and “Jem” use different tactics, such as posting videos of themselves engaging in everyday activities while looking directly into the camera to establish eye contact with the viewer, asking for personal opinions and feedback from followers, and using endearing terms like “my tribe” and “hi you,” which is similar to how YouTube personas and Influencers greet their followers to establish a personal connection. This finding highlights the techniques used in TV productions and social media content to create an intimate and personal feeling to establish emotional connections and build trust among followers, which can result in increased monetization for content creators. This finding contributes to the discourse on the commodification of intimacy and the role of emotional attachment in creating and maintaining a business model on digital platforms like OnlyFans.

This study uncovers a novel approach to selling the Girlfriend Experience (GFE) on OnlyFans, where creators merge the emotional connection and intimacy desired by clients in the traditional sex industry with elements of cam-girl interactions and a reality TV atmosphere. By

strategically blending images with a specific mise-en-scene and texts, the creators of OnlyFans craft a warm and affectionate setting that simulates an intimate experience. This transformative fusion elevates the GFE, allowing fans to immerse themselves in the company of a caring digital girlfriend within the creators' proper environment. Moreover, using affective and personal elements in the content fosters para-social relationships between creators and fans, deepening emotional attachment and blurring the boundaries between work and personal relationships. Notably, the study highlights the role of affective elements, such as GL's content, in cultivating para-social relationships and creating an illusion of authenticity beyond the typically commercialized intimacy in the sex industry. These findings contribute to the literature on commercializing intimacy in the sex industry and pave the way for further exploration of the complex dynamics between content creators and subscribers on OnlyFans and the broader implications of intimacy commodification in sexual content.

The authenticity of representations and experiences on screen-mediated communication platforms such as OnlyFans is an important area of investigation. One particular concern in this study was verifying the identity of individuals with whom one interacts, primarily via text messages. Research has revealed that some companies provide customized profiles for OnlyFans creators, including authentic conversations and round-the-clock message-responding services, which a third party, such as an employer or chatbot, may generate. While the “girlfriend experience” may offer a way for individuals to cope with the complexities of modern life, the simulation of intimacy raises broader questions about the role of simulation and make-believe in our lives. This paradoxical situation highlights the increasing importance placed on emotional connections in a society where traditional forms of intimacy and companionship may be challenging to attain or maintain. It also raises questions about the impact of technology on our perceptions of intimacy and authenticity and whether the desire for simulated intimacy is a symptom of deeper societal issues. These findings suggest the need for further research into the emotional and psychological effects of screen-mediated communication and the implications for our social and cultural norms.

Suggestion for further research

An exciting avenue for future research would be to explore the integration of the OnlyFans app with other social media platforms and how this integration allows users to incorporate OnlyFans' communication features into their daily routines. Although this aspect was not

investigated in the present study, a closer examination of the advertised image reveals potential insights. The image portrays a young woman casually using the app on her phone, dressed in a simple jumper without any sexual connotations. However, the symbols within the picture suggest that the app offers opportunities to connect with others and express affection. It would be valuable to investigate how users perceive and utilize these communication features and how they impact social interactions and relationships within the platform. Additionally, given the depiction of the young woman in the image, further exploration could focus on the experiences and motivations of young users engaging with OnlyFans.



Figure 10 Screen shot retrieved from the introduction of the OnlyFans app April 2023

In conclusion, drawing on theoretical perspectives and my research findings, it is evident that the mainstreaming and the commodification of sex and the growing prevalence of sexualization in contemporary Western cultures have contributed to that much of the content with sexuality that we are exposed to are centered around play, pleasure, profit, and competition. This cultural shift can be observed through the commodification of sexuality, exemplified by platforms like OnlyFans, and the widespread availability of sexual content on social media platforms. It is important to acknowledge that sexual content not only influences our media consumption choices and patterns but also has the potential to shape our behavior and reasoning processes. Research suggests that increased exposure to sexual content may lead to a higher endorsement of permissive behaviors, particularly among individuals inclined toward such thinking (Dillman Carpentier, Brown, & Ortiz, 2018). Moreover, depictions of relationships and sexual practices in media serve as models of social acceptability and could influence attitudes and behaviors. However, it is important to note that interactions on OnlyFans can similarly provide a platform

for exploring sexualities and identities, as well as a means of navigating the complexities of life and seeking entertainment.

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