



Online Sex Work of Women on *OnlyFans*: Oppression or Empowerment? *OnlyFans* Platformunda Kadınların Çevrimiçi Seks İşİ: Baskı mı Güçlenme mi?

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Abstract

(Online) Sex work is a hot topic in feminist literature which is mainly studied with respect to two perspectives towards sex work: oppression and empowerment. This study aims to understand "How online sex work of women on *OnlyFans* can be interpreted and try to understand if *OnlyFans* can be explained through the perspectives of victimization and empowerment. For this purpose, this paper will provide a theoretical discussion about two main debates (oppression and empowerment) in the literature; be analyzed by taking *OnlyFans* as a case. Study results show that women's online sex work experience cannot be explained purely by oppression or empowerment paradigms, instead coexistence of oppression or empowerment should be taken into account. Secondly, emphasizing only the oppression or empowerment paradigm underestimates women's differences that directly affect women's online sex work experiences. Thus, intersectional analyses that are taken into women's age, race, and gender considerations are necessary in order to understand women's *OnlyFans* experiences. Last but not least, women's experiences of online sex work can change according to the motivation behind being a sex worker in *OnlyFans*.

Keywords: *OnlyFans*, online sex work,

Öz

(Çevrimiçi) Seks işİ, feminist literatürde genellikle iki perspektife dayalı olarak incelenen bir konudur: baskı ve güçlenme. Bu çalışma, "*OnlyFans* üzerindeki kadınların çevrimiçi seks işİ nasıl yorumlanabilir ve *OnlyFans*'ın mağduriyet ve güçlenme perspektifleri aracılığıyla açıklanıp açıklanamayacağını anlamaya yöneliktir. Bu amaçla, bu makale, literatürdeki iki ana tartışma (baskı ve güçlenme) hakkında teorik bir tartışma sunacak ve bunu bir vaka olarak ele alarak analiz edecektir. Çalışma sonuçları, kadınların çevrimiçi seks işİ deneyiminin sadece baskı veya güçlenme paradigmalarıyla açıklanamayacağını, bunun yerine baskı veya güçlenmenin bir arada var olduğunun göz önüne alınması gerektiğini göstermektedir. İkinci olarak, sadece baskı veya güçlenme paradigmasına vurgu yapmak, kadınların çevrimiçi seks işİ deneyimlerini doğrudan etkileyen kadınların farklılıklarını küçümsemektedir. Bu nedenle, kadınların *OnlyFans* deneyimlerini anlamak için kadınların yaş, ırk ve cinsiyet gibi demografik değişkenleri içeren kesişimsel analizlere ihtiyaç vardır. Son olarak, kadınların çevrimiçi seks işİ deneyimleri kadınların bu işİ hangi motivasyonun ile yaptıklarına bağlı olarak değişiklik göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *OnlyFans*, çevrimiçi

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Introduction

OnlyFans is relatively a new online space and studies concerning this platform are mushrooming. Launched in 2016, OnlyFans is a subscription-based social media platform where users can sell and/or purchase original content. When utilized as an adult site, users will post videos and photos to their accounts, which are protected by a paywall¹. Subscribers to this online platform increased especially during the Covid-19 pandemic in the world. The content of this platform is not limited to women's sex work or nudity but if the contents are reviewed the main way of using this online platform is based on women's sex work. Today this online site is an important way for women to earn money and it seems it will be increasing in the upcoming years (Boseley 2020). According to Litam et al., (2022)'s study which explores the demographic characteristics of OnlyFans users shows that, although most of the sexually explicit material users are male, content creators of those materials are mostly female. Because most of the content creators on Onlyfans are women and the platform's content are based on women's bodies and nudity, this paper focuses on intentionally only women's content creator's experience.

Studies concerning the platform (Fabiya 2022; Rodriguez 2022) indicates an effort to understand and evaluate this platform, where women often earn money by using their nudity or by doing sex work. This effort mainly divides literature about this topic into two. The first perspective is conceptualizing sex work on OnlyFans through the commodification of women's bodies and emphasizing how women are exploited and are in a victim position (Jones 2005; Prior et al 2013) or sex work as a type of work in that women can earn money and they can empower through this work (Döring et al 2022; Jones 2005).

This study is aiming to examine the mentioned dominant perspectives of OnlyFans in the literature to explore the peculiarity of women's experiences who produce content on this platform that would be lacking in mentioned main literature veins. The main question behind this endeavor is to understand "How online sex work of women on Onlyfans can be interpreted; whether it is exploitation that women are in a victim position, or it is a kind of work and platform that can empower women?". Thereby to further the debates by offering a new strain of understanding for the platform which interprets women's unique experiences, rather than the binary discussion in the literature, which seems to overlook the possible simultaneity between oppression and empowerment, although the relative weight may change depending on the circumstances, and even they may not be an explanation for certain experiences of women in the process.

Based on these, this paper proceeds with perspectives on the (online) sex work in the literature (perspectives of oppression and empowerment),

¹ <https://www.complex.com/life/a/joshua-espinoza/what-is-onlyfans-explainer>
Accessed on 08.01.2023

discussions found to be dominant for understanding the OnlyFans platform. After the methods section, results section shows how polymorphous perspective is beneficial to understand content creator women's sex work experience on OnlyFans is suggested after discussing Onlyfans based on mentioned dominant paradigms.

OnlyFans: Sign up to make money and interact with your fans²

OnlyFans is a website launched in 2016 by a United Kingdom-based company and became more widespread, especially during the pandemic. It is an online platform that allows content creators to share photos and videos with their subscribers in exchange for a monthly fee. The platform takes a 20% commission from the subscription fee, while the content creators receive 80% (Van der Nagel, 2021). Besides subscription fees, tips, private messages, and the pay-per-view feature are other fund resources of this platform. Although OnlyFans advertise itself as open to a variety of content, the majority of content is adult content which consists of sexual photos that include nudity and videos. The most unique characteristics of OnlyFans that are separated from other online social platforms are adult content and a subscription-based model where fans directly pay creators through tips, gifts, and subscriptions, not the payment system based on the number of views like YouTube and TikTok. (Hamilton et al 2022). Individuals who are 18 years old and above can create an OnlyFans account, but those who have a significant number of followers on other social media platforms like Instagram, particularly influencers and celebrities, have an advantage in gaining subscribers on OnlyFans. This is because they can leverage their existing fanbase to promote their OnlyFans profile, increasing their chances of attracting more subscribers (Boseley 2020). The most popular example of celebrity participation in OnlyFans is Bella Thorne who is an American actress and singer. She is so popular because she earned 1 million dollars in the first 24 hours after setting up her account. These kinds of examples are significant to understand that OnlyFans is not only a platform where women create content because of financial necessity but also celebrities and wealthy individuals like Bella Thorne create content on this platform to make adding more money to their earnings (Sanchez 2022). The price for a subscription on OnlyFans typically ranges from five to twenty dollars, which may vary depending on the content creator and the level of explicitness and nudity in their content (Hunt 2022). The platform is available worldwide and supports international payment gateways, allowing creators to receive payments from different countries but there is currently no application for the platform, and it can only be accessed through a web browser (Ford 2022).

The number of users of this platform is increasing from 7.5 million to 85. million (Boseley 2020). There are several reasons why OnlyFans is increasing

² Promises of OnlyFans on their website: <https://onlyfans.com/>

during the pandemic. Firstly, because sex work requires physical contact, sex workers have to digitalize their work to prevent themselves from Covid (Sanchez 2022). Secondly, this increase is also explained in relation to the loss of income sources for a lot of individuals during the pandemic period (López 2020). In other words, during the covid period, a lot of people face the risk of unemployment or lost wages because of the economic instability and recession and in this context, OnlyFans can be interpreted as a “mode of survival” for those people (Sanchez 2022, p.7). Thirdly, Hamilton et al (2022) study based on 22 semi-structured interviews with current and past OnlyFans content creators show that people have more leisure time during the pandemic (especially marginalized groups) is also one important reason why OnlyFans as a platform become so popular during this period. OnlyFans is a pioneer in the transformation of sex work and especially with the increased usage of this platform during the covid period; research studies, academic and journal articles, and thesis studies have mushroomed to understand this relatively new platform in terms of sociologically. One of the efforts of literature is to understand its effect on women’s lives and understand the positive and negative sides of this platform for women and their position on it. If the literature is revisited according to this effort, the literature can be divided into two. One side focuses focusing the positive effects of OnlyFans on women’s lives which can be interpreted as empowerment, the second side is mostly focused on the negative effects which focus on the victimization and exploitation part of sex work. Following section is elaborating on this main channels of perspectives.

Perspectives Towards the (Online) Sex Work

Sex work is defined as “sexual services or performances in exchange for material compensation (Weitzer 2000, p.259). The term is developed as an alternative to the concept of prostitution which mostly implies criminality and deviance (Sanchez 2022) but still, in the literature, it can be used interchangeably with prostitution. Most of the time sex work is conceptualized in social sciences as “a form of deviant behavior, a type of gender relations, and as a distinct occupational sector” (Weitzer 2009, p. 214). Although there are some different types of sex work, prostitution and female sex work are overstudied types of sex work in the literature. Today, sex work become an umbrella term that includes direct and indirect types. While street prostitution escorts and brothels are categorized as direct, lap dancing, swinger clubs, and massage parlors are categorized as indirect ones (Harcourt and Donovan 2001).

Together with technological advancements like every occupation sex work has undergone some changes with technology. As an output, there are some new types of technology-mediated sex work like phone sex, instant messaging, and webcamming (Cunningham 2018). OnlyFans can be interpreted as an indirect sex work and it is a relatively new output of this technological transformation of sex work. Because this is the platform that gives the possibility to content creators to earn money. Since OnlyFans is a platform that allows content producers to earn money by presenting sexual content, the

literature on this platform cannot be considered independent of the sociology of sex work discussions. When the literature is revisited, the paradigms perceiving online sex work as a source/outcome of oppression and empowerment, are two important paradigms to answer “how sex work is interpreted sociologically” in the case of OnlyFans.

Sex Work Interpreted as Oppression

According to the oppression paradigm, historically sex work is a reflection of the patriarchal structure of societies and it causes exploitation, subjugation, and violence against women. (Weitzer 2009; Farley and Kelley 2000). In other words, it “objectifies women by reducing them to sex; sex that incites violence against women and reduces women to commodities for market exchange” (Barry 1996, p.1) There is an essentialist understanding of the oppression paradigm that almost all women who earn money by sex work experience physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, using drugs or drug addicted, all customers used sexual violence and physical assault, experience terrible and exploitative working conditions. (Farley 2004; Weitzer 2009). As it can be understood from the assumptions there is understanding that desperate women become sex workers because of economic insufficiency and precarity and they want to exit sex work if it is possible. Because the main reason for engaging in sex work is financial necessity, most disadvantaged groups have to become sex workers.

Monroe (2008) emphasizes the link between poverty and prostitution. According to Monroe (2005) female sex workers, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, tend to be in a state of financial hardship, lacking education and marketable skills. Traditional theories of prostitution are based on oppression and mostly overemphasize insufficient economic conditions like poor housing and living conditions, lacking education, and previous coercive, forced exploitative sexual experiences. In other words, “prostitutes were described as being dispossessed, dislocated, and helpless” (Kisil and Davey 2000, p.5)

Sex Work Interpreted as Empowerment

Second perspective is the empowerment perspective which is totally opposed if it is compared to the oppression perspective. Contrary to anti-prostitution feminists (Pateman 2016), according to this perspective, sex work is just another type of work (McLeod 2022) and it has the potential to empower workers as other occupations have (Carmen and Moody 19859). From this perspective, sex work is not the last option for poor women to earn money; on the contrary, it involves human agency. The most important empowerment paradigm emphasizes that exploitation is not inherent to sex work. In other words, exploitation can be a part of sex work like other work’s part. Furthermore, “sex work can enhance a person’s socioeconomic status and provide greater control over one’s working conditions than many traditional jobs” (Weitzer 2009, p. 215). McLeod (2022) criticized the criminalization of sex work by emphasizing sex work should not be interpreted as work that only a

small number of deviant women engage in. Augustin (2007) is a scholar who studies sex work in the migration context and her study based on migrant sex workers' testimony criticizes mainstream understanding interpreting poor migrant women who sell sex with human trafficking. However, Augustin underlines that migrants have an active agency that can calculate pros and cons and they prefer to sell sex with their free will because they are "fleeing from small-town prejudices, dead-end jobs, dangerous streets, and suffocating families" (Augustin 2007, p.45). This study and its results are important literature overstudy migrant women's sex work experiences by emphasizing victimization and exploitation.

In general, scholars who support the empowerment paradigm believe that sex work can be "edifying, lucrative, or self-esteem" (Weitzer 2009, p.213). Because both the perspective one-dimensional most of the time oppression paradigm scholars focus on the most dramatic example of sex workers and it also affects their language; they mostly use sexual slavery (Barry 1984), paid rape (Day 2021), and survivors. On the contrary, scholars from the empowerment paradigm mostly focus on success stories of sex workers that caused liberation and upward mobility in the sex worker's life.

Methods

In this study, I relied on descriptive literature analysis to answer my main question. This study can be interpreted as the first part because, after this descriptive analysis, I will plan my interview questions to explore the experiences of women content creators on OnlyFans by using in-depth interviews. For this reason, this first step based on descriptive analysis is important in terms of understanding discussions on literature about OnlyFans and preparing interview questions accordingly.

To find related scientific material, I utilized resources like jstor.org, Google Scholar, and libgen focusing on materials published up to May 2023. After conducting a literature review on this topic, I identified several themes and formulated my research question. In order to access appropriate literature, I employed the following keywords: "Women experiences of OnlyFans", "interpretation of OnlyFans", "empowerment of women through OnlyFans", and "Exploitation of women through OnlyFans". Through this process, I realized that when studying OnlyFans in conjunction with content creators' experiences, scholars generally hold two main perspectives. The first perspective revolves around empowerment, emphasizing the positive effects of OnlyFans and how it provides women with a possibility for liberation. The second perspective view OnlyFans through the lens of oppression and exploitation, considering it as a new version of traditional sex work with similar mechanisms of exploitation that have not changed fundamentally for women. However, it also acknowledges the emergence of new challenges and negative aspects unique to this platform.

Limitations of study

We know from the literature that there are not only women who are sex workers in OnlyFans but also there are a lot of people from different genders. It

is a well-known fact that LGBTQ+ identities are experiencing inequality and harassment in society (Mckay et al 2019; Hoskin, 2019; Tran et al 2023), and most of the time they have to struggle to get rights that heterosexual people already have like marriage. Thus, this can change the direction of oppression and empowerment discussions. However, this does not mean that their OnlyFans experience only can be explained with an oppression paradigm, not empowerment. This only meant that their sex work experience in OnlyFans has need direct focus. In other words, because of the limitation of time, I have only focused on women sex workers' experiences of OnlyFans but I am aware of the fact that LGBTQ+ sex workers' experiences require a specific and direct focus. Thus, explanatory studies based on qualitative empirical evidence about both women and LGBTQ+ individuals OnlyFans experiences will be an important contribution to the literature which is my future study plan.

Another limitation of this study is not elaborate on immanent stratification in OnlyFans. Although it is a digital platform that can open to everyone who is older than 18 years old, OnlyFans like other digital platforms cannot be thought of separately from stratification mechanisms and inequalities in society. Thus, the hierarchy of OnlyFans is also an important topic that should be taken into account. For example, literature shows that content creators and users are mostly White (Litam et al. 2022). In other words, like sexual orientation and gender, race is an important factor that can be thought of together with the OnlyFans structure because it directly affects a person's OnlyFans experience in terms of oppression and empowerment. Besides race, to what degree one's content is explicit or whether one have any fan base account or popularity before you signed up for an account in the OnlyFans account are another important indicator that shapes this hierarchy. The following results section will focus on the descriptive examination of empowered (positive) and oppressed (negative) aspects of sex work in OnlyFans by focusing on related literature.

Results

OnlyFans: "Old job, New Name": Tracing oppression on the online space

As discussed in the "Perspective Towards the (Online) Sex Work" section, there is some literature that claims that although this is a new form of sex work that is technology-mediated, oppression and exploitation is an intrinsic characteristic of OnlyFans like in all other types of sex work. In fact, because digitally mediated sex work has some unique characteristics compared to traditional sex work, there are different kinds of oppression and exploitation mechanisms that are sociologically important. Doxing and capping, emotional work and overworking of online sex work which are significant exploitative characteristics of online sex work on OnlyFans will be discussed in this section.

The first one is the possibility of doxing and capping which are specific types of online harassment. Doxing is a complex and gendered process where one or more individuals intentionally seek and widely distribute private or personal identifying information about another person (subject/target) through online channels without their consent (Eckert and Metzger-Riftkin 2020). As it is

understood from the definition OnlyFans opens the possibility for doxing when content creator women share personal information about themselves with their subscribers. Capping is another form of online harassment. Capping refers to the unauthorized recording and dissemination of explicit performances by content creators. While customers are initially restricted to using these recordings for personal purposes, “capped” videos are frequently uploaded to adult websites and can be sold without the performer’s consent (Jones 2015). Taking screenshots of content without permission from the creator can be a common example of how capping occurs in OnlyFans. The possibility of doxing and capping destruct the anonymity character of OnlyFans and it create dangerous results in terms of privacy. Atkinson’s (2022) qualitative study results show that some content creators worry about blackmailing especially when their parents and relatives did not know about their OnlyFans account. Besides doxing and capping which are a specific type of online harassment, literature shows that (Atkinson 2022; Safee 2021) content creators can get hateful comments about themselves, their bodies, and appearances which is also one form of harassment. In other words, OnlyFans create an online environment where any type of harassment (except physical one) can emerge, there are not any mechanisms to prevent insulting comments and hateful attitudes in OnlyFans.

The second one is the emotional labor that OnlyFans required. Emotional labor is developed by Hochschild (2012) to understand workers' experiences in service sectors which require face-to-face and voice-to-face contact with the customer. In the “Managed Heart” (2012) book by Hochschild, the author gives examples of emotional labor by explaining flight attendance work experience which is directly related to making customers comfortable and happy. Thus, even if they felt bad and sad, they should smile, and be respectful and kind all the time to transfer positive feelings to the customers. This situation is conceptualized as “acting” (Hochschild 2012, p.38). Hochschild also mentions most of the time employers expect this kind of emotional labor, especially for women’s service workers. For those reasons, most of the time emotional labor is interpreted as an unpaid and unspoken part of women’s service work (Safee 2021). When emotional work is interpreted in OnlyFans context, it can easily be said that women's content creator work is also emotional. Although they haven’t got any supervisor that should control and check customer satisfaction, the number of subscribers and money they can earn is an important element in their job. For increasing their subscribers, producing content is not enough but making them comfortable and happy is one side of their work. As Safee (2021) emphasizes in her master thesis based on in-depth interviews with content creator sex workers on OnlyFans Subscriber interaction is one of the important elements of OnlyFans that require emotional work. According to her result acting as if they were happy is just one part of emotional work but content creators spent “a lot of effort to make their subscribers feel as if they have a personal connection to them” (Safee 2021, p.44) This personal connection requires knowing subscribers’ personal life like their current problem at work or name of pets. Especially considering that the use of OnlyFans has increased during the pandemic period, the emotional work of content creator women's

efforts to make their subscribers feel good and comfortable will be more visible. Safee's study results support this argument because the study shows that the number of subscribers who sought meaningful conversation increased and this could be attributed to people's desire for solace and support during difficult circumstances.

The third one is overworking. Although most people assume that being a content creator on Onlyfans is not a real job or that creating content on OnlyFans is an easy way of earning money, it requires a lot of labor. First of all, like every content producer, OnlyFans content producers have to be creative and increase the number of subscribers by constantly producing new and interesting content. Secondly, besides being creative, their jobs are directly related to their body and they invest their body in order to make more subscribers and sometimes to change their physical appearance to create more original content. As Cardoso and Scarcelli (2021) 's study based on OnlyFans content creators' body preparation and representation processes shows that content creators "have specific hairdo routines, or using specific outfits; and by changing the physical properties of their bodies via exercise or the thought-out deployment of specific dietary routines" (p.106). Thirdly, their job did not end when they prepare content but editing the visual or audiovisual material is also an important part of the post-production process. Although this seems like a technical part of this job, this technical part which is related to how they frame and pose their body is related to the question of which narrative they want to have in their content. As a result of Cardoso and Scarcelli (2021)'s thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, there are mostly three types of narratives that OnlyFans creators use while they create content. "Glamourised" is related to the accepted aesthetic presentation of self which is associated with sexual tropes, "everyday life" is a standard and normal presentation of the normal and casual appearance of women's bodies, and "an essentialist embodiment" which implies their body is their biological inheritance (p.107). As it is understood, creating content on OnlyFans and earning money on it requires a lot of time because they are not just providing some nudity content but they create content that tells stories according to subscribers' preferences.

OnlyFans: Possible Empowerment Path for Women?

Mentioning some empowerment side (positive) of OnlyFans in terms of the sex work experiences of women is possible by focusing on literature. The first one is decreasing physical violence toward women because OnlyFans (digital commercial sex) do not necessitate physical contact due to the technologically mediated nature like in phone sex, and instant messaging. In other words, technology creates an environment that is not based on physical space and prevents violence against women (Sanders 2016). In other words, it eliminates risks associated with traditional street sex work like "risk of arrest, violence from bystanders or targeted hostility from perpetrators" (Cunningham et al. 2018, p.54). Besides preventing physical violence, this characteristic of OnlyFans gives the possibility to sex workers to maintain their job without being Covid during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

Secondly, most of the sex work literature mentions how sex workers are exploited because of intermediary agencies (Gerassi 2015; Karandikar and Prospero 2010). In other words, most of the time, women's labor in sex work is controlled by "third-party management like pimps or pornography directors" (Sanchez 2022, p.2). This cannot be the case for women who earn money through creating content in OnlyFans because they have the ability to control their accounts, content, and money.

This also brings us a third positive effect of OnlyFans, controlling the working schedule and deciding which kinds of content women are going to create for whom (Jones 2015). Hamilton et al.'s (2022) studies focus on the motivations of content creators' adults (most of them are women) and study results emphasize that one of the motivations behind being a content creator on OnlyFans is perceiving OnlyFans as a better alternative to other kinds of service or gig works³. In other words, women are active agents in this period because they compare OnlyFans with other kinds of informal (gig) jobs and they prefer OnlyFans by calculating the pros and cons. Besides, as mentioned in the introduction section there are a lot of celebrities in OnlyFans who create content to earn money. In this sense, stereotypical poor or migrant women who had no choice other than being sex workers are not relevant for all women content creators in OnlyFans.

The fourth characteristic of this platform which can empower content creator women is their relationship with their bodies. One of the important results of Hamilton et al. (2022) study is women use OnlyFans because they interpret this platform as a form of sexual expression. Most of the content creators that they interviewed stated that they already have sexual content archives and making money from their already available archive is logical and fun for them. This study's results also show that most of the women did not start creating sexual content with the emergence of OnlyFans, but maybe they decided to sell their sexual content via OnlyFans and earn money. Besides sexual expression, Atkinson's (2022) qualitative study with content creators in Onlyfans suggests that confidence building is one empowering result of OnlyFans. Some of Atkinson's interviewees mention they "become more comfortable and less insecure with their body" (p.66) after they create and sell sexual content in OnlyFans.

Fifthly, if it is compared to a direct type of sex work like street prostitution, OnlyFans give a possibility a certain degree of anonymity to a person and this anonymity characteristic of OnlyFans decreased stigmatization of sex work in women's social life. Moreover, OnlyFans cannot have a search feature which means to access someone's account either the user knows the specific username of the content creator or the link should provide to the content creator themselves. OnlyFans is a platform that combines sex work and social media, and for this reason, the stigma associated with sex work is decreased

³ According to Flanagan's (2017, p.379) definition, gig work is "platform-based 'gig' employment, which uses digital technology to mediate the process of commissioning, supervision, delivery, and compensation of work performed by workers on a contingent, piece-work basis."

(Hamilton et al. 2022; Lippmann et al. 2023). When we evaluate the indirect feature of sex work on OnlyFans along with its anonymous feature, OnlyFans provides the opportunity to have a second job (additional source of income).

Last but not least, although the content creator's work on this platform is conducted individually, there is a community aspect of OnlyFans like in all other social media platforms. In other words, "OnlyFans offers a community feeling" (Atkinson 2022, p.82) to both creators and fans. Like in other social media, content creators can support each other's OnlyFans account by re-sharing their posts which increases their popularity and they can earn more money. Besides the economic aspect, it is a community that enables interaction (Uttarapong et al. 2022). Content creators can interact with each other and share their both good and bad experiences regarding OnlyFans and give some tips.

From now on, I focused on the interpretation of online sex work in OnlyFans from the oppression or empowerment paradigm. However, I think it is more productive to focus on the unique experiences of women who produce content and the content production processes of women on Onlyfans, instead of fully adopting one of the two views and coming to a conclusion about Onlyfans. For this reason, the next section will focus on how polymorphous understanding can be developed for OnlyFans without reducing oppression or empowerment.

Polymorphous Understanding of Sex Work in OnlyFans

Although points highlighted by two opposite views toward sex work in OnlyFans in the previous section are valuable, they are not enough to understand the experiences of women. Because either the oppression or empowerment perspective interprets sex work in OnlyFans as deterministic. Instead of a static understanding that is based on the reification of sex work in OnlyFans, I believe that we should focus on the agency side of the story. In other words, instead of developing one static perspective of sex work in OnlyFans and trying to understand all women sex worker experiences in OnlyFans through this perspective, social scientists focus on the agency part of the sex work considering all agencies experiences are unique and most of the time it cannot simply justify neither oppression nor empowerment paradigm. In the light of those understanding, in this section, I highlight three problematic issues if either oppression or empowerment paradigm is adopted to understand sex worker women's experience in OnlyFans.

The first problem can be summarized with the question: What if the women's experience is not purely oppression or empowerment? Women's sex work on the OnlyFans platform can include both oppression and empowerment experiences. In other words, it is possible to talk about the coexistence of oppression and empowerment, instead of describing a women's experience where only one of these two perspectives dominates. For example, a woman who has been subjected to sexual and physical violence many times because of her direct sex work experience can continue to earn money through this platform without being exposed to physical violence thanks to OnlyFans. But

again, the same woman may have been exposed to the types of online harassment discussed earlier, such as doxxing and capping.

As can be seen from this example, women's online sex work experiences cannot be solely explained with the empowerment or oppression paradigm, on the contrary, it can be explained with the coexistence and intertwining of these two. Besides the coexistence of two paradigms together, the online sex work experiences of women can change over time. In other words, at the beginning of online sex work experiences of women, the positive sides of OnlyFans can be dominant for women and women can feel empowered but after a while the situation can change and negative sites can be dominant. For example, as mentioned before, during covid direct sex work becomes more dangerous for women because of the possibility of infection but for most women, sex work is the only way of earning money. Besides sex workers, a lot of women lost their jobs because of the economic depression that is experienced during the pandemic. In this context, doing sex work in OnlyFans has empowered both sex worker women and women who lost their job. But after a while, women can be exhausted because of the emotional work that OnlyFans requires. As those examples highlight time and context are two important elements that directly affect women's sex work experiences on OnlyFans. That is, while empowerment and exploitation may occur simultaneously, which one dominates in women's experience may vary with time and context.

The second problem comes from assuming that women as a homogenous category and that their experiences of online sex work are similar. However, it should not be forgotten that women's age, class, and race can totally change their online sex work experiences. For this reason, instead of trying to answer whether OnlyFans is a platform that empowers or oppresses women, we should ask which women experience what. For example, is it possible to explain the OnlyFans experience of a White, middle-class, young woman and the OnlyFans experience of an Afro-American, working-class woman with three children from the same paradigm? There is also important literature on how race is an important factor that shapes Black women's online sex work experiences (Jones 2015; Evans 2021) and how intersectionality discussion is necessary to understand Afro- American women's online sex work experiences (Moorman and Harrison 2016). Therefore, it can be said that OnlyFans cannot be considered apart from the inequality mechanisms that already exist in society. Therefore, the two women in the example have different experiences and practices in every stage of life, not just the practice of experiencing OnlyFans. For this reason, focusing on the uniqueness of the online sex work experience of these women from different races, ages, and social classes will be more valuable than focusing only on the oppression and empowerment paradigm. In other words, the question of how existing inequality dynamics affect the sex work experience of women in OnlyFans would be much more appropriate.

The third critic is also related to the second one. Women's experiences of online sex work can change according to the motivation behind being a sex worker in OnlyFans. As it is mentioned previously, there can be different motivations behind being an online sex worker like economic necessity, fun, and second gain. In this regard, understanding those motivations are important

because it also changes the total experiences of content creator women in OnlyFans. Let's remember Bella Thorne who is an American actress and singer and she earned 1 million dollars in the first 24 hours after setting up an account. Although we cannot easily answer the question of what is the motivation of Bella Thorne to be a content creator in OnlyFans, I believe that we can easily say that her motivation is not an economic necessity but can be fun or gaining additional income. In other words, it can be easily said that Bella Thorne's motivation is totally different from a content creator woman who is poor, comes from Afro- an American background, and has three dependents. Besides, their relationship with OnlyFans should be different because if Bella Thorne feels exploited or has any negative experiences in regard to OnlyFans she can quit easily but this does not relevant for other women who have to earn money to sustain their life or Bella Thorne has a chance to mention her negative experiences about OnlyFans via in social media or giving press briefing which means she has the power to create public agenda. For sure, those motivations did not only change the sex work experiences of these two women in OnlyFans but it also changes all negotiations and strategies that women can develop in this platform.

Conclusion

This paper's main aim is to elaborate on why victimization and empowerment perspectives provide a partial understanding of content creators' experience in OnlyFans. For this purpose, after explaining dominant perspectives in the literature towards (online) sex work and explaining OnlyFan's characteristics as an online platform, I focused on how dominant perspectives toward sex work can be reflected OnlyFans which are either oppression or empowerment paradigms. Although most of the scholars did not mention explicitly using oppression or empowerment conceptualizations, when the studies are reviewed, there is a dominant tendency that either focus on the negative or the positive sides of online sex on OnlyFans. Some scholars who mainly mention negative sides claim that there is no big difference between direct sex work and online sex work on OnlyFans and they interpret online sex work on Onlyfans as a sex work that contains all negative and exploitative characteristics of direct sex work. Another group of scholars who focus on negative and exploitative sides claim that because it is digitally mediated there are some new negative aspects different than direct sex work. Those groups of scholars mostly focus on increasing the possibility of doxing and capping which are types of online harassment, intense emotional labor that sex work on OnlyFans requires, and mentioning how being a content creator in OnlyFans requires overworked by focusing on the content creation process requirements.

Scholars who focus on the positive sides are mostly focusing on OnlyFans's empowering characteristics. Those empowering characteristics are most of the time based on a comparison between direct sex work and online sex work on OnlyFans. Those characteristics are decreasing physical violence which is common in direct sex work, not containing any intermediary mechanisms that exploit women's earning through sex work, creating opportunities like

controlling working schedule compared to other types of gigs works, allowing space for sexual expression, providing a certain degree of anonymity which decrease stigmatization, offering communal interaction and solidarity based on the interaction between content creators.

Although those paradigms can be beneficial to understanding women's online sex work experiences on OnlyFans, there is a danger that most of the time they end up with a deterministic understanding. Thus, this paper suggests polymorphous understanding due to the fact that all women's experiences are unique and most of the time it cannot simply justify either oppression or empowerment paradigm.

To support this argument, I highlighted three critical points. The first one is most of the time women's online sex work experience cannot be explained purely by oppression or empowerment paradigms, instead coexistence of oppression or empowerment should be taken into account. Secondly, emphasizing only the oppression or empowerment paradigm underestimate women's differences that directly affect women's online sex work experiences. Thus, women's age, race, and gender are significant characteristics that affect all experiences. In relation to the second one, thirdly, women's experiences of online sex work can change according to the motivation behind being a sex worker in OnlyFans. Thus, it should not be forgotten that celebrity women's motivations for being content creators on OnlyFans cannot be interpreted as same as women's motivations whose only income source is OnlyFans.

Taking into those three critics and this study's limitation indicated in the method section consideration, further studies based on intersectionality will be necessary for the literature to draw a more comprehensive picture of content creator's online sex work experiences on OnlyFans.

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