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The Boundaries of Business and Pleasure: How Personal, Social, and Legal Factors Influence Webcam Models' Boundaries

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ABSTRACT

Webcam models live-stream erotic shows for viewers around the world. Unlike traditional pornography, they interact directly with clients during their performances, and clients may play a role in shaping the direction of the performance. Models can decide what kind of shows to offer or what acts to perform. This article is based on interviews with 23 North American webcammers and explores how these models shape their boundaries based on different personal, social, and legal factors. Legal consciousness is used as a sensitizing concept to help contextualize webcam models' experiences and interactions with the law and the terms of service (ToS) on webcam platforms. The findings show the co-occurring forces shaping webcam models' boundaries such as stigma, social norms, moral subjectivities, personal preferences and desires, sexual pleasure, and the law and ToS. This shows how webcam models are both controlled by formal and informal law but also have the agency to act within it – and sometimes beyond it.

Introduction

Research on sex work has examined the personal factors that play a role in the creation of various boundaries by those who are performing sex work (e.g., Barton, 2006; Koch, 2021; Sanders, 2002). For instance, maintaining mental and physical boundaries while doing sex work can be an important way for sex workers to separate their professional and private lives, protect their mental health, and mitigate the impact of experiences of stigma, abuse, and discrimination (Barton, 2007). Some of these boundaries include staying emotionally detached while working, maintaining control during the sexual act, and using condoms (e.g., Barton, 2006; Koch, 2021; Sanders, 2002). However, there is limited research on how online sex workers create these boundaries in their everyday professional interactions (Koch, 2021; Vickers & Brooks-Gordon, 2023). The different working circumstances between in-person and online sex workers may influence the need to create different kinds of boundaries as well as specific boundary creation strategies. Webcam models are online sex workers who live-stream erotic shows and interact with their audience. Webcamming stands apart from traditional pornography because independent webcam models are perceived to enjoy greater autonomy in choosing the kind of shows they do without pressure or influence from a director and thus may be able to more readily set their boundaries while they are working (Bleakley, 2014; Jones, 2020). The direction of shows is shaped by interactions between webcam models and their clients but also by the desires of the models (Jones, 2016).

Furthermore, working online also means that sex workers are subject to the terms of service (ToS) on platforms, which are often more restrictive than required by US law (Blunt & Stardust, 2021;

Stardust et al., 2023). Models have to navigate these regulatory boundaries during their performances. Of relevance to this article, the ToS outline acts that cannot take place or things that cannot be present during performances, such as blood or pretending to be underage. These differences warrant further exploration of boundary perception and boundary creation in the realm of online sex work, which is what this article aims to do.

This article is based on interviews with 23 webcam models located in North America. This research examines the influence of personal, social, and legal factors in shaping boundaries, as well as models' perceptions of the need for boundaries. It contributes to the current literature, which primarily addresses boundary setting among in-person sex workers, by directly investigating boundary establishment in the underexplored context of webcamming. This study also extends the literature by conducting an in-depth exploration of the role of legal rules and norms in shaping boundaries, an area that has received limited investigation to date, and applying the socio-legal lens of "legal consciousness" as a sensitizing concept. Legal consciousness is a concept that can be used to interrogate people's perceptions of and interactions with the law (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Fritsvold, 2009; Merry, 1990). Using legal consciousness as a sensitizing concept adds an extra dimension to the study of boundary setting and gives insights into how webcam models navigate and establish their boundaries within the regulatory framework that governs their work.

Conceptual Context

Boundary setting refers to how people create or determine their boundaries. I am particularly interested in how webcam models create boundaries in relation to what they will do during shows and how they will interact with viewers. In this

section, I outline literature that directly or indirectly discusses sex work and the factors that could influence boundary making. The work of these researchers serves as the foundational basis for constructing the analytical framework in this article.

Personal Boundaries

Boundary creation can be influenced by personal beliefs or desires. For example, Koch (2021) examined sex work and the law in Japan. In Japan, it is illegal to have sexual intercourse for money but other sexual services can be offered, such as erotic massages and flirtation. In part, the law shapes the sex industry and the kind of available services. However, even if the law allowed sexual intercourse, many workers would not offer it because of their personal beliefs about engaging in sexual intercourse for money. Their moral subjectivities influenced their boundaries beyond what was defined by the law. This points to the value of looking at an individual's beliefs or sense of morality in relation to their boundary setting strategies.

Wesely (2003) explored the boundaries of exotic dancers and how they used their bodies to interact with customers and the “fluidity” of their boundaries depending on the situation and the customer. She interviewed 20 former and current exotic dancers in the United States. In the interviews, dancers shared how their boundaries shifted or changed the longer they worked in the industry, often influenced by money; solid boundaries suddenly became permeable for the right price. Wesely's work shows how the boundaries of exotic dancers in her study changed over time as they gained experience, became acclimated to the working environment, were offered the right financial motivations, or depending on the customer.

Other research has indicated that defining personal boundaries can also be shaped by pleasure. In their aptly named article “I get paid to have orgasms”, Jones (2016) discussed how the sexual and affective pleasure of webcamming served as a motivator to be involved in webcamming and shaped models' interactions with clients. Although Jones did not explicitly describe it as boundary setting, pleasure played a significant role in determining how they worked with clients and the direction of their shows, and their work points to the potential for pleasure to be a factor influencing personal boundary formation.

Social Boundaries

Stigma is one social factor that can shape boundaries because being stigmatized can lead to ostracization or discrimination (Goffman, 1986), and creating boundaries can be a way to manage the stigma of sex work. For example, Barton (2007) investigated how strippers managed the toll of stigma in their work. She conducted observations and in-depth interviews with strippers at nine strip clubs in three different cities in the United States. Part of their stigma management techniques included hiding their work from others, distancing themselves from the identity of “stripper”, and stigmatizing and “othering” strippers who engaged in more “deviant” acts. DeLacey (2024) examined how webcam models in North America managed stigma in their personal relationships and from wider society. DeLacey (2024) argued that the online domain also created new opportunities for webcam models to

experience stigmatization due to their visibility online. On an individual level, stigma also played a role in determining what some webcam models were willing to do during their shows (Jones, 2020). Some webcam models chose not to act out taboo or stigmatized scenarios because of the fear of social backlash in the present or future. The work of these researchers points to the relevance of stigma and social norms in shaping webcam models' boundaries in relation to their work.

Legal Consciousness and Boundary Setting

Existing research focused on webcamming has indicated the significance of legal aspects, including the impact of the law and ToS on webcam platforms on shaping the behavior and boundaries of webcam performers during their work. For example, in research on webcamming in Korea, Lee (2021) described how webcam models operated despite the country's censorship law. Webcam models did shows that skirted the borders of the law by alluding to nudity and sex. If webcam models broke the platform rules, they faced being (temporarily) banned from the platform. Therefore, models' boundaries were shaped by the law and the fear of punitive measures. However, in response to the censorship law, some models strategically used the criminalization of erotic webcamming and being temporarily banned to make themselves more transgressively appealing and erotic to clients. Their behavior shows how the law may strictly define the boundaries for some webcam models but others may willingly and strategically break the law for reputational and financial gains.

Other research on webcamming has also highlighted the influence of legal factors on boundary formation. Stegeman (2021) analyzed the ToS on multiple webcam platforms and the ways in which they regulated the behavior of models while working, including banning certain acts or items from live-stream performances. Violating the ToS could lead to a webcam model having their account banned temporarily or permanently, which creates an incentive to follow the rules of the platform. Stegeman argued that the ToS limited possibilities for sexual expression while also defining and perpetuating sexual norms online, which points to how restrictive and exclusionary the rules may be for some performers who want to offer shows beyond what is considered “normal.”

The work of Stegeman (2021) and Lee (2021) both point to the role of law and the ToS in defining the boundaries of webcam models. Drawing from and expanding on their work, I use the socio-legal concept of legal consciousness as a sensitizing concept to help contextualize webcam models' experiences and interactions with the law and ToS. Broadly described, legal consciousness is “the ways people understand and use the law” (Merry, 1990). Ewick and Silbey (1998) examined legal consciousness as a cultural practice that investigates how people express their agency while interacting with the law and broader institutional and social structures. Ewick and Silbey divided legal consciousness into three categories to describe how people interact with the law and to characterize components of their legal consciousness: “Before the Law”, “with the law”, and “against the law”. Categorizing legal consciousness in this way aids in understanding how people interact with and perceive the law, even if each of these categories can occur simultaneously and in ways that seem contradictory.

“Before the Law” is the perception that the law acts as an immobile, rational, and abstract entity that treats people equally. By appearing to be static, the law maintains a sense of legitimacy and power and is resistant to influence from individual action. “With the Law” describes how people interact with the law as if it were a game, and seek to use it effectively in the pursuit of fulfilling their self-interest. The rules of the game of law are seen to be biased and thus able to be manipulated. “Against the Law” sees the law as inherently arbitrary, subjective, inequitable, and something to be resisted or avoided. It is out of the reach of everyday citizens and may result in them accepting problems rather than fighting against them. Fritsvold (2009) added to the theory of legal consciousness with “Under the Law”. Views the law as illegitimate, corrupt, and an agent of injustice. People operating “under the law” may intentionally engage in lawbreaking and challenge the law.

For this article, I use legal consciousness to examine webcam models’ perspectives of, interpretations of, and reactions to the ToS and the law. I am interested in understanding to what extent these regulatory structures play a role in defining boundaries for performers. I draw from the categorizations of legal consciousness (before, with, against, and under the law) and question whether these categorizations reflect their experiences with and perceptions of the law and ToS.

Method

My research and methods were approved by the Leiden Law School Ethics & Data Committee. I recruited participants by meeting them in person at an adult industry business conference¹ (1), social media (20), and referral sampling (2). I interviewed 23 independent webcam models based in the United States (22) and Canada (1). None of the models I interviewed worked at a webcam studio.² One of the webcam models often performed with a partner who was more experienced in the industry. Some participants said they occasionally did shows with other models or made content with people, such as boyfriends or friends with benefits.

Interviews were semi-structured and I used an interview guide that included topics that were relevant to different aspects of my dissertation’s overall research goals. Some of the topics included but were not limited to participants’ motivations to begin and continue working as a webcam model, their use of social media, interactions with clients, stigma, personal boundaries, fetish and kink performances, perspectives on the law or ToS, and perceptions of the adult

entertainment industry and sex work more broadly. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and over 4.5 hours, with the majority of them lasting around 2 hours. The variation in the length of time of interviews was determined by the participants’ availability, and the length of their responses. At the beginning of the interview, I told all participants that they could end the interview at any time. I also gave occasional reminders if the interview was lasting longer than anticipated or if the participant had mentioned a time constraint.

Some participants did not turn on their cameras, but I turned on my camera for all of the interviews, except for one.³ I did this to verify my identity with the participants, to help develop rapport with the participants, and so that they could see my body language and emotions. I recorded the interviews with the consent of participants using an external audio recorder, and I stored the files in an encrypted folder created using VeraCrypt. I pseudonymized the interviews while I transcribed them. Some interviews were transcribed using semi-automated transcription software (AmberScript) but only with written consent from the participants. I manually edited and pseudonymized the transcripts produced by the software.

Then I coded transcripts using inductive and thematic coding in qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti). Thematic coding involves using a word, extended phrase, or sentence to describe what the section of coded data means thematically, what it is an example of, or what it represents. Inductive coding involves making codes based on the data available (Saldaña, 2021). During the first round of coding, I coded broad sections of the interview data with codes related to boundaries and based on the information data. These codes were also informed by the research objective and academic literature. During the second round of coding, I organized codes into broader thematic categories based on the major emerging themes related to boundary formation that I identified in the data: social, personal, and legal boundaries. Within these larger thematic categories, I identified smaller categories that constructed these broader themes. For example, in relation to the theme of “personal boundaries” I had codes for “moral boundaries,” “personal interest,” and “too taboo.” Each of these codes touched on a different factor that could play a role in shaping the personal boundaries of webcam models, such as not participating in acts that they thought were immoral or that they considered to be “too taboo.”

Participants

Participants included 19⁴ female, three male, and one non-binary persons (pronouns zie/zier). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 71, with the majority of them being between 20 and 30 ($n = 17$). I refer to participants in the text by their pseudonym, age, and their length of time in the industry (e.g., Melanie, 26, 2.5 years). Of

¹Adult industry business conferences are events where people involved in different aspects of the adult industry meet to network and make business arrangements. They are very similar to business conferences in more mainstream industries, and include business presentations, information booths, and social events. Some conferences are attended by performers while others are primarily attended by representatives of businesses involved in the adult industry, such as webcam and porn platforms, traffic sellers, payment processors, and marketing firms.

²A webcam studio is a place that provides webcam performers with a workspace and the equipment they need to work, such as a camera, lighting, and Internet. Some webcam studios offer additional services such as a gym, professional hair and makeup, clothing, and training or mentorship. Webcam studios are common in Eastern Europe and South America, and uncommon in North America (Franco, 2022; Matache, 2018).

³I did not turn my camera on when I spoke to one participant. He requested to speak “on the phone” even though we used a video chat platform to do the interview. I met him at an in person adult industry conference and had spent an extended period of time with him, so we had an existing relationship and level of comfort speaking with one another.

⁴One participant identified as female but expressed that she was questioning her gender identity.

those participants who reported their racial identity, two identified as Hispanic, five identified as mixed-race, and 11 identified as White. The majority of participants had attended university to study for a Bachelor's degree ($n = 14$) or higher degree qualification (Master's or equivalent degree $n = 2$; PhD $n = 2$). The majority of participants had worked as a webcam model for two years or under ($n = 16$) and five had worked as webcam models for over 10 years.

Similar to prior studies on webcam models (e.g., Jones, 2020; Patella-Rey, 2021), this research revealed varied approaches to camming, including differences in time commitment, reliance on it as the primary income source, types of performances, and engagement in other aspects of the adult entertainment industry. Each of the participants I spoke with had a different approach to webcamming; some viewed it as a part-time job, and others viewed it as their career. Some of the models I spoke with only did webcamming, while others were involved in other parts of the sex industry, such as working as a phone sex operator, doing paid sexting, selling custom videos, or doing full-service sex work. Participants reported working different amounts of time, ranging from just a few hours a week to over 16 hours a day. It is difficult to calculate the amount of time each model spent working as a webcam model because some of them reported only the amount of time they spent live streaming on a webcam platform, while others also included all the time they spent communicating with clients, posting on social media, creating content, doing administrative work, or attending to other activities related to their jobs.

Results and Discussion

Personal Boundaries

Personal boundaries are those which are created by individuals based on their preferences, desires, or moral subjectivities. Setting boundaries can play an essential role in sex workers maintaining a positive and sustainable work experience, protecting their autonomy and well-being, and making it easier to clearly communicate with clients about the performances they are open to doing (Barton, 2007). It is important to note the influence that money can have on what models are open to doing and the power it has to coerce models into crossing their boundaries (Wesely, 2003). Models I spoke with highlighted the importance of knowing their boundaries before beginning work because there is this space for clients to pressure models into doing shows they are not comfortable with. Melanie (26, 2.5 years) helped maintain her boundaries with clients by being clear from the beginning about what she was willing to do. Creating boundaries also had practical reasons for Melanie; they helped her offer a better show to viewers and they helped to diminish the amount of negative behavior she had to deal with from clients.

Melanie: [If you, HD]⁵ like overstep boundary. And it's kind of clear that you're extremely uncomfortable. But you way overcharged this person to go out of your comfort zone. But you can't kick the discomfort, so you end up giving like a bad show. The customer is going to be more likely to, you know, come after you. So if you, if you stick to your boundaries and, and tell people

"No, I can't do that" or "Yes," you know, keep it polite and keep it professional, and you don't negotiate with rude people (Melanie, 26, 2.5 years).

However, boundaries were not static and would change over time. In Wesely's (2003) study of exotic dancers, she described the different factors that impacted the fluidity of boundaries. When many dancers started, they had pre-determined rigid boundaries. However, as time passed, their boundaries became more fluid based on factors such as their comfort working as an exotic dancer and the normality of the work, their feelings about the customer, their ability to justify crossing the boundary, their feelings about their identity, and monetary rewards. Similarly, webcam performers I spoke with also described their boundaries changing depending on various influences. When Veronica (30, 11 years) started working as a webcam model, she wouldn't take her clothes off. As she became comfortable with live-streaming and interacting with clients, she expanded her repertoire and started doing a variety of vanilla, role-play, and fetish shows. Similarly, Tony (23, 1 year) started with largely vanilla shows and transitioned to more fetish content after getting used to performing. During the interview, he also shared his future plans, including doing new types of kink shows and collaborating with other models on content.

Emma (26, 2 years) also adjusted her boundaries further as she gained more experience and to accommodate a client's kink request. One day she was asked to do a "JOI" scene or "jerk off instructions". JOI is when a person instructs another person how to touch themselves while masturbating or "jerk-ing off". At the time, she had never heard of this so she wasn't sure if she was comfortable doing it. After doing some research, she decided it was something she would be comfortable doing. Emma's motivation to shift her boundaries was also linked to the pleasure she experienced doing these scenes, as well as the positive feedback she received from clients and the monetary rewards. Her experiences point to how pleasure (Jones, 2020) and monetary rewards (Wesely, 2003) can be motivating factors in determining boundaries.

Jenna (25, 1 year) is another example of a model whose boundaries changed while she was working, and these changes were motivated in part by her sexual pleasure. When she first started camming, she thought that she was submissive. However, over time, she realized that she actually enjoyed being dominant more and began exploring new ways to be dominant during shows.

Jenna: When I started out this job, I was actually very submissive as a person, not like as a person, but sexually. Like in my own relationships. But I really think that was just because that was what I saw in porn and I thought that was what I was supposed to be to like attract and please men. (...) Since I put myself first this time, and like, I've actually been exploring myself and my wants. My needs. I've actually like become, realized that I'm totally a dominant person sexually (Jenna, 25, 1 year).

Through this work, she had the chance to delve into her sexual desires and reassess what brought her pleasure, leading to a shift in her boundaries to accommodate her newfound sexual interest. Yet, even within this newfound realm of dominance, she realized she had specific boundaries concerning how she

⁵I have added my initials to indicate where I have added information, pseudonymized text, or included information about a participant's behavior.

expressed her dominance. One day, Jenna had a client who asked her to pretend to be a liberal woman and to “politically dominate” him by yelling at him for being “a horrible republican.” However, when she started the scene, she received almost no reaction from him. This made her feel really uncomfortable and she quickly ended the show.

Jenna: I was really excited about it but when I called, he was just really boring. (...) He wanted to hear me yell and get really angry? And I was like trying and it wasn't really working, and he wouldn't yell back. He was just like “Okay...” And that made me feel like, like really, really inadequate and I was like “I don't like this” so I just hung up (...). But, and then I just felt really angry (...) getting into that anger, like, really freaked me out and I felt like on edge the rest of the day. So, so I was like “Okay, anger and yelling isn't for me” (Jenna, 25, 1 year).

Drawing from this experience, Jenna resolved to continue to dominate clients during shows but exclusively in her preferred manner: by slowly pulling them apart by their insecurities. This new boundary she set for herself enabled her to find fulfillment in her work, cater to client requests, and safeguard her mental well-being. Her experience also shows how her affective and sexual pleasure worked to reshape her boundaries (Jones, 2020). Moreover, Jenna's experiences underscore the significance of establishing and adjusting boundaries as circumstances require, aligning with the work of Barton (2007) and Wesely (2003). In their research on exotic dancers, clearly defined boundaries proved instrumental in safeguarding the dancers' physical and mental well-being. Crossing these boundaries had adverse effects on their self-esteem, sense of self, and increased psychological tension.

Webcam models' boundaries were also shaped by their moral subjectivities or the feeling that they were doing “right” things for the “right” reasons or their personal sense of what was “right” or “moral” (Keane, 2016; Koch, 2021). There were certain fetishes or fantasies that models felt were immoral to perform (e.g., age play, race play, incest play⁶), while other moral boundaries were discovered or realized when presented with a new experience or request. During the interviews, models shared specific examples of times when they had to make a decision about their moral boundaries. Taylor (34, 15 years) described doing scenes early in her career about clients exposing their genitals to drive-thru workers. One night, a client actually did it. At this moment, Taylor realized this crossed a moral boundary and she never did scenes like this again.

Taylor: I didn't think about the trauma that that caused that person. I didn't think about the impact of what could happen. I also didn't think about clients going to jail. No one went to jail, luckily. And there was only once that a guy actually did it. But after

I heard the shriek in the girl's voice “I was like, wow, that's not funny. That's not funny. That's not funny at all...” And that's when I really started thinking “I have to think about what I'm encouraging.” So like when I'm going through fantasies and stuff, I always, I refuse to add other people that they would know into the fantasy because I don't have their permission, and I don't want to encourage them to do something that that person didn't give permission to (Taylor, 34, 15 years).

This experience, as well as others, worked to shape Taylor's boundaries and reinforce what she felt was ethical to role-play with clients. Taylor tried not to involve real people in any role-play and would redirect clients when they pushed the scene in that direction.

Taylor: [Clients would say, HD] “Yeah, but like my sister-in-law” and I'm like [uncertain voice, HD] “Yeahhhh... but like would your sister-in-law like that?” “I think it'd be really hot if I was your sister-in-law.” Like, it's really (...) it can be really difficult to redirect. But yeah, I do feel like I have a moral and ethical role (Taylor, 34, 15 years).

Similarly to Taylor, Emma (26, 2 years) also said that she would not include real people in role-play fantasies because she was worried about the real-world impact. In contrast to Taylor and Emma, Samantha (26, 1 year) was open to including other people in roleplay fantasies. She shared an example of doing a scene in which her client walked in on another man engaging in intimate relations with his wife. This shows that models did not draw the same boundaries in terms of including real-life people in fantasy role-play scenarios.

Emma (26, 2 years) was also forced to define her moral boundaries when faced with new experiences. Emma had an unexpected pregnancy and had to think about whether she would be able to continue working while she was pregnant.

Emma: “Would I be okay working into my pregnancy and possibly having to fetishize my baby?” And it really bothered me thinking about it. (...) But that is something, like that is like a hard line. Like I would never ever want to get into that and I am kind of, I'm creeped out by it. (...) I saw this one girl [on social media, HD] who did like a whole block of like her pregnancy stuff. And I opened up and like looked at the replies. And I was so fucking grossed out. Like just [sighing, HD] (Emma, 26, 2 years).

Emma went on to say that she would tell her children what she has done for work, but it would be so much harder to tell them that she worked while she was pregnant.

Emma: But I can't imagine ever going to my child and explaining to them that “Yes, Mommy made content while she was pregnant with you and you were kind of in a part of me making money.” That's how I look at it. If you can do that, I guess more power, and you can like detach that, good for you. I could never possibly do that. And it really fucking creeps me out that there's dudes out there that literally just want to like pretend it's like their baby and be like, it's just, I can't, I can't do it. It really, and it really wasn't something that I ever thought about until I had to think about being in that situation. (Emma, 26, 2 years).

In the end, Emma decided she couldn't work while she was pregnant; she didn't judge other models for making different choices but this was something that she personally could not do. Her decision was strongly based on her sense of morality and the fear of the impact that it could have on her future children.

⁶Race play, age play, and incest play are the eroticization or sexualization of race, age, and incest. They can be explored in multiple forms focusing on consensual power and control dynamics for pleasure and play. It is important to note the distinction of scene based play versus non-consensual power and control dynamics. Additionally, “daddy,” “mommy” or “zaddy” are terms or roles that can extend beyond the play/pleasure space and can be seen in negotiated consensual relationship structures. These terms are not always linked with incest but can also be used to refer to a person in a position of power without the insinuation of a familial relationship (see for example: Henkin & Holiday, 1996; Lindemann, 2011; Midori, 2005; Taormino, 2012).

Some models had distinct boundaries around doing specific types of performances. For example, Jenna (25, 1 year) wouldn't dominate clients if they wanted to be yelled at and Emma (26, 2 years) wouldn't involve race in her "big cock" roleplay shows. Sophie (23, 3 years) had specific boundaries when she did age play. During the interview, she outlined how she rationalized her boundaries. She distanced herself from responsibility by saying she didn't advertise and only did the shows when specifically requested by clients. However, she also acknowledged that she deliberately dressed in a youthful manner, wearing a simple tank top and shorts, and styling her hair in pigtails.

Sophie: In real life I'm 23 and my cam persona is like either 18 or 19. And I dress that way. Like if you watch me live, like I like the pigtails and shit. (...) Most, most people just want me to be like [sighing, HD] (...) somewhere around like 13 to like 15. I say I won't, I won't act an age if I don't physically appear that. So like I think I've had about the same body since I was 13. I'm like, that's kind of my hard line. Anything below that just feels really fucked up. TBH [to be honest, HD] (Sophie, 23, 3 years).

By only playing ages she physically appeared to be, she reduced her uneasiness with these scene requests and rationalized her behavior to herself – she has looked the same since she was 13, so why not pretend to be that age? However, she expressed during the interview that playing any age below 13 felt wrong but she did not explain why in detail. Sophie went on to describe how she made her boundaries in relation to power dynamics during the scenes to protect herself from discomfort.

Sophie: I don't do anything that involves like forcing a minor, if that makes sense. So like if I'm doing age play, it always has to be me coming on to them. And well I didn't always do it that way but I, I did a few shows where I just felt really, really icky about it, where it was like, because daddy daughter, most popular of course. It was daddy, you know, like coming on too hard or whatever. And I was "Aaaahh, I just feel too yucky about that." So like I don't mind being like, seducing, like and if I happen to be whatever age he requests then like so be it. If that makes sense (Sophie, 23, 3 years).

By creating specific guidelines for age play, Sophie was able to continue to do these shows (which made up the majority of her income) and reduce her discomfort. Her experience, as well as those of Sophie and Emma, illustrate how models strategically created boundaries within specific types of (taboo) performances to make themselves more comfortable and as a way to protect their mental well-being (Barton, 2007).

There were a lot of differences in models' moral boundaries, and what they thought was acceptable or not. During my interview with Vicky (49, 1 year), I asked her "Do you think there are any kinks that are too far?"

Vicky: (Long pause, HD) Oh, well... No. You can't help it. 'Cause the thing is, once it gets to be too far, is when that adrenaline is going to come and it's going to be good for them. So most people need to get to that point where it's a little bit too far, in whatever direction that they are, you know? (Vicky, 49, 1 year)

In her response, Vicky touched on some interesting aspects of sexuality and humans' drive to engage in taboo activities or things that go "too far". During the interview, Vicky also talked about a client who enjoyed role-play scenarios featuring circumcision and another who liked anal vore or the fantasy of

being eaten by a butt (Chester, 2013). After sharing these stories, she reflected on the importance of the work that she does and how impactful it can be on the clients to have someone role-play their fantasies with them.

Vicky: So he only really feels safe discussing this fantasy with somebody who can, you know, somebody who pretends to also like it and understand it. Also, I can present it back to him, mirror it back to him in a unique way, so it's not his own thoughts generating the fantasy but somebody else saying "What if I did this? What if I did that?" (...) Now it's a conversation, and people just want that connection. (...) And not to have to feel ashamed (Vicky, 49, 1 year).

By creating stories with clients featuring their most taboo desires, Vicky provided these clients with a space to explore sexual fantasies and perhaps work through past traumas and anxieties (Easton, 2007; Lindemann, 2011). The affectively fulfilling aspects of these encounters also helped shape Vicky's boundaries; she saw the benefits of doing these shows for the clients which in turn made her feel good and willing to participate in these shows. This links with Jones's (2020) sociological theory of pleasure, which describes how affective as well as corporeal pleasure motivates behavior and mediates social experiences (Jones, 2016, 2020). In Vicky's case, pleasure played a strong role in helping her define her boundaries. However, Vicky did draw a boundary when it came to degrading or being abusive toward clients. She said that she would never do this because her goal through webcamming was to make people feel loved and seen.

Vicky: Yeah, so if people, if people come in and they "I want you to insult me" or "Do this mean BDSM thing" and I just say "I can't. I prefer to love you." You know, that, "I want you to tell me that my cock is too small" and I'm just like "I can't. I'm [short, HD] and all dicks are big to me. Sorry." (Vicky, 49, 1 year).

Sexual pleasure and personal sexual interests also played a role in models' boundary creation. For some of the models I spoke with, their own sexual pleasure was one of the main things that motivated them to start or continue webcamming. Similarly, the models that Jones (2020) interviewed who enjoyed their work were more likely to continue webcamming, and the clients reacted positively to the models' authentic pleasure. For example, Blake (20, 6 months) described himself as kinky in his personal life and brought his kinks to his webcam work. He really liked to wear specific costumes or lingerie while working, even if it wasn't pleasing to some of the customers.

Blake: Sometimes I'll have like lingerie on the stream. And they'll [customers, HD] be like "Why are you dressing like a girl?!" And I'm like "I'm having fun, like, what are you talking about dude?" (Blake, 20, 6 months).

For Blake, webcamming was primarily about his own fun and sexual pleasure, and earning money was secondary. He said that even clients who were not into his kinks liked watching and talking to him because of how much he enjoyed his work. Quinn (24, 1 year) shared similar stories about clients commending her for genuine enthusiasm and evident enjoyment in her work. Clients told her they could tell the difference between models camming solely for financial gain and those who, like Quinn, were driven by genuine sexual passion, the desire to provide satisfaction, and create new experiences.

Even when models made strict boundaries, there were still situations when these boundaries were flexible or crossed willingly. Emma (26, 2 years) said that she was more comfortable exploring sexually with clients she had a preexisting relationship with compared to new clients. As will be later described in detail (see Legal Boundaries), Emma selectively engaged in blackmail shows, reserving them for clients she trusted due to her recognition of the illegality of blackmail, even if it is just a fantasy. However, not all models mentioned changing boundaries based on ongoing connections with clients, and some, such as Whitney (26, 2 years), were very resistant to it. Whitney's discreet approach to work and lack of regular clients may have played a role in shaping her boundaries with clients. Barton (2007) and Wesely (2003) similarly described the flexibility or fluidity of exotic dancers' boundaries based on personal factors, their relationship or familiarity with the client, or due to the desire or necessity to earn more money.

There were also situations in which boundaries were crossed without the consent of the webcam models. In most instances, models would ignore or block the person bothering them. However, some models shared experiences of clients escalating behavior before they could be stopped. Webcam platforms generally give clients the option to pay per minute for a one-on-one private show with a model. During these shows, it is possible for the client to have their camera on so they can be watched by the model (often for an additional fee). This opens up opportunities for models to have their boundaries violated.

Megan (23, 1 year) recounted an experience she had while doing cam-to-cam. She initially consented to the activity but without fully realizing what was going to happen.

Megan: A guy put like a glow stick inside of his dick. And I didn't, like he asked me if he could do it first, and I just kind of said yes. Nothing freaks me out. But I didn't like fully register what he was going to do (...) and then he turned his camera on. It was thin but like really long and the whole thing went in. And I was kind of just like shocked (Megan, 23, 1 year).

Sophie (23, 3 years) shared a similar story of a client on cam-to-cam taking a show too far before she realized what was happening.

Sophie: I thought he wanted to show me videos of girls pissing because for some reason at the time, a lot of guys were showing me videos of other girls. (...) And so then he, like, turns on his cam and he's in his bathroom. I'm like "Okay, it's getting a little weird." But then my inner cam girl just like turned into high gear and I'm like "All right, I'm just going to smile and nod and see where this goes." And so then it, it just it escalated real fast, real fast. (...) And so, yeah, he was like "What do you want me to do with the shit?" And I was like [uncertain grossed out sound, HD] "I don't know..." Because my mind I was just thinking hepatitis, hepatitis! [both laughing a lot, HD] And I was like, because no, I didn't want him to get sick. (...) Like, I know you don't touch poop. Anyway. So he was like "Do you want me to rub it on myself?" And I was like [clenched teeth, uncertain voice, HD] "All right..." So yeah. And it escalated into that and then it escalated into eating it. I don't know if he swallowed it. I don't fucking know. I don't wanna know (Sophie, 23, 3 years).

In this moment, she smiled and froze, and then reverted to the social scripts she had learned to follow as a woman and a webcam model (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999; Martins et al.,

2023). Her boundaries were crossed in this moment before she could fully realize what was happening and she witnessed a man doing things that made her extremely uncomfortable and that she did not consent to. After Sophie described this experience, she said that she was happy that it happened later in her career as a model. Sophie believed that her extensive experience as a model shielded her from trauma resulting from the client's behavior, having cultivated what Jones (2020) termed an "ethos of resiliency" (p. 131). This resiliency, as Jones noted, enables models to navigate the dangers of camming while still deriving pleasure from their work (p. 131). Sophie demonstrated resilience by continuing to work after this upsetting experience, as well as many other bad or upsetting experiences. She also demonstrated resilience by not allowing these experiences to ruin the job for her; she continued to find joy and pleasure in her work, and express compassion and kindness toward clients. Her willingness to withstand negative experiences and continue to work was also influenced by her high earnings (on average \$100 to \$150+ an hour), and the generally favorable working conditions and flexible schedule which suited her lifestyle.

Megan and Sophie's experiences highlight one of the downsides to models being in charge of dictating the rules in their webcam rooms. In some ways, this is valuable for the models because it gives them the freedom to dictate who they interact with, and their boundaries about what kind of behavior they will accept or tolerate from clients. It may also limit the over-surveillance of their behavior by platforms, and give them more space to explore pleasure (Jones, 2020). However, it can also result in situations where they see things that make them feel uncomfortable, violated, or traumatized, and clients may not face any or only limited repercussions for their behavior (Stegeman, 2021).

The models I spoke with expressed a great amount of agency in deciding the types of shows they did and defining their boundaries. Sometimes webcam models are coerced or pressured into doing shows they are not comfortable with, and this can lead to feelings of regret, reinforcing boundaries, or sometimes leaving the industry (Jones, 2020). However, all of the models I spoke with talked about how they primarily shaped their shows around what they liked doing, what they were good at, and what they felt comfortable with. They were also motivated by sexual and affective pleasure (Jones, 2020). Even when models did shows outside their personal interests, they still found pleasure in the humor, curious exploration, and novelty of the experience. Some models prioritized their sexual pleasure by doing shows that they found exciting and catering to clients with similar interests. However, not all models used webcamming to fulfill their sexual needs, and among those I spoke with, it was a small minority who primarily used camming for this purpose. At times, some models would stray beyond their boundaries as they got more comfortable performing, if they had an ongoing relationship and feelings of trust with a client, or if they wanted to try something new (Barton, 2007; Wesely, 2003). When clients crossed the boundaries of models, this resulted in models reinforcing their boundaries by reprimanding the client or blocking them. In this way, webcam models had control over who they would work with and they had the tools to technologically enforce their boundaries with the "ban button."

Social Boundaries

Social norms, stigma, and the fear of being stigmatized can play a role in shaping individuals' behavior. Goffman (1986) described stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and how being stigmatized can result in a person being discriminated against or ostracized. Being a sex worker is a highly stigmatized profession, and sex workers may experience more or less stigma depending on the type of work they do (Sallmann, 2010; Weitzer, 2018). This stigma may come from wider society but also from within the adult industry (Knox, 2014; Makbul et al., 2023). Webcamming is seen as "less dirty" than other forms of sex work because models do not physically interact with clients and because of the legality of the work (Rodriguez, 2022; Scortino, 2016). However, webcam models still face stigma and pressure to conform to social norms. In previous research (DeLacey, 2024), I described how the models in this study managed the stigma associated with webcamming, such as by using information control strategies and reframing or resisting stigma. However, that article did not examine how stigma shaped the types of shows models did and their boundaries. This gap prompted the question: What role do stigma or social norms play in defining the boundaries of webcam models while working?

In my interviews with webcam models, they often discussed norms focused on prohibited behaviors, particularly related to specific fantasies and kinks such as race play, age play, consensual non-consent, and incest play. Engaging in these was seen as "too taboo," and carried the risk of social backlash. Some social backlash came in the form of people being attacked and shamed on social media for doing taboo shows. Shaming on social media can be a powerful tool to control behavior and reinforce norms, and it can also have a devastating impact on people who are targeted (Klonick, 2016; Strano & Wattai Queen, 2012). Anna (28, 1 year) recalled seeing models "canceled" on Twitter. In some of the cases, people did not know that the fetish was potentially inappropriate until they were attacked by other users.

Anna: Well, a big one is like, like when anime, like the *ahogao* face (...) The face where they're like [Anna demonstrates the face by sticking out her tongue and crossing her eyes, HD].

Hannah: Is that offensive?

Anna: I didn't think so until like Twitter but a lot of people on Twitter have pretty much banned that in sex work because (...) [some people say, HD] that is racist against Asians. But then like the entire Asian community was like "No, it's not." So I feel like there was a lot of people who are like, you know, like justice warriors and they just like, try to find things now to call out (Anna, 28, 1 year).

Other models also mentioned race-related terms or fantasies being "banned" by people on Twitter. Jenna (25, 1 year), who did not identify her race, "dabbled in" race play. However, she discovered that offering these shows put her at risk of being attacked on social media due to widespread opposition.

Jenna: [A girl on social media messaged me and said, HD] A couple of years ago, apparently there was like a witch hunt, like girls were going all over asking people if they did race play, and if they did, then they would repeatedly report them (Jenna, 25, 1 year).

Jenna's concerns about being attacked on social media impacted her decision to do shows involving race play. Her discomfort was also influenced by the broader societal problems and the political climate at the time of our interview in 2021. She also experienced an internal moral dilemma, wherein her personal convictions clashed with external societal norms and advice.

Jenna: I don't think it's like so wrong to use that word when a Black person is asking for it whereas the girl that attacked me was like "You should never, ever use that word. You are propagating racism." But I'm like "Oh, I don't know. I just feel like I'm more like hearing Black people." (Jenna, 25, 1 year).

In contrast, Sophie (23, 3 years), who was White, participated in race play and did not express concern about doing these shows. This may have been linked to Sophie's libertarian viewpoints and willingness to monetize taboo performances. Layla (26, 1 month) also said she did some race play in the form of "big black cock" (BBC) shows. However, her mixed-race identity and the fact that she regularly created content with a Black man might have shielded her from feeling the stigma or social pressure not to do such performances.

These models' experiences highlight the diverse challenges of navigating requests from clients, stigma, social norms, and the fear of repercussions for breaking these norms. They also showed how some models want to be open to kinks and not shame people for their sexual desires but have to balance this against their risk of stigmatization. Jones (2020) described webcam models going through similar dissonant experiences when deciding whether to participate in race play. Making a decision was a complex process that was influenced by broader social structures of racism and power, and the implications of denying or granting power to others. Jones also acknowledged how "The affectual pleasures of this escape and reclaiming of power can be cathartic (Jones, 2020, p. 218)" which touches on the potential benefits of exploring these taboo fantasies. Moreover, exploring taboo fantasies can serve as a means to delve into one's hidden self, address past trauma, or simply engage in an intensely erotic experience (Easton, 2007, Levand et al., 2019; Taormino, 2012).

Another worry for models was the potential for future social backlash or stigmatization if their shows were recorded and reuploaded without their consent, a practice known as "capping" (Jones, 2020). Capping may be done by viewers but also by the platforms themselves (Stuart, 2022). Samantha (26, 1 year) recounted an instance when a viewer requested a taboo performance. Although she couldn't recall the specific details, she was apprehensive about the potential long-term consequences if the scene were to be capped.

Samantha: It crosses a weird boundary and I was like "Eh, you know, it's one thing if you're doing this actually in-person with a sex worker and it's another thing to be putting it on the Internet where everything is recorded. No thank you." So I was like "If that's something you in your personal sex life are into you can negotiate that but I that's not what I want to put on the internet." (Samantha, 26, 1 year).

Models interviewed in this study and also those interviewed by Jones (2020) who were asked to engage in race play or other

taboo fantasies also expressed similar concerns about capping. Future repercussions could also arise if the content were to be uncovered, given the stigma surrounding sexuality and taboo fantasies, and the potential for the material to be misinterpreted when taken out of context.

Social norms, stigma, and the fear of social backlash worked to shape the boundaries of some models. Some of the restricted acts weren't necessarily illegal or against the ToS but were considered immoral or believed to harm society. Violating social norms could lead to models facing ostracism, attacks or shaming on social media, or loss of social support. However, some models still engaged in these taboo shows despite the risk of stigma and social backlash.

Legal Boundaries

The work of models is regulated by the ToS on webcam platforms and ToS are largely the same across these platforms (Stuart, 2022). There may be slight differences in what is allowed in public and private chat rooms depending on the payment model of a platform. Freemium platforms (e.g., MyFreeCams; Chaturbate) generally put more emphasis on public shows and groups of clients paying with tips, though there is usually an option for clients to switch to private one-on-one pay-per-minute shows. Premium platforms (e.g., LiveJasmin; Streamate) put more emphasis on private one-on-one pay-per-minute shows and limit what models can do in the public chat to encourage clients to switch to a private show.

ToS are generally designed to prevent litigation and define what is acceptable behavior (Gillespie, 2018). Webcam platforms' ToS are shaped by US law, as well as an additional extralegal body: payment processors (Beebe, 2022; Jones, 2020; Stardust et al., 2023). The policies of payment processors act as a parallel regulatory regime that exerts power and control on the users of their technologies (Reidenberg, 1998). Payment processors tend to be more conservative than US law and pressure platforms into creating more restrictive rules in the ToS than would be required by law (Stardust et al., 2023). This creates a unique situation where both the law of the government and the policies of the payment processors work to create the regulatory framework that governs the work of webcam models.

While working, models have to follow the rules of the ToS or they risk having their accounts banned temporarily or permanently, which could result in (massive) repercussions for them. For instance, they could lose access to their screenname and the fanbase that associates them with it, and experience financial losses due to downtime (Jones, 2020; Stuart, 2022). Platforms may monitor what the models are doing in their shows and viewers can also report the models for breaking the rules. However, ToS can be unclear and up to interpretation or selective enforcement by platforms (Blunt & Stardust, 2021; Stegeman, 2021).

The ToS contain a list of banned activities, items, and behaviors. Some of the things which are commonly banned on webcam platforms are blood, asphyxiation, breastfeeding or lactation, fisting, sleeping, unusual or overly large sex toys, vomiting, defecation, urination, illegal or unsafe activities or violence, animals, and pretending to be underage. Many of

these acts are not illegal in the offline world and they are a normal part of many people's daily lives (e.g., breastfeeding, [menstrual] blood, vomiting) or a part of their (regular) sexual activities (e.g., age play,⁷ fisting,⁸ consensual violence) (Fattorosi, 2012; Thorneycroft, 2020). However, there are still many kinky acts that models can perform without breaking the rules, such as popping balloons, showing off their feet, degrading clients, and role-playing (Fattorosi, 2012).

Models were often faced with making decisions about what they were comfortable with and what they thought was illegal or against the rules of a platform. In this section, I will describe the different ways that the ToS and law shaped the boundaries of models and the kind of shows they were willing or able to offer. I use legal consciousness as a sensitizing concept to provide a lens through which to analyze and understand models' behavior and perceptions about the law, and how the law shapes their boundaries while working. For this article, I explore how webcam models interact with both the law and the ToS as "law". The ToS are significant because they have the most direct influence on the everyday working experiences of webcam models by laying out what is or is not allowed on webcam platforms.

Many of the models I spoke with understood the rules on the platforms based on what would be considered common sense and a general understanding of what was legal or illegal in real life. When I asked models during interviews whether there were rules they had to follow while working, they could usually name a long list of things that they assumed to be forbidden on the platform or illegal, or they cited specific examples from the ToS or rules they learned in other places (e.g., talking to other models, reading on social media).

Melanie: There are some things that I just plain can't do [on the webcam platform, HD] (Both laughing), but some things that I wouldn't do. The incest, for sure. That's a no-go. That's against site policy anyway. (...) Yeah, you really can't talk about that stuff. Age play is also super against site policy. (...) You can't do, it's called scat.⁹ Piss, you can't do that, which is fine because I don't want to do that anyway (Both laughing). You can't do like anything with your period, which kind of disappoints me because I totally would. (...) I know there's people out there with fetishes, and it's kind of like spit, I don't know, it's coming out of my body like why not, right? I bled every month since I was 13 (Melanie, 26, 2.5 years).

While outlining the rules of the platform, Melanie highlighted the rules that she was okay with (no scat, no incest) but also the rules that she did not agree with (no blood). This commonly occurred when models talked about the rules on platforms. There were rules that they agreed with or had no intention of violating but others that they felt restricted their work or the work of others in a problematic way. In this sense, they were operating "before the law" but also "against the law" (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). These models were accepting the ToS on

⁷Age play is when people pretend to be an age that is different than their actual age. It may include an erotic component but this is not an essential feature. Power dynamics are often present but are not required to engage in age play (Tiidenberg & Paasonen, 2019; X, 2022).

⁸Fisting is a term to describe the insertion of the hand and forearm into either the anus or vagina (Barcelos, 2023).

⁹Scat is another term for feces and is often used to refer to defecation or interacting with feces in a sexual context.

platforms as a powerful entity over which they had no control, while simultaneously expressing frustration with its rules and how this defined their boundaries.

Notably, there was no consistent agreement among models about what activities or fantasies went too far or shouldn't be banned. Generally, people were against feces, race play, age play, and incest play and were okay with these things being banned, even if they were not illegal in real life. However, there were also models who were open to catering to these fantasies forbidden by the ToS as long as they were not illegal in real life. Webcam models work in a unique situation where their work is most directly regulated by the ToS of platforms but more broadly by the law. Some models decided to navigate and work in the areas between the ToS and the law; they did shows that were officially forbidden by the ToS but did not put them at risk of legal trouble. The existing literature on legal consciousness has yet to describe the strategic maneuvering between regulatory frameworks. I have termed this "between the laws" to encapsulate the actions of individuals who navigate the ambiguous territory situated between two distinct regulatory systems: ToS and law. Their understanding of and interactions with these regulatory structures are shaped by the dynamics of both these systems and the potential repercussions associated with rule infringement or legal transgressions. Violating the rules of a platform's ToS may result in being (temporarily) banned, a risk deemed acceptable by some in light of the potential financial gains or personal desires, alongside the uncertainty of detection and punitive measures. However, violating the law could result in far more severe real-world consequences. Therefore, models opt to strategically work in the area "between the laws."

For example, Lexi (38, 20 years) frequently operated "between the laws." The ToS had the most immediate impact on her work but she was open to breaking it as long as the act was not illegal and she wouldn't face legal penalties. Therefore, her biggest risk was having her account banned. By navigating the space between regulatory systems, Lexi was able to cater to her clients who requested shows on the fringes of acceptability while reaping the financial rewards.

Lexi: I'm like really glam porn star and [I do, HD] severe dirty talk. And then I specialize in whatever guys want. Like I have very low boundaries, I would call it, for perverts. (...) I'll do it for you as long as it's not fucking illegal. Like I'll even bend some rules for you. I don't care. So I've got, I just have no level of shame, really, I guess I would call it. Which why I think I do really well [financially, HD] (Lexi, 38, 20 years).

She had been in the industry long enough that she was desensitized to a lot of client requests and she said this was why she could earn so much as a webcam model (she reported earning \$25,000 per month). She was the only model who mentioned fulfilling a request to defecate, which was one of the most consistent hard boundaries of other models and a rule in the ToS they agreed with.

Lexi: One guy was like "I want you to take a shit on the toilet for me while we do a video call." And I'm like, "OK." I'm like, "I don't know how the fuck you think I could shit on command but ok, whatever." (...) So I took a bunch of body makeup and I just squeezed it into the toilet and it looked like shit. And then he's like "Oh, I want to see what it looks like, what your ass looks like when

it's dirty with shit." So then I just took body makeup and squeezed it on my butt (Lexi, 38, 20 years).

When she was fulfilling this request, she was strategically working "between the laws" by knowingly breaking the rules of the platform in a way that was unlikely to lead to any real-life legal consequences. However, if the platform moderators had flagged her, it could be expected that she would have been in trouble; regardless of whether she actually defecated, it appeared that she did. Platforms may lean toward taking swift punitive measures when models seem to have broken the ToS rather than taking the time to investigate due to their risk of being demonetized by payment processors and their fear of legal consequences (Stardust et al., 2023; Stegeman, 2021).

Sophie (23, 3 years) also was willing to work "between the laws." She did a lot of shows pretending to be under the age of 18. During our interview, she demonstrated an in-depth awareness of the law and to what extent she could push the boundaries without getting in legal trouble (which was her primary concern).

Sophie: Oh, well, so the law is kind of unclear (...) but there's been Supreme Court cases that said as long as there's not a minor victim, then it's not child pornography or child abuse materials. So, if I pretend to be a minor or any girl pretends to be a minor, that's not illegal (Sophie, 23, 3 years).

Sophie was at risk of having her account banned but not at risk of legal trouble, so she continued to do the shows. She also justified doing these shows by stating that she was a libertarian and this meant she would monetize things if there was a demand. As described in the section on personal boundaries, Sophie's political viewpoints and sense of morality worked to shape her boundaries while working. Similarly, Lexi (38, 20 years), also did shows where she pretended to be underage. She said that she did them in part to protect children from actually being harmed and because she didn't think the clients would *actually* act out these fantasies – some guys "just like to do a lot of drugs and they're kinky as fuck (Lexi, 38, 20 years)." Lexi defined her boundaries by considering both the rationales behind clients' behavior and her belief in the potentially protective benefits of giving clients an outlet for their desires. Lexi and Sophie's perspectives shine light on how different individuals' moral subjectivities or feelings of what is "right" or "moral" can be (Koch, 2021), and the various factors that they use to explain, rationalize, or define their boundaries. Despite being open to pretending to be underage during shows, both Sophie and Lexi reported clients who seemed like they might act these things out in real life. They both were firmly against actual abuse. In the cases where they reported a client who they suspected might actually abuse someone, they were mobilizing the ToS of the platforms and working "with the law". However, they were both uncertain to what extent platforms had the power to stimulate legal action offline.

Conversely, not all models were comfortable working in this area "between the laws." Rachel (25, 1 year) was into age play. However, she had her account temporarily banned when she pretended to be underage during a show.

Rachel: I like put my hair in pigtails and like, I put on like a little,¹⁰ because I personally like age play. But I hadn't, I didn't read the rules on the one site I was on until I put my hair in pigtails, had the braces on, and I had like this like light up binky thing. And I thought that it would be okay because it was like "I'm an adult, I'm a consenting adult. Like, I'm just pretending." But they [platform moderators, HD] were just like "Yep, no, we don't even, don't even want the playing of age play" (Rachel, 25, 1 year).

Rachel was playing with her fantasies and pleasure but accidentally broke the ToS of the platform. Her experience highlights how personal pleasure can define models' boundaries, but the constraints of the ToS can compel a model to redefine them. Rachel vowed never to violate the ToS again by pretending to be underage due to the risks involved.

In another case, a model discussed the difficulty of discerning the boundary between fantasy and reality, and to what extent fantasy could result in legal trouble. Emma (26, 2 years) had a client who asked her to blackmail him. Blackmail is illegal in real life but Emma was uncertain to what extent she could act out this fantasy online, and whether there could potentially be legal repercussions.

Emma: I had somebody that wanted me to like completely blackmail them, they gave me their entire personal information. (...) [They, HD] made me film them on [video chat, HD] and wanted me to post the video on PornHub and then they would pay me to take it down. But then like I did some research and I actually asked on the [webcam help forum, HD] like how I could this legally okay. Because blackmail is technically illegal even if it is a kink, and even if it's done consensually. Can that actually hold up in court? (Emma, 26, 2 years).

In the end, Emma decided not to act out this fantasy because it was forbidden in the ToS and it is illegal to blackmail people. She also made this decision because she felt like she could not trust the client; he was aggressive and rude toward her during their interaction. However, later in the interview, Emma said she occasionally did blackmail shows but only with trusted clients with whom she had a preexisting relationship. With these specific clients, she took a calculated risk; she felt that they were trustworthy people and unlikely to report her to the authorities for blackmail. She also never actually posted the photos or videos of the clients online, or contacted their friends or family members. She only stored the information and pretended she was going to expose it during role-play scenarios. Emma's experience underscores how personal trust, relationships, and legal assessments can shape boundaries, sometimes going beyond the letter of the law. Other models, such as Lexi (38, 20 years) and Taylor (34, 15 years), also shared similar stories of breaking or bending the rules to do a show with a trusted regular client, but most models did not mention taking these kinds of risks.

Some models described cases of working "with the law" or strategically using the law to their advantage. Taylor (34, 15 years) specialized in doing shows involving hypnosis. But when the word "hypnosis" was banned, zie began offering

"mind fuck" shows instead, as a way to overcome the new rules and continue to cater to zier client base. Taylor's actions could also be seen as working "under the law" or intentional subversion of the law and an open challenge to the law (Fritsvold, 2009).

Taylor was the only model I talked with who cited an example of the ToS changing and having to redefine their shows. This could have been a result of Taylor being in the industry for over a decade and specializing primarily in kink performances. Most of the models ($n = 16$) I interviewed had been in the industry for under two years. However, other models shared stories of strategically subverting the rules, such as Samantha (26, 1 year). "Squirting" or the expulsion of fluid from the genital area¹¹ (Pastor & Chmel, 2022; Rubio-Casillas & Jannini, 2011) is allowed on webcam platforms but urinating is not. Samantha was regularly asked to ejaculate but she could not do it on command, so she opted to urinate instead. It is difficult to visibly tell the difference between urine and female ejaculation if someone is well-hydrated due to the similar coloration of the bodily fluids, and Samantha used this to her advantage.

Samantha: I can squirt but it's not necessarily on demand but dudes want it on demand so ... it's urine. (...) I put towels down. And dude, I'll be like "Oh, it might be a splash zone! I'd better get a towel." (...) They're all like super into it (Laughing) (Samantha, 26, 1 year).

Samantha was acting "with the law" by manipulating the scene to fulfill the clients' request while appearing not to violate the ToS.

The ToS and law did not play a role in creating boundaries for all models. Some models primarily offered "vanilla"¹² shows. None of the things they did in shows would violate the ToS or law. They made their boundaries based on personal preferences, rather than the rules of the platform.

Whitney: [My shows are, HD] primarily like vanilla. I don't really even get a lot of requests for weird stuff and sometimes I wonder if it's just because I have, like such like vanilla appearance, where I look like very like girl next door, and so I just naturally draw in like more vanilla guys, I don't know. (...) It's just a lot of like mutual masturbation or like they masturbate and I watch and then I masturbate and pretend to come (Laughing a lot) (Whitney, 26, 2 years).

Natalie: I really capitalized on the girl next door thing where the people that are going after my content don't necessarily want like kink fetish work from me, they're very much into the idea of me being like their girlfriend (...) Like I do a lot of, like, strip teases, saying people's names, just kind of like dirty talking to them, but like I said, it's super, super vanilla (Natalie, 24, 3.5 years).

For these models, the ToS were largely irrelevant to how they defined their boundaries while working; they were not inclined to do anything that would violate the rules.

¹⁰"Little" is an umbrella term to refer to people who like to act as children and regress to a younger age. They think like a child and engage in typical child-like activities, such as coloring and playing with stuffed animals. It is important to note that there are many differences in how people define and express being a "Little." There may be a sexual or kinky element for some people but this does not always occur (Masri, n.d.).

¹¹"Squirting" and "female ejaculation" are separate phenomena. According to Rubio-Casillas and Jannini (2011) and Pastor and Chmel (2022), female ejaculation is the release of thick whiteish fluid from the paraurethral or Skene glands while squirting is the transurethral expulsion of fluid from the urinary bladder. However, in common use, the terms are used interchangeably and used to describe the visible release of fluid from the genital area as a result of sexual stimulation.

¹²Vanilla is a term generally used to describe "normal" sex or sex that does not include any fetish, kink, or bondage, discipline/domination, sadism/submission, masochism (BDSM) components (Iovine, 2019).

All of the models I spoke with described using the ToS on platforms and the functionality of platforms to regulate the behavior of clients in their rooms. Webcam platforms typically have features that allow models to silence, (temporarily) block, or report viewers who are harassing them or saying things that make the model uncomfortable. These tools can be used to reinforce a model's boundaries.

Samantha: Yeah, I have had a few guys be like "Wow. You look exactly like my daughter. You're so hot" I'm like "Block!" That's gross! Please go away! (26, 1 year).

In this way, models worked "With the Law" and used the functionality of the platforms to control the behavior of people in their rooms and decide who they interacted with, and also to reinforce their boundaries. However, it must be noted that this was not a perfect solution to dealing with problematic clients; sometimes they would make new accounts or harass the models on other platforms.

Webcam models interacted with and were influenced by both the ToS on platforms and the law while working, and these regulatory structures influenced their boundaries. Many models opted to follow the ToS, regardless of whether they agreed with the rules outlined in it. For the models I spoke with, the ToS were largely seen as an unmoving structure. The complete power of the ToS shaped their boundaries by defining which acts were forbidden and defining strict punishments for violating the rules. They expressed frustrations with the ToS and described how they limited their work, but they also acknowledged the beneficial and protective aspects of the ToS. There was also an ambivalence or begrudging acceptance of the law and ToS – they were constructed outside the models' realm of control, and they had to follow the rules in order to do their work or accept the repercussions of breaking them.

All models worked "with the law" to control the behavior of clients by blocking or reporting them. There were also cases of models strategically working "with the law" and "under the law" to strategically manipulate the ToS or subvert it, such as by renaming their shows to avoid restrictions on certain terminology or covertly performing acts that were forbidden. Finally, some models worked "between the laws" and strategically navigated the area between the ToS and the law; they broke the rules of the ToS as long as they were not breaking an actual law or at risk of legal consequences. These models' experiences show how some people may decide to navigate these gray zones of (il)legality while also making judgments about their personal sense of morality and how they feel about a specific situation and client. Collectively, these models' experiences demonstrate the myriad of ways in which the law and ToS act to create boundaries but also how some models subvert, avoid, manipulate, and break and define boundaries based on other factors. In that sense, their legal consciousness was not only about what they did with the law but also an acceptance of the structure of law and its role in governing their work.

Conclusion

In this article, I wanted to understand how webcam models shaped their boundaries and which factors played a role in this process. I identified social, personal, and legal factors,

illustrating their distinct impacts on boundary-setting strategies for webcam models and highlighting the complexity involved in this process. Through this research, I addressed gaps in the literature about how webcam models make decisions about the kind of performances they do and the factors which shape these decisions. I also used a novel approach by examining boundary setting through the lens of legal consciousness to understand how perceptions of the law shape peoples' interactions with the law, and in turn, how this impacts their boundaries while working.

While commonalities exist among webcam models, there's no singular stereotypical "webcam model". Instead, individuals can mold their work in various ways based on personal preferences or external influences like social and legal factors. This underscores how the webcam models in this study had the agency to tailor their work to suit them but also highlights how legal constraints and societal norms restricted or curtailed their behavior and sexual expressions (Stardust et al., 2023; Strano & Wattai Queen, 2012; Thorneycroft, 2020). Most of the performers' boundaries were within the bounds of the ToS and law but two performers opted to work "between the laws". They strategically navigated between these cooccurring regulatory frameworks, weighing the potential consequences of punitive actions against the perceived benefits. These models willingly broke the rules of the ToS to satisfy client requests, provided that they remained within the bounds of the law. Their behavior is notable in the study of boundary setting as it shows the role of law in influencing behavior but also how individuals may make calculated decisions based on risk and the potential reward.

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