

"Webcamming Platforms and Structural Sex Precariousness in the Era of Platform Capitalism"

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Introduction

- Webcamming – a form of platform capitalism is transforming the sex trade (legal and visible)
- Programmatic: in exploration
- Definition: a show activity, organised by platforms (Cam4, LiveJasmin, uFancyme, etc.)
 - On the one hand, we have people offering shows against retribution.
 - On the other spectators, who pay or not, to attend shows.

Why focus on sexcamming?

- Platform that has been the subject of little work, at least outside social science work on gender and sexuality
- Media discourse to demonise what is perceived as a new form of prostitution: moral panic
- Hypothesis: You do not sell a sexual service like other services. Produce unique forms of engagement on these platforms.

Is sexcamming a singular form of labor exploitation?

- A field that lends itself to the observation of forms of precariousness and exploitation of labour in the universe of platform capitalism, and in particular the exploitation of emotions.
- Towards a form of emotional precariousness?
- Two questions
 - Is sexcamming a singular form of labour exploitation?
 - Does sexcamming contribute to the creation of sex precariousness?

Communication plan

- 1. Becoming a camgirl?
- 2. What does it mean to be camgirl?
- 3. Modes of engagement

Methodology:

1.1 *The population*

- *Camgirls/francophone/broadcasting public shows/having a male audience*

1.2. *Field: observations on the web*

- *Sexcamming platforms*
- *Other web spaces (promotional sites, camgirls blogs, Twitter...)*

1.3. *Interviews with models*

- *20 camgirls*
- *5 camboys*

1. Why do one become a camgirl?

1.1. The entry into the career: a meeting of two events

- A pivotal moment in the life trajectory: entry on the cam often linked to a break in the life trajectory: going out to study, disability, moving, etc.
- A search for money but not only: far from the social vulnerability of street prostitution
- Middle-class sex work: many came girls have higher education.

1. How does one become a camgirl?

1.2. *Moving on in the career*

- *A financial need: staying on platforms requires a material investment. Implies to stay to make the investment profitable.*
- *Loyalty logic on the part of the platforms: the longer you stay, the more you earn. Importance of notices and contests to encourage camgirls to stay on the site.*

2. What does it mean to be a camgirl?

- *2.1. A substantial investment...*
 - *An investment of time and money*
 - *A physical, psychological and emotional investment*
- *2.2. For limited profits*
 - *Variable income: from 400 to 3,000 euros.*
 - *Platforms that capture 40 to 70% of revenues*
 - *A very low hourly rate*

3. The 'motives' of commitment

Statement:

- Sexcamming is a **precarious job**: no contract of employment, weak social protection
- It is **underpaid**: hourly rate equals (more or less) to the minimum wage
- It is a **hard job**: physical, psychological and emotional work
- It is **socially risky**: it has potential consequences on private life (rift with family or friends) and professional careers

Why do women commit in sexcamming?

- Hypothesis 1. Because they have no choice
- Hypothesis 2. Because they find good 'motives' to carry on.

H1. Because they have no choice

YES

- Sexcamming often follows a **break** that has economic implications: in a career path (lay-off, resignation, work accident) or trajectory life (break-up).
- Sex platforms impose a **balance of power**: no contract of employment, oligopolistic market, exclusivity agreement, no bargaining on price
- Workers are **isolated** (home-based work)

BUT

- Interviewees often have **resources**: cultural capital, technical skills, sometimes social capital
- They often belong to the **middle-class**, which echoes with the literature [Hochschild, 1983 ; Bernstein, 2007]

H2. Because they find good 'motives' to commit.

Non-monetary compensations encourage the commitment...

| Intrinsic pleasure of the activity | Personal achievement | Vocational activity |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amusement• Sexual satisfaction• New relationships and friendships | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social recognition of subjective singularities• Enlargement of 'sexual scripts' | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Artistic performance• Pro-sex activism |

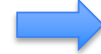
3.1. The denial of sexcamming as a job

| | HOBBY | IDENTITY BUILDING | VOCATION | |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Incentive</i> | Intrinsic pleasure | Personal achievement | Vocational | |
| <i>Archetype</i> | Player/Gamer | Liberated women | Artist performer | Pro-sex activist |
| <i>Lived as a work?</i> | No | No | Yes <i>(creative work)</i> | Yes <i>(political work)</i> |
| <i>Importance of labour compensation</i> | / | / | Low | Low |

3.1. The denial of sexcamming as a job

Platform devices shape the denial of sexcamming as a job

- Currency is **token**
- Platforms organise **lottery**
- Clients '**roll the dice**' to play
- Viewers are **fans** of camgirls

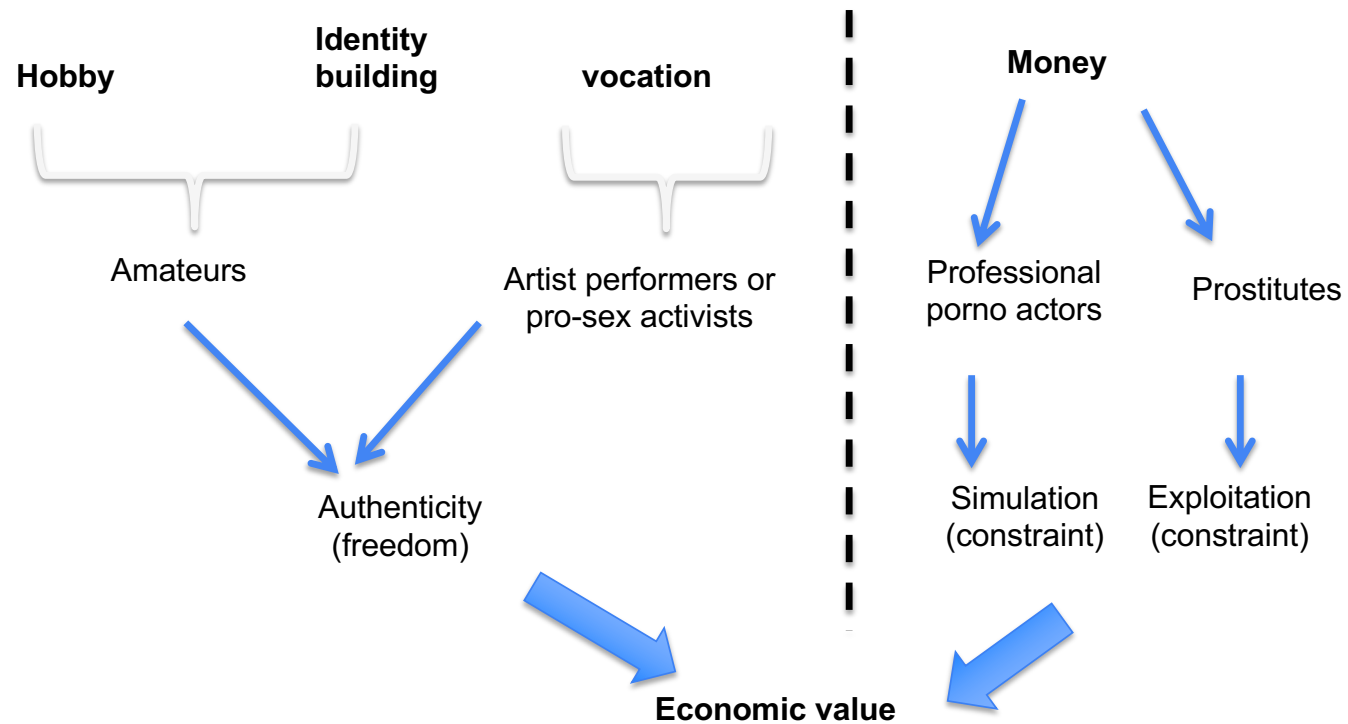


Cupidon ematrix [Dow Schüll, 2012] and *affection mercatos* [Callon, 2017]

The denial of work and labour as the valuation process

- If there is no job, then there is **no exploitation**
- If sexcamming is not a job, it is neither (classical) pornography nor prostitution: it is '**amateurism**'.
- If sexcamming is amateurism, then camgirls are '**authentic**'.

3.2. *The denial of work and labour as valuation process*



3.3. Sexcamming as an entrepreneurial commitment

A day-to-day entrepreneurial activity

- Coping with the '**long tail**' business strategy of platforms
- Creating **marketing strategy** with the help of platforms managers and websites advice.
- Invest in **material** (software, hardware, sex toys, clothes...)

Performative effects

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Naturalisation | - <i>'I think I am a deep-down freelance worker'</i> (PadméLove, ex-waitress) |
| Rational calculation | - <i>'I am reading optimisation books like those of Tim Ferriss. I love stuff like that. When I was on DesirCam platform, I paid off-shore assistants in Madagascar to answer the messages of my clients.'</i> (Antigone, ex-senior official) |
| Entrepreneurial futures | - <i>'My project is to put money aside and open my franchise: an e-sports bar'</i> (Deborah Intimity, ex-fast food employee) - <i>'With my companion, we will soon launch a platform. We want to be the first partners of camgirls.'</i> (Sofia Larocca, ex-butcher employee) |

Conclusion

- A contribution to the study of work in platform capitalism
- Literature
 - Sharing economy (amateurism or side job)
 - Uberisation (professionals)
- Sexcamming as a 'fantasy side job'
 - the myth of amateurism
 - Learning how to perform 'authenticity'.

Conclusion

- Only a few camgirls accept to be interviewed (circa 1/5)
 - Representativeness of the sample. Contact via Twitter
 - All the interviewees are 'professionals'. Do non-professional camgirls really exist?
 - What about camgirls that stopped their activity?
- Method: one shot interview
 - Is it possible to really study trajectories commitment to such a method?
 - What about post-rationalisation?

**Thank you for your
attention**