

**Subscription Intimacy: Amateurism, Authenticity and
Emotional Labour in Direct-to-Consumer Gay Pornography**

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Abstract

As pornography studios deal with declining profits and performers work to survive on decreasing scene rates, direct-to-consumer platforms such as OnlyFans are being hailed by some as saviours of the industry. Exemplifying the promises of the current gig economy, these platforms claim to offer supplemental income and autonomy and have been praised by journalists as addressing market demand for intimacy in a mainstream pornographic landscape largely devoid of it. But these platforms can also be seen as another example of the emotional labour that is increasingly required of porn performers. This includes performers depicting “authentic” desire in their videos, participating in on-camera interviews, and engaging with fans across multiple social media networks with differing regulations around nudity that can be challenging for adult performers to navigate. This article situates these direct-to-consumer platforms within the larger history of gay

porn production, amateur video, and discourses of authenticity, and considers the possibilities of monetizing new forms of emotional labour, or what I refer to as “subscription intimacy”.

Keywords: gay pornography, authenticity, amateur pornography, emotional labour, social media.

A funny thing happened on my Instagram feed in Spring 2019 when several of the “fitness models” I follow began appearing together in each other’s posts, all wearing the same branded swimwear and underwear. Box Menswear, it turned out, had orchestrated a 10-day party in Koh Samui, Thailand¹, to publicize the launch of their new swimwear line and had invited some of «the most-followed models around» (Grant 2019). Box also invited gay men’s blog «Queerty», as well as photographers Jake O’Donnell and Carlos Trey Salazar, whose work focuses almost exclusively on partially unclothed, muscled white men and whose combined follower counts total more than 125 thousand. In a blog post announcing the venture, Queerty teased: «The stunning locale is a \$5 million villa atop the Bophut hills boasting an amazing view of the paradise island. We’re sure that’ll make the perfect backdrop for some tastefully jaw-dropping thirst traps» (*Ibidem*). The “thirst trap” is a product of selfie culture and refers to a photo that is «used to entice a response, usually in the form of praise, compliments, or more explicit expressions of ardent desire» (Merriam Webster, *Thirst Trap*). The content generated on the Box menswear Thailand trip was certainly engineered to generate expressions of ardent desire. In fact, the trip functioned as a sort of thirst trap factory, with models taking photos and videos of themselves and one another in Box-branded speedos by the infinity pool, posing in towels in the marble-and-chrome bathrooms of their villa, and working up a sweat together at a local CrossFit gym. While these posts were no thirstier than these models’

¹ Thailand is a popular destination for LGBT travellers. In 2018 gay tourism contributed an estimated 1.15% to the country’s gross domestic product – a greater share than any other nation. Randy Thanthong-Knight (2019) *Thailand’s Tourism Industry Looks to Cash In on Same-Sex Partner Law*, «Bloomberg», 12 March 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-12/thailand-s-tourism-industry-looks-to-cash-in-on-same-sex-law>.

usual content, their stories were another matter altogether. Instagram stories are by default ephemeral: once uploaded they remain visible for 24 hours and then they disappear. In these disappearing posts, models would tease racier and possibly even explicit content available on their OnlyFans – a subscription platform in which users subscribe to their favorite content producers for a monthly fee. Although I had a passing familiarity with the platform, this was the first time I had seen it marketed through social media. I was intrigued by what seemed like a new, collaborative model of porn production and distribution.

OnlyFans and its competitor JustFor.Fans are what feminist labour scholar Heather Berg has called direct-to-consumer distribution methods. Both platforms allow models to set their own subscription rates, which usually fall anywhere between \$9.99 and \$29.99 a month, with both platforms claiming 20 percent of these fees. Models post photo and video content, which is often captured on their smartphones, though some models also boast “premium” content that includes professional photoshoots. Though OnlyFans allows pornographic content, this is not mentioned on their website; instead, they market themselves as a «useful tool for YouTubers, fitness trainers, models and other public figures or influencers» (*OnlyFans* 2019). JustFor.Fans, on the other hand, was started in response to OnlyFans in 2018 by gay porn producer and performer Dominic Ford (Parham 2019) and is more explicitly “adult.” Its landing page, for example, features free previews of porn clips sorted into categories that include “Men,” “Women,” and “Trans.” The default category, however, is set to “Men,” perhaps hinting at the site’s primary audience².

These direct-to-consumer platforms highlight many of the issues that animate the contemporary gay male pornographic industry. As repositories for self-produced material, they play to market tastes for “amateur” or “intimate” content. They boast deep social media integration and messaging systems, indicative of both the self-marketing demanded of porn performers across social media, as well as the emotional labour that is increasingly part of the job. As examples of the current gig or platform economy, they

² While Ford did not release subscriber demographics, he did note that the majority of models were male, and gay male porn stars were «instrumental in spreading the word about the site» (Parham 2019).

also speak to the ways in which performers are adapting to a changing industry. During the 10-day Thailand trip referenced above, all of these issues came to life in saturated color across my Instagram feed and stories. Models posted social-media appropriate teasers of the content they were generating for their more risqué OnlyFans or JustFor.Fans accounts: nude photos cropped in such a way to be suggestive, but not too revealing; smartphone videos of naked men posing or masturbating while expertly covered up with text or digital stickers, which were accompanied by links embedded to the full, uncensored and paid content. Models promoted each other's accounts by tagging one another in photos and posting stories with embedded referral links to models' OnlyFans pages, both of which direct traffic and generate referral fees. Models showed the kind of access these platforms granted paying subscribers by posting screenshots of messages they received from satisfied customers complimenting their bodies, telling them how hot a certain post was, or thanking them for helping them "get off".

My broader research on contemporary online gay pornography focuses on discourses of reality and authenticity. Platforms such as OnlyFans represent new iterations of the demand for amateur or Do-It-Yourself (Diy) porn content; and yet, the deep and sustained social media integration and promotion that appears inherent to them also speak to another area of interest: the increased emotional labour that is seemingly required in online reality or amateur gay porn. Emotional labour, according to sociologist Arlie Hochschild, is the process by which workers are expected to produce, manage, and indeed market authentic emotions as an essential component of their job (1983). The concept of emotional labour has become increasingly central to scholarship on sex work, with research showing that sex workers do not just sell sexual encounters, but emotional connections that clients are willing to pay for (Chapkis 1997). But what does emotional labour look like in the context of an increasingly digitized, mediated, and commodified sexual world?.

In this article, I situate these newer subscription revenue models within a larger history of the distribution and consumption of gay pornography and amateur pornography. I examine how the discourses surrounding these platforms position them as providing intimate access to adult performers, what I refer to as "subscription intimacy." I argue that sites such as OnlyFans are producing new forms of performer engagement and emotional labour, becoming yet another social media presence for them to manage and further taxing

adult performers who must always appear “on” and accessible in order to maximize their earning potential in a rapidly changing adult industry.

1. A Brief History of Gay Pornography

The distribution and consumption of moving-image gay pornography have changed significantly since its beginnings, due largely to various technological shifts. Stag films, for example, which were made and exhibited for male viewers in the first half of 20th century, were early iterations (see Williams 1989). Queer film scholar Thomas Waugh estimates that there were approximately 2000 of these films produced between 1915 and 1968 (2004, 127). Due to their illegal nature, they were mostly exhibited in private settings, including stag parties, Legion clubs, and fraternity parties (Di Lauro and Rabkin 1976, 54-57). While these films were not gay, per se, Waugh notes that they often traded in homosocial or homoerotic content, e.g., men sharing women, men getting off on watching men with women, supplanting men with women, and procuring women for other men (Waugh 2004, 133). Any overtly homoerotic behavior was exceedingly rare and always took place in the context of heterosexual relations, serving to «bolster heterosexual hegemony» (Waugh 1996, 310). Though there were no discrete gay audiences to speak of at the time, private gay men’s viewings have been documented (Waugh 2004, 133).

At the end of WWII, as the popularity of stag films began to wane, physique films by the likes of Bob Mizer and the Athletic Models Guild began to take their place. Ostensibly just exercise films for the athletically inclined, physique films were legal films that pandered to a secret queer desire. Models posed in microscopic posing straps – a sort of pouch on a string – exercised nude, play-wrestled, or acted out Greco-Roman fantasies. Distributed by mail-order to home viewing audiences, they were consumed both solo and in private group events (*ibidem*, 138). In the 1960s the content became more homosexual than homoerotic, and began featuring more explicit sexual action. While still available via mail-order, these films were also exhibited in adult cinemas (Mercer 2017, 50).

A new era of gay porn was ushered in with the 1971 release of Wakefield Poole’s *Boys in the Sand*. *Boys in the Sand* is often cited as the first feature-length narrative porn film,

predating *Deep Throat* by a year. *Boys* became the first porn film to be reviewed in *Variety* and was a hit with both gay and straight audiences in mainstream movie theatres across the United States (Escoffier 2014, 319). Other gay pornographic films followed, such as Fred Halsted's *L.A. Plays Itself* and Joe Gage's working men trilogy: *Kansas City Trucking Company* (1976), *El Paso Wrecking Corp* (1978) and *L.A. Tool & Die* (1979). As home video equipment became more affordable and ubiquitous at the beginning of the 1980s, gay pornography moved out of the theatres and into the home. Arriving just before the Aids crisis would completely transform gay sexuality and sex practices, Vhs porn became, as Chris Mann of Catalina Video put it in 1988, «an alternative, a surrogate... to going out and having sex» (quoted in Escoffier 2014, 189). Video catalogs and rental shops blossomed³.

As porn went digital in the early 2000, – first with Dvd and then with online distribution – consumption remained firmly rooted in the privacy of the home. Online-only studios emerged, and the feature-length films were largely abandoned in favour of bandwidth-friendly vignettes approximately 15 to 30 minutes in length (Mercer 2017, 59). Today, studios operate on subscription models, and scenes can be individually streamed and downloaded. Just like the movie and the music industries before it, the porn industry has, in recent years, seen its profits siphoned off by piracy. Tube sites, such as XTube and Pornhub, on which pirated content can be uploaded and viewed for free, are the biggest offenders. Unlike the more politically powerful record and film industries, porn studios were limited in their ability to sue their adversaries. As a result, profits declined and the rates that performers could expect to be paid for their work tumbled as well (Bernstein 2019).

2. Amateur Porn and Authenticity

The appeal to amateurism has often served to bolster pornography's affective charge or heighten its appeal. By definition, amateur content describes an intent – making porn not

³ For a thorough historical account of straight adult video stores and guides, see Peter Alilunas's (2016), *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video*, Oakland: University of California Press.

for profit but «for the love of it» – and is often used to describe a visual style. Positioned in opposition to “professional” or commercial pornography, amateur porn often features shaky, handheld, or uninventive camera work, poor lighting, low image quality and untrained performers⁴. This, porn scholar Susanna Paasonen argues, helps to «enhance a sense of “truth” and authenticity that is central to the genre» (2011, 75). Calls for “truth” arguably gain an extra charge in pornography featuring gay men, because their sexuality is less represented across other media. John R. Burger suggests that while the technical quality of amateur videos may be lacking, they often contained remarkable performances that can be described as «visual autobiographies of the sexual tastes and desires of a usually private sector of gay men» (1995, 46). Social anthropologist Shaka McGlotten has argued that gay amateur productions, or “Diy porn,” possess a vital force due to their participatory nature and their elements of self-representation (2013, 103). Even the earliest academic writing on gay pornography draws links between amateur production values and a sense of realism. In describing Curt McDowell’s underground pornographic art-house short *Loads* (1980) in his seminal article «Men’s Pornography: Gay vs. Straight», Thomas Waugh praises the «spontaneity of camera twitches, the fragility of flares» and notes that the hand-held camera adds «the frisson of subjective angle». «Slickness takes away from desire» (1985, 35).

With the popularization and proliferation of amateur and reality as styles of commercial pornography, the amateur ethos of “doing it for the love of it” can no longer be automatically assumed. This conceptual murkiness is exacerbated by the fact that reality style pornography has been popularized, in large part, by studios such as Sean Cody and Corbin Fisher, who hire predominantly straight performers. While these studios cultivate an image of boyish camaraderie, they also draw a great deal of ire on gay porn fan blogs for hiring straight – or “gay-for pay” – performers who are often perceived as faking their pleasure and enjoyment and having sex on camera with other men solely for the money.

⁴ See Shaka McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013); Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); John R. Burger, *One-Handed Histories: The Eroto-Politics of Gay Male Video Pornography* (New York: Haworth, 1995); Ruth Barcan (2002), *In the Raw: ‘Home-Made’ Porn and Reality Genres*, in «Journal of Mundane Behaviour», vol. 3, n. , pp. 87-108.

Commenters on blogs such as *Str8UpGayPorn* and *WayBig* frequently scrutinize the performances of Sean Cody or Corbin Fisher models, noting that some performers do not appear to be fully erect, that they don't seem to be sexually engaged, or that the editing seems to obscure multiple takes, suggesting less-than-spontaneous action. As the amateur or reality style is no longer a guarantee, in itself, for authenticity, gay porn performers are often expected to perform authenticity on-set – a mode of performance that Heather Berg describes as both being oneself and wanting to be on set and shooting the scene – and, emphatically, being there not just for the money (2017, 671). Berg's research applies to gay reality porn scenes as well, namely the filming of before- or after-scene footage in which performers discuss their sexual history, their desire for their scene partners, their nervousness, or the pleasure they experience. Some performers in Berg's study found that sharing their "authentic" sexuality, or speaking truthfully about their experience, was more demanding than playing a role. Articulating consent and pleasure in a before – or after – scene interview is indeed an additional form of emotional labour; and while most performers Berg interviewed indicated that they appreciated the attention given to consent, they also acknowledged that sometimes they would prefer to simply shoot the scene and go home (*Ibidem*, 684).

3. Marketing and Managing Porn Personas on Social Media

Social media and direct-to-consumer clip services have become especially important outlets for performers who wish to perform authenticity on their own terms. At the same time, each of the major social media platforms present particular challenges for adult performers, because they all have different regulations regarding nudity and sexual content. A panel titled «Premium Platforms: Finding the Next Level of Social Media Marketing» at the 2019 Adult Video News Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas explored some of the challenges. The panelists, all women working in the adult industry who had achieved success in social media marketing, outlined the various rules and regulations that adult performers must navigate on social media. They named Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, respectively, as the most profitable platforms in that they provided the most click-throughs to sign-up pages for subscription content or other online shopping pages. Each

platform, however, has markedly different regulations for “adult” content. Twitter, for example, will not allow nudity in one’s profile image or cover image, and performers must choose the option to mark their content as “sensitive” to avoid being reported. Twitter was also identified as the most useful for generating and maintaining conversation and fan interactions, as the other platforms had much more limited commenting systems. Panelists also expressed reservations about Twitter’s so-called shadow-banning, by which certain profiles are hidden from searches – especially adult profiles – making it difficult for fans to locate performers’ feeds. Shadow banning was not in fact a targeted action by Twitter administrators but a combination of two separate processes. The first was a new setting which would show “sensitive content” in search, but it was disabled by default, making it impossible to locate certain profiles via search. The second was that Twitter marked certain accounts as sensitive and this was not always based on content. Rather, sometimes it was based solely on association: if you followed a number of accounts with so-called sensitive content, you might find your account marked sensitive as well.

Instagram was singled out as the most directly profitable platform. With Instagram, individuals can embed links in posts to shopping pages, but its shuttering of adult accounts and vague nudity policies were also a cause of anxiety and concern. A lack of clearly defined regulations about what constituted “nudity” meant that what kind of posts were acceptable or not was often a gamble. For example, posting an image of a naked butt was seemingly okay, but showing a butt crack was not allowed. One panelist discussed a rumour that there was an algorithm that measured the skin-to-clothing ratio of images and flagged posts that failed this modesty test. Instagram also does not allow links to sexually explicit webpages, so performers are unable to include links in their Instagram bios to direct fans to their porn or cam sites. This can be circumvented by adding a “swipe up” link in Instagram stories, although this feature is only available to profiles with more than 10,000 followers. Finally, adding certain hashtags such as such as #porn or #sex might result in your content or account getting flagged. Alternative tags for female performers might include #glamour or #cute. For gay men, these might include #gay, #instagay and #instahomo.

Snapchat’s 10-second clip limitation means that if you wanted to upload a longer video clip you would have to first edit it into 10-second segments, which requires not only an

extra step but separate video editing software. Snapchat also has a policy against nudity, although many performers post nude or explicit content, with the understanding that it will not be taken down if the account is private. Of course, with all of these platforms, the rules and regulations are subject to change at any time and in fact they often do.

As porn performers work to navigate these fuzzy but intricate systems of regulations for each social media platform, new industries are emerging to address social media management, especially for adult performers. Performer Alix Lovell, for example, has founded New Verticals Consulting, a firm dedicated to developing social media strategies specific to each platform, including how to plan and time posts and manage interactions, with the promise of growing one's social media presence and dramatically increasing interactions and engagements, metrics that are essential to a solid social media brand.

If this all sounds exhausting, emotionally as well as physically, it is. All of the panelists described managing their social media accounts as a full-time job – in addition to however many other full-time jobs they might have. And as much as these new social media consulting firms and agencies promise to alleviate some of the labour involved, one panelist cautioned that thinking of social media as a business was antithetical. Adult performer Harriet Sugarcookie, who runs a lifestyle blog and subscription site that produces its own adult content, claimed that performers are working in a new era: «We're in the age of amateur. [Social media] is not about pictures or hashtags; it's not a billboard. Porn isn't just about sex anymore. People are paying for a connection. Social media is a way to show people that you're real» (2008). Sugarcookie suggested that that porn lost its social aspect in the 1980s, when home video technology removed pornography from the public world of adult film theatres and brought it into the privacy of the home⁵. Pornography's social aspect can now be regained with social media. She encouraged performers to «think of [their] own brand as a person» (*ibidem*). Sugarcookie's comments, while earnest and sincere, highlight the role of emotional labour in building and sustaining fan engagement for the 21st-century adult performer. It is work that, importantly, has no clearly defined boundaries.

⁵ For a first-hand account of the socio-sexual encounters that often took place in adult theatres in Times Square, see Samuel R. Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

4. Subscription Intimacy, Collaborative Practice

The *New York Times* article “How OnlyFans Changed Sex Work Forever” offers valuable insights into what I refer to as “subscription intimacy.” Here, writer Jacob Bernstein features go-go boy and former New York City club scene fixture Matthew Camp. Camp, who made a name for himself as a dancer at downtown New York parties, had recently moved upstate to Hudson, New York, as a result of the crumbling club scene in the city. According to Camp, OnlyFans is basically «online go-go dancing» (quoted in Bernstein 2019). While there are videos of him dancing on his page, he is most likely referring to the vacillation between concealment and display that go-go dancing entails: his videos, most of which are only about one minute long, show Camp in his apartment, in his bed, in various stages of undress. In one video, he is in his bathroom wearing only a towel, still wet from the shower. He holds his phone out in front of him to display his body; he grabs his dick through his towel. In another video he is lying in bed, holding his phone in one hand and masturbating with the other. The videos are “amateur” both in technical skill and displays of intimacy: they are overexposed and shaky; and while the clips do not last long enough to capture his orgasm, we are alone with him in his bed.

Camp positions OnlyFans as a more appealing alternative to studio work, in which companies would own his videos forever and brand him as a porn star. While he eventually posted a penetrative sex scene to his OnlyFans, he waited nine months before doing so. In the interview, he does not elect to say how this is different from being a “porn star”, but perhaps in the gig economy, where casual labour is framed as an appealing alternative to a stable profession or career (Ravenelle 2019, 6, 59), one only ever moonlights. Profession or not, Camp was able to leverage his more than half a million Instagram followers into a lucrative OnlyFans side hustle – a term that has come to mean «work performed for income supplementary to one’s primary job» (Merriam Webster, *Side-Hustle*)⁶. Camp

⁶ Since Alton Sterling was murdered by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in an altercation that stemmed from his side hustle of selling CDs outside a convenience store, several critics have commented on the racist double standard of earning money outside the law, particularly in regard to the gig economy: Uber drivers and Airbnb hosts can earn money in ways that, depending on the region, are technically illegal, while others (predominantly black men) are heavily criminalized for similar behaviour. See Badger (2016).

regularly took home more than \$10,000 a month, according to Bernstein. In his interview, Camp highlights the distinctive affective structure of OnlyFans:

Tumblr was filled with the most extreme sexual experiences you could see... And I think a lot of people were turned off by that. It's not what they're looking for. They want more intimate experiences. They want a boyfriend experience. They want to fantasize about someone that they want to have sex with and not feel disgusted by it (quoted in Bernstein 2019).

While Camp's comment seems to be at odds with the ways in which many users experienced Tumblr before its 2018 ban on adult content,⁷ particularly queer and gender-diverse users, his characterization of the supposed intimacy of subscription-based platforms as «a boyfriend experience» is notable. The “boyfriend” or “girlfriend” experience describes an encounter with a sex worker that is more affectionate and that might proceed, as the name implies, like a non-paid encounter between two lovers. In *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex*, Elizabeth Bernstein describes a Firl-Friend Experience (Gfe) as one that stands in stark contrast to a quick session with a client that would include one or more of the basic acts to reach a climax, and little else. A Gfe session might include, for example, lengthy foreplay, perhaps with kissing (which is often out of bounds for many sex workers), activities where the client attempts to please the sex worker as opposed to her solely pleasing him, and may conclude with a period of cuddling and closeness (126). Girlfriend experiences are characterized by authenticity, or what Elizabeth Bernstein refers to as «bounded authenticity»: a variation of sexual labour, which includes the sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection (Ivi, 103). While both of these terms refer to in-person interactions, extending them to the virtual seems natural. A “boyfriend experience” via subscription messaging could potentially replicate the intimacy between two in-person lovers and would still be governed by

⁷ For an account of queer and gender-diverse users' use of the platform in discovering their sexuality, and their responses to the ban, see Paul Byron, 'How could you write your name below that?' *The queer life and death of Tumblr*, «Porn Studies», doi: 10.1080/23268743.2019.1613925.

the rules of exchange: when one's subscription lapses so, too, does one's messaging capabilities and the intimacy it may have provided.

My original response to OnlyFans and other similar platforms was that it seemed to be yet another player in today's gig economy, one characterized by apps such as Uber and TaskRabbit, where workers are considered contract employees and are therefore are not eligible for employee benefits or protections⁸. In the neoliberal state, where the responsibility for well-being is shifted away from the state and back to the individual (Harvey 2005, 76), OnlyFans appeared to be another tool that called on individuals to take it upon themselves to solve the larger structural problems facing the porn industry, including fewer scenes and lower scene rates. It also seemed like yet another form of social media engagement that was rapidly becoming essential to the job of being a porn star. But many performers seem pleased with these direct-to-consumer models. Female porn performer Casey Calvert, speaking to «BuzzFeed News», noted that direct-to-consumer content now accounts for 50 percent of her income (Montgomery 2018) and performer Chanel Santini claimed that the income from her OnlyFans eliminated the need for escort work (Bernstein 2019). These platforms also integrate nicely with existing social media strategies. They provide feed content that models can link to their paid platforms, helping them monetize their otherwise non-monetized social media feeds. While Instagram doesn't allow links to porn sites in bios, OnlyFans and JustFor.Fans links have yet to be blocked. Performers can thus post tamer or censored versions of their OnlyFans content in their stories and add swipe-up links that bring fans directly to their subscription sites.

Direct-to-consumer platforms are also creating new opportunities for content producers to collaborate. Griffin Barrows began his porn career at ChaosMen before moving on to Men.com and other high-profile mainstream studios. At nearly 200,000 Twitter followers, Barrows's OnlyFans has become quite prolific. He regularly posts videos of himself having anonymous sexual encounters, filming his partners from the neck down. In addition, he also creates content with fellow porn stars that each of them can offer on their individual subscription accounts. For example, Barrows turned a visit to friend and fellow

⁸ Of course, the gig economy predates the apps that have helped it proliferate – exotic dancers, for example, have been successfully winning lawsuits against clubs that illegally classified them as independent contractors for more than twenty years. See Grant (2012).

porn performer Gabriel Cross in London into multiple videos that they could each offer on their subscription accounts. He posted one video of himself and Cross kissing, which was posted to both of their Twitter accounts; one video of the two of them kissing and masturbating together; a three-way scene with Jonas Jackson; and an orgy scene that was uploaded in four parts with fellow porn stars Jackson, Josh Moore, and escort and OnlyFans/JustFor.Fans model Diggory. The 52-minute orgy scene, edited together from multiple angles and from multiple smartphones, resulted in four videos that each of the five performers could post on both their OnlyFans and JustFor.Fans accounts.

Both OnlyFans and JustFor.Fans also include messaging options, and thus paying subscribers can interact via text with content producers. JustFor.Fans has a robust text messaging service, which charges users \$1 to send Sms messages, \$2 to send or receive photos, and \$5.99 to send or receive videos, with non-subscriber rates being 20% higher. Some performers advertise these messaging options as the only way to reach them – «I only answer OnlyFans messages: subscribe to chat with me» – therefore monetizing engagement or only engaging with paying customers. There is also a practice of posting screenshots of direct messages on social media as proof of the quality of the content and demonstration of (paid or subscription) engagement. Fitness model Andrea Moscon, who was also one of the models on the Box Thailand trip, routinely posts screenshots of his OnlyFans messages. In one screenshot, a fan tells Moscon that he has just subscribed and rates a poolside video with a string of emojis – flame, flame, heart eyes, water drops – with the last presumably signifying either the user’s or Moscon’s climax. In another screenshot, a subscriber writes «I thought you were only posting fitness pictures on your onlyfans... I was surprised. Before I followed your public life and now, I can see more of my idol. It’s great my friend.» In his response, Moscon mirrors the subscriber’s familiar language telling him to «Keep following to discover more, my friend!».

Finally, much direct-to-consumer content offers a fantasy of attainability that was first articulated in the beginning of the amateur porn boom of the 1990s. Not only are porn stars having sex with each other in collaborative content sharing practices, they are also having sex with “regular” people and posting these videos as well. Porn star Austin Wolf, for example, posts videos of anonymous encounters in gay male cruising areas. Griffin Barrows annotates his posts about where he met his scene partner – the gym, Grindr,

social media – advertising his sexual availability to those outside the porn world. In a solo clip posted to his JustFor.Fans, Barrows recorded himself masturbating on his couch while speaking directly to the camera he is holding in his hand. He tells viewers that he has been enjoying producing his own content more so than studio work and expresses his preference for making these “real” videos with “real” guys, essentially articulating the very definitions of amateur pornography. In this particular video clip he speaks directly to the viewer – “stroke your cock with me” – describing how he likes to cuddle and spoon after a sexual encounter. This mode of direct address, personal revelations, and statement of sexual availability combine to offer a spectacularly intimate display.

5. Re-gendering Emotional Labour

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild describes emotional labour in gendered terms, as something that is more important for women than for men (162-163). Although she acknowledges that both men and women do emotional work, she estimated at the time of her writing that one half of American women had jobs that called for emotional labour (Ivi, 11). But more than this, characteristically “feminine” qualities, such as being the supportive mother or the sexually attractive mate, had increasingly come under company management (Ivi, 182).

Although gay porn stars might not “mother” their clients in the traditional sense of the word, they do have to manage their feelings and provide support in terms of social media interactions or direct messaging. In addition to this, they make themselves available sexually in ways that performing in a more traditional, studio-produced porn scene does not necessarily require or enable. This may mean responding to sexual messages or inducing (or pretending to induce) feelings of arousal or sexual attraction to paying clients who send them photos or videos of themselves. While cisgender men performing traditionally “feminine” emotional labour is not inherently subversive or progressive, it does provide a counterpoint to the hypermasculine bodies they are often required to cultivate to work in the porn industry.

Direct-to-consumer subscription platforms complicate our understandings regarding porn and labour, as well as discourses of authenticity and intimacy. Given the rapid transformation of the adult industry over the past decade, as the studio system has waned and more and more performers are engaging in the sexual “gig economy”, it is unclear if this mode of production is one that will last and remain profitable in the face of piracy. (As it stands now, much OnlyFans and JustFor.Fans content ends up on PornHub and other streaming/downloading sites). It is also uncertain if these sites will simply get absorbed into or pushed out by one of the existing porn conglomerates. PornHub, for example, has already launched a clips-for-sale platform called Modelhub, with a subscription model apparently in the works (Montgomery 2018). It also remains to be seen if those currently earning large sums from their subscriptions will remain in this line of work for an extended period of time. Hochschild noted that many of the flight attendants in her study had difficulty in their personal lives because of overuse of qualities that are traditionally reserved for personal relationships (2012, 182-183); and performer Steven Land described regaining some of the 150 subscribers he had lost after failing to post for 5 consecutive days as a «laborious, personalized process» (quoted in Montgomery 2018). Perhaps, as with many other emotionally laborious jobs, direct-to-consumer porn content producers will burn out. But in an industry where most workers are already contract workers, another gig – one that affords opportunities for collaborative practice and can serve to monetize their required social media engagement – can be seen as a welcome addition for now.

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