

'I'm in a Very Safe Place': Webcam Sex Workers in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Their Perceptions of Danger and Risk

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Abstract : Sex work is a contested subject in academia. Many authors now argue that the practice should be recognized as a legitimate and rationally chosen form of labor, and that decriminalization is necessary to ensure the safety of sex workers and reduce their stigmatization. However, a prevailing argument remains that the work is inherently violent and oppressive and that all sex workers are directly or indirectly coerced into participating in the industry. This argument has been complicated by the recent proliferation of computer-mediated technologies that allow people to conduct sex work without the need to be physically co-present with customers or pimps. One example of this is the practice of 'camming', wherein 'webcam models' stream themselves stripping and/or performing autoerotic stimulation in an online chat-room for payment. In this presentation, interviews with eight 'camgirls' (aged 22-34) will be discussed. Their talk has been analyzed using Foucauldian discourse analysis, focusing on common discursive threads in relation to the work and their subjectivities. It was found that the participants demonstrated appreciation for the lack of physical danger they were in, but emphasized the unique and significant dangers of online-based sex work (their images and videos being recorded and shared without their consent, for example). Participants also argued that their largest concerns were based around stigma, which they claimed remained prevalent despite the decriminalized legal model in Aotearoa/New Zealand (which has been in place for over 14 years). Overall, this project seeks to challenge commonplace academic approaches to sex work, adding further research to support sex workers' rights and highlighting new issues to consider in a digital environment.

Keywords : camming, sex work, stigma, risk

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