



OnlyFans and the realization of women's freedom

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Abstract

This thesis aims to position the sex work on OnlyFans within the realization of women's social and economic freedom. Using argumentation analysis through the theoretical frameworks of liberal feminism and radical feminism, this thesis investigate whether the sex work on OnlyFans is compatible with the social and economic freedom of women. The findings show that both liberal feminism and radical feminism recognize that OnlyFans have major safety deficiencies which pose threats on women's social freedom. Liberal feminism recognize that the possibilities of economic gain for sex worker women exist, but radical feminism finds that these possibilities are slim, and lastly the findings showed that the free will of sex workers is to be fully realized, but at the same time elements of coercion and financial pressure were present when agreeing to provide certain sexual content and services which does not comply with the realization of women social and economic freedom.

Key words: *Sex work, OnlyFans, freedom, feminism*

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1. Introduction

Sex work is a highly debated subject within fields of politics, sociology, gender studies, law, philosophy, and more. It is especially debated within feminism and its differencing theoretical branches. Online-based prostitution include escort and prostitution marketization, call girl websites, camming, and more recently – a website called ‘OnlyFans’ marketed especially towards celebrities and influencers, i.e., people with a following base, to share monetized explicit content with their ‘fans’. Influencers using and promoting Onlyfans to their followers is an important element relevant to the analysis of the platform’s compatibility with women’s freedom and is key to understanding how this case differs from other studies on online sex-work. Feminist scholars such as Dworkin and Mackinnon argue that what prostituted women are subjected to is a direct violation on women and their autonomy, and that the power that men hold over women is that over their bodies and their sexuality - making prostitution one of the most obvious manifestations of patriarchy and female subjugation. On the other hand, there are feminist scholars such as Nussbaum claiming that the stigmatization of sex work is a reinforcement of the message that female sexuality “is a cause of social disruption unless tightly controlled” (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 287).

When engaging with the topic of women’s social and economic freedom and what function sex-work has, one is introduced to a strongly divided feminist discussion. Most feminist thinkers argue for a society where men are not superior over women and the world, where one gender cannot exploit the rest of the population and claim possession over the resources the society is built upon. Most feminists argue for equal rights between men and women, and some argue that the concept of gender is to be deconstructed entirely if we aim for liberation for all (Tickner, 2014, pp. 259-262).

1.1 Intent

This study aims to situate the discussion on prostitution and its implication for women’s social and economic freedom from the point of what prostituted women are subjected to rather than how they present themselves or cope with their realities. Patriarchy is inescapable within all fields of society and the first step in promoting women’s freedom consists of recognizing that women are not to be blamed for how the patriarchy affects those under its hegemony. The research problem this thesis engages with is whether OnlyFans has positive implications for women’s social and economic freedom or if it is exploitive, but within that

problem one must further ask whether it must be one or the other. The aim of this study is to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion on the issue and give an account for differencing experiences and arguments regarding OnlyFans and women's freedom. By analysing the arguments on sex work and OnlyFans from both a liberal feminist and radical feminist perspective the intention of the study is to deconstruct some of the common arguments regarding sex work and thereby provide nuanced elements to the scholarly discourse on OnlyFans and its compatibility with women's social and economic freedom.

1.2 Research question

Is the sex work on Onlyfans compatible with women's social and economic freedom?

1.3 Relevance to human rights

There are several human rights issues involved within the jurisdiction on prostitution. Keeping the sex trade entirely unregulated risks an increase in human trafficking and the numbers of people involved in the sex trade increase. Pimping and taking advantage of the disadvantaged people forced to prostitute is also at danger when not regulating the sex trade. However, making prostitution illegal also has a large negative impact on the people selling sex; criminalizing prostitution makes the environment for the prostitute increasingly unsafe, and they aren't able to report any crimes committed against them. One of the most prominent threats according to sex workers themselves is harassment and threats of the police. There are reports of sex-workers as a group heavily over-policed and not having their human civil rights respected. This is a problem existing even in the northern states where prostitution is legal, but the buying of sexual services is not (Fick, 2006).

This study does not engage with the jurisdictional part of sex. This study does not aim to make any conclusions on the jurisdiction of the sex trade nor suggest ways to go around the dilemma. However, being aware of all the human rights problem involved in making laws on sex trade is important for carrying a discussion on the moral and therefore possibly eventually legal implications for the online sex trade. This study engages with the question of online sex work and the realization of women's social and economic freedom. The fight for gender equality has been going on for long and the subjugation of women and non-binary people is still an ongoing issue. Until these issues are resolved the realization of human dignity is not possible.

1.4 Delimitations

Delimitations to this study include that it is not only women using OnlyFans but also people of other genders. What OnlyFans means for men's or trans peoples struggles is beyond the scope of this paper. It will only engage with what it means for women and their social and economic freedom. It does not mean to erase other genders' experiences with the site. Furthermore, aim of the study is to give a general view for the general female population, recognizing that this might provide insufficient intersections between factors such as race, class, and cultures to the factor of gender. The study aims to include women of all these factors in the analysis of the issue, but extensively specifying on certain groups of women is not possible within the scope of this thesis.

1.5 Previous Research

Research regarding sex work and pornography in the context of women's freedom has been quite extensive. Since the term "sex work" and "prostitution" are quite broad concepts with different meaning, there is an extensive amount of research to be made, not the least in the last year with the emerging of the internet and the gig-economy. The topics, theories, and methods used in the previous research often share similar components even if they pose different research problems and questions. The central question most of the previous research presents is whether sex work could be regarded as empowering for the women practicing it. Different feminist perspectives have different arguments and reasoning regarding this question. The research is almost explicitly only covering feminist perspective and some economic elements to those theories. Sloan and Wahab discusses sex work from the point of Marxist feminism where the discussion tends to be more on the labor part of sex work, and less on gender issues regarding sex work. The issue has also been covered from a black feminist thought-theory where the element of race is analyzed in relation to sex work and prostitution (Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

However, the most commonly discussed perspectives are liberal feminism and radical feminism, both often viewed as two opposing sides. Liberals value particularly the right of the private life before the regulative public life. the liberty of women to do what they need with their bodies is among the most important ideals within liberal feminist theory. To say that sex workers are oppressed and wish to be saved could be a violation on their right, and only creates stigmatization of female sex workers. The feminine body shouldn't be regulated

and restricted in such a way that anti-sex worker feminist suggest. For an example, Jones goes to argue that sex work can be a more liberating form of work than any other. In her article “I get paid to have orgasms” she argues that “adult webcam models experience sexual and affectual pleasures in the course of their work and that they are able to experience these pleasures because the computer-mediated sexual exchange acts as a psychological barrier and becomes the primary tool that models use as part of emotional management” (Jones, 2016, p. 233).

Previous research on the radical feminist theoretical perspective puts emphasis on women’s agency and the bodily autonomy. The radical feminist perspective recognizes that we live in a patriarchy which affects all aspects of our lives. According to radical feminist thinking, one of the major power tools men have under patriarchy is that regarding sexual violence. The sex work industry is an expression of that sexual violence (Sloan & Wahab, 2000, p. 463).

One of the most prominent radical feminist thinkers within the question of sex work is Andrea Dworkin. Dworkin believed that women have been subjected to such marginalization and degradation that the objectification and subjugation now comes from within us as well. She writes “the brilliance of objectification as a strategy of dominance is that it gets the women to take the initiative in her own degradation. The woman herself takes one kind of responsibility absolutely and thus commits herself to her own continuing inferiority; she polices her own body; she internalized the demands of the dominant class and, in order to be fucked, she constructs her life around meeting those demands” (Dworkin, 1987, p. 261). In sex work, online or not, the objectification of women is done in the literal sense of men buying the power of, not with consent, violating her body. Regardless of how the women view themselves and their agency, patriarchy has forced them into a position of submission and in the buyers view they are not anything else than objects to be bought and used. Dworkin explains that the hatred of women is a source of sexual pleasure for men in its own right. Objectifying and degrading the women in the sense of buying the ability to violate and take advantage of, could be regarded as a form of hate, maybe the purest form of hate (Ibid.).

These two perspectives provide the most theoretical reasoning best fitted for the question of sex work, including the sex work on the internet and on Onlyfans. Some of the topics or factors most commonly used in the research regards that concerning safety, economy,

sexuality, and a general conception of agency or freedom of will. A rather big amount of the research done in this area has used qualitative research through interviews and observations on online adult content platforms. These studies were those made by Bays (2019), Fick (2006), Gallier (2020), Jones (2016), Pezzutto (2019), Ryan (2019), Sloan & Wahab (2000), Teela (2016), and Tremblay (2021). This methodology has been successful in creating a deeper understanding in sex worker's reality and has helped create a discussion from the perspective of the sex workers themselves. Reaching out on sex worker's platforms however unfortunately tend to result in sex workers with positive outlook on their realities and work to only take part of these sorts of studies. It's been proven far more difficult to reach out to women working under force or socioeconomic pressure to willingly partake in studies about sex work. This makes a lot of interview-based studies lack credibility and it makes impossible for any conclusion and generalizations to be made because they are sometimes one-sided and narrow. Additionally, some research has been made on what the gigification of society entail for the future generations, and also how the internet and celebrity-influence has led to increased use of services promoted via them, such as OnlyFans. However, the previous research lacks analysis regarding what the emerging forms of sex work such as on OnlyFans means for women's freedom, and this is the academical gap this study aims to fill.

Women's emancipation is a multifaceted phenomenon. There are many different perspectives on the causes of women's oppression and, as a result, many different perspectives on what is required to end that oppression. To put it another way, the movement encompasses a broad range of perspectives on what it means to be a free person in social and political terms, and therefore diverse perspectives on what it means to be a free person. The liberal feminist tend to argue that sex-role stereotyping causes social and economic inequality, and that while it is perfectly fine for a woman to choose to be a housewife and mother and fulfill these traditional roles, she should not be actively excluded from other choices or alternatives because of her gender. According to liberals, women should have equal social, economic, political, and legal rights as men, as well as equal responsibilities. Women should be treated according to their abilities and performance, such as men, and not their gender (Law, 2019).

Whereas the liberal believes that changing the system can lead to freedom and liberation, the radical feminist believes that freedom can only be achieved by overthrowing the political

system. Women are oppressed by marriage, the state and the family as political entities. They, as well as the more blatant social and legal laws, must be abolished. Radical feminists argue that women's oppression cannot be resolved without the help of the abolishment of other oppressions. It's part of a kit that needs to be thrown away as a whole. Capitalism has provided a labor market which systematically disadvantages women. Money determines value and since women have an inferior status within the labor market, their work is considered valueless (Cohen, 2018, p. 722).

1.6 Background on Onlyfans

“I felt it was pretty good. Like an online strip club where you get to see pretty much whoever you want do whatever you want, within their limits and of course, for a price!”

- MrSelidor, 1 april 2021

“You sign up for X amount, only to find all the content is a pay wall. But the amounts are astronomical. 10\$+ for 1 picture? 100\$ for a video? That would definitely stop with a rating system”

- Onlyfanssuxx, 12 December 2020

“Onlyfans is a money grabbing tool for woman to scam us. Let them get real jobs forreal. Cause we ain't paying 250 a month just for some nudes”

- Nate Simpson, 7 November 2020

“I paid a girl on onlyfans \$100 to make a 15 mins custom video. Firstly she wouldn't send it until I renewed my membership which was running out that day. When she did send it, it was only 5 mins. I paid her for 15 mins but she only delivered 5mins. It feels like a scam and complete fraud and breach of contract”

- BR, 30 March 2021

“For \$20 I unlocked only 2 photos and they were just the same as what was already on the site – nothing hot at all... [...] Such a con”.

- Ian Sinclair, 20 March 2021

“[...] the girls are so slow at giving you anything you buy, if at all. Also words like ‘young’ and ‘pee’ are banned. This is insane. There does happen to be young ladies on there, whether they pee or not im not sure, but they do other things very explicit”.

- M jones, 24 February 2021

“Highest priced garbage I have ever paid for. Bcrispinofficial offers more on her Instagram which is free then what u get when u buy vids and pics that she charges insane prices for. I had to check it out because shes got this amazing booty and advertises pretty well but that’s all it is, a sales pitch for a product that doesn’t come close to expectation”.

- Ethan, 28 January 2021

These are some of the reviews OnlyFans has received on Trustpilot that were not related to technical issues such as payments and verifications. These reviews shed some light on what the platform offers and is used for. OnlyFans is a platform created by Tim Stokely in 2016. As the owner of several other soft-core cam websites, he created OnlyFans as way for celebrities and influencers, i.e. people with a fanbase, to post unfiltered explicit content that Instagram would not approve of because of their community guidelines. OnlyFans’ slogan is “Sign up to make money and interact with your fans!”. The content creator makes money because this platform is not free for the ‘fans’, but it’s based on a subscription-based model, and the platform takes a share of the profit. The subscribers are also able to tip the creators and therefore the content is personalized, sometimes to provide a so-called “girlfriend experience”. Brok states the platform has a worth of estimated 1.2 billion dollars (Brok, 2020).

The emerging of the gig economy has transformed many sectors of society. The gigification of society has normalized this method of making money as effective and even empowering. It is often portrayed as an easy and quick way to make money (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). However, sex work on Onlyfans is not as stigmatized as sex work on the streets, and this has a lot to do with the gig economy as mentioned, but it is also about social media and influencers being present on the platform, even marketing it as a safe and effective way, especially for women, to get economic independency and therefore power. The presence of celebrities and influencers has increased the popularity of the platform drastically. Tim Stokely, cited by Shaw, states “When Beyoncé rapped about us on the ‘Savage Remix’ and Cardi B joined the platform, that’s when we really started to see the growth accelerate,” (Shaw, 2020). Celebrities using OnlyFans as a platform to promote their other contents such as music, movies, art, and more, has led to an increase in women joining the platform as a way to make money and marketize their personas.

2. Theory

2.1 Liberal feminism

2.1.1 Safety

Liberal feminists value above all the liberty and the right to non-violability of the private live. This means that liberal feminists tend to take a stance against interference of contraceptives, abortion, sexuality, etc. This commitment to non-interference applies too on their stance on pornography and sex work. Liberal ideals such as freedom of expression and the right to privacy positions this feminist perspective as pro-pornography. Even though some proclaimed liberal feminists personally don’t conform to this stance, their theory does not suggest any political grounds for opposing pornography and sex work, unless the content of the pornography itself is a violation on the autonomy and agency of women’s individuality and bodies (Wendell, 1987, p. 81).

Mills believes that the notion that women are victims and exercise no power or freedom within patriarchy is especially dangerous when it comes to violence against women. Women who are abused and marginalized on a daily basis cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that they have some power, even if limited, over their lives. They can't afford to see themselves simply as 'victims,' because their existence is dependent on their continued use of whatever personal powers they have (Donner, 1993, p. 159).

Part of the liberally suggested solution or remedies for the violence or threat of violence against women is strengthening women’s agency and deconstructing the victim-mentality

which dulls women's ability of resistance. The liberal response to discrimination is often with suggestion on legal reform (Law, 2019, pp. 36-39).

2.1.2 Economy

S. A. Law states that the liberal ideology of the eighteenth century was dominated by the idea that the economic and political life of women were represented by their fathers or husbands. Law writes "The married woman was civilly dead, her legal identity merged into that of her husband. She could not sue, be sued, enter into contracts, make wills, keep her own earnings or control her own property" (Law, 2019, p. 26). In the eighteenth century, having political rights was a privilege that came with owning property; and because women were mere representations of their father or husband, they could not own property. They were therefore denied civil and political rights. Even though women did not have a public voice, there are documented acts of resistance and rebellion, theory building and a collective movement manifesting rights for the politically marginalized peoples (Ibid.).

The notion that women are not fitted for jobs or education held on even in on the twentieth century. Women were primarily seen as mothers and caretakers, and family law presented women as marital property. Law writes "Society failed to support the work of caring for the frail, both young and old, and instead expected that women bear the burden of this essential work, without recognition or compensation. All these forms of discrimination violated basic liberal norms of equality and liberty" (Law, 2019, p. 28).

The central challenge for gender, class, and racial equality is according to liberal theory disparities in economic opportunities. Women are systematically underpaid, and their work is undervalued based on their gender and not on their ability to perform.

On topics of economic equality and opportunity, feminism, like liberalism, lacks a central consensus stance. Feminism, like other social movements for exploited and marginalized peoples, such as movements for social justice, LGBTQ emancipation, and refugees, also focuses on questions of economic justice and aims to foster women's health. Law suggests that "The first thing we need is information ... It seems a tame thing to drop so suddenly from talk of revolutions to talk of statistics. But I believe in statistics just as firmly as I believe in revolution. This is classic liberal feminism. With respect to reproductive freedom, Eastman argued that there were two central 'facts of feminism': economic independence from men and birth control" (Law, 2019, p. 43).

Economic freedom, according to Follett, is the key to female empowerment. Instead of praising social justice reforms, the focus should be on achieving economic independence and fair pay for women; only then will social freedom and equality be achieved. The economy provides opportunities for personal growth and independence. Women have the ability to “rescue themselves” if only provided the economic ability to do so (Follett, 2017).

2.1.3 Agency

Liberal feminists don't argue against the differentiation of roles between men and women. In fact, some even claim that due to the nature of the sexes, they are meant to perform in different ways in society. Blackstone states that “Sex-differentiated labor, sex stereotyping, and the restriction of females in terms of opportunities and roles are not oppression but the fulfillment of women's nature and necessary for family and social cohesion” (Blackstone, 1975, p. 243). Liberal feminism argues that equality is found within these restrictions and they are not to be interfered with by the state. If a woman chooses to become a housewife, mother, or prostitute, and perform these roles, that is not something inherently sexist. What is sexist is the systematical exclusion from other alternatives or options based on her gender. Blackstone claims that liberal feminism essential belief is that “Women should have equal rights with men - social, economic, political, and legal - the liberal holds, and equal responsibilities. They should be judged as individuals and on the basis of their ability and performance - just as men” (Blackstone, 1975, p. 244).

Liberal feminist theory does not aim to abolish or dismantle traditional gender-roles for women or challenge traditional family values, but women should be able to choose not to perform those roles without repercussion. Liberal feminism does not advocate for the suppression or abolition of sexuality but argue that sexuality is a basic purpose for which social and political systems are devised; namely self-preservation and personal interests. Blackstone argues that instead of advocating for a desexualization of society, we have to focus on social and legal reforms to end gender discrimination (Blackstone, 1975, p. 247).

Wendell goes on to argue that “the preeminent value that ought to underlie the feminist movement is freedom, that is, self-development. This arises through the exercise of agency, that is, through the exercise of the human capacity of free choice, in forms of activity undertaken to realize one's purposes and to satisfy one's needs” (Wendell, 1987, p. 74). The key concepts of liberal feminism include individualization and freedom of choice; each

woman should be considered a being with agency capable of making her own choices that favors her own, personal life. This is essentially what can be defined as equality, according to liberal feminists. “The equal rights of women and men are thus grounded in the nature of human agency itself” (Ibid.).

2.2 Radical feminism

2.2.1 Safety

The radical feminist perspective on violence against women positions itself rather far from liberal feminist thoughts on the issue. While liberal feminism values the importance of legal reforms in the protection of women from gendered violence, radical feminists agree to some degree that the violation of women should have legal repercussions. However, radical feminists tend to indulge in an analysis that goes beyond what can be addressed by jurisdiction; namely the social and cultural ideas and norms which perpetuate violence. Andrea Dworkin claims that if we were to battle the issue of violence against women by changing or strengthening the jurisdiction, it would be entirely useless. She states in an interview “It is as if- I mean for us to sit here and talk about changes in the law, changes in this, changes in that, to me- and I do not make this analogy lightly, I make it with the utmost seriousness whether other people ultimately reject it or not- would be as if you and I were sitting as Jews in pre-Nazi Germany and the country was saturated with anti-Semitic literature and Jews were being beaten up on the streets and their shops were being broken into and you and I were sitting here talking about some improvements in some laws” (Wilson, 1982, p. 26).

Gender is, according to this feminist theory, a social construct, and how gender is construed and shaped is decided within our social context. Chambers refers to radical feminists Bourdieu and MacKinnon when stating the idea that gender is a conceptualization of symbolic violence where sexuality is the organizing principle; “[...] sexuality is characterized by the eroticization of male dominance and female submission” (Chambers, 2005, p. 329).

The patriarchal model of sexuality affects people's bodies, minds, and personalities. Sexuality is often profoundly hierarchical. The eroticization of hierarchy, according to MacKinnon, pervades patriarchy's sexuality and, moreover, describes patriarchy politically. Men's dominance over women is based on male sexual dominance. Power and sexuality are

inextricably linked, with “power structuring sexuality and sexuality reinforcing power” (Ibid.).

On this basis one could argue that the hierarchal structure of sex and sexuality is the root for fantasies and practices of rape, abuse, and violence. MacKinnon argues accordingly and assumes that “pleasure [is] the experience of power in its gendered form” (Chambers, 2005, p. 330). These gendered forms are ‘the active male’ and ‘the passive female’ and are representations of sexual desires.

Symbolic violence works through the method of norms of male domination and female subjugation. Symbolic violence is not performed so much physically as it is mentally. Because it is the norm, according to radical feminists, for men to dominate and women to be passive, it is also accepted and more importantly, consented to. Chambers writes “Gender inequality is symbolic violence because women (and men) comply willingly, with no need for coercion, and because its effect is to create symbolic normative images of ideal gendered behavior”. Sexuality cannot be freedom for women because patriarchy makes it impossible for us to discover out true desires outside of these symbolic normative images of sex. Following this argumentation, consent can never be true and fully expressed because we act according to the norms existing within society’s hierarchy and not according to our true wants and desires (Chambers, 2005, p. 330).

2.2.2 Economy

Cohen suggests that radical feminists political economy “offers a feminist perspective from which to critically examine capitalism and alternative modes of production” (Cohen, 2018, p. 716). Cohen introduces the idea of the process of social reproduction and the gendered work that implies, which is often overlooked in traditional Marxist and anti-capitalist theories. According to early feminist thought, what can be defined as a ‘productive sphere’ and a ‘reproductive sphere’ are not inseparable phenomenon but are intertwined and must be understood in relation to each other if we strive for a thorough understanding of the economy and women’s oppression (Ibid.).

To further position women’s opportunities of economic development, one could look further than marriage and childbirth – because there are women who want neither of these – and look within the labor market. Phillips and Taylor suggests that women are discriminated within the

work field in the sense that their work is more frequently considered unskilled than men, even though this bears little to no relation the actual amount of ability required. They state that “Skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias. The work of women is often deemed inferior simply because it is women who do it” (Phillips & Taylor, 1980, p. 79). Women are often forced to take part-time work because of childcare, and this sort of work is nearly always classified as unskilled. But regardless of home responsibilities and part-time positions, women are still considered unskilled in systematically larger instances than men, just because of gender. Phillips and Taylor argue that to deconstruct this problem, it is fundamental to question “the meaning of skill itself and the economic categories through which skill has been defined” (Phillips & Taylor, 1980, p. 80). Phillips and Taylor conclude that skill classifications such as feminine skills like dexterity and masculine skills as strength, are illuminating the “sexual hierarchy which permeates capitalism”. Working towards the economic freedom of women, Phillips and Taylor believe that it can only happen when “the socialist movement has been freed from its ideology of masculine skills that it will be able to confront the nature of capitalist work itself, and make the transformation of that work the focus of a future strategy”. Moreover, they state that “Perhaps then-in a struggle to claim for both men and women the lives now given over, day-by-day, year-by-year, to the crippling dictates of capitalist production- a new basis for sexual unity might begin to be forged” (Phillips & Taylor, 1980, p. 87).

2.2.3 Agency

Whereas the liberal believes that changing the system can lead to freedom, the radical feminist believes that freedom can only be achieved by overthrowing the political system. Some radical feminists argue that the state is at the center of oppression and perpetuates capitalism and the class system, and therefore it must be deconstructed and even abolished. Essentially what is argued it that the oppression of women is a system of marginalization that cannot be abolished alone, but the deconstruction of the state and capitalism will make the liberation of women possible. Some feminists do not agree with this economically oriented analysis and argue that gender oppression has been present since before capitalism. There is a level of reality that does not stem directly from economics. For feminist revolution we would need an analysis of the dynamics of sex war as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for economic revolution. For we are dealing with a larger problem, with an oppression that goes back beyond recorded history to the animal kingdom itself. For

Firestone, women can only be liberated if our biological differences are overcome, which happens through technology (Halbert, 2007, p. 118). For Dworkin, the answer is not so simple, in fact, we cannot even know what will ultimately bring our liberation and ensure our absolute freedom. In an interview, when asked about the possibilities of change, she states “I feel strongly that there is no way to begin to arrive at what must be revolutionary answers without in fact understanding the reality of the system, and I think that all the descriptions of it so far have essentially been apologies for it. They have been ways of saying, yes, it's painful in this way and it's painful in that way, but if we just move a little bit over here, we just do a little more there, we can get through. Now women have been remarkably resourceful in terms of individual survival, there's no doubt about that. But it's not what I'm talking about. [...] The question is: is it possible? and I'm saying that I think so, because I think – I think that the men have made a very big mistake. I think that in displaying to us the true opinion that they have of us and the actual content of their sexuality they have made an irreversible error” (Wilson, 1982, p. 28).

3 Method & Material

3.1 Method

The research problem introduced in this study is normative by its nature. It attempts to present a suggestion on whether the sex work on OnlyFans ought to exist within a society where the social and economic freedom of women is maximized. As shown above, two different theoretical frameworks have been considered to be able to present an answer that fit a larger theoretical span of interpretations on what women's social and economic freedom entails. Furthermore, three main factors which the analysis will be based on have been introduced in the theory. These factors are safety, economy, and agency, which are the three main points of interest within the feminist discourse on sex work. The method through which the research question will be investigated is argumentation analysis. In analyzing common arguments made regarding the sex work on OnlyFans in a factual and statistical manner, one can deconstruct the assumptions and arguments surrounding the issue. This research method furthermore also makes it possible to value sex worker's personal experiences (i.e., firsthand sources) as real and factual, while at the same time looking at statistics and studies made by researchers within the field. Using the logic of argumentation structure, one is easily able to methodically analyse the argumentation being used and discuss whether the argument holds. Aristotle argued, according to Liakopoulos,

that “the argument is as good as the reasoning behind it, and there are certain universal rules that can be used in assessing the logic of the argument” (Liakopoulos, M. p. 153).

3.2 Discussion of material

For this study, 33 sources of information have been considered. This chapter will present the different types of material that have been used and critically assess their weaknesses and strengths. This shows that the liability of the sources has been critically examined throughout the whole process of this study.

Regarding primary sources, reviews on OnlyFans on the site Trustpilot were examined and several examples of Fans’ reviews were included in the study as background information that would give some clarity on Fans’ appeal to the platform. They were both positive and negative reviews. These particular reviews were chosen because they were the most recent reviews that rated the contents of OnlyFans and not technical issues with the platform.

A few statistical sources were included in the study. Influencer Marketing presented some statistics on OnlyFans; user statistics, revenue, and profit. Additionally, Teela’s UK study on online sex workers was used to present statistics regarding sex worker’s experiences of safety in their work. These statistics were necessary for the analysis on the general experience and profit of the Creators on the app.

Generally, there was found to be a lack on statistical studies on online sex work, and especially on OnlyFans specifically. This study relied to a large extent on studies that methodically used interviews with sex workers to investigate the safety and agency of these subjects. The sources that included interviews in their study were Bays (2019), Fick (2006), Gallier (2020), Jones (2016), Pezzutto (2019), Ryan (2019), Sloan & Wahab (2000), Teela (2016), and Tremblay (2021). The strength with this method is that it provides an in-depth perspective on sex work from sex workers themselves, which increases the credibility of the source. However, it is often those who are more comfortable in their work that tend to participate in these studies, which may cause some biased results; but nevertheless, the conversations and interviews highlighted some issues and rewards with their work that could be applied, according to themselves, to most sex worker women. The interviews did not target a specific group of women, but some studies reported that the vast majority of their interview subject were white and therefore some intersectional perspective on race and class were possibly overlooked.

Some additional studies were used to present a theoretical framework in regard to the question on sex work. Literature from an interview with Andrea Dworkin were used, even though her thoughts do not target online sex work on OnlyFans specifically, her radical feminists thoughts were still applicable. Some studies examined the question of online sex work from several theoretical perspectives, which strengthened the objectivity and credibility of the sources. These studies were those made by Bays (2019), Chambers (2005), Jones (2016), Pezzutto (2019), Ryan (2019), Sloan & Wahab (2000), and Tremblay (2021). Some sources were argumentative in their nature and favored a certain theoretical view on the question. Arguing for a liberal feminist stance were the articles by Bracewell (2016), Donner (1993), Follett (2017), Law (2019), Nussbaum (1998), Blackstone (1975), and Wendell (1987). Arguing for a more radical feminist stance were the articles written by Bindel (2020), Cohen (2018), Dailymail (2020), Gallier (2020), Dworkin (1987) and Halbert (2007). Even though these favored a certain theory, they were used to present the respective theories argumentation regarding the research problems, which makes them credible for that specific use.

Lastly, articles explaining the development of the gig-economy and what this entails for the future of sex work have been considered. These were important in positioning OnlyFans as a platform that has changed people's view on work and money-earning. Adding the factor of influencers and celebrities presence on OnlyFans, these articles have added elements to the issue that have not been considered in other studies regarding online sex work. The articles written by Brok (2020), Longstaff (2020), Pezzutto (2019), Shaw (2020) and Roy & Shrivastava (2020) were used to discuss the gig-economy and sex work.

4 Analysis

4.1 Safety

Argument: "Onlyfans is safe platform for sex work because it is online-based".

The discussion on online adult content creation and what it entails for the safety of the women behind the service is not overlooked by feminist scholars. Positioning women's freedom within the adult content creation business requires some analysis on the objective safety the platform provides, but more importantly on whether the women *feel* safe using the platform. The term 'safety' in this situation can cover a lot of issues, but what has mostly

been discussed regards the safety from violence or threats of violence, and safety to personal integrity and autonomy.

Liberal feminism

According to Bracewell, liberal feminist and junior law professor Elena Kagan argues that pornography itself does not pose a threat on women's safety and autonomy, but at the same time she recognizes that some of the content of pornography are a threat of these, and even perpetuates and advocates violence against women. Instead of abolishing pornography altogether, Kagan argues for implementing jurisdiction aimed at violent or degrading pornography. This corresponds with the liberal feminist theory on how to secure the safety of women; through jurisdiction. Bracewell states "More specifically, [Kagan] called for stricter enforcement of existing hate-crimes laws as well as the enactment of new criminal prohibitions on both pornography whose production involved violence or coercion and certain kinds of harassment, threats, and intimidation" (Bracewell, 2016, p. 42). There have been safety issues regarding online sex work as seen in previous studies and interviews with online sex workers. Some scholars and researchers find a large number of safety-related issues within the adult content creation business. Bays finds that all of her interview subjects had struggled with customers in boundary-setting and distinguishing between their private or personal lives. Bays writes "As Ashley explained, "they don't understand that I am a living human being and I have boundaries; they don't believe that"". Customers will try to find out where they lived, according to some cam models. A few regulars, for example, threatened one of the women interviewed, saying they might "kidnap [her] at any moment" (Ibid.). Further on, Bays findings show that the camgirls had difficulties in keeping their own boundaries because of the financial pressure from the demanding customers. Some camgirls were persistently sticking up for their boundaries, but some had begun questioning if the money was worth doing something out of their comfort zone. Liberal feminist do not deny the challenges that online sex workers face regarding safety, but they believe in and advocate for stricter rules and laws to increase the safety for them.

Liberal feminists however further recognize that women themselves are not to be responsible for the violence that is perpetuated against them. There must exist remedies that give them justice and shows that violence against women is morally wrong. Liberal feminists thus

advocate for justice-through-jurisdiction theory and claim that stronger laws on violence against women will create a protection from it.

Radical feminism

Radical feminists do not disagree on the fact that violence against sex worker women need repercussion for the perpetrators, however they would argue that implementing jurisdiction on the issue would have no effect and the violence would still be occurring. Radical feminist As mentioned, Andrea Dworkin stated in an interview “I mean for us to sit here and talk about changes in the law [...] would be as if you and I were sitting as Jews in pre-Nazi Germany and the country was saturated with anti-Semitic literature and Jews were being beaten up on the streets and their shops were being broken into and you and I were sitting here talking about some improvements in some laws” (Wilson, 1982, p. 26). This quote frames the view that radical feminists don’t deem legal protection to make any real material difference for women in the protection of their safety.

Studies on adult content creation and camming have shown that women performing these services are, even though they are not meeting with clients in person, under threat of violence and stalking. In its Terms of Service, Onlyfans demands “Do not use OnlyFans to stalk, bully, abuse, harass, threaten or intimidate anyone else” (OnlyFans, 2021). In their Terms of Use they do not provide any support or compensation for the harm that the creators are subjected to – the platform merely bans the account that made the threat, no further consequences. Dailymail interviewed a 21-year old creator on Onlyfans who had been threatened on the platform by a Fan, and her private information had been leaked. The platform refused to take legal action or compensate for the harm that was caused on the creator. In the interview, she states “I’m hardly sleeping, eating, I’m crying and having severe panic attacks and I’m just absolutely destroyed mentally, physically and emotionally. I have all the evidence in the world and no one will help me” (Dailymail, 2020). Even in Jones’ study, online sex worker women experienced stalking and the threat of stalking. One of the interviewed stated “The safety threats that models can face, if that is in question here, are (to name a few) identity, location, security/safety, family safety, etc. There are a LOT of fucking lunatics out there and you never know who’s watching. An MFC member came to me last winter and showed me a screenshot they took of a model who was camming near their

window paired with Google Street view and Google Maps pins on the exact location of where that model was camming from due to the shape of the skyline behind her. He was proud that he had deduced the exact location, floor and side of the building the model lived in". Jones findings in her study show that online harassment is very common within the online content creation business, and even though most of the harassers can be blocked and reported, the "psychological harm it imposes on the sex worker is often still there" (Jones, 2016, p. 246).

Onlyfans quite recently had a large leak of content, the Spectator reports that "a 4 terabyte dump of videos and images was leaked online, primarily of women who use the site to share pornographic images. Rather than a hack, the leak seemed to be from OF customers accessing photos and videos individually, then sharing them with others and compiling them into a large file for free" (Bindel, 2020). Factually, it is evident that violence and threats are happening within Onlyfans, much like it does on other forms of online adult content creation platforms and camming websites. The argument that Onlyfans is a safe way to perform sex work is factually incorrect in the way that violence and threats occur even though the sex work is based online and not in person. It might be, to some degree, safer than street-based prostitution, but the threat still exists. What may be further discussed is to what degree female OnlyFans creators feel safe on the platform. No such studies have been made in the case of OnlyFans, however drawing on the parallel between OnlyFans and camming websites, harassment or leaking is a fear that a large proportion of female adult content creators experience. In a UK case study, 57% of the interviewed deemed their online sex work safe. Further statistics from the study showed that 47% have experienced harassment and other crimes against them (Teela Sanders, 2016, p. 9).

These findings show that Onlyfans lacks safety when it comes to

- Violence and harassment being reoccurring problems for content creators,
- Claim to be a safe platform for explicit content creation and not giving a proper warning on the risks included,
- Not offering any remedies or compensation for the women being violated or threatened nor providing legal help for their case, and
- Do not provide sufficient security to prevent leaking of content.

4.2 Economy

Argument: "Onlyfans provides a way for women to claim economic independence"

The concept of online adult content creation is not a new phenomenon. However, there are clear distinctions between camming and other forms of online sex work and that of Onlyfans. Gobinda Roy and Avinash K Shrivastava talk about the ‘gigification’ of society and the economy. Gig economy is a form of free market system which blurs the lines between being an employee and employer. Instead of being employed in the traditional sense of having union rights, a decided working schedule, and a manager to follow, individuals can freely provide gig services such as delivery (Foodora etc.), taxi services (Uber) and more via apps and platforms, without having a proper employment contract. It is often portrayed as an easy and quick way to make money (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020).

The emerging of the gig economy has transformed many sectors of society. Sex work has rarely never been a legitimate form of work with managers, set schedules, and contracts, but the gigification of society has normalized this method of making money as effective and even empowering. However, sex work on Onlyfans is not as stigmatized as sex work on the streets, and this has a lot to do with the gig economy as mentioned, but it is also about social media and influencers being present on the platform, even marketing is as a safe and effective way, especially for women, to get economic independency and therefore power. Longstaff summarized the phenomenon by stating “Onlyfans.com have enabled ‘ordinary’ subjects to assimilate and adapt elements of celebrity and pornographic representation in ways that have permitted them to explicitly and publicly present (and profit from) their private sexual persona. [...] Individuals create and sustain their individual profiles through boundless processes of self-branding, self-promoting, self-objectifying, and the self-management of their sexual personas as “an ideal typification of the neoliberal self, emphasizing how demotic neoliberalism, with the aid of celebrity role models instructs” not only their own, but also their viewers desires” (LONGSTAFF, 2020, p. 9).

OnlyFans is mostly beneficial to broadcasters who either have or may acquire a significant personal audience on social media—success is based on the ability to self-brand and spread the digital self. To help with this, the website is currently linked to Twitter and will be linked to other social media platforms soon, and updates will be retweeted. Everyday life is being pornographized in the sense that the proliferation of digital outlets for sharing and selling sexual content is part of a larger trend in which the sex industry has become more mainstream in Europe's economy and culture. This process has been seen as affecting both the scale of the

sex industry and its spread into other sectors of the economy. Onlyfans is a result of - and at the same time causes a development of - a rising gig-economy. The gig-economy could be seen as a developed form of neoliberal economy because it maximizes the priority of entrepreneurship and individuality, at least according to liberal thinkers such as liberal feminists. Local economies have been deregulated by neoliberal economic policies, which have favored entrepreneurship over individual responsibility and the free market. The use of sex to advertise and sell consumer goods has become commonplace across the economy, resulting in increased societal acceptance of the sex industry (Ryan, 2019, p. 121).

Liberal feminism

One Creator behind OnlyFans stated in an interview with Pezzutto “: The most empowering thing is that it’s no longer centralized. Being able to work on cam alone, on Onlyfans, and the idea you can shoot a video with one person and post across three platforms that make approximately the same amount of money... you couldn’t do that before where you had conglomerates and agents to go through. You couldn’t perform with a black man or a trans person before... but now performers can decide more what they want to do” (Pezzutto, 2019, p. 44).

Self-branding has become critical to success in the pornographic industry in a world where there is plenty of explicit content available online. Performers, like well-known corporate brands, often consider and discuss themselves as brands. A strong personal identity allows performers to stand out and be easily recognizable, allowing them to charge more through their different services, just like a well-known company would use its prestige to market a variety of products and services. You no longer have to create a brand; you are the brand (Ibid.).

For Liberal feminists, OnlyFans and the gig-market supporting the platform creates possibility for economic gain for individuals, as shown through the interview in Pezzutto’s study. Additionally, OnlyFans creates opportunities for entrepreneurship, where the workers themselves can decide on how much and when to work. This maximizes the individual freedom for women, and it ensures that women will not have to deal with otherwise regular work-based discrimination such as lower wages, devaluation, and sexual harassment (Ibid.).

Radical feminism

Platform labor can be described as the distribution of at-request sexual material on a platform: people sign up for a platform and are paid through the platform, which then acts as an intermediary. Workers on this site must understand self-branding activities in order to draw subscribers to their OnlyFans pages. On OnlyFans, the entertainers form themselves into a persona that is portrayed at the behest of someone else; their self-branding is caused by the possibility of making money, not by a genuine representation of the self. In the gig economy, without the promise of social benefits, an entertainer must play by OnlyFans' and its subscribers' ideals in order to make a living (Brok, 2020).

The argument that ordinary people have a great opportunity to make a living wage or above thanks to Onlyfans, is flawed because of the fact that it is those with an already large following base that get most of the attention and most of the money. As Brok puts it, “the Celebrities on OnlyFans simply get more traction” (Brok, 2020). Some scholars criticize OnlyFans for their system, where celebrities and influencers stand in the way for sex workers to earn money. In order for non-celebs to establish themselves on the platform and grow their page, they have to work almost around the clock and have a near perfect customer service, which includes agreeing to services that prioritize the customer satisfaction and not the will of the Creator themselves. This creates an unsafe and unhealthy workspace. Brok writes “With the platformisation of sex work, those who have the biggest follower base are the ones that are most successful on OnlyFans. It makes working for a platform that sounds accessible to anyone with the desire to distribute adult content, very inaccessible” (Ibid.).

Radical feminism criticizes the sex work industry for creating a commodification of the self which essentially alienates the worker, even more than in regular work. In Pezzutto’s study, one of the interviewed shared that “Well... it’s hard because you have to invest so much into your character and then it becomes a matter of remembering to turn it off. Like, for me, it can get hard cus I wake up and there’s shoot lights surrounding my bed for my webcam show. My bed is a set. It’s not somewhere where I instinctfully [sic] know that I’m gonna lay here and rest and catch a breath and stuff. That’s a work station and when you’re in a work station you are performing as your person. You are commodified” (Pezzutto, 2019, p. 49).

The argument that OnlyFans creates opportunities for significant economic gain for women can be somewhat disproven when looking at the statistical earnings for the average creator.

Statistics from Influencer Marketing Hub shows that the top 1 percent of OnlyFans creators make 30 percent of the earning of OnlyFans. The statistics further show that top 10 percent make 73 percent of the money (Influencer Marketing, 2021). This shows an incredible unequal market and weakens the argument that economic gain is a big opportunity on OnlyFans. Of course, there is still an opportunity to make it to the top earners, but as shown it often requires a large following base from the start, and marketing and technological skills that are not easily available to all sex workers. The statistics shows that most creators make less than \$145 a month, which is far below a livable wage and does not compensate for the amount of risk-taking, effort, and time it takes for most Creators on OnlyFans (Ibid.).

In conclusion, these facts resonate with the radical feminist perspective in that the sex work market on OnlyFans is not liberated but rather exploitative of the labor and bodily integrity of sex worker women. Even for liberal feminists, who advocate for the freedom of sex worker women, could criticize OnlyFans on the basis that it does not offer any economic benefits for the average individual sex worker but strengthen the already unequal sex work industry with the presence of celebrities and influencers on the market. Liberal feminists could further question the way the individuality of sex worker women is compromised and commodified on the platform, and where women are expected to compromise their individual boundaries and wills to cater to male-centered ideals of beauty and sexuality. Unfortunately, liberal feminists that have prominently advocated for OnlyFans and its ‘opportunities’ have missed some central theoretical points and ignored the statistics behind OnlyFans, which would have given the discussion more depth and better grasp the reality of sex worker women on OnlyFans. What can be concluded by deconstructing this argument is that

- The gig-economy serves a great disadvantage for sex workers working conditions and ability to organize
- There is an opportunity for economic success however it is very slim and the presence of celebrities and influencers on Onlyfans limits ordinary people’s chances of making livable earnings or earnings that match the effort and risk-taking included in the work.

4.3 Agency

Argument: “There is no free will in sex work”.

Liberal feminism

Regarding the transaction for sexual content or services, one of the pressing issues within both radical and liberal feminist thought has been about consent. Tremblay states that “Sexual consent, although extensively discussed, is “often ill-defined” (Tremblay, 2021, p. 3).

Tremblay argues for the notion of “affirmative sexual consent” which is a definition of consent that “is direct, unambiguous, and demands a constant confirmation that one clearly agrees on and repeats during the ongoing sexual act; further, consent can be revoked at any time” (Ibid.). Tremblay further acknowledges that the definition of consent becomes a gray-area when dealing with the question of trading money for sexual services.

Liberal feminism values the importance of the individual woman and her freedom of choice. If she chooses to sell sexual content or services, she does it out of her free will which under no circumstance should be questioned or intervened, because that would be a violation on the individuality of her personhood and in itself misogynistic. Consent, in a liberal feminist perspective, is boiled down to will and choice of what she wants to do with her body. An interviewed sex worker stated in Tremblay’s study “One side is willing to pay, and the other side is willing to sell. This is the deal between two persons. Other people should not involve and judge. The law should not intervene. Consent is, you know, what you are offering, and you are not forced to do anything. In the transaction, it includes what is being agreed, including the type of service, time. Selling sex does not mean the clients can do whatever they want. I may see if I am willing and able to do it. It is wrong to assume sex workers cannot consent” (Tremblay, 2021, p. 8).

Nussbaum states that “Bounding the prostitute off from the “good woman,” the wife whose sexuality is monogamous and aimed at reproduction, creates a system that maintains male control over female desire”. She argues that instead abolishing the sex trade and OnlyFans “What we should instead think about are ways to promote more control over choice of activities, more variety, and more general humanity in the types of work that are actually available to people with little education and few options. That would be a lot more helpful than removing one of the options they actually have” (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 290).

According to the liberal feminist perspective, sex work might even give more autonomy and power to the women performing it than regular heterosexual sex, because within a transaction there are clear lines of what is provided and where the boundary is drawn. Another interviewed sex worker in Tremblay’s study claims that “if a client doesn’t listen that would be a violation of my consent, only when I don’t tell them do I feel exploited or taken

advantage of. Thankfully all my clients have listened when I informed them that I didn't like something" (Tremblay, 2021, p. 9), however she further states that "I would have to say that thankfully [not stating my boundaries] isn't something I've struggled much with since going independent. But starting off with agencies where the review culture is very present you always feel like you need to live up to the standards the boards set. [. . .]. As in any type of labor, some days are more difficult than others. Fatigue may cause sex workers to take chances, transgress their own rules about consent and lose control of the situation." (Ibid.).

Considering the fact that many sex workers online are being coerced and pressured into services that they sometimes are not comfortable with, it might be difficult to sympathize with the view that sex workers are expressing their full consent when engaging in their work. This is where it becomes essential to listen to sex workers themselves and their thoughts and experiences with consent. The liberal feminist perspective show full support for the work itself and the women performing it, and often highlight sex worker's own thoughts on the matter. The liberal feminist stance is rooted in the sex worker movement for the realization of their agency and freedom, rather than the radical feminist perspective which claims that sex worker women are victims. that the claim that women are victims is a sexist claim in and of itself. Victimization should not be the basis on which women bond over their shared experiences. This leads to a problematic situation where women who do not share victim-mentality, but are rather asserting and self-affirming, are not welcome in feminist rooms and shun from engaging in the discussion on women's freedom. Mills writes ".... Ironically, the women who were most eager to be seen as 'victims' ... were more privileged and powerful than the vast majority of women in our society" (Donner, 1993, p. 159)

Radical feminism

For the radical feminist perspective, the sex work industry is a direct consequence of the patriarchy. Bays writes "Radical feminists argue that by purchasing commercial sex, men take advantage of the subordinate status of women, which include stereotypes of women as sexual objects, property, and servants of men". Women are not prostituted by nature, but as a result of the male domination over female sexuality. MacKinnon stated that "male force is romanticized, even sacralized, potentiated, and naturalized, by being submerged into sex itself" (Bays, 2019, p. 71).

Bays' findings in her study shows that sex worker women were more often than not pressured financially to agree to certain acts that they were not comfortable with in their camming. Bays states that "Customers, who would come to camming websites seeking to fulfill particular fantasies and fetishes oftentimes would not be satisfied with a "No" answer from a cam model because they seemed to be empowered by their paying ability. In pursuing their desire to see requested actions in a video show, some customers would offer alluringly high compensation on top of the official per-minute rates, pushing cam models outside of their comfort zone" (Bays, 2019, p. 45). What many of the sex workers try to do to get money and not lose a customer is to compromise on the question. Bays contests that it is vital for the sex workers to feel that they have a high sense of agency and power to turn down actions that they don't want to do and keep their boundaries. To prevent customers from taking advantage of sex workers in financial need, it is important to strengthen sex workers feelings of autonomy and self-empowerment to survive in the environment that they work in. One of the sex workers that Bays interviewed stated that "People have asked me to do a show that I was like: "Yeah, I guess I can do that," and then after I did the show I was like: "Yeah, I wasn't really into that; I didn't enjoy that." I don't know, you get to know yourself a lot better. But it certainly challenges every single aspect of what I am okay with. It took me some time to be able to say like: "No, I am not in the mood for that today, come back tomorrow, I just don't feel like it." And that's seems so simple, but it's easy to say "yes" when people are there with money" (Bays, 2019, p. 57). This shows that sex workers are often in the position to explore their boundaries and therefore also the possibility to stick strictly to those boundaries; but as this example shows, the harm of exploring those boundaries in a setting of performing and receiving money for the performance, it might not be that easy to resist and the psychological harm of performing sexually against your will is still left.

Thea de Gallier conducted an interview with female creators on Onlyfans, and even though it is a platform meant for online use only, these women were still pushed by customers to go beyond their boundaries and beyond their online platform. Gallier write in their reportage "Recalling the kind of messages she's received, Lauren says: "'Will you sleep with me, I'll give you five grand?' I'm just like, no.'" (Gallier, 2020). The demand on creators on Onlyfans to serve their fans according to their personal will is ingrained in the whole business idea of the platform. It is marketed as a means to personally connect to the influencers, celebrities and creators that you follow. In the terms of use of Onlyfans it is stated that "The Creator participating in the Fan/Creator Transaction agrees to make the Relevant Content available to

the Fan once the Fan has made the Fan Payment applicable to the Relevant Content” (OnlyFans, 2021). There are no rules which gives the creator freedom to change their mind regarding their content or length of the video. The platform’s priority seems to lay more with the customer satisfaction and less with the well-being and agency of the creators. As a result, Fans have issued several complaints to the platform that creators are scamming them or that there are false advertising. Looking at ‘BR’'s and “Ethan”'s reviews on Trustpilot, stated on Trustpilot, it becomes clear from these and the many similar reviews on Trustpilot that the persons buying these services deem the creator the service themselves, reducing the creator to a “product” showcases the objectification of women in that radical feminists have been trying to prove is the issue of sex work and prostitution. For radical feminists, consent not just about affirmative sexual consent but about critically analyzing the objectification and violence that women are passively coerced to consent to.

Without assuming that sex workers cannot consent because they are victims who are being paid, which some radical feminists argue, there is another element to the radical feminist discussion on consent that applies to this situation. That is that consent cannot only be reduced to a yes or no, even regarding trading money for certain services. Exploitation and violence may still occur within the act that were agreed upon, technically consented to, within the transaction, and these acts of violence and dominance is what radical feminist base their criticism on. There is still a power dynamic which makes men dominant and women passive, and this is often used by men to objectify women and dominate them. If we want to entirely deconstruct the issue of consent we should not only talk about affirmative sexual consent, a “yes”, but we have to deconstruct the acts within the sex itself. As proven, there are an overwhelming number of women that have been coerced or even groomed into complying to paying men’s desires. The dominance in the case of Onlyfans is their exploitation of women’s financial marginalization for their own sexual and gendered gain. This is what radical feminist base their victim-approach on. However, the liberal feminist perspective rejects this view of sex worker women on the basis that it is inherently sexist and denies the high sense of agency and self-affirmation that a lot of sex worker women have. Jones finds that “Moreover, the dangers of camming force these sex workers to develop an ethos of resiliency. Like many other subaltern groups, since they are constantly forced to advocate for themselves, they develop agency. They also gain autonomy because the website owners, who function largely as absentee landlords, “allow them” to control their own pages. This ethos of

resiliency allows webcam models to cope with the dangers of camming while still experiencing high levels of pleasure” (Jones, 2016, p. 250).

As stated, the radical feminist perspective highlights an important factor, and that is that consent does not explicitly cover a simple yes or no, because there is a gendered power dynamic in heterosexual sex which often allows for a man to dominate a more passive woman through a consent that is influenced by societal norms on sex. However, interviews with sex workers show that sex worker women are aware of these societal norms since it is the core of their work, and they have worked on setting boundaries and developing their agency. The interviews further show that they have been conditioned to develop a strong boundary-setting ability because of the coercive and exploitive conditions they perform within. This raises some further discussion on how many sex workers do develop this agency that some of the interviewed subjects have, and what harm has been done in the process of developing this sense of agency. For liberal feminism, advocating for safer and more empowering sex worker communities and having an increased social status will improve sex workers self-images and strengthen their agency and ability to stand up for their boundaries. For radical feminism, agency stand in direct contradiction with the existence of the sex work industry. They see the agency-development within sex workers as a result of, a way to survive, an exploitative and objectifying environment, not genuine empowerment through a safe way. What can be concluded by deconstructing this argument is that

- Coercion and financial pressure were common factors present when agreeing to sharing certain sexual content.
- Interviewed sex workers show that agreeing to share sexual content for a fee is a form of affirmative sexual consent
- Affirmative sexual consent misses the power structures such as coercion and social norms that are present in sex acts and sex work
- Non-paid casual heterosexual sex share the same gendered power structures, which showcases that the monetary exchange is not the cause of violence and coercion, even if it occurs more frequently in sex work, but an overall progress for safer and less violent sex should be the focus in both theoretical perspectives.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Results

This study has used a method of argumentation analysis to critically analyze some of the arguments made in relation to the sex work on OnlyFans. The theories liberal feminism and radical feminism and their standpoints in sex work and the gig-economy have been used to show differencing feminist views regarding whether the sex work on OnlyFans is compatible with women's social and economic freedom. To limit the scope of the study, the three main factors which have been discussed are issues relating to safety, economy, and agency. For clarification, this study will present two differencing conclusions; one for the liberal feminist perspective and one for the radical feminist perspective. There is not one general concept of women's social and economic freedom, and both theoretical perspective share different thoughts on what freedom for women entails. This makes it necessary to present two conclusions. However, the theories do share some common factors which will be discussed further in part 5.3.

Liberal feminism

In regard to safety against violence, threats, and stalking, liberal feminists see no issue in pornography and sex work in general. However, it is recognized within liberal feminism that some pornography and sex work contain violence and harm, and that many sex workers are subjected to threats and stalking that have serious consequences on their well-being.

Liberalism highlights the importance for women to make their own choices and recognize that they have the free will to perform sexually for money, and thus argue that feminism should focus on making these spaces safe for women to exist and do as they wish. What concerns liberal feminists in regard to OnlyFans specifically is that OnlyFans claims to be a safe space for all Creators and that they are protected by OnlyFans' security system, however the facts are that there still exists a large threat of stalking and harassment, leaking of contents and personal information has occurred, and OnlyFans does not take responsibility for these breaches nor offers any compensation for the women this has harmed. From a liberal feminist point of view, the safety of sex worker women on OnlyFans is very poor.

Moving on to economy, liberal feminists argue that one of the most important improvements for women's freedom regards the economy and the opportunity for economic independency. Liberal feminism positively welcomes a developing gig-economy and describes it as an

opportunity for women to earn money outside of the regular labor market. By being their own bosses, women on OnlyFans can freely choose their work hours and be independent of male coworkers and bosses. Even though it is only the top 10 creators on OnlyFans that receive a big amount of money for their work, there is still opportunity for all creators to make it that far. You are not dependent of a certain education or experience to be able to grow your page, even though it requires some marketing skills. Liberal feminists view positively the economic freedom women are offered to develop with OnlyFans.

Finally, regarding agency and the freedom of will, liberal feminists do not question the will of the sex workers providing certain services on OnlyFans but highlight cases of sex workers that show a strong sense of resilience and a high sense of autonomy. Liberal feminists highlight the fact that the tough conditions that sex worker women work under allow them to develop resistance that empowers them to stick up for their boundaries. Interviewed sex workers contend that agreeing to performing sexually for money is a type of consent and that claiming that sex workers cannot consent is false. The findings of this study shows that liberal feminism embraces OnlyFans as a productive way to willfully perform sexually and gaining both an economic advantage at the same time as developing strong agency and individual resilience.

To answer the research question from a liberal feminist point of view, one can conclude that OnlyFans offers positive opportunities for women's social and economic freedom. Even though the platform needs more regulation and protection on the safety of the Creators on OnlyFans, this does not stand in the way for the sex worker women on the platform to stand up for their standards and ideals. It is nevertheless needed for sex worker women to be able to rely on the platform to offer them a safe space to perform, and remedies if their freedom is not respected. What the platform does offer is a possible way for all women, regardless of background and education, to make money out of their content and their creativity. Liberal feminists would generally argue that the sex work on OnlyFans could be, and in a lot of instances is, compatible with women's social and economic freedom.

Radical feminism

Radical feminists entire critique on sex work and pornography lies on the topic of safety from violence and harassment. For radical feminists, the safety-related issues that were found regarding OnlyFans and other types of sex work, is not a consequence of an unsafe workspace for sex worker, but the violence and harassment that they are subjected to is what the business was built on. The sex trade is a symptom of a gender hierarchy where men are dominating women through objectification and sexual violence, through the sex trade. Radical feminists highlights the stalking, harassment, and violence that all sex workers are victims off and argue that no woman is safe under sex work. According to the radical feminist perspective, OnlyFans cannot be compatible with women's right to safety; and not because the platform lacks security systems or lacks in protecting the creators, but because the sex work industry itself can never be safe as long as men can pay women for sexual services that they never would have provided otherwise.

In regard to economy, radical feminists worry about the dangers sex workers are put in during the process of building a flawless personal brand of themselves. The fact that the Creators on OnlyFans are dependent on perfect customer service to attract subscribers that will support them under a consistent time, means that the sex workers might feel pressured into supplying the demand for certain content to earn their money. The fact that celebrities and influencers marketize OnlyFans and the commodification of itself as a productive and empowering way to make money is heavily criticized by radical feminists. They highlight the unequal earning rate on OnlyFans and the fact that the average sex worker on OnlyFans makes less than \$145 a month, arguing that this does not make up for the extent of the commodification sex worker women are put through. According to the radical feminist perspective, OnlyFans is not compatible with women's economic freedom.

Moving on to agency and free will, radical feminists argue that no sex worker woman is doing sex work out of free will but they are forced into that position because of the gender hierarchy. Radical feminists argue that the constant coercion and financial pressure that sex worker women are subjected to hinders them from performing under true willfulness, but they constantly have to challenge their own boundaries and commit to services they are not comfortable with to comply with customers demand. Radical feminists essentially believes that as long as we live under a gender hierarchy, OnlyFans cannot be compatible with women's agency and free will.

The general conclusion that can be drawn is that liberal feminists believe that OnlyFans can be compatible with women's social and economic freedom, but that sex worker women need more protection from the threats of violence and leaking of material. They also need legal implications for violence that they may be subjected to. Radical feminists however believe that the gender hierarchy and the norms of men as sexually dominant and women as passive hinders OnlyFans from ever being compatible with women's social freedom, and it creates highly unsafe conditions that laws and rules cannot reduce. Furthermore, they highlight the fact that the earning rate on OnlyFans is very unequal and most sex worker women receive very little for what they are offering.

5.2 Possible objections

The biggest obstacle in providing an answer to the research question "Is the sex work on OnlyFans compatible with women's social and economic freedom?" was the lack of information on OnlyFans specifically and the experiences of the sex worker women on the platform. Parallels between OnlyFans and other types of sex work, mostly camming, has therefore been applied to provide an answer. Even though scholars agree that these different platforms share the same issues that have been discussed, one has to recognize that the analysis is a rough generalization of a quite big issue. The results may show a lack of depth and intersectionality, which was due to the lack of information related to OnlyFans specifically.

5.3 Discussion of the results

This study shows that in many cases, the ability to create sexual content on Onlyfans is an option that women should not be deprived of. However, this study shows that for both feminist perspectives, criticism can be made on the basis that OnlyFans is argued to be the most empowering or most beneficial option for labor, as opposed to a labor market that systematically discriminate women on their skills and bodily integrity. Liberal feminism values above all the freedom of choice and the availability of options for women. Liberal feminism would stand in support of a platform such as OnlyFans on the premise that women at the same time are not forced to resolve to that kind of sexual labor but are also afforded options for other form of labor. Liberalism sees little to no issue on the economic opportunities on OnlyFans but embraces it as a potential for bigger economic gain and thus source of empowerment for women. Radical feminism criticizes the unequal earnings the

presence of celebrities and influencers on the platform has created. Radical feminists heavily criticize the influence this has on non-famous women, especially those under financial pressure that need quick money, the socioeconomic group of labourers that the gig-economy targets. Radical feminism deems the existence of the sex market as the most absolute form of patriarchy and violence against women and does under no circumstance accept its existence. While both of these perspectives give very differencing options for women's freedom and have their different views on what that entails, they share the same fundamental view that women have to be liberated and have to be free. Both theories argue that no woman should be forced into prostitution. As the study has shown, OnlyFans show strong tendencies of unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, little economic gain, and the wills and boundaries of the Creators themselves are constantly devalued. OnlyFans takes no responsibility on what their Creators are exposed to, does not present any form of protection or remedies for those their system has failed. What liberal and radical feminists share in this question is a desire for a safe space for sex worker women to share their experiences and support each other. Even though radical feminists wish to, "rescuing" unwilling sex workers from the outside is very difficult and is more often than not resulting in a stigma that only further devalued the agency of the sex workers. The shared thought and goal to strengthen women's position in society and within themselves should, according to sex workers themselves, start with believing and supporting sex workers – not by claiming that what they are subjected to is in any way a desirable or empowering form of labor for all women – but by engage in non-judgmental conversation and encouraging them to stand for their own ideals. It starts somewhere at making sure that they are afforded other options. By analyzing the arguments from both a liberal and radical feminist perspective, it becomes apparent that you can criticize the political and above all economic system which forces women into positions that should not have been that obvious, without making judgements and assumptions on their lived realities and wills.

5.4 Further research

Positioning women's freedom within the context of sex work and OnlyFans more specifically requires a lot of additional research. Being able to read first-hand sources of sex workers themselves is necessary if one wishes to entirely deconstruct what sense of freedom OnlyFans can offer. Some further suggestions include topics and factors that were not within the scope of the paper but would be of interest within the same research problem. These are

issues regarding grooming of (famous) children online, beauty ideals, exotification, and more. These factors would propose an even more critical stance on the issue of OnlyFans. The findings of these studies can be applied on research regarding both the future of sex work and what the gig-economy entails for women's opportunity for work. Regarding the theoretical framework, the shared goal for the feminist theories is the liberation of all women. Although the perspectives ended up in different standpoints, they shared in identifying some common factors that they deemed necessary in fulfilling women social and economic freedom. To fully engage with the topic on freedom for all women, some intersectional theories would be needed which were not included within the scope of this thesis.

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