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"Lost Forever in Time": Narratives of Desire, Auras of Authenticity, and the Embodied Costs of (Queer) Porn Work on Twitter and OnlyFans

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Abstract

This digital ethnography observes and analyzes the experiences of gay/bi men who identify as "content creators" on Twitter and OnlyFans. In what I argue can be called a *scattered personal public*, these men negotiate internal desires and external expectations to produce "raw" or "authentic" sexually explicit material (SEM) in a community on Twitter colloquially known as "Spicy" Gay Twitter. Generally driven to this virtual space in hopes of organically being "seen" or feeling "found", content creators in fact must master a variety of techniques to curate appropriately engaging content. Eventually transforming their profiles into commodified, promotional exhibits which guide their audience from a scattered personal public (Spicy Gay Twitter) to an exclusive, subscription-based service site (OnlyFans), this content must feel both genuine *and* marketable. Obscured by auras of "authenticity" which in part drew them to this scattered personal public in the first place, these laborious techniques result in a number of embodied costs for the creators-turned-curators featured herein.

Introduction

Within and outside of academia, people think of Twitter as both a social networking site (SNS) *and* a social media site (SMS), where individuals, organizations, or institutions use the platform intending to build and sustain digital "communities", create and manage parasocial relationships, or disseminate and consume information on a broader scale. Where these intentions coalesce Twitter becomes a nested series of what Jan-Hinrik Schmidt (2014) calls "personal publics"—the complicated, overlapping, virtual equivalents of physical public spaces, wherein people engage with and produce content they consider personally relevant to them or their "followers" (their digital audience or network). This ethnography concerns itself with one of those personal publics colloquially known as "Spicy" Gay Twitter, a "scattered" but distinct space characterized primarily by its circulation of "spicy" content. What makes content "spicy" is its inflection of polyvocal desire, often represented visually in the form of sexually explicit material (SEM); what makes Spicy Gay Twitter "scattered" are the messy social networks figured around this content. Traceable only through "love-energy...as a system in action" (Hocquenghem 1993), these communities are impossible to pin down, not sedimented in any fixed, exclusive center but instead woven through dynamic flows of presumably "raw", ephemeral intimacy.

In contrast, OnlyFans is a subscription-based SNS/SMS which is, as the name suggests, "only" for one's "fans"—individuals "follow" an OnlyFans content creator by paying a monthly subscription fee, which then grants them exclusive access to that creator's posts for the duration of the subscription. While not primarily intended for SEM, OnlyFans has become one of the most popular—if not *the* most popular—platforms for individuals producing SEM to monetize, or charge for, this content. Some scholars attribute its rise in popularity to the COVID-19

pandemic and subsequent global lockdowns (Cardoso and Scarcelli 2021); news sources

documented this trend quite well, noting that in 2020, transactions on the site exceeded $2.4

billion (a seven-fold increase) among over 120 million users (Cooban 2021). Although the

majority of the income generated on the platform is related to SEM or "amateur" porn, OnlyFans

does not allow, nor does it choose to promote, any of its SEM creators on the website's home

page. Thus, most SEM creators on OnlyFans almost always maintain an additional profile on

Twitter because, compared to other platforms of its kind, it is one of the last SNS/SMS whose

terms and conditions do not completely censor the circulation of SEM or pornographic content

for its users, affording individuals the opportunity to freely promote their OnlyFans.

Twitter stands as a particularity in this way after the U.S. Congress passed the "Stop

Enabling Sex Traffickers Act" (SESTA) and the "Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act" (FOSTA) in

2018. Most other websites—including Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram, and Craigslist, which were,

prior to these laws, also popular virtual spaces with similarly spicy personal publics—quickly

began censoring SEM. This is because SESTA-FOSTA amended Section 230 of the

Communications Decency Act of 1996, effectively meaning that online "providers" (i.e.

Craigslist) could now be held legally responsible for the "illicit" content shared on their

platforms (i.e. classifieds marketing prostitution services). Though having rarely actually

resulted in the prosecution of sex-traffickers, SESTA-FOSTA have, in their "lack of judicial

interpretation...[and] lack of clarity" (Albert et al. 2020) instead forced SEM creators to wrestle

with increasingly precarious discourses of criminalization and threats of prosecution. As most

sites updated their terms of service and wiped or purged their platforms of sexual content,

Twitter remained significantly less strict than other platforms, and became the "place" to which

these digital "refugees" (a term commonly used in men's biographies on the platform) migrated to advertise their OnlyFans without potential legal repercussions.

What is fascinating about this relationship between Twitter and OnlyFans is that none of the gay/bi men I interviewed in this research mark their path towards monetization as entirely intentional. Of course, the content one *creates* is extremely intentional, but there is a greater sense of having stumbled into porn work. Most of my interlocutors, for example, identified the importance of queer connection or intimacy online before they did the financial benefits of what they typically called a "passive income". Though obviously *not* passive—creating SEM, as I have experienced firsthand, is incredibly exhausting and invasive *labor*—in constructing it as such there is a performance of distance. These acts of distancing reflect the various forms of stigma, distress, or embarrassment that accompany taking up labels like "porn worker"; they also reflect the assumption that content on Twitter or OnlyFans is more "authentic" than SEM on other platforms. Those who participated in this research had complicated associations with the terms "sex worker" or "porn worker", and generally relied on the phrase "content creator" to describe what they do. For this reason I have chosen to theorize from this label as well, as it represents the unique relationships creators have with their work, reflective generally of what defines Spicy Gay Twitter as a scattered personal public in first place, rather than just a marketplace in which people buy and sell goods.

But this ethnography is not one of a category—it is one of a process. This I mean in three ways: how gay/bi men stumble into porn work after reportedly using Twitter like a "digital diary"; how they negotiate the curation of their content as they eventually transform these "diaries" into promotional, museum-like "exhibits"; and finally, how they themselves describe changing after having "opened" these exhibits, commodifying or objectifying their intimate

senses of self and sexuality, are its ultimate concerns. As such, this research traces the contours

of these processes, highlighting the complex paradigmatic intersections of digital desires,

physical or affective labors, and relational marketizations required in the act of (virtually) selling

one's body. I argue it is under a guise of liberatory self-expression that these men decide to

become content creators, strategically leveraging their physical bodies in a scattered personal

public replete with promises of sexual connection and creative opportunity. The inescapable yet

illusory aura of authenticity, which here demands an *opening*, is not just taxing but taxable;

individuals transform "deeper", private selves into fetishized public goods, their literal bodies

curated, abstracted artifacts which are advertised, purchased, and owned. The consequences of

these transformations, though deceptively digital, are *real*, and content creators pay a price of

their own in the act of "doing" OnlyFans. In these ways this research contributes to the broader

theoretical conversations involving porn work, digital intimacies, and authenticity writ large.

Porn Work, Digital Intimacies, and Authenticity

Scholarly attention directed towards pornography is not new; many theoretical

perspectives, including but not limited to anthropology, sociology, and a variety of feminisms,

have taken up pornography as a means through which to study gender, sexuality, personhood,

and more. Aside from acknowledging its history as an object of intense, contentious analysis,

this article does not seek to trace the genealogy of debate surrounding pornography (see Nguyen

2019 or Berg 2021 for a comprehensive historical account). It also does not attempt to offer a

resolution to these arguments that pornography is *either* "good" or "bad", but instead relies on

Kendrick's (1996) description of pornography as "a thought structure". To consider porn as a

thought structure is to consider the process of marking an aesthetic or symbol *pornographic* as

maintaining an interest in particular forms of knowledge production, an attempt to "control the

circulation of knowledge and culture" which shifts from place to place (McKee, Byron, Litsou & Ingham 2019). In the context of Spicy Gay Twitter, this definition, as a starting point, illuminates the complexity of platform affordances creators and consumers of SEM negotiate in virtual spaces where the body and sexuality are an increasingly commodified self-representation upon (and through) which relationships are established.

A variety of literatures engaging porn work have tended to emphasize the affordances of digital platforms and the ways in which digital technologies have provided access to more agency and independence in the production of SEM as a form of labor (Berg 2021; Nguyen 2019; Pezzutto 2019; van der negel 2021; Wang 2021). Prior to this work, feminist sociologists in particular have relied on Carole Vance's (1984) pleasure/danger framework in their intellectual pursuits; Angela Jones (2016; 2020), for example, has conducted extensive research with webcam models and demonstrated the forms of both pleasure (i.e. one's relationship to orgasm) and danger (i.e. they face threats of "doxing", or having their private physical locations revealed publicly online) women manage in their experiences as porn workers. Critically, this work shifted narratives away from reductive binary oppositions of oppression and empowerment. Nguyen (2019) then attempted to move beyond this pleasure/danger paradigm toward what she names an "affordance/risk" framework—calling attention to the opportunities for accessibility because of, as well as the increased dependence on in using, digital platforms in the gig economy. Interested as well in how these platforms' affordances contribute to "networked intimacy" more broadly, or what has otherwise been referred to contentiously as "liquid love" (Bauman 2003; Tarkowski 2006), this ethnography stresses the role that digital platforms play as *intermediaries* (Best 2019; Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber 2017) in the (parasocial) relationships SEM creators form with each other and with their followers on Spicy Gay Twitter and OnlyFans.

Though obviously inseparable from the labor involved, gay/bi men report the significance of authentic community, raw intimacy, and sexual self-expression which motivated their entering Spicy Gay Twitter in the first place. These stories—which do not fit neatly into a pleasure/danger framework or an affordance/risk framework—instead point to the ways by which digital platforms function as new types of scattered personal publics throughout which the queer experience manifests. But they also demonstrate how Twitter socializes what Hogan (2010) calls an "exhibitionist" approach to social media, and what Heather Berg (2017; 2021) calls the logics of a "performance of authenticity". The exhibitionist approach, which insists that individuals necessarily *curate* rather than perform as in the traditional, Goffmanian social situation, helps to explain the way "digital diaries" become "exhibits" in this ethnography. The particular brand of authenticity at stake here is typically associated with what Josie Reade (2020) names "rawness", or the desire to see and be seen online as vulnerable, relatable, and literally "unfiltered". A few other scholars have begun to theorize the inculcation of these logics in queer virtual spaces specifically (Cao 2022; Pezzutto 2019; Ryan 2019; Wang 2021), but these processes often remain shrouded by the auras of authenticity which dominate most of SEM on social media. As that which must remain hidden in order to preserve the artifactual attraction of a creator's content, the dramaturgical tensions of what is publicly curated yet privately produced are at the heart of this ethnographic work.

It is interesting to note here that most research considering emerging forms of porn work emphasize women's roles in the laborious production of SEM and men's roles as the consumers of SEM (Cardoso and Scarcelli 2019; Jones 2016; Jones 2020; Paasonen 2011; Rouse & Salter 2021; van der negel 2021), while scholarship questioning broader modes of digital intimacy and self-representation online often involve queer populations—specifically gay/bi men (Cao 2022;

Dunn 2019; Hobbs, Owen, & Gerber 2017; Ryan 2019; Wang 2021). Yet, research that observes the relationship *between* online sex work and specifically queer forms of digital intimacy itself is sparce (see Logan 2010 or Ryan 2019 as exceptions). This may be because the majority of online sex work involves women-as-SEM-creators (Cunningham et al. 2018), while mobile dating apps and social media sites, since their design, have been crucial for the gay/bi community in negotiating intimacies, finding available sexual partners, and constructing presumably authentic senses of self. Participants of this project, for example (all of whom were between the ages of 21 and 35), referenced their engagement with virtual spaces as gay/bi men somewhat timelessly, as if using a variety of digital technologies to form these scattered, but meaningful relationships, is and always had been a part of being gay/bi. These sentiments reflect unique relationships to digital worlds of intimacy and pornography that remain under-studied; in this way, gay/bi men represent a novel sociological "case study" through which existing theory can expand.

Paul Ryan's (2019) work is perhaps the most comprehensive exception to this aforementioned gap in the existing sociological literature. His research centers primarily on how men use both Instagram (a social media app) and Grindr (a dating and "hookup" app for men who have sex with men); he understands self-representations of the former as more "permanent" sexual biographies used to advertise one's sexual services, the latter as more "transient" projections malleable across contextualities. His study, which does engage critical theoretical concepts with which this article is ultimately concerned, requires further development here. Namely, his attention to Giddens's (1991; 1992) "reflexive project of the self", whereby the body transmits a sense of identity, but also must be sculpted through a habitualized "performance of authenticity" (Berg 2017; 2021) which then marks it with a particular symbolic value (Bourdieu 1986), is especially salient. But his work, published in March 2019, predates the COVID-19

pandemic as well as many of Instagram's stricter "Terms and Conditions" which limit the production and advertising of SEM, motivated in part by SESTA-FOSTA. While he speaks briefly of OnlyFans and its relationship to Instagram and Twitter—the platform had emerged in the midst of his research—Ryan (2019) notes that it was at the time "too early to predict" the kind of impact OnlyFans would have on "porn work".

The most relevant research here concerning OnlyFans in particular is written by Cardoso and Scarcelli (2021), who interviewed women identifying as amateur porn workers. Most importantly, their study examines the ways that these women "carry with them the full weight of the word 'work'": while "[they] are preparing (themselves as) content to upload on OnlyFans", they are at once participating in forms of self-objectification, self-commodification, *and* self-reflexivity (70). This assumption, which is not a juxtaposition of good and bad, pleasure and danger, or affordance and risk, is truly what Jones (2016) calls a "polymorphous paradigm" in that it allows us to understand digital bodies and selves as layered, negotiated, and shifting. This is not to say that these bodies and selves are unstable, but instead that they are always *on the move*, forced to keep pace with the rapidly changing digital environments in which they are situated. This framing is helpful especially insofar as it illuminates some of the techniques individuals use to prepare and curate these layered bodies, which this ethnography also does. Still, Cardoso and Scarcelli (2021) fail to capture the dynamism of this unfolding as they rely exclusively on interview material, privy only to the way people have felt after-the-fact, rather than how they transform in the midst of doing it, and it is from here I depart from their research.

Research Design

In this research I have located Spicy Gay Twitter as a site of ethnographic and interview-based analysis. Twitter is especially unique in that its content is not exclusively or even

predominantly pornographic in scope—it is designed, rather, as a tool for broader connectivity, and there exists a kind of infinite opportunity to engage with *any* sociocultural milieu. Porn workers and creators of SEM on Twitter consistently take advantage of this atmosphere to establish more developed senses of self by posting about "backstage" interests not directly related to their sexual image (Goffman 1959; Wang 2021). These particular interactions can help solidify one's sexual self-representation: tweets about a workout in the gym may bolster a man's presupposed role as a "jock" in the gay community; a cover photo of Guts from *Berserk* may capture an audience who likes Anime while doubly signaling the importance of an ideal male body; or a profile picture including a drawing of one's favorite Pokémon standing alongside him may indicate he is a "gaymer" which attracts followers who resonate with a kind of "geeky" nostalgia.

Consequently, this article takes up Mario Small's (2009) approach to ethnographic and interview-based research wherein gay/bi men who identify as content creators on Twitter and OnlyFans represent a unique case study. Case studies benefit from ethnographic work in that they present the opportunity to reveal "truly emergent knowledge", while a process of sequential interviewing treats each "case" (or interlocutor) as providing "an increasingly accurate understanding of the question at hand" (24-25). Furthermore, this ethnography takes seriously the assertion that "the operant capacity to feel, think, and act like a Whatever among the Whatevers" is a worthy criterion by which we can judge our social scientific work, another way to know that it has in fact been "scientific" enough (Wacquant 2015). This study is not, in this way, attempting to be statistically representative or generalizable, and Twitter is therefore a fitting site for digital ethnographic work. The space is "rich" and "thick": virtual selves are meaningfully created, centering the masculine body as a site of (re)negotiation; maintained

through virtual social norms or community-wide "best practices"; and interacted with (*liked*, retweeted, commented on), both glorified (toward mystical fetish) and reified (to mere commodity, marketed and sold). And while it seems like every gay/bi person knows a guy who knows a guy who "does OnlyFans" or "has a Twitter" (Wang 2021), and the small population of male content creators on OnlyFans overwhelmingly identify as gay/bi (Cunningham et al. 2017), these particular cases remain understudied. Paired with in-depth, sequential interviews, these approaches more adequately illuminate how or why gay/bi men involve themselves in these spaces, naming exactly what is at stake in a line of work which is at once both precarious and fulfilling.

Methodology

Most studies which have engaged forms of amateur porn work on Twitter and OnlyFans have relied on a variety of qualitative methods, but predominantly forms of digital content analysis (Rouse & Salter 2021; van der Negel 2021; Wang 2021) or demographic and attitudinal surveys (Cunningham et al. 2017; Litam, Speciale, & Balkin 2021; Rouse & Salter 2021). This thesis instead draws on ethnographic and interview data collected over the course of two years, and with a total of 12 cisgender, gay/bi men, from January 2021 to March 2023. Relatively little data on Twitter and OnlyFans as scattered personal publics involve ethnographic and interview-based methods (see Cardoso & Scarcelli 2021, Pezzutto 2019 or Ryan 2019 as exceptions). Save for Angela Jones' *Camming* (2020), to my knowledge no other scholars have engaged in these digital pornographic landscapes as *active* participants. Most identify as "lurkers", which means they observe the spaces anonymously. Being an active participant—involved in what Schilt and Forberg (forthcoming) describe as a consistent "negotiation of ethnographic co-presence"—was crucial in not just revealing but *experiencing* the processes to which my informants alluded.

Developed as a tool originally by the discipline of virtual anthropology (Boellstorff et al. 2012), digital ethnography has, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, become an increasingly relevant method for qualitative sociologists interested in digital communities, virtual worlds, and "life" online in the quotidian sense (Forberg and Schilt, forthcoming). Still, what makes digital ethnography *ethnographic* is complicated, not least because the ethnographic method is traditionally about "being somewhere" physically, in order to unearth latent (micro-)cultural assumptions and otherwise contradictory patterns between what people say and do. It classically involves the ritualistic jotting-down of "field notes" as an entire world of "others"—including the mundane, as much as, if not more than, the exceptional—is opened to observation and interpretive analysis. The question thus becomes: how does one conduct an ethnography online, when digital platforms may disrupt the fixity of person in time and space, lack the same opportunities to observe the spoken and embodied word, or are populated with anonymous or potentially "fake" profiles and avatars? These concerns are reasonable, and digital ethnography is not a perfect method fit for every "case" we study. Still, as I argue, its emphasis on participant observation and "doing" in the virtual field has strengthened this research. Below, I clarify what in fact makes my research ethnographic in the first place.

In January 2021, I made a new public Twitter account with the intention of building and maintaining a presence on Spicy Gay Twitter. This account included no personally identifiable information—I did not, like some creators, attach my age, location, or full name to my profile. Additionally, I deactivated or made private my other personal social media accounts, including Twitter and Instagram, in order to reduce the chance that anyone would recognize me across accounts and platforms. Quite aware of the stigma that many people confront as a result of their producing SEM, I chose to erect strict boundaries between what I originally considered my

"real" and "pornographic" selves. It is because of this stigma also that I worked on establishing and maintaining what Joshua Bluteau (2019) has called a sense of "immersive cohabitation" in these spaces over such a long period of time; I knew that it would be more difficult for me to build trust with my participants if I was not at least a recognizable face. Thus, I have used the platform daily for over two years, posting, liking, messaging, retweeting, or sometimes simply observing. My identity as a researcher has remained covert and I am choosing to conceal my public profile in this research, both to protect my own identity in this space (I do not want the 77,000 people who follow me to potentially know where I live and study) as well as the participants with whom I worked (a number of people have explicitly expressed anxieties about their profiles being associated with myself and this thesis). Creating SEM is exhausting, invasive, and potentially dangerous; shielding myself, and more significantly, all those who were gracious enough to collaborate with me in this research, is of the utmost concern.

Importantly, I have never chosen to monetize my content, nor have I had sexual relationships with any of those who collaborated in this research. While I would not say I "do" porn, my work is still what Loïc Wacquant (2015), Randol Contreras (2015), or Kimberly Hoang (2018) would call "carnal" or "enactive" forms of ethnography, in that it takes the body, and habitus, as both an object *and* method of analysis. There were times, for example, when I thought the profile I had created was *becoming* me; I felt addicted to the rush of posting, attached deeply to the persona I originally considered a playfully affected self-representation. Thus, refraining from monetizing my content was more than a linguistic distancing from a potentially stigmatizing identity: it was a meaningful and intentional decision with which I managed to stay "grounded" in the field, especially as I began to transform in unexpected ways. What Hoang (2015) names the "embodied cost of ethnography" is of great relevance here, though as I will

contend, this experience is perhaps better illuminated by my interlocutors who shared similar stories about the sometimes terrifying sense disillusionment with which they continue to reckon in their work.

The 12 men with whom I collaborated also rely on a variety of labels to describe themselves, but are best understood in relation to me in this project as "mutuals"—a term used to describe online connections that are somewhat akin to acquaintances or friendships but are predicated primarily on the notion that two or more people are mutually following one another on a given platform. The fact that my participants are mutuals is of methodological import, as it is only by being mutuals that one can send or receive direct messages that are guaranteed to be visible in someone's inbox on Twitter (other messages get filed away into an "unread" folder which is commonly ignored). The term mutual also typically implies that one mutual has never met the other in person, though this is not true for all of my interlocutors with whom I conducted an interview; I was able to conduct four in person. These in-person interviews were conducted in coffee shops or in my participants' homes, and the rest I conducted virtually by Zoom. I began by interviewing three people with whom I had grown close, and from there was connected to a broader network of content creators who eventually became mutuals through a process of snowball sampling (Small 2009). I conducted all interviews between December 2022 to March 2023. I recorded the audio of each after receiving informed consent, transcribed them, and coded them thematically to find threads of connection through their stories. I have replaced each individual's name with a pseudonym, and have chosen not to include any information in this article that could be traceable to their online presences.

This thesis is ultimately limited by its methodological approaches insofar as neither snowball sampling nor ethnographic observations allow us to generalize or "objectively" gather

bias-free data; in the context of this research especially, my physicality and sexuality are inescapable pieces of my subjectivity. Additionally, these methods lack the benefit of quantitative analyses, which may tell us more about the standard demographics (age, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status, etc.) of gay/bi SEM creator-curators, and these data are also very much needed. However, this ethnography does not seek to generalize—it operates under the assumption that gay/bi men involved as SEM creator-curators on Twitter and OnlyFans are a unique case study through which we can unearth something novel about the process of entering, navigating, and negotiating senses of self and sexuality in these spaces. Furthermore, I take my subjectivity seriously here, as it is in fact constitutes the very foundation of the stories I can tell (Maxwell 2005). Having participated in these scattered personal publics over a period of two years myself lends a particularly unique edge to the project: many of the questions I was able to ask, or even think of asking, were informed by my own experience as a gay man caught up in a web of affective negotiations, embodied traumas, and transformations of self at large which have fundamentally changed the ways I and my interlocutors move through both physical and virtual worlds.

Narratives of Desire: Being Seen and Feeling Found through the "Digital Diary"

My very first informant, Kit, in recounting their[1] relationships with their social media platforms, immediately described Twitter as a "digital diary". The platform was, in their words, an opportunity for (sexual) self-expression, a virtual place replete with queer people and likeminded kinksters where one could project deeper, more intimate "truths" into the "void". The potential for authentic connections—to followers and fellow content creators with whom these

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[1] This gender-neutral language reflects Kit's shift in gender identity since the time of our interview and the time of writing this thesis. Since our interview, Kit has "come out" publicly, on Twitter, as gender-queer and gender-fluid; they use and accept all pronouns (including he or him), but I rely on they, them, and their here to distinguish and respect their current self-representation.

truths might resonate—were of the utmost importance to them. The possibility of monetization through OnlyFans, they say, came naturally, an eventual outgrowth of the community they had worked so hard to create and strengthen. "For those [of us] who live in more rural areas especially," they told me, "these spaces are...really important." This emphasis on intimacy, authenticity, and community I had seen myself in their tweets over the year we followed each other, some of which invited others to virtually play videogames together or presented close-up images of their "breakdowns", where it was not their sexualized body on display but instead their reddened, swollen, glistening eyes. Presumably, these images revealed a private, but more earnestly affective, raw sense of self one traditionally might not share with a public audience. As I will argue, essences of the raw and authentic embedded in Kit's narrative are crucial for content creators on Spicy Gay Twitter but are themselves eventually complicated by the nature of a publicly accessible digital diary that, in order to fulfill its purpose, others must "read".

Though not all of my participants described their Twitter or OnlyFans platforms as digital diaries, this particular example is still emblematic of a larger sentiment expressed by nearly everyone with whom I worked: that their entry into this scattered personal public reflected broader desires of queer connection, sexual self-expression, or "validation" of something otherwise latent. Tony, for example, first made an account on Reddit—another SNS/SMS where pornography and SEM are also popular because of its more lenient terms and conditions—to help himself embrace a kink for small penis humiliation (SPH) before his followers requested he create a Twitter and OnlyFans. Kai, similarly, began posting about Furry[2] content, memes, and videogames until he was virtually "scouted" to model for underwear and eventually shoot studio

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[2] The Furry Fandom, and those who identify as "Furry" are deeply interested in anthropomorphized animal characters who ultimately reflect broader aspects of "self". These characters are often referred to as "Fursonas"; the community exists primarily online, though there are many in-person events (mostly conventions, or "cons") individuals attend. See Dunn (2019) for a more detailed account.

porn; he now shoots his work independently full-time. Alex started creating SEM on Tumblr as a way to build confidence in and explore more "creatively" his body prior to deciding (at an online friend's suggestion) he could expand into Twitter and OnlyFans. Each of these brief stories speak to the myriad motivations which brought these individuals into their respective virtual spaces; importantly, none identify monetization as their primary or initial decision to participate in these digital environments.

In the context of this research about a scattered personal public, it is no surprise that most literature on digital intimacy engages the queer community. Alex eventually told me that the some of the relationships he had made online became "even a little more fulfilling" than people he could "regularly see in person". Similarly, Jason, another participant, told me that his Twitter profile was especially useful for him as a kind of tool with which he could validate his own body and sexuality, and consequently his greater sense of self, when he did not initially feel comfortable seeking out experiences in person. It functioned for him as a diary that, when read by others, allowed him "to be seen". And another of my interlocutors, Joey—who is, I should note, the least likely among my participants to ever describe Spicy Gay Twitter as a "digital diary" because he claimed to have made a Twitter primarily for the money—still beautifully articulated his desire to "find" and be "found" on Twitter in the following way:

> I feel like gay people are—and just queer people in general—I think are lost forever, just in time...like, we'll always be trying to find meaning that just won't—I think we'll get shreds of it. That's really philosophical, but I think...I think that's a lot of "gay thirst". Twitter has to do with people trying to prove who they are and that they're desirable and, in some ways, it was really gratifying at the beginning to be like, 'Oh, people are taking notice and complimenting me,' and things like that...And I think that's where a lot of it comes from, immediately but also deep down. It's definitely—I think people want to feel...*found*. And I don't know, it's very loaded. People want to feel loved. And I guess this is just another way to do that.

Thus, Spicy Gay Twitter specifically appears to become a substitute or supplement for otherwise uncomfortable (or unavailable) physical spaces, a safer way, as Jason and Joey remarked, to satisfy a yearning to "be seen" and "feel found". Unlike Grindr (Ryan 2019), for example, which organizes profiles by distance and proximity to the user, Twitter as a platform is not inherently designed for physically meeting up or hooking up; in fact, as I observed, there are countless "Spaces" (virtual voice-chat rooms on Twitter, populated with "listeners" and "speakers", but no live video) in which individuals would often engage collective fantasizing and mutual masturbation. While the majority of Spaces I entered *were* being used for self-pleasure, I was still surprised to find that many were intended to strengthen their respective digital communities in addition to sex, too. The same individuals or groups of men I observed fantasizing with each other one night might also "host" these Spaces another with the desire to make friends or "catch up" with mutuals; recap and joyously discuss episodes of their favorite television series; or provide collaborative educational workshops about how one can be successful "doing" OnlyFans. Anybody can join these Spaces, and one is identifiable within them by profile picture and username, both of which link to one's full Twitter profile (see Figure 1 below).

Spaces are, in this way, representative most broadly of an individual's desire to "be seen" (like Jason says) or "feel found" (as Joey describes), as well as of the kind of virtual scattering that uniquely defines Spicy Gay Twitter. But they are, too, emblematic of what Josie Reade (2020) calls the importance of consuming or producing raw content on social media platforms. I consider Spaces raw because they are literally "unfiltered"; groups of individuals engage in (sexual) social situations in real-time, without the chance to labor over selecting the perfect picture or caption. These situations are often emergent, fleeting, and serendipitous, and outside of the context of this research, would remain impermanent or otherwise unnoteworthy. They

mirror casual physical encounters whereby friends might bump into one another on the street and chat for a while, or where gay men cruise[3] for some "no-strings-attached fun". And it is precisely because of their rawness that Spaces remain important tools with which people establish the kinds of intimacy and connection they so often spoke to in my interviews; as perhaps the most conducive to authentic interactions on the platform, Spaces are a poignant example of the way that gay/bi men allow others to read their accounts—or their "digital diaries"—on Spicy Gay Twitter.

Figure 1. Screenshot of a typical Twitter Space. Host, Speakers, and Listeners are underlined. All profile names are blocked out; profile pictures featuring participants of this research or more explicit imagery are blurred.

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[3] The act of "cruising" refers to the practice of seeking out casual, random, or sometimes totally anonymous sex, often in public places like parks, beaches, or steam rooms.

But how else do people feel found or, as Joey additionally claims, "prove who they are"? Because traditional diaries are private, and these digital diaries are public, what more is at stake in the act of reading or being read—of proving or having proved? What becomes of the diary when its original intention as a tool—used for sexual self-expression, revelatory self-exploration, or as a means through which authentic connections are built—is commodified? These questions require complicated answers, and by no means does this ethnography purport to resolve them in their entirety. Yet feeling found implies being seen, and to be seen (or read), one must create content; Spaces on Spicy Gay Twitter, while strong examples of narrativized desires for the raw, are alone not sufficient in capturing the plethora of techniques gay/bi men use to feel seen or found. They must, in other ways, fill their diaries with content, and it is this very *need* to create for an audience that complicates the concept of a visible digital diary. Especially for those who monetize their content (which all of my interlocutors eventually did), maintaining this digital diary becomes an elaborate negotiation between self-representation and audience, necessarily requiring a manufacturing, a production, as content is continuously put on display out of what Tony once called an "overwhelming need to post". No longer just a series of spontaneous reflections of otherwise internal musings, the profile-as-diary becomes a perusable *object*, the content creator doubling as a *content curator*. I turn now to a more thorough investigation of this process, whereby the creator-curator must engage a variety of techniques in order to transform this diary into a promotional "exhibit" while still preserving its presumed artifactual "authenticity".

Narratives in Conflict: Techniques of Curation and Auras of Authenticity

The sheer intensity of energy one applies throughout the process of creating and curating content for a (relevant) Twitter profile—especially one that links to an OnlyFans—often remains

obscured by the aura of authenticity which inflects a creator-curator's desired and projected self-representation. In fact a mode of labor, this energy manifests in what I call *techniques of curation*; these are the myriad methods by which a creator-curator deliberately produces SEM and transforms their profile from a digital diary to an interactive, museum-like exhibit. Complicating narrativized desires for the presupposed raw and authentic, these "exhibits" also advertise: creator-curators' posts are effortfully dug up, laboriously polished, and carefully tended to, meant to eventually direct their audience of followers from a scattered personal public (Spicy Gay Twitter) to an exclusive, subscription-based platform (OnlyFans). This section, which attempts to reveal the deeply embodied labors of content curation, traces the contours of several highly ritualistic processes whereby these techniques are rendered visible. It illustrates how content creator-curators successfully manage to convince an audience to move from one platform to the next as they negotiate seemingly contradictory internal motivations (as discussed in the previous section) and external expectations to produce content that is at once authentic *and* marketable.

A creator-curator's labor often begins with a conscientious preparation of the body and environment for photographic preservation and capture. Other scholars have paid attention to this particular process of production in porn work (Berg 2021; Cardoso and Scarcelli 2021); here I intend to buttress this existing data by highlighting the ritualistic specificity involved in these techniques. Below is a composite story which reveals the intricacies of such embodied labors involved in a "typical" creation process:

> Connor returns home from the gym at 7:30PM after a brutal leg day; his muscles are totally cooked, worked to 'failure' and already beginning to ache. Hot and sweaty from his workout, he makes it to his room flushed and panting. After struggling to peel the shirt off his clammy back he glances in the mirror. *Damn, I look good*, he thinks. A smile touches his lips: it is golden hour, after all, the light spilling into his bedroom in just the right way, accentuating the curve of his ass, the thin layer of sweat on his skin glowing. He has been

meaning to post a few pictures to tease his new video on OnlyFans; suddenly, now feels like the perfect time to take them. Quickly, knowing he only has about 45 more minutes to spare—soon his 'pump' from the gym will fade, and the sun will set—he sets up his laptop's webcam on the bedside table and reaches into his basket of jockstraps and thongs. He changes into one that is uncomfortably tight (*In what world is this thing an XL?* he wonders), but he readies a 10 second timer on Photobooth anyway and hops onto the edge of the bed. Instinctively, he assumes position: knees splayed to make his ass look even bigger, back arched to reveal the waistband of the jockstrap over the crest of his cheeks, fists driven into the mattress to widen his back and engage his shoulders. The motions come easy to him, without much thought; he has done this countless times before. Four seconds left on the timer and he twists his head to the left—his good side, that he knows—while inhaling, puffing out his chest. With two seconds left on the timer he releases the breath but continues to hold his shoulders high, pursing his lips and furrowing his brows. He looks back as if there is someone in the room with him, and as if, in this moment, he is experiencing pure, unbridled ecstasy. The camera clicks; he slips off the bed, covered in a new layer of fresh sweat. He glances at the image on his computer briefly—*could be better*. He readies the camera again at a slightly different angle, assumes position once more, captures another picture. This process he repeats over the next hour, and by the time he finishes, his knees burn, his wrists ache, his head is pounding. He collapses back onto the bed. There is work yet still: he now has 300 photos to sift through.

As a composite story, these data are neither unique to, nor are they totalizing of, any single informant's relationship to Twitter, OnlyFans, or SEM. An enmeshment of a variety of experiences articulated by my interlocutors and informed by my own carnal ethnographic participation, they reveal the aura of authentic spontaneity as well as the aspects of a skilled and practiced performance which are, not in spite of but *because of* the frictions they produce, central to a curation process. In this example, the photos "Connor" (a composite interlocutor) captures are, of course, *real*, and they are, too, raw—in the sense that they present a fleeting, "unfiltered" moment in time marked by a mixture of bodily fatigue and seductive confidence—but they are not produced unintentionally or purely for the sake of sexual self-expression. They are at once a form of self-preservation (Connor captures a series of images to feel "found" or "prove", as Joey might say, his raw self is in fact desirable) *and* an advertisement (Connor promotes the sale of his body as an abstracted, objectified possession, to his audience). The process of creation is ritualistic, the movements ingrained as layers of sedimented knowledge within and throughout

his body as a kind of erotic habitus: he has *mastered* a variety of techniques, including that of producing seemingly found footage through the use of a low-resolution webcam; highlighting his best angles and muscular features as he positions and poses appropriately; and even the art of capitalizing on serendipity as his gym "pump" and golden hour coalesce to create an environment fit for documenting the body-as-is.

But content creators also employ multitudinous techniques of curation after they have captured these images—this is Connor's work yet still—and it is in this labor that gay/bi men transform their digital diaries into promotional, but still seemingly authentic, exhibits. Doubling as curators, individuals manage, care for, and organize collections of tens of thousands of images which feature or front the body. Paul Ryan (2019) has discussed this phenomenon as his participants built "curated lives" on Instagram and Grindr to advertise their services. In my research, creator-curators become experts at using photo-editing software and apps like Facetune to crop, blur, or stretch photos; writing an image or video's accompanying caption, crafting intimate but promotional descriptions for the content posted; displaying or re-organizing their exhibits by "pinning", "quote-tweeting", or "re-tweeting" content to re-direct an audience's attention so it does not ever feel "stale"[4]; or using art programs, some involving Artificial Intelligence (AI), to convert existing photos into more authentic pieces of art that fuse uniquely digital or algorithmic media with the body (see Figure 2 below). Twitter and OnlyFans as platforms uniquely complicate some of these techniques about which Ryan has also written, specifically because they are nested as scattered personal publics and because many creator-

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[4] "Pinning", "quote-tweeting", or "re-tweeting" are built-in platform affordances offered to any Twitter user. They refer to the ways by which people move particular content to the top of a profile or display another creator's content on their own "feed", respectively. Importantly, they prevent (as Rob, another informant of mine told me) content from appearing "stale", by breaking up what might otherwise look like too much of the same because of certain poses, rooms, etc. in which a body is featured. They also allow creator-curator's to share and promote one another's content; as techniques, they mimic virtually the curation and organization of physical objects in a space.

curators produce "solo" content that does not require physically connecting with "clients", fans, or followers. It is even common for Twitter and OnlyFans content creator-curators—especially those with monogamous partners—to publicly clarify they are *not* on "the apps" like Grindr.

Figure 2. *SEM fused with original, digital art. Credit: @QuimeraVermelha on Twitter; not a participant in this research.*

Yet, a discussion of content curation remains insufficient without investigating how else a profile functions as an exhibit in addition to a digital diary. For it is also in the way individuals virtually navigate and interact with another content creator-curator's profile that this metaphor crystallizes: a potential follower, for example, scrolls through an account like one might meander through a museum. Using our fingers to swipe through a creator-curator's gallery of images, videos, and GIFs mirrors walking through an exhibit's collection of carefully selected art;

pausing to pinch the screen and zoom in on an image mirrors physically stepping up, peering

through the glass, getting closer to the artifact of interest; and "liking" specific posts mirrors

what we might literally say or think about the pieces by which we are figuratively touched. If

curated successfully, by the end of such an interactive experience we, as followers, are directed

someplace else, where we can then purchase replicas of the *things* themselves. In a traditional

sense (at a museum, for example), these places are called gift shops; for content creator-curators

on Spicy Gay Twitter, this "place" is called OnlyFans. Typically directed by a "link in bio", if a

creator-curator's content sufficiently "resonates", described Dylan, one may decide to click or

tap that link and subscribe to an individual's content.

As I have argued, transforming a digital diary into an interactive exhibit is deliberate,

thoughtful, and laborious—but these intentions are often obscured by narrativized desires (and

expectations) for raw or authentic content. Manifesting in what I call *techniques curation*, these

labors reveal themselves in the ritualistic and highly skilled processes of producing, editing, and

organizing SEM. But what happens, then, to content creator-curators themselves as they continue

to engage these various techniques? What happens *after* one transforms their digital diary into a

museum-like exhibit—when the body as a form of self-representation is abstracted into a

commodified, possessable object? Caught up in a web of affective negotiations and relational

marketizations, creator-curators in this research relay a variety of contradictory stories about

these happenings. Still, threaded through them all, as I will show, are narratives of embodied

costs: people change fundamentally, and in a lasting way, the longer they create and curate. I

tend now to these stories in order to understand more concretely the ways that my informants'

relationships with their own senses of self and sexuality have transformed as a direct

consequence of creating, curating, and commodifying the SEM they produce, or the kinds of prices *they* pay "doing" an OnlyFans.

The Price of "Doing" OnlyFans: Misrecognition, Desensitization, and Bodily Distortion

"Have you ever looked at a picture of yourself," I asked Joey, "and not recognized it—as yourself?" The thought occurred to me somewhat distantly in the midst of our discussion about the creation of his OnlyFans, but suddenly felt pressing when he paused, waiting for the next interview prompt.

"All the time," he said matter-of-factly. "I...don't know who this other person is anymore, honestly." A soft silence collapsed in on us both, palpable even through our respective monitors; I began to tear up. Joey's answer was profoundly resonant, and I had not expected to feel so immediately flayed open. But such is the nature of a response which speaks to a deeply personal and perhaps self-indulgent question: I know now that I had asked, in hindsight, not because it was particularly relevant to the conversation at hand, but because it was something I myself had been struggling to reconcile at the time. This was, in truth, not the first or the last instance in which my own ethnographic experiences as a content creator-curator motivated my "going off script". Personally, I found these instances beautiful and productive gifts of the ethnographic method.

Nevertheless, this brief conversation illustrates a crucial affective dilemma to which several of my informants alluded. Content creator-curators who produce SEM may confront negative feelings of disgust or self-loss as frequently as they embrace positive feelings that accompany being seen or feeling found. At once familiar and strange, an individual's projected sexual self-representation—however authentic it may or may not appear—can generate a sense of the uncanny. This broader sentiment is not necessarily unusual in contemporary digital spaces

(which ubiquitously demand, for example, the "selfie"), but it is uniquely experienced as one effectively opens their literal body to logics of commodification or marketization. Others in this project, for example, describe having become desensitized to particular sexual pleasures or struggling with extreme feelings of bodily distortion the longer they do Twitter and OnlyFans. That which was once important to reveal as authentic in the digital diary begins to lose its potentially liberatory *power* as followers or mutuals become fans. Serialized in the form of images and videos, creator-curators' bodies become artifactual objects to which these (paying) fans establish a sense of ownership; this ownership creates an inescapable relationship dynamic that has important implications for creator-curators of all kinds, but especially those who produce SEM. While this section does not gesture to any totalizing psychological theories from the data provided, it does attempt to earnestly and sensitively represent the stories so graciously shared with me.

Tony, introduced earlier in this thesis as someone who originally began posting SEM on Reddit to embrace and enjoy a kink for small penis humiliation (SPH), eventually made a Twitter and OnlyFans as his profiles grew in popularity. In a discussion about how his relationship with these platforms has changed since he began, Tony shared with me the following:

> I will say that the...the taboo of it, is fading fast. So like—there's a lot of messages that I get that...I mean, I'm getting less and less humiliated by it by the second. So it's kind of fading in my mind because I'm doing it on such a such a large platform, so I'm getting inundated with these messages. And it's desensitizing me to the actual fetish. I felt like it—but it's too—I guess it's too much attention to that kink, it kind of fades, it loses its *power*, I guess, over time. I still like it. And I'll still do it and I still want content of it out there...

Paradoxically, as Tony's fetish for SPH marries a sense of embarrassment with sexual pleasure, to have grown more comfortable in his sexuality and body as a result of sharing this kink—to be "less and less humiliated by it"—has in fact reduced the pleasure he experiences *from* this fetish. As a result, Tony went on to say:

> I think it [OnlyFans] has helped me to grow a lot in my confidence to the point where
> exhibition has become more of a fetish than the humiliation part of it. So I think, I think
> doing this has got me to—the emerging kink is exhibition. So now I feel very comfortable
> being nude in public spaces and around other people...So a lot of it—doing the kink, having
> an OnlyFans, has expanded my confidence in the bedroom, and thus, I can explore more
> kinks, with more sex, than I would have before.

Interestingly, Tony describes that in the growing desensitization to his fetish for SPH, a kink for

exhibition *emerges*, and this instead has become a more important part of his sex life. At once

distanced from, and closer to, his own sexuality while producing SEM on Twitter and OnlyFans,

Tony reports a transformation in the way he experiences life within and without the bedroom.

Neither an indubitably positive nor a completely negative change, there is nonetheless here a

change.

Jason, on the other hand, has had a similarly ambivalent journey with SEM on Twitter

and OnlyFans but a much more extreme drift from an effusive sense of confidence to what he

himself has referred to as "body dysmorphia"[5]. Originally, in our first interview, Jason was

relatively insistent that any of the downsides—in the form of negative self-talk or "nasty" direct

messages with rude comments about his body—of having a Twitter or OnlyFans were

overshadowed by the positive, or sexually fulfilling, upsides. In this conversation, he explained:

> I do that thing where I take a bunch of pictures, and I'm like, 'Gross, gross, gross, gross,
> gross' [pretends to be swiping on his phone], 'Oh, wait, that one looks kind of okay.
> Favorite.' [Pretends to swipe again] 'Gross, gross, gross, gross, gross.' You know? And
> everybody goes through that...Nobody looks great from every angle all the time...and in a
> way, that's sort of liberating to me. You can tailor certain angles and things like that, but
> it's not the whole picture.

When I pressed him further on whether or not he receives negative responses from any of his

followers and how this might affect the way he sees himself in these pictures, he continued:

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[5] As stated, this thesis does not seek to engage the "body dysmorphia" to which Jason refers as a pathological
ascription of "body dysmorphic disorder" in the psychiatric or psychotherapeutic sense. This language comes from
our interviews and conversations.

> I mean, I am kinky, so a lot of times there's the kind of, like, *sexy* aspect of dehumanizing. I do kind of, like, tone out the 'objectifying-in-a-bad-way' kind of content, so from what I actually pay attention to—*positive*. I'm sure it's there but I just scroll past it; I block it out of my mind, because like, I know...I have worth outside of the content that I make. Some people think they're owed your time. I don't owe anybody my time. I'm just fucking on the internet.

Since this interview, Jason has become my barber and I have seen him a handful of times for a haircut and beard trim or to grab dinner; I was lucky enough to be able to conduct the interview with him in person and establish a strong friendship. When we see each other we spend our time catching up, sharing stories about our work and gossiping about our (lack of) love lives. Over time, Jason's attitudes towards Twitter and OnlyFans in these conversations has changed dramatically.

While he managed complicated feelings about his SEM before, but still emphasized the "liberating" or "sexy" aspects of his experiences, Jason now tends to stress, almost exclusively, the suffering it brings. Most recently, he told me while cutting my hair that "If I look too long at other people on there [Twitter], I start to spiral. It's *bad*. I want to be them—I feel fucking small—and it makes me fucking hate myself." When I saw him this particular night I could see before he even mentioned it that he had started on a cycle of Trenbolone; his shoulders looked like they had exploded in size. Having become increasingly invested in amateur bodybuilding since we first met, this was not the first time Jason had tried cycling with a new performance-enhancing drug. It was also not the first time that he claimed his relationship with his body had deteriorated or explicitly linked that deterioration to Twitter or OnlyFans. Seriously affected by the other men he follows and the pressure he feels from his audience to continue putting out more content, Jason appears to be confronting, now more than ever, the embodied costs of doing OnlyFans. Intense feelings he associates with "body dysmorphia", which for him are tied to

creating and curating SEM, have developed over time and are in fact presently defining of the way he relates to his body, sexuality, and self.

Each of these vignettes from Joey, Tony, and Jason, while extremely brief and distinctively ambivalent, begin to illuminate processes of transformation inevitably involved in the act of virtually selling one's body. Uncanny experiences of self-misrecognition, blunted (and burgeoning) relationships with sexual pleasure, or heightened feelings of bodily distortion are but a few examples of the extremely complex dispositions through which content creator-curators negotiate senses of self and sexuality. Often articulated with direct references to their profiles on Twitter and OnlyFans, participants of this ethnography describe having transformed in deeply personal ways: at the interstices of narrativized desires for raw and authentic, but still commodified, marketized content, emerges the creator-curator anew. Uncomfortable, (dis)empowered, or even potentially burdened with disgust, individuals participate in the objectification and sale of their own bodies and personhood. Virtually owned by followers who become paying fans, content creator-curators describe sometimes feeling liberated or more confident, but grapple with a number of other embodied costs as a result of this dynamic of ownership. Not an exhaustive list by any means, this small collection of stories still reveals the very real prices some creator-curators themselves pay the longer they do OnlyFans.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Ultimately, these narratives—of "digital diaries", of highly practiced techniques of curation, of transformation and embodied costs—are not representative of all SEM creator-curators but are still critical interventions for the existing literature on porn work, where these stories often remain marginal to a handful of other frameworks. Not fitting neatly into paradigms of pleasure/danger, affordance/risk, or even current theoretical conversations about motivations

for authenticity, the gay/bi men in this ethnography produce SEM in what I have called a scattered personal public. Representative of what Joey has called feeling "forever lost in time", they find their ways into this scattered personal public, and content creation-curation, for uniquely complicated (and queer) reasons. The very fact that most of the gay/bi men in this study rely exclusively on other language to describe their experiences, for example, suggests that what motivates them to enter and remain in these spaces is not sufficiently captured by current understandings of porn work or digital intimacy when treated as separate phenomena. Though bright, dynamic, and nuanced bodies of work, the existing literatures cannot completely encapsulate the complexity of the stories told here, which are a messy entanglement somewhere in-between.

However, this ethnography does not purport to have "filled in" every gap in the literature, nor does it claim to represent a "truer" narrative than any other. Its intention is not to expose the relative sincerity of any interlocutors' claims, but rather, to understand the process through which people have narratively mobilized their reported desires: what is most interesting here is that certain motivations are named at all, let alone consistently, and that queer people so often turn to platforms like Twitter (and eventually OnlyFans) in the pursuit of realizing them. If the stories gay/bi men articulate here remain themselves complicated and at times contradictory, so too must the stories of other content creator-curators and porn workers, especially those characterized by qualitative research foci.

Limited by these very constraints as a digital ethnographic work, this thesis embraces its subjectively positioned methodological approach which is attuned more to the intricacies of individual but overlapping lifeworlds. Further research should continue interrogating these social phenomena with a variety of quantitative or mixed-methods approaches: very little is known

about gay/bi men involved in content curation-curation or porn work and the distributions of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status across platforms, for example. Tracing the contours of these stories in ways that ethnographic or interview-based data cannot—or has not in this research—will only improve our collective understanding of the ways that complex identities and social positions intersect to elucidate otherwise taken-for-granted assumptions, some of which may even present themselves unintentionally in this work.

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