Unveiling The Digital Bordello

An Analysis of Gender, Labor, and Sex in Dutch News Coverage of OnlyFans

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OnlyFans Unveiled: Exploring Gender, Labor, and Sex in the Digital Bordello

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the portrayal that is presented by Dutch legacy media of women who are engaged in digital sex work on OnlyFans. OnlyFans has emerged as a site of controversy and empowerment amid rising cultural visibility of platform-based sex work. The platform is often framed as a symbol for entrepreneurial freedom, because it promises creators' financial autonomy as well as direct audience access. Still, its media representation shows cultural issues since it involves gender, labor, and sexuality. Drawing from forty articles within four major Dutch newspapers, this research investigates legacy media discourses depicting women engaging in sex work upon OnlyFans. Critical discourse analysis joins content analysis in this study. It pinpoints these four major themes: affective labor and precarity, platformization and infrastructural control, gendered bias and moral concern, and entrepreneurship and empowerment. Simplified narratives do repeatedly depict women across these frames, not as complex laboring subjects, but as tropes: the self-made entrepreneur, or the emotionally available caretaker, or the morally endangered woman, or perhaps the platform-dependent content creator.

The findings revealed that legacy media has a tendency to foreground women's autonomy frequently but only when it aligns with neoliberal values as well as postfeminist ideals of consumer agency, visibility, and self-management. Emotional labor, central to digital sex work, is reframed as a natural tendency, excluding its economic and structural demands. Media coverage rarely addresses the algorithmic, financial, as well as reputational constraints around creator success. Journalistic portrayals distribute risk unevenly. They attach danger, coercion, and moral judgment predominantly to women. These frames work to stigmatize in addition to discipline. Some forms of labor, even when fully legal, do remain socially deviant because of how these frames suggest it.

As this thesis contributes to feminist media studies, public understandings of platform-based sex work are actively constructed by Dutch legacy media. It argues that these portrayals are not neutral reflections but discursive interventions that shape how sex work is legitimized, governed, and judged. Through a blend of postfeminist expression, neoliberal values, and gendered framing, the media frame women's digital labor simultaneously visible and marginalized. OnlyFans, as a culturally unstable site, reveals the shifting terrain where gender, labor, and digital economies intersect - and where media discourses play a key role in writing the rules

KEYWORDS: Sex Work, Gender Roles, Digital Labor, Platformization, OnlyFans

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Preface

I would like to thank my supervisor, Tim de Winkel, for guiding me through this project and for the many fruitful discussions about OnlyFans. I am also very grateful for my father for encouraging me to pursue a master's degree in the first place. Additionally, a special thank you to my colleague Lard for the steady support and for always checking in. Lastly, a heartfelt thank you goes to my friends, Robin and Nicolien, for supporting me through every stage of this thesis and for always keeping me on my toes.

I had to move mountains to complete this project – but we made it. Now it's time to move the mountains back to where they belong.

1. Introduction

> Sex is not the problem, porn is not the problem. The extremes are the problem. Blue's fuck-marathon flattens everything that can make sex exciting, stimulating, adventurous, liberating, and emancipatory.[1] (Althuisius, 2025, para. 5)

In our rapidly shifting digital landscape, even media scholars may feel overwhelmed by the pace of change. But even amid this continuous change, one cultural constant persists: the stigma, shock, and taboo surrounding sex work. As the quote above illustrates, public discourse around sex work remains emotionally charged and challenged. This tension becomes especially visible in the rise of platforms like OnlyFans where digital labor, sexual expression, and media spectacle intersect with each other. Debates around OnlyFans have intensified in the present, particularly when figures like Bonnie Blue enter the chat. Bonnie Blue is known for her provocative content strategies, including camping near university campuses to recruit male students for adult videos (Van der Rijst, 2024). In a widely circulated podcast quote, she stated, "So being a slut pays really well." As her platform grows, so does her media attention, from viewers, other creators and journalist. OnlyFans' growing visibility has started broader debates about ethics, economics, and social meaning in relation to women's labor, sexuality, and autonomy. It is within this charged and shifting landscape that this thesis centers itself.

OnlyFans was launched back in 2016 and quickly evolved from a general-purpose subscription platform. It turned into a space linked to adult content, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. Its appeal lies in that promise of direct-to-consumer monetization, and it grants creators a sense of autonomy over their income plus image (Litam et al., 2022, p. 3094). Yet this promise is intertwined with a number of contradictions. The empowerment narrative that surrounds OnlyFans in the media overshadows the structural conditions that shape creator labor. The platform thrives on commodification of intimacy, asking creators to perform a continuous emotional availability in exchange for income (Constable, 2009, pp. 50-51). Simultaneously, creators face income instability, no employee benefits, and constantly changing community guidelines central to platform-based gig work (Butler, 2021, p. 349). Added to this is the persistent social stigma attached to sex work, which continues to shape how creators are perceived by media, institutions, and the public.

OnlyFans represents a paradox within platform economics thus blurring boundaries between labor and leisure, intimacy and commerce, empowerment and exploitation. It offers new opportunities toward economic independence and self-expression. Yet that promise exists inside systems involving monitoring, market reliance, and moral scrutiny. Understanding how OnlyFans is

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[1] "Seks is niet het probleem, porno is niet het probleem. De extremen zijn het probleem. Blue's neukmarathon slaat alles plat wat seks opwindend, zinnenprikkelend, avontuurlijk, bevrijdend en emanciperend kan maken." (Althuisius, 2025, para. 5)

publicly discussed, especially in legacy media, therefore offers insight into the shifting discourses of gendered labor and digital sexuality in contemporary times.

The cultural significance of OnlyFans is amplified by how it is portrayed in the media. Particularly in legacy media, such as long-established national newspapers, OnlyFans creators are framed in conflicting ways: as self-made entrepreneurs, exploited workers, feminist icons, or cautionary tales. These portrayals of women working in sex work are not merely reflective: they are constitutional. Legacy media actively construct public understandings of digital sex work through framing strategies, word choices and the narrative structures, which can shape just how it is viewed and judged and governed.

In the Dutch context, national newspapers such as de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Algemeen Dagblad (AD), and De Telegraaf have significant influence in shaping societal debates, since these outlets have the biggest reach combined in the Netherlands (Allen, 2023b). While coverage of OnlyFans has grown in recent years, there is little scholarly analysis of how they represent women in digital sex work on the platform. The absence of this coverage is unexpected, particularly given the rising visibility of platform-based sex work in the digital sphere and the broader questions it raises about gender, labor, and digital economies.

In this study, through the OnlyFans platform's lens, we seek to uncover how Dutch legacy media construct narratives around women in digital sex work. To do so, it combines content analysis and critical discourse analysis, focusing on how themes of gender, sex, and labor are woven into these media portrayals. This approach allows for both a thematic mapping of dominant frames and a deeper interrogation of the language and ideology implanted in journalistic discourse. The research question guiding this inquiry is:

How do the discourses in Dutch legacy media depict women that engage in sex work on the OnlyFans platform?

This research question uses three key concepts: *discourses*, *sex work*, and *platforms*. In this context, *discourses* refer to how language and power structures are used in the media to shape public understanding of people, behaviors, and values. Media discourses do not simply report facts - they also influence how we think about certain topics, such as sex work. *Sex work* in this study refers to the production and sale of sexual content online, specifically by women using OnlyFans. This includes work that is self-made and the digital communication, where creators decide what content they create and how they engage with their audience. Lastly, *platforms* like OnlyFans are digital tools that allow creators to earn money directly from fans. However, they also set the rules and shape how content is seen, monetized, and controlled. These three concepts help to explore how Dutch legacy media talk about women on OnlyFans, and what those stories say about gender, labor, and sexuality in the digital age.

To explore how Dutch legacy media depict women in digital sex work on the OnlyFans platform, this study uses a qualitative research design that combines content analysis with critical

discourse analysis. This approach makes it possible to identify recurring themes and frames in media coverage, while also analyzing how language is used to construct meaning and reproduce ideologies around sex, gender, and labor. The material for this research is forty newspaper articles from de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Algemeen Dagblad, and De Telegraaf, which are all major Dutch outlets, published during the period between 2016 and 2025. The selection was based also upon women's participation within digital sex work. To focus on empowerment, exploitation, risk, and visibility, the analysis uses inductive and theory-driven coding. Themes are constructed by legacy media discourse.

       This thesis aims to unpack how Dutch legacy media portray women in digital sex work on the OnlyFans platform. The following sections guide the structure of this thesis. In Section 2 the theoretical foundation is shaped by reviewing literature on OnlyFans, platformization, digital labor, and feminist theories of sexuality. It links the platform with wider scholarly dialogues. The discussions concern with the gig economy, the commodification of intimacy, and gendered self-presentation. The analysis is also grounded by key feminist perspectives upon sex work, from anti-porn critiques and sex-positive approaches to performative approaches. Section 3 details an outline of the research design examining forty articles from four major Dutch newspapers using content and critical discourse analysis focusing on the themes of gender, sex, and labor. Section 4 presents the findings, and it traces how women within OnlyFans are framed across outlets through narratives of entrepreneurship, risk, affective labor, and platform dependency. Section 5 unpacks the findings on how these depictions influence public understanding about digital sex work plus gendered labor inside the Dutch media sphere. It explores legacy media's contributions to wider discussions regarding visibility, regulation, and digital independence.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework outlines the theory that this thesis builds on for a close analysis of Dutch legacy media discourses depicting women working digital sex on OnlyFans. The framework draws perceptions out of platform studies, digital labor theory, feminist scholarship, and media framing. Also, the framework situates OnlyFans inside larger socio-technical, economic, and ideological structures. Rather than treating OnlyFans as merely a site where people perform or media expresses sensational interest, this framework approaches it as a complex platformed environment that technology affords, that economics pressures, as well as that gender norms shape.

The first section provides background information on OnlyFans as a platform since it traces all of its development and cultural importance inside the adult content industry's more broad transformation. This section highlights how its platform structure contributes to new forms of labor visibility, autonomy, as well as risk and distinguishes OnlyFans from earlier models of online pornography.

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The third section introduces feminist theories of sex work as it focuses on three positions namely radical, sex-positive, and poststructuralist while arguing Judith Butler's performativity theory helps to understand gender enactment, negotiation, and commodification on OnlyFans. This section moves beyond the binary of empowerment versus exploitation and instead centers the complex interplay of agency, labor, and identity in digital sex work. The final section introduces framing theory as a critical tool for analyzing media discourse. Drawing on the work of Goffman, Entman, and Van Gorp, it explains how media frames shape public understanding, particularly of stigmatized forms of labor like sex work. This section is essential for understanding how Dutch legacy media not only report on OnlyFans but actively construct meaning around it. These theoretical perspectives offer together the basis for analyzing legacy media frames.

2.1 OnlyFans

The rise of online pornography has reshaped the production, distribution, and consumption of sexual content in contemporary times. With increasing accessibility, anonymity, and normalization, pornography has become a mainstream product with even more wide-reaching effects on intimacy, gender roles, and sexual behavior (Rama, et al., 2022, pp. 1-2). Websites such as Pornhub amid this

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shift reflect porn's industrialization as centralized, commercialized, as well as an exploitative labor model (Rama et al., 2022, pp. 4-5). The adult content industry has seen a massive shift towards websites like Pornhub, where millions of videos are directly available for the users, often these videos are created under dubious conditions. "Tube sites", websites shaped like YouTube yet solely focused on pornographic content, have been critiqued for facilitating exploitative practices, such as hosting non-consensual content and profiting from unpaid labor (Tarrant, 2016, p. 45).

OnlyFans, founded in 2016 by Tim Stokely, is a subscription-based platform that was designed to give content creators more control over their income. The platform offers various subscription models where fans can either pay a monthly fee, leave one-time tips, or engage in pay-per-view transactions. Initially aimed at a broad range of content creators, OnlyFans became mainly associated with adult content during the Covid-19 pandemic (Litam et al., 2022, p. 3094). Easterbrook-Smith (2022) outlines three overlapping groups who turned to the platform during this time: established sex workers transitioning to digital spaces, unemployed or underemployed individuals seeking income, and caregivers forced to leave their traditional work (pp. 1-2). The platform's growth, as outlined by Hamilton et al. (2023), was accelerated by celebrity endorsements and discussions that lessened stigma and sparked conversations among peers online and offline. Like Beyoncé's mention of OnlyFans in 2021, boosted its visibility massively (Boseley, 2021). Furthermore, the platforms design limits natural discovery through algorithmic infrastructure, forcing creators to actively promote their content on mainstream social media, which elevates its presence (Hamilton et al., 2023, p. 6).

The pandemic intensified the OnlyFans its growth. With people globally strained to their homes, digital intimacy and self-produced content raised. Research shows this period saw increases in pornography consumption, masturbation, and sex toy purchases (Döring, 2020, pp. 2769-2770). These shifts, combined with higher social media use and viral discussions, accelerated OnlyFans' mainstream exposure. However, the platform's design, especially the lack of algorithmic discovery, meant creators have to actively self-promote across other platforms like Twitter and Instagram, reinforcing their visibility while exposing them to platform dependency and surveillance (Hamilton et al., 2023, p. 6).

In 2021, OnlyFans banned explicit content due to scandals involving the circulation of child explicit content, reflecting broader industry challenges (Croxford, 2021). As highlighted by The Guardian (2021), payment processors like Visa and Mastercard deploy substantial influence over the content hosted by adult platforms. This control was especially evident when these companies' halted transactions within MindGeek's ecosystem, forcing the removal of millions of unverified videos from websites like PornHub. OnlyFans, while offering financial independence to many sex workers by allowing them to retain 80% of their income, has also faced increasing investigations from regulators and politicians, concerned about its monitoring systems and removal of illegal content (Waterson, 2021). These regulations were dropped within six days, when Stokely got a deal with the payment

processors (Hern & Waterson, 2021).

This regulatory moment not only exposed the fragility of digital sex work economies but also underscored the differences between OnlyFans and traditional adult content websites like Pornhub. Pornhub, currently the 19th most visited website in the world (Similarweb, 2025), operates primarily as a free, ad-driven website where most users are consumers, not creators. Content is often bulked, sometimes without consent, and the line between performer and platform is heavily mediated by corporate control (Rama, et al., 2022, p. 5). In contrast, OnlyFans positions itself as a platform: creators are responsible for content, pricing, and fan interaction, and earn directly through subscriptions. This decentralization is shifting the power dynamic for creators, which grant creators more autonomy, but also bear greater labor responsibility now. Where Pornhub embodies the industrialized, anonymous model of online pornography, OnlyFans symbolizes the platformized, entrepreneurial one. This shift has complicated public and media discourse: OnlyFans creators are often framed not just as performers but as small business owners, digital influencers, or even feminist icons - depending on who's telling the story. As this section shows, these structural and ideological contrasts are important for understanding how OnlyFans is discussed in legacy media: not merely as a porn site, but as a symbol of larger questions about agency, labor, and the platformization of sexuality.

2.2 Digital labor

While the term 'platform' has many academics feuding about the definition of the word, the media scholar Gorwa (2024) defines it as a "digitally enabled product that mediates relationships between two or more parties, usually featuring technical elements that allow third parties to build upon it or interact with it" (p. 16). Gillespie (2010) adds that "platform" also functions as a tool, allowing companies to present themselves as neutral agents while exercising significant control over user behavior (pp. 350-352). This dual nature is key to understanding how platforms like OnlyFans reshape labor. The platform functions both as a marketplace and a rule-maker: organizing, monetizing, and regulating adult content creation through a digital infrastructure. This transformation reflects what the media scholars Nieborg and Poell (2018) call platformization: the penetration of platform logic into cultural production, bringing with it data-driven monetization tools, algorithmic systems, and new dependencies between creators and digital infrastructure (pp. 4281-4282). On OnlyFans, these dynamics shape what kinds of labor are visible, discoverable, and profitable. Creators are responsible not just for producing content, but also for building their audience, managing their income, and staying in line with community guidelines, all within the borders of the platform.

The OnlyFans model mirrors broader trends in the gig economy. As Butler (2021) describes, gig work is task-based, flexible, and often mediated by digital platforms (p. 348). While it offers autonomy and accessibility, especially to those excluded from traditional labor markets, it also

introduces new forms of precarity. Workers have no guaranteed income, labor protections, or benefits (Butler, 2021, p. 349). Marginalized individuals, including women, racial minorities, and LGBTQ+ people, are more likely to rely on gig work as a primary income source and face heightened vulnerability within these deregulated environments (Butler, 2021, pp. 348-349). Platforms such as OnlyFans function more as facilitators than employers so they shift labor's costs and risks to their users, in this case the creators.

Within digital sex work, this gig logic intensifies longstanding vulnerabilities. OnlyFans creators must assume multiple roles: content producer, brand manager, marketer, and customer service agent. As Constable (2009) argues, contemporary capitalism increasingly commodifies intimacy and affective labor, particularly in feminized forms of work (pp. 50-51). On OnlyFans, emotional availability, flirty responsiveness, and curated authenticity are essential to commercialize. Creators are expected to perform a heightened version of themselves, selling not only sexual content but access to intimacy and personality (Di Cicco, 2024, p. 27). This labor aligns with Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labor, the management of emotion to fulfill the requirements of a job. In The Managed Heart, Hochschild outlines how service workers, especially women, are expected to display emotions, they may not genuinely feel, in order to please clients (Steinberg & Figart, 1999, pp. 9-10). On OnlyFans, creators perform gratitude, desire, and emotional closeness, even when emotionally or physically exhausted. This constant affective performance can lead to identity strain, especially given the lack of boundaries between professional and personal space. As Di Cicco (2024) notes, the amateur porn genre evolution, largely enabled by platforms like OnlyFans, has turned private homes into hybrid sites of production and consumption, collapsing the boundaries between work and leisure even more (p. 38).

At the same time, creators engage in what Duffy (2015) calls aspirational labor: forward-looking, often unpaid work performed in hopes of future success, visibility, or earnings (p. 6). On OnlyFans, this includes constant content production, fan engagement, and cross-platform promotion, often without immediate financial return. Digital sex work platforms encourage a belief that hustle, strategy, and personal branding will eventually lead to success, even as algorithmic opacity, oversaturation, and shadow banning limit upward mobility (Doorn & Velthuis, 2018, pp. 185-186). This culture of hustle hides deeper inequalities and puts all the pressure for success on the individual.

These dynamics are intertwined with what the feminist media scholar Rosalind Gill (2007, 2017) outlines, as *postfeminist sensibility.* Postfeminist sensibility refers to a cultural logic that reworks feminist ideas through language of individualism, choice, and empowerment, while leaving structural inequalities unchallenged (Gill, 2017, pp. 5-6). Postfeminism does not reject feminism but instead reuses its language to fit into the neoliberal mindset focused on individual success. This sensibility is marked by a celebration of makeover culture, entrepreneurial femininity, and emotional self-regulation, where success is framed as self-made and failure as personal mismanagement (Gill, 2007, p. 156). Within this logic, OnlyFans creators are encouraged to understand their success or

failure as entirely based on their actions. The underlying responsibilities increase the emotional toll: the exhaustion and identity strain that creators report are not merely by-products of platform labor but are central features of a culture that demands constant self-branding, positivity, and entrepreneurial hustle (Doorn & Velthuis, 2018, p. 187).

These types of labors are part of what Lazzarato (2004) terms immaterial labor: the production of affect, relationships, and cultural meaning (p. 205). On OnlyFans, this labor becomes profitable. Subscriptions represent exchanges involving attention, trust, and emotional connection, alongside the erotic content. Nonetheless a big portion of these efforts persists are either unpaid or underpaid. Terranova (2000) argues that digital economies rely heavily on this labor: affective, creative, and social work that generates value but is excluded from formal compensation (p. 48). Creators on OnlyFans invest large amount of time and energy to build a following without guaranteed returns. Their labor is central to the platform's profitability but does not immediately pay off on their end.

The structural precarity of this model became especially visible during the 2021 content ban, when OnlyFans announced it would prohibit explicit sexual content in response to pressure from financial intermediaries like Mastercard (Croxford, 2021). Though the ban was reversed after public outrage, it exposed the platform's underlying governance logic (Hern & Waterson, 2021). Media scholars Van Dijck et al. (2021) describe this as deplatformization: the removal or restriction of access to digital infrastructures due to reputational or political risk (p. 3441). Gorwa (2019) further notes that governance on platforms often blends state regulation with private moderation, meaning that external financial and political actors hold significant influence over what labor is permitted and how it is monetized (p. 858). These crises do reveal just the fragile infrastructure that then supports digital sex work. The model of OnlyFans gets embedded within algorithmic control, within reputational risk, and within a broader political economy that involves platform dependency, while marketing itself as entrepreneurial freedom. Creators navigate systems that frame sex work both as self-expression and as a site of constant surveillance, financial exclusion, and moral judgment. On OnlyFans, digital labor is not limited to content production, it also involves managing platform rules, performing emotional labor, and dealing with economic instability. While the platform presents sex work as a pathway to personal success, it also embeds that labor in structures that reproduce precarity and extract value from intimacy, identity, and visibility. These contradictions lie at the heart of how digital sex work is organized, and how it is portrayed in legacy media.

The dynamics described above, platformization, emotional labor, aspirational labor, and the gendered demands of visibility, will be returned to in the results section to understand how OnlyFans creators are positioned in Dutch media discourse.

In particular, this thesis uses the notion of postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007, 2017) to examine how feminist language around choice and empowerment is reworked into neoliberal scripts of self-management and emotional control. This framework is key for analyzing how women on

OnlyFans are portrayed not just as workers, but as self-responsible brand managers in a system that obscures structural inequality.

2.3 Feminist studies

Feminist debates around sex work have long been marked by friction between two primary positions: radical feminist critiques of pornography as inherently exploitative, sex-positive arguments for sexual agency and consent. This section outlines each of these perspectives and argues that Butler's theory of performativity offers a framework for analyzing digital sex work on OnlyFans. Rather than framing sex work as either empowering or exploitative, this lens allows for a better examination on how gendered labor is constructed, performed, and negotiated within platformized economies.

Sex has always been a hot topic of discussion. Feminist discussions around sex work have long been polarized, shaped by an intriguing divide between sex-negative and sex-positive perspectives. The radical feminist writer Andrea Dworkin (1991) describes sex as the act of possession: an intimate act of dominance, control, and turning a person, females, into an object (p. 23). "The more she is a thing, the more she provokes erection; the more she is a thing, the more she fulfills her purpose; her purpose is to be the thing that provokes erection" (Dworkin, 1991, p. 128). This framing of female sexuality as inherently tied to objectification informs Dworkin's critique of pornography. The definition of pornography by the Cambridge Dictionary: pictures, movies, or writing that show or describe sexual behavior for the purpose of exciting people sexually (2025). The word 'pornography' derives from the Greek language, directly translated as "writing about prostitutes". We as a society, moved from this literal meaning to a broad definition as mentioned in the dictionary. Dworkin (1991) strongly opposes this view, arguing that pornography, by definition, portrays the lowest form of sex work, entirely rooted in male sexual domination. The very concept of a "whore," she contends, exists solely within this patriarchal system: created, defined, and enforced by men as both a label and a commodity (pp. 200-201). From this standpoint, sex work is viewed not as a legitimate form of labor but as an extension of male dominance over female sexuality. Dworkin even went as far as:

> We are free when the pornography no longer exists. As long as it does exist, we must understand that we are the women in it: used by the same power, subject to the same valuation, as the vile whores who beg for more. (Dworkin, 1991, p. 224)

In contrast, while Dworkin's perspective frames sex work and pornography as inherently oppressive constructs within a patriarchal system, other feminist scholars challenge this resolute view. Gayle Rubin, a feminist theorist, (1984) advocates for a more nuanced approach to sexual politics. Sex is often viewed as inherently wrong unless there's a clear justification to deem it acceptable (Rubin, 1984, p. 11). She critiques the moral panic and restrictive hierarchies that

categorize certain sexual behaviors, including sex work and pornography, as inherently deviant or harmful (p. 35). Building on Rubin's critique, Patrick Califia, a writer and sex educator, (1994) pushes further, contending that such restrictive views, particularly within the antipornography movement, uphold traditional and limiting ideas about women's sexuality (p. 118). Califia (1994) highlights how this movement assumes that women do not desire pornography, casual sex, or sexual experiences outside romantic relationships, effectively elevating women above sexual need (p. 118). Rubin (1984) urges feminists to extract sex from moral judgments, suggesting that sexual expression, including sex work, can exist outside frameworks of domination if not constrained by social stigma and legal repression (p. 18). Where Dworkin sees pornography as an extension of patriarchal violence, Rubin emphasizes the importance of sexual freedom and cautions against reproducing hierarchies that oppress sexual minorities, including sex workers. As Califia argues, this framing sustains harmful stereotypes. The feminist movement should work to dismantle, and not seek to reinforce, those stereotypes. Califia's work underscores the sex-positive belief that consensual sexual expression is a form of empowerment and resistance against patriarchal norms through supporting people to recognize diverse sexual desires that include kink, queer sex, and pornography that women create for women.

The Dworkin-Rubin-Califia debate certainly sets the stage for a broader feminist engagement with sex work, and yet it can also reinforce binary logics wherein sex work is either violence or liberation. Judith Butler's theory of performativity provides a gentler explanation. In Gender Trouble (2002), Butler argues that gender is not an innate quality, but a series of repeated performances shaped by social norms (pp. 43-44). These performances are not freely chosen but constrained by the cultural scripts available to us (Butler, 2009, p. 4). From this perspective, sex work, and digital sex work in particular, becomes a space where femininity, sexuality, and labor are consistently enacted. On OnlyFans, creators perform specific gendered and sexualized personas to attract and retain subscribers. These performances are often exaggerated, hyper-feminine, and emotionally engaged, offering fans a curated sense of intimacy (Tynan & Linehan, 2024, pp. 2308-2309). Yet they are also strategic, shaped by platform affordances, user demand, and algorithmic pressures. A creator chooses to present themselves drawing from a repertoire of gendered scripts to navigate a competitive and monetized environment. The labor involved in maintaining these personas, responding to messages, customizing content, projecting availability, blurs the line between authenticity and performance, agency and expectation.

This tension is especially clear in Butler's term "citationality", which refers to how gender is not something innate, but is produced by repeating behaviors that are recognized and validated by cultural norms (Salih, 2007, pp. 62-63). In other words, gendered acts are seen as 'real' only when they align with dominant cultural expectations. On OnlyFans, creators might overthrow gender norms with deviant gender performances, yet find heteronormative fantasies create lucrative

identities (Rama et al, 2022, p. 16). The platform thus becomes a space of both constraint and creativity, where gender is simultaneously re-structed and reimagined.

While Dworkin saw sex work as inherently oppressive and Rubin and Califia emphasized the importance of sexual freedom and consent, Butler's theory adds nuance: it highlights how sex work is a site where gender and sexuality are actively performed, shaped, and constrained by social scripts. These performances are not fixed or entirely free: they are iterative, socially legible practices that construct both gendered identity and labor under platform capitalism. This performative lens aligns, in addition, with the broader structure of digital labor for OnlyFans. As has been discussed in the previous section, the platform demands that creators labor both emotionally and also affectively, that they brand for themselves, and that they constantly appear so as to remain profitable. These demands are not just economic but also deeply gendered. Like this, Butler's performativity theory reveals the way in which labor, identity, and platform infrastructure are entangled; it can do more than just describe the gendered dynamics of sex work. Audiences' payments and algorithms' priorities constrain OnlyFans creators' choices. Cultural norms also limit how creators can present themselves. The recurrent nature associated with this labor is highlighted by performativity, in which gender turns out to be a tool as well as product for digital sex work.

These feminist frameworks, overarching sex-negative and sex-positive, provide insight into how media discourses frame sex work. Butler's theory of performativity will be especially relevant in analyzing how gender is constructed through repeated performances shaped by platform expectations, audience demands, and moral scripts.

2.4 Framing

Sexual stigma plays a critical role in how sex workers are treated, understood, and represented in society and the media. As Grittner and Walsh (2020) argue, sex-work stigma creates a culture that normalizes violence, reduces empathy, and frames sex workers as morally suspect or even disposable (p. 1674). The dominant cultural narratives, particularly those the media produce, sustain and circulate this stigma. Which is not merely a set of individual attitudes, rather a scripted cultural system. In this context, framing theory offers an analytical lens: it reveals how media discourses not only reflect but do actively shape social meanings around digital sex work, influencing how audiences perceive labor, legitimacy, gender, and morality.

Framing, in its most basic form, refers to the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of reality in communication. As the sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) explains, individuals rely on "primary frameworks", deeply embedded cultural schemata, to make sense of events in the world (p. 21). These frameworks help people make sense of what might otherwise seem meaningless, enabling them to recognize, describe, and interpret events, often without being fully aware of the underlying structure shaping their view. In media discourse, such frames do not just organize what is shown but also how it is shown, making some narratives appear natural or self-evident (Goffman, 1974, p. 28).

When applied to sex work, these frameworks help audiences understand who a victim is, who is empowered, and what forms of labor are legitimate or deviant.

Robert Entman, a communication theorist, (1993) builds on this by offering a more systematic definition: "Whatever its specific use, the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text" (p. 51). He outlines four key functions of framing: to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral evaluations, and suggest remedies (p. 52). A single frame may perform one or more of these functions; it shapes how a media audience understands an issue. Importantly, Entman (1993) emphasizes the role of salience, making information more noticeable, meaningful, and memorable (p. 53). Through framing, certain aspects of a story become highlighted, while others are backgrounded or excluded entirely. In coverage of OnlyFans, for example, legacy media might emphasize economic welfare while excluding discussions of precarity or platform infrastructures. On the other hand, legacy media might frame creators as reckless or morally deviant, minimizing the structural conditions that shape their labor, sex work, entirely.

This effect is not just theoretical. Tversky and Kahneman (1981) demonstrate that how information is presented, the framing effect, shapes decision-making and perception (pp. 453-455). If media consistently highlight OnlyFans as a space of risky behavior, readers are more likely to interpret sex work as inherently dangerous or irresponsible. On the other hand, if creators are framed as entrepreneurs, the platform may be seen as a site of agency and empowerment. Both framings, however, carry ideological weight: they influence public policy, shape audience empathy, and affect how sex workers are treated in everyday life.

Baldwin van Gorp (2007), a media scholar, extends framing theory by introducing the concept of "framing packages": clusters of frames, metaphors, and narratives that resonate with shared cultural values (pp. 62-64). These packages are powerful not because they are logically persuasive but because they draw from familiar symbolic repertoires (Van Gorp, 2007, pp. 62-64). When applied to OnlyFans, these packages frame digital sex workers through pre-existing lenses, shaping their visibility and moral positioning. For example, the "empowered entrepreneur" frame aligns with neoliberal values of self-responsibility and individualism, while the "at-risk woman" frame taps into longstanding tropes of female vulnerability and moral decline.

How these framings intersect with gender politics is helpfully understood through Rosalind Gill (2017) publication, it contains an analysis of media culture. She identifies a postfeminist sensibility and stresses choice, empowerment, and self-discipline (pp. 5-6). This sensibility also features its use of irony, knowingness, and "common sense". Postfeminist discourse has more of a self-aware tone. It recognizes when women are objectified or commodified yet represents it as humor, a chosen lifestyle, or enterprise (Gill, 2007, pp. 159-160). This ironic structure works as a cultural safeguard allowing critique expression. In doing so, this framing can deflect its own political impact. Sex work may be presented via the media in the context of OnlyFans as playful and divergent, profitable and risky, empowering and taboo. Treating structural inequality as a branding

problem avoids deeper critique, even though this self-aware tone makes the issue seem more relatable than political. As Gill (2007) stated: "In this context, critique becomes much more difficult – and this, it would seem, is precisely what is intended." (p. 161).

Returning to sexual stigma, Grittner and Walsh (2020) emphasize that media narratives which frame sex work as inherently risky or deviant contribute to real-world harms (p. 1674). Sex workers report being blamed for their own victimization, denied support by institutions like the police, and subjected to social isolation. These consequences are not accidental; they are the outcomes of repeated, culturally resonant framings that construct sex workers as outside the bounds of normative femininity and labor (p. 1674). Even the more positive entrepreneurial framings can perpetuate stigma by demanding constant emotional labor, self-surveillance, and performance of hyper-feminine success. Framing, then, is not a neutral act of reporting. It is a mechanism through which public meaning is constructed, contested, and circulated. In the case of digital sex work on OnlyFans, Dutch legacy media do not simply describe a new form of labor: they participate in the cultural work of defining what that labor means. By foregrounding certain narratives and backgrounding others, media outlets play an active role in shaping how OnlyFans creators are perceived, understood, and judged.

Framing theory is central to this thesis because it illuminates how language, selection, and salience shape public meaning. The analysis will draw from the works of Goffman, Entman, and Van Gorp. It will also examine just how legacy media may construct more moral and ideological narratives regarding digital sex work plus narratives reflecting broader cultural logics related to postfeminism, stigma, and to platform capitalism.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the research design, methodological choices, and analytical procedures used in this thesis to examine *how do the discourses in Dutch legacy media depict women that engage in sex work on the OnlyFans platform?* Given the ideological and linguistic complexity of the subject, this study combines qualitative content analysis with critical discourse analysis to gain both thematic and ideological insight into legacy media narratives. The research is interpretive in nature and seeks to uncover both explicit and implicit patterns in how gender, sex, and labor are represented in Dutch mainstream news media.

3.1 Method

The aim of this study is to explore how legacy media articles depict women in digital sex work, with a focus on the platformization of OnlyFans. To investigate this, the study employs a qualitative research design that integrates both content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013: Reisigl & Wodak 2017). This dual approach allows for an in-depth examination of not only what is being said about women in digital sex work, but also how people construct, frame, and ideologically position these narratives within the context of public discourse. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for this research because the subject matter, gender, sexuality, and labor within a digital and highly stigmatized context, requires interpretive analysis rather than quantification. This approach enables a nuanced exploration of media language, recurring themes, representational patterns, and the assumptions rooted in the portrayal of OnlyFans creators. The combination of content and discourse analysis provides both a structural overview and critical depth, making it possible to research broader power relations and social norms reflected in these representations.

Content analysis is defined as "a family of research techniques for making systematic, credible, or valid and replicable inferences of text and other forms of communication" (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, pp. 7-8). In this study, recurring themes, language patterns, as well as representational strategies throughout media coverage of women on OnlyFans are identified then categorized using content analysis. Mapping the frequency of narratives across media justifies using this specific method. This mapping gives to one a structured foundation for more of deeper interpretation. Language constructs social realities as well as power relations so CDA examines just how to interrogate all these patterns even further. CDA is appropriate here because media representations of digital sex work are often entangled with societal assumptions, ideologies, and moral judgments. Following Fairclough's (2013) understanding of CDA, discourse is viewed not only as a reflection of social structures, but also as a form of social practice that actively shapes and reproduces power dynamics (p. 10). This enables a critical reading of how legacy media may naturalize neoliberal, gendered, or moralizing discourses around platform-based sex work.

The analysis draws particularly on the Discourse-Historical Approach developed by Reisigl

and Wodak (2017), which emphasizes how discourse is situated within specific socio-political contexts and operates through identifiable strategies (p. 88-89). Key analytical tools such as nomination (how actors are named), predication (how actors are described), and argumentation/topoi (common lines of reasoning) were used to unpack the ideological positioning of sex workers, platforms, and labor. These tools help expose how discourses of empowerment, risk, and entrepreneurship are deployed and how certain forms of work and femininity are legitimized or marginalized through language.

The study works to integrate CDA with content analysis plus identifies just what it is that is said in legacy media about OnlyFans creators. It also critically examines just how it is that these messages are produced, reinforced, and then challenged. The context of platform capitalism sheds light for us on the discursive construction of gender, sexuality, and labor.

3.2 Sample

For this study, the purposive sample includes legacy media articles from: de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Algemeen Dagblad (AD), and De Telegraaf. These outlets were selected due to their national reach, influence on public discourse, and ideological diversity within the Dutch media landscape. Secondly, the outlets have an average reach of 2341000 with their prints, which serves as 83,3% of the total average reach of the national newspapers (Allen, 2023b). Their status ensures that the articles analyzed are both widely circulated and reflective of mainstream narratives.

As highlighted by 'De Puttenaer', each outlet brings a specific editorial character to the dataset. De Volkskrant is traditionally seen as a progressive, center-left newspaper aimed at highly educated readers. It is known for in-depth interviews, analytical features, and its cultural reporting. NRC Handelsblad targets a similarly educated audience but takes a more centrist or liberal-conservative stance. It is widely regarded for its political, economic, and cultural coverage, and it maintains a critical and neutral tone. De Telegraaf is one of the most widely read newspaper in the Netherlands and is known for its tabloid style, populist tone, and eye-catching headlines. It uses clear language and strong editorial opinions, often foregrounding sensationalism or moral concerns. Although framed as independent, De Telegraaf is often associated with right-leaning perspectives, particularly on cultural and social issues. Algemeen Dagblad (AD), the most widely read papers in the country, is a centrist outlet with a strong regional character due to its origins in a merger of regional newspapers. Especially popular in the western and southern provinces, AD combines national news with local reporting and typically emphasizes accessible human-interest stories (Van Den Houten, 2021).

From each outlet, ten articles were selected, resulting in a total sample of forty news articles. The selection criteria include: (1) the article must explicitly discuss digital sex work and/or women on OnlyFans; (2) the article must contain a minimum of 300 words to ensure sufficient discursive material for analysis; and (3) articles must be feature-length, commentary, or news reports. The time

frame for selection spans from 2016, the year OnlyFans was founded, to the present. This allows for the analysis to capture the platform's evolution, shifts in public perception, and changing media framings across key events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 content ban controversy. This sample offers sufficient variation to detect patterns across time, ideology, and tone while remaining manageable for close qualitative analysis. This diversity is important as it enriches the understanding of how different media producers frame and discuss the issue of women in digital sex work on platforms like OnlyFans (see Appendix A for the entire sample).

3.3 Data collection

Data collection for this study involved retrieving newspaper articles from four major Dutch legacy media outlets: de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, AD, and De Telegraaf. The articles were retrieved via the Nexis Uni digital news archive, a widely used krantenbank that offers access to full-text newspaper publications. The selection process followed the research objectives and purposive sampling strategy outlined earlier, ensuring that the most relevant content was gathered. For each single article, key metadata was thus recorded, and this metadata included within it the article's title, its publication date, the outlet, and the author (when available). The format for each piece, including news report, opinion, feature, or interview, was noted also with any visual elements. For framing effects, they considered these visual elements. Nexis Uni enabled downloading articles as standard pdf files including all metadata. Full article texts were collected and imported into ATLAS.ti to support systematic qualitative analysis. ATLAS.ti was chosen for its ability to manage large amount of textual datasets and organizing the thematic codes and notes. Secondly, I accessed the tool through the academic license from Erasmus University, which influenced the choice naturally. The prepared dataset formed the basis for both content and discourse analysis, enabling close examination of how themes around gender, sex, and labor in digital sex work are constructed and communicated in Dutch media coverage of OnlyFans.

All selected articles were downloaded in full PDF and prepared for analysis by creating a clean textual dataset. This included ensuring consistent formatting, while preserving the original wording and structure of the articles. The complete texts were then imported into ATLAS.ti, where they were coded thematically and discursively. While newspaper articles do not require verbatim transcription in the same way as audiovisual materials, attention was paid to tone, language choice, and rhetorical framing. These elements alongside headlines, leads, and structural layout, were treated as meaningful components of the articles' discursive construction. This detailed preparation ensured a foundation for both the content analysis and critical discourse analysis phases of the research (see Appendix A for the entire sample).

3.4 Operationalization

This study explores portrayals of women in digital sex work with a specific focus on OnlyFans,

analyzed through legacy media articles. The analysis is structured around three core dimensions, gender, sex, and labor, which serve as thematic anchors in both the content and discourse analysis.

The gender dimension examines how articles construct and represent gender roles and identities, particularly focusing on how women are positioned in the narratives. Language use, framing, and metaphor are closely analyzed to uncover how media shape understandings of female agency, empowerment, or victimization. The analysis also investigates how media portray women's presence on OnlyFans in relation to broader cultural expectations about femininity and respectability.

The sex dimension interrogates how sexual content, practices, and identities are discussed and morally framed in the articles. Special attention is paid to how certain behaviors are normalized or stigmatized, and whether sexual autonomy is positioned as empowering, deviant, or dangerous. This includes the presence or absence of language that evokes moral panic, erotic capital, or hypersexualization.

The labor dimension addresses how digital sex work is characterized as a form of labor. This includes analysis of references to income generation, work autonomy, worker rights, and economic precarity. Articles are assessed for how they frame the platform's monetization model, the commodification of intimacy, and the structural risks or opportunities for women participating in this form of work. These three dimensions enable a comprehensive view of the media discourse around women on OnlyFans and connect individual portrayals to broader social and policy debates

3.5 Data analysis

The analysis process is divided into stages. First, all articles are imported into ATLAS.ti and coded according to the three main dimensions. A codebook was developed using a hybrid of deductive and inductive methods. Deductive codes emerged from the theoretical framework on digital labor, platform studies, and feminist media analysis, while inductive codes emerged through close reading of a small batch of the articles. This iterative approach ensured that both pre-established and arising themes were captured. The finalized codebook consists of five main thematic categories: gender, sexuality and sexual content, labor and work conditions, platformization and governance, and discourse and framing, each broken down into specific sub-codes (see Appendix B for full codebook). The first stage of analysis involved thematic coding to identify dominant patterns across the four newspapers.

In the second stage, a CDA lens was applied to contextualize and interpret these patterns. Drawing on Fairclough's (2013) view of discourse as a social practice and on the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017), CDA was used to examine how ideologies, power relations, and normative assumptions are embedded in language. Special attention was given to discursive strategies such as nomination (how actors are named), predication (how they are described), and topoi (common lines of reasoning), which illustrates how media narratives construct figures like the "empowered entrepreneur," the "exploited sex worker," or the "risk-prone woman

online." This layered analysis, first identifying what narratives dominate, then critically unpacking their ideological function, enabled a fruitful analysis of how Dutch legacy media shape public understandings of women in platform-based sex work. See appendix C for all coded data.

3.6 Ethics

This research includes analyzing publicly available Dutch newspaper articles regarding OnlyFans and digital sex work. Ethical considerations remain important given the topic's sensitive nature, although these articles are part of the public domain. The study ensures that all references to individuals are treated with respect and discretion. When names or quotes are cited, they are done so with care to avoid unnecessary exposure or sensationalism.

Given the stigmatization of sex work and the potential for harm through misrepresentation, this study deliberately avoids reproducing harmful stereotypes or moralizing narratives. The analysis focuses on structural discourse, narrative framing, and representational strategies, rather than on individual figures or explicit content. Emphasis is placed on contextualizing the language and tone used in media representations to critically examine how power, gender, and morality are constructed in public discourse.

As a researcher, I acknowledge that my individual situation shapes the way I perform this research project. Professionally, I work in the adult toy industry which gives me direct insight into the commercial, cultural, also emotional dynamics. Sexual orientation together with virtual closeness include such interactions. My fascination with feminist theory, especially in an academic context, leads me to actively be knowledgeable about gendered inequalities. These experiences always mold my viewpoint, particularly about empathy for sex workers. I recognize that this perspective can present prejudices, like an inclination toward perceiving media constructions through a judgmental or proactive lens, while delivering context and interpretation. To tackle this, I have engaged within the analysis via careful methods and reflexivity. Explanations originate from explicitly stated coding conventions and theoretical constructs. This self-awareness is key to ensuring the integrity and transparency of the research process.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of how Dutch legacy media portray women engaged in digital sex work on the OnlyFans platform. Drawing on Fairclough's (2003) approach to CDA, the analysis focuses on how language and representation shape public understandings of legitimacy, labor, and gender. Particular attention is paid to how discourse contributes to the normalization of ideological frameworks, including neoliberalism, gendered norms, and platform logic.

To answer the research question: *How do the discourses in Dutch legacy media depict women that engage in sex work on the OnlyFans platform?* A mixed qualitative approach was adopted, content analysis was used to identify recurring themes and framing patterns across the dataset, which were then examined more closely through CDA. The dataset consists of forty articles published between 2016 and 2025 across four major Dutch newspapers: de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Algemeen Dagblad, and De Telegraaf. A total of 287 relevant excerpts were coded and analyzed in ATLAS.ti using a thematic codebook that was both theory-driven and refined inductively during the analysis process.

Four dominant themes emerged from the data: entrepreneurship, affective labor and precarity, platformization, and biased panic. Autonomy versus exploitation, visibility versus invisibility, also empowerment versus vulnerability are the key tensions these thematic groups reflect in the Dutch legacy media discourse. Some media articles frame OnlyFans as being a space for empowerment and financial independence. Others do highlight the emotional as well as social costs borne through female creators within an increasingly platformed digital economy. Each of these themes receives further discussion in the sections below, starting with entrepreneurial framing which shapes Dutch media discourse regarding women within digital sex work. All Dutch quotes used in the results have been translated into English by the author. The original Dutch quotes are included in the footnotes.

4.1 Entrepreneurship as Neoliberal frame

Across all themes emerging from the analysis, entrepreneurship dominates the way Dutch legacy media represent OnlyFans. Across the sample, the platform is strongly framed as a site of economic opportunity, where users supposedly turn erotic capital into financial freedom. In this section, we unpack how media narratives can construct a neoliberal vision of digital sex work. One shadowing all the emotional and relational and structural labor that can sustain it while also celebrating profit and autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit.

Of the 287 quotations coded, 178 were labeled with economic themes, including commercial gain, business logic, and erotic capital. This makes entrepreneurship the most dominant frame in the dataset. In what follows, we unpack how this framing manifest across articles, starting with examples that glorify success and ending with those that position the creator as a liberated, self-determined entrepreneur.

Distribution table	Female	Male	Intersection/Irrelevant	Total
Economic Frame (D4)	15	28	24	67
Erotic Capital (S4)	22	25	16	63
Entrepreneurship (L2)	16	19	13	48
Total	53	72	53	178

Table 1. Gender distribution for economic-related codes. This table shows the number of quotations per gender reference that were coded with economic frames, erotic capital, and entrepreneurship. Male creators were most frequently linked to economic success, though female and intersectional references were also common.

4.1.1 The Promise of Profit

Across all four newspaper outlets, OnlyFans seems consistently represented as offering economic opportunity since it gives its users quick and good income. Articles frequently stress the platform's potential toward individual creators. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform grew rapidly. In the Telegraaf, the headline "*Loads of money for your nudes. Celebrities and influencers cash in on their own bodies*" suggests a low-effort, high-reward model, while Volkskrant headline notes "*OnlyFans owner was earning millions by the age of 20*" referring to founder Tim Stokely. These representations frequently do rely on a sensationalist framing of success, and this framing can increase a neoliberal ideal when people determine their own finances and show entrepreneurial spirit. As the Volkskrant states:

> "For those looking to make quick money, OnlyFans appears to be a lucrative option. Some creators earn staggering amounts: the top five earners together bring in over 50 million dollars per month"[2]

This quote embodies how economic success on OnlyFans is framed as both fast and spectacular. Through nomination, content creators are referred to neutrally as "creators" and "earners", erasing any reference to sex work or emotional labor. These actors are predicated with attributes such as "top five earners" and associated with "staggering amounts" which intensifies their income and emphasizes economic success.

This quote also draws on a topos of financial opportunity, suggesting that because some creators earn immense wealth, OnlyFans is therefore a valid and lucrative path for anyone who wants

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[2] "Voor wie snel veel geld wil verdienen lijkt OnlyFans een lucratieve optie. Sommige makers halen hallucinante bedragen binnen: de vijf best verdienende artiesten verdienen samen ruim 50 miljoen dollar per maand" (Hermus, 2023, para. 10)

to make quick wealth. Yet, through this logic, the article implicitly generalizes exceptional cases, excluding any mention of platform inequalities, algorithmic invisibility, or the thousands of creators earning close to nothing (van Doorn & Velthuis, 2018, p. 178). There is no indication of the speaker's voice or context, which further gives the impression that these figures are neutral facts rather than part of a carefully constructed narrative.

In addition to sensational earnings, legacy media coverage frames OnlyFans as a driver for empowerment, control, and autonomy. These narratives position creators as self-directed entrepreneurs who have broken free from the 9-5 model and now enjoy lifestyle flexibility, independence, and fulfillment. As Entman (1993) notes, framing involves both selection and salience: this quote selects exceptional outcomes and presents them as typical. This framing reflects what Van Doorn and Velthuis (2018) describe as the entrepreneurial promise of platform labor: autonomy and economic success are emphasized, while the infrastructural dependencies and precarities are backgrounded. The absence of any reference to sex work flattens the complexity of this labor, rebranding it in terms of entrepreneurship. An example of Telegraaf:

"She claimed she was able to pay off her overdue mortgage within five minutes."[3]

This quote embodies the argumentation of liberation through income, casting sex work on OnlyFans as a fast track to financial security. This framing aligns with critiques of the gig economy (Van Doorn & Velthuis, 2018; Duffy, 2015), centering a fantasy of individual financial empowerment through quick, market-based action while excluding the structural and emotional labor that sustains such success. The phrase within five minutes exaggerates the speed and efficacy of the platform, reinforcing a neoliberal fantasy of instant success. Through predication strategies, the speaker is portrayed as competent, independent, and money-wise. The quote lacks context or careful thought about if those earnings are normal. The anecdote is viewed as being a model for success instead of one analyzing sustainability. The lack of an explicit reference to sex work further depicts the romanticization of labor upon the platform. OnlyFans is thus able to be rendered as a business platform that is enabling financial freedom, not as a site that is of erotic production. This fits into a broader framing package (Van Gorp, 2007), where sex work is constructed as lucrative and self-empowered while excluding platform dependencies, affective demands, and economic precarity.

Furthermore, the quote functions ideologically by obscuring the labor behind the reward. There is no mention of content production, online engagement, or digital marketing, tasks that make up the bulk of an OnlyFans creator's day. The result is an overexposed reward narrative and an underexposed labor process.

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[3] "Naar eigen zeggen kon ze binnen vijf minuten al haar achterstallige hypotheeklasten afbetalen." (De Jong, 2024, para. 6).

"Sex workers now have more autonomy than ever. Through websites like OnlyFans, they sell their work directly to their audience – shady porn producers have become redundant."[4]

Here, autonomy is explicitly celebrated. The use of comparative predication "more autonomy than ever" sets the present apart from a darker past, while topos of emancipation opposes the transparency of platforms like OnlyFans to the "shady" intermediaries of legacy porn. This binary positions platforms as the empowering alternative, reinforcing the ideology of platform as liberator (van Dijck et al., 2018). From a CDA lens, this quote also contains strong nomination strategies. The speaker assigns agency to "sex workers" and constructs them as actors, navigating platforms with control and intent. Yet this linguistic move masks the platform dependencies and algorithmic governance that shape creators' visibility and earnings. As Di Cicco (2024) argues, creators must perform not just for their audience but for the platform itself: optimizing content, chasing engagement, and staying within moderation guidelines.

Moreover, this quote excludes the emotional, social, and infrastructural costs of such autonomy. While it suggests empowerment, it fails to address the gendered expectations around accessibility, availability, and vulnerability that often define sex work on OnlyFans (Tynan & Linehan, 2024, pp. 2313-2314). In this way, the language of freedom is used to distract the deeper issues. Reframing exploitation as personal choice and shifting structural inequalities onto individual responsibility.

While the discourse of empowerment celebrates autonomy and control, it often passes over the structural conditions that constrain this freedom. The glorification of flexible lifestyles and direct fan access obscures the realities of emotional exhaustion, performance pressure, and economic instability. In presenting creators as entrepreneurial success stories, legacy media texts often ignore the affective and invisible labor that underpins platform visibility. The next section explores these hidden dimensions in more depth, tracing how affective labor and precarity are represented in coverage of digital sex work on OnlyFans.

4.2 Affective labor and Precarity

While legacy media often frames OnlyFans through the lens of entrepreneurial success, narratives rarely account about the affective nature of platform labor. As discussed in section 4.1, coverage tends to celebrate the economic lens yet glosses over the continuous emotional, relational, and digital work creators must perform to remain visible, relevant, and sustain themselves. In this section, we move beyond the economic imaginary to explore how affective labor and precarity surface, both explicitly and implicitly, in Dutch legacy media reporting on OnlyFans. Of the 287 coded quotations

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[4] "Sekswerkers hebben tegenwoordig meer autonomie dan ooit. Via websites als OnlyFans verkopen ze hun werk direct aan hun publiek – schimmige pornoproducenten zijn voor hen overbodig geworden" (Theirlynck, 2024, para. 10).

in the dataset, 73 referenced to relationship building, gig economy, and precarities surrounding digital sex work.

Distribution	Female	Male	Intersection/Irrelevant	Total
Precarity (L1)	17	3	2	22
Affective Labor (L3)	11	9	5	25
Digital Gig Work (L4)	16	5	5	26
Total	44	17	12	73

Table 2. Gender distribution for affective labor and precarity codes. Precarity and emotional labor were most often associated with female creators. The data also shows that male and intersectional references appear more frequently in affective labor codes than in earlier themes.

4.2.1 Selling the Self

“Our clients don't just want pictures, they want a connection.”[5]

This brief but revealing quote captures the core of what distinguishes OnlyFans from traditional adult content: the commodification of intimacy. Creators are not just selling sexual content; they are offering emotional labor in the form of attention, relational consistency, and the performance of intimacy. This quote embodies how sex work on OnlyFans is not limited to explicit imagery but extends to the sphere of emotional engagement. Drawing on Constable (2009) and Lazzarato (2004), we can understand this shift as part of a broader capitalist tendency to commercialize intimacy, in which care and affect become profitable services. This dynamic blur the boundary between authentic emotional connection and strategic performance, positioning intimacy itself as a form of labor subject to market logic and platform attraction.

This is particularly visible in the CDA nomination-predication pair: the consumer is nominated as a “customer”, but their needs are predicated not in transactional terms, but as “relational bonds”. This positions the creator as more than a performer: they become an emotional caretaker. A role rooted in what Hochschild (1983) defines as emotional labor, where managing and performing feelings becomes a key component of work (Steinberg & Figart, 1999, p. 9-10), especially in feminized service roles. What is being sold is not just a body or image, but access to a curated version of the self. In this logic, visibility and affect are deeply intertwined, success depends not only on how much is shown, but on how much is emotionally invested.

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[5] “Onze klanten willen niet alleen foto's, ze willen ook een band.” (Smithuijsen, 2023, para. 17).

"What Yvonne finds particularly disappointing is how much time it takes to establish relationships with potential customers. People want to chat endlessly, you must keep up with conversations all the time. If you don't respond for a day, people already drop out."[6]

This quote illustrates the temporal and emotional burdens that underpin platform success. Emotional labor here is both demanded and uncompensated, a classic example of what Terranova (2000) describes as "free labor": the unpaid or underpaid emotional investment that is central to the platform's value production (p. 48). The creator's account draws attention to the time-intensive nature of relationship maintenance and the platform's built-in expectation of constant availability.

From a critical perspective, this quote introduces a topos of obligation: if creators do not maintain the demanded emotional engagement, they risk losing income. The verb "you must" indicates urgency, and the predication that clients will "drop off" implies immediate economic consequences for emotional absence. The invisible boundaries between personal and professional interaction collapse, the creator becomes both a product and a service provider whose value lies in continued presence.

This ties closely to Duffy's (2015) concept of aspirational labor, the continuous, future-oriented investment of time and emotion with no guarantee of success (p. 6). This creator is not just producing content; she is maintaining a digital persona, cultivating affective ties, and performing a version of herself that is emotionally accessible and economically strategic. In this way, the labor of visibility becomes a kind of emotional endurance, marked by dependency.

"But earning more doesn't necessarily mean showing more skin or engaging in more unusual fetishes. "Many of my followers are looking for the girlfriend experience. They're at home, on their phone or computer all day, and they're bored," Valentine says. "They want to talk to you and get to know you to create an intimate moment together. That often doesn't require any nudity or sexuality at all."[7]

This final quote disrupts the normal equitation of sex work. Sex work is now not explicitly all about sexual performance. Instead, it highlights just how more and more, creators must offer up for emotional intimacy. Creators turn closeness into a profitable product. The "girlfriend experience" (GFE) has long been a trope in both online and offline sex work. GFE is a form of commercial sex in

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[6] "Wat Yvonne vooral tegenvalt, is hoeveel tijd het kost relaties aan te gaan met potentiële klanten. 'Mensen willen eindeloos chatten, je moet alsmaar gesprekken bijhouden. Als je een dag niet reageert, haken mensen al af." (Smithuijsen, 2023, para. 6).

[7] "Maar meer verdienen, betekent niet per se meer huid tonen of meer bijzondere festisjes. „Veel van mijn volgers zijn op zoek naar de girlfriend experience. Ze zitten thuis, de hele dag op hun telefoon of computer en ze vervelen zich", vertelt Valentine. „Ze willen met je praten en je leren kennen om een intiem moment met elkaar te creëren. Dat vereist vaak helemaal geen naaktheid of seksualiteit." (Waal, 2021, para. 7).

which emotional intimacy and mutual pleasure are emphasized, making the encounter resemble a romantic relationship rather than a purely transactional exchange (Huff, 2011, pp. 112-113). From a CDA perspective, the quote relies on predication strategies that frame creators not as sex workers per se, but as emotional caretakers, individuals who "talk," "get to know," and "create intimate moments." These actions carry affective weight and are linguistically associated with femininity and care, reinforcing gendered expectations of labor. Through nomination, creators are positioned as providers of a relational service, rather than agents of erotic performance. Intimacy itself becomes a discursively constructed product, stripped of spontaneity and embedded in platform logic.

Rather than freely choosing how to perform intimacy, creators adapt to what the platform makes profitable. Femininity is no longer performed erotically alone, but relationally, creators are valued as much for emotional labor as for sexual appeal. Drawing on Gill's (2007) concept of postfeminist sensibility, this can be read as empowerment-through-care: creators appear autonomous, yet the framing reinforces that women's worth lies in their capacity to soothe and emotionally serve. As Butler (2009) might argue, this availability is not just personal, but a gendered performance shaped by cultural norms and economic pressure.

While OnlyFans is often framed as a space of freedom and flexibility, the emotional and relational labor that sustains that visibility is rarely recognized as work. Dutch legacy media highlight connection, intimacy, and responsiveness, but rarely name these as structured forms of feminized labor. Instead, the emotional labor required to remain visible, desirable, and profitable becomes a silent standard, not a subject of critique. Through a platform logic that rewards constant engagement and relational closeness, femininity is not only eroticized but emotionalized. As such, affective labor becomes both the product and the cost of digital sex work.

4.3 Platformization

While previous sections examined how Dutch legacy media frame OnlyFans as a site of economic opportunity and affective labor, this section turns attention to the infrastructural and algorithmic conditions that structure visibility, success, and control on the platform. Drawing on concepts from platform studies and digital labor theory, we analyze how legacy media representations construct the platform's role as an economic gatekeeper. Although OnlyFans is often described as a tool of empowerment and self-employment, the platform operates within the logic of platform capitalism, wherein creators must constantly navigate opaque rules, content moderation, monetization systems, and cross-platform promotion to sustain their visibility and income (Poell & Nieborg, 2018; Gorwa, 2024; van Dijck et al., 2021).

Of the 287 quotations coded in our dataset, 94 referenced issues related to platform infrastructure, including algorithmic discovery, income dependency, and deplatforming risk. These narratives offer insight into how legacy media reproduce a techno-economic discourse that positions

the platform as both a facilitator of success and a source of instability.

Distribution	Female	Male	Intersection/irrelevant	Total
Algorithmic Influence (P1)	1	3	9	13
Policy & Moderation (P2)	10	28	10	48
Platform Dependency (P3)	10	12	11	33
Total	21	43	30	94

Table 3: Gender distribution of platform governance codes. Platform-related issues such as moderation, algorithmic influence, and dependency were most frequently mentioned in gender-irrelevant quotes, suggesting that media tend to frame these concerns as structural rather than gendered.

4.3.1 Platform dependency and governance

While OnlyFans is often portrayed as a medium for autonomy and financial independence, the daily reality of content creators is deeply shaped by infrastructural dependency and platform governance. As this section demonstrates, Dutch legacy media offers occasional insights into how sex workers are tied to multiple digital platforms, the restrictions those platforms urge, and the larger infrastructures that ultimately determine what forms of labor and expression are allowed. A quote from AD offers an evident illustration of this entanglement between life and labor:

“Without a phone there is no work, and without work no life.”[8]

This formulation reveals the extent to which sex work on OnlyFans is embedded within platform infrastructures. From a CDA perspective, the quote uses a statement of inevitability “no phone, no work” to present this dependency as an unavoidable reality. The way the sentence repeats similar phrases makes the dependence on work feel inevitable: the boundary between life and labor is not blurred but collapsed entirely. The absence of a subject, no “I” or “we,” just an impersonal truth, produces a generalized discourse, projecting the condition onto all creators. This framing neutralizes the infrastructural dependency central to platform labor.

The creator's livelihood depends not only on OnlyFans, but on constant connectivity, content production, and algorithmic visibility. This demand erases the line between personal and professional life. This aligns with what Duffy (2015) and Di Cicco (2024) describe as the collapse of work/leisure boundaries in digital labor, particularly for creators whose self-branding and relational performance

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[8] "Zonder telefoon geen werk, en zonder werk geen leven." (Kunst, 2024, para. 24).

must remain untouched. From a CDA perspective, the topos of necessity operates here: the phone is not just a device, but a lifeline. The quote blurs personal and professional spheres, casting connectivity as a precondition for existence. Importantly, the burden of that connectivity falls most heavily on creators themselves, individualizing what is in fact a structural dependency.

Dutch media occasionally touch on the infrastructural demands of cross-platform self-marketing. Several articles outline how creators use Instagram as a teaser space, Twitter as a space for explicit previews, and OnlyFans as the monetized endpoint:

"Through accounts on regular social media platforms like Instagram, OnlyFans creators build an audience. There, they share suggestive content, but no nudity- since that's not allowed on Instagram. Those who want to see more are often first directed to X (formerly Twitter). Nudity is permitted there, allowing creators to post short previews. And for even more, users are sent to OnlyFans, where they have to pay."[9]

This strategy stems from a core limitation: OnlyFans offers no algorithmic discovery. As one article bluntly notes,

"You can only join OnlyFans if you're already known."[10]

Here, media coverage explicitly points to the cross-platform dependencies sex workers must navigate to generate traffic and income. This strategy reflects the lack of algorithmic discovery on OnlyFans itself, a limitation that creators must counter through self-marketing on more mainstream platforms. As Poell and Nieborg (2018) argue, such infrastructural configurations make creators highly vulnerable to changes in platform affordances, policy enforcement, or shadow bans, factors entirely beyond their control (p. 4283-4284). From a broader perspective, this quote reflects more than a workaround for visibility, it signals how platforms like OnlyFans have taken control over the infrastructure of erotic labor. Rather than simply enabling creators, they have displaced older infrastructures and imposed commercial rules for visibility, monetization, and legitimacy. From a CDA lens, this shift is hidden in the language of "building audiences," which places the burden on workers while erasing platform governance. Nomination strategies focus on creators as agents but hide the system shaping success. What we see here is not just digital sex work, but a form of labor entirely shaped by platform control. Profits and power remain with the platform, while creators carry the risks: making platformization more about control than empowerment.

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[9] "Via accounts op reguliere sociale media zoals Instagram bouwen OnlyFans-makers een publiek op. Daar delen ze prikkelende beelden, maar geen naakt - dat is op Instagram niet toegestaan. Wie meer wil zien, wordt eerst veelal naar X (voorheen Twitter) verwezen. Daar mag naakt wel, en kunnen korte voorproefjes getoond worden. En wie meer wil, moet naar OnlyFans en betalen" (Nijssen, 2024, para. 8).
[10] "Je kunt alleen instappen op OnlyFans als je al bekend bent." (Nijssen, 2020, para. 15).

Moreover, creators' livelihoods are vulnerable to forces beyond the platform. The 2021 decision by OnlyFans to ban explicit content, later reversed after backlash, was prompted not by law but by pressure from financial institutions:

> "Recently, the major global app OnlyFans announced that users were no longer allowed to post content showing sexual acts, 'in order to comply with the requirements of the financial institutions we work with.' Only nude photos and videos were still permitted. The ban was only lifted after switching to a different bank."[11]

This quote surfaces an important truth about the governance of digital sex work: it is not solely controlled by the creators or even the platforms themselves but shaped by opaque financial infrastructures. Payment processors like Visa and Mastercard can directly influence content policies, risking the livelihoods of creators in the process. This illustrates what van Dijck et al. (2021) describe as infrastructural deplatformization: a form of indirect censorship enacted not through public law, but through backend institutions like banks, app stores, or cloud services (pp. 3443-3446). In this case, Visa and Mastercard used the demonetization strategy to maintain control on the platforms content (p. 3444). From this vantage point, digital labor on OnlyFans is not merely precarious due to its fluent gig structure, but also because it is vulnerable to external governance from private corporations. This quote erases agency, the subject "OnlyFans" complies passively, as if financial governance were unavoidable. The logic of moderation is displaced: what is permissible is no longer decided by law, but by the risk tolerances of Visa or Mastercard.

Finally, some articles gesture toward a strategic repositioning of OnlyFans itself, aiming to appeal to a more "mainstream" audience:

> "At the launch of a new platform, creators of sexual content are tolerated to attract visitors and generate popularity. But as soon as the opportunity arises to go truly mainstream or larger investors come on board, we're unceremoniously kicked off."[12]

This quote signals the platform's shifting logic: from centering independent sex workers to courting celebrities and influencers. These shifts echo van Doorn's (2022) critique that platform capitalism often instrumentalizes marginalized labor during early growth phases, also it then rebrands toward sanitized, commercial models once financial stability is achieved (pp. 10-11). In this case, the move

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[11] "Recent maakte de grote, wereldwijde app OnlyFans nog bekend dat gebruikers er geen beelden van seksuele handelingen meer mochten plaatsen 'om te voldoen aan de eisen van de financiële instellingen waar we mee samenwerken'. Alleen naaktfoto's en -video's mochten nog. Pas na de overstap naar een andere bank werd het verbod ingetrokken" (Rosman & Wassenaar, 2024, para. 19).

[12] "Bij de start van een nieuw platform worden makers van seksuele content getolereerd om bezoekers aan te trekken en populairiteit te genereren. Maar zodra de kans zich voordoet echt mainstream te gaan, of grotere investeerders zich aandienen, worden we er oneerbiedig uitgegooid" (Waal, 2021, para. 4).

toward mainstream visibility entails a symbolic erasure and practical erasure of sex workers. These workers built the platform's success, but they remain at risk for marginalization when their presence becomes reputationally inconvenient.

Taken all together, these are quotes that disrupt at least the illusion of autonomy now attributed to OnlyFans creators. They expose a digital labor economy reliant infrastructurally and governed through financial and algorithmic systems. This economy is increasingly commercialized in such ways as to re-center celebrity culture to the harm of marginalized workers.

4.4 Biased Cultural Panic

While themes such as entrepreneurship or affective labor surfaced clearly through content analysis, the theme of gendered risk emerged more subtly during the deeper stages of coding and critical discourse analysis. In rereading and engaging closely with the material, a distinct pattern became apparent: whenever the articles addressed themes of risk, harm, victimization, trafficking, or moral concern, these were almost exclusively associated with women. The threat of coercion, exploitation, or social deviance was repeatedly framed as something that happens to female creators, whereas articles about men on OnlyFans either backgrounded such risks altogether or focused on their nudity and financial gain without concern for safety.

This asymmetry in the framing reveals a gendered discourse for vulnerability risk that is treated not as a structural condition of digital labor but as a problem attaching specifically to female-coded sex work and to female bodies. Male creators are largely excluded from concern, while the one article referencing transwomen creators used the term "shemales", a deeply stigmatizing and reductive label that underscores the broader marginalization of gender-diverse sex workers. These patterns emerge through interpretive analysis of how language, tone, and narrative framing operated across the dataset.

To better illustrate this pattern, Table 4 below presents a quantitative mapping of how risk-related themes were distributed across gender references in the dataset. This mapping supports the interpretive insight that Dutch legacy media tend to frame sex work-related danger, coercion, or stigma as gendered phenomena.

Distribution	Female	Male	Intersection/Irrelevant	Total
Risk Frame (D2)	28	7	12	47
Cultural Panic (D3)	29	7	8	44
Victimization (G2)	25	9	6	40

Moral judgement (S1)	26	15	9	50
Total	108	38	35	181

Table 4: Gender distribution of risk-related codes. This table demonstrates that themes of moral judgment, panic, victimization, and risk are disproportionately applied to quotes referencing women, confirming the gendered framing of danger in media discourse on OnlyFans.

4.4.1 Female Exploitation and Vulnerability

Dutch legacy media coverage of OnlyFans frequently sways between narratives of empowerment and concern. However, a closer look reveals a consistent pattern: when themes of risk, harm, trafficking, or moral judgment appear, they are disproportionately linked to women, and especially to female-coded forms of sex work. This section examines how such depictions use gendered vulnerability frames for the media to make a moral binary in which women are strong yet naive or abused so rescue is necessary. These framings perpetuate stigma via presentation of women's digital sex work as inherently suspect and obscure structural dynamics of platform labor. This quote from de Volkskrant clearly expresses the tension with agency as well as constraint. The tension between agency and constraint is clearly expressed in this quote from de Volkskrant:

> "It may seem like empowerment that women can earn money easily this way, but it's still earning money within the structures of patriarchy."[13]

This quote embodies what Gill (2007) calls a "double entanglement" in postfeminist discourse, where women are both hailed as autonomous and simultaneously disciplined through suspicion, irony, or moral ambivalence (p. 161). The phrasing "It may seem like empowerment" casts doubt on the legitimacy of women's choices, suggesting that the speaker sees through a false appearance and knows the 'real' truth behind it. The clause "but it's still earning money within the structures of patriarchy" performs as a strategic use of language: it replaces the creator's voice with a generalized ideological critique, disqualifying individual experience or agency as naive. From a CDA perspective, this framing erases the subject: there is no named actor, no specific creator, only a vague plural "women," frames women's choices as simplistic examples of what can go wrong, stripping them of complexity or agency. Rather than challenging the system, the discourse often narrows the conversation. It shifts attention away from the political potential of digital work, framing it instead as something that fits safely within traditional gender roles. This framing becomes especially problematic when the media discusses exploitation, particularly in stories about gender-diverse creators. In AD, a report states:

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[13] Het lijkt misschien empowerment dat vrouwen online makkelijk geld kunnen verdienen op deze manier, maar het blijft geld verdienen binnen de kaders van het patriarchaat." (Smithuijsen, 2023, para. 29).

"The shemales are virtually all available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And often for sexual acts like gangbangs, fisting, or anal sex without a condom. Very few people choose such a life entirely of their own free will. And so, there is a constant suspicion of human trafficking. The only way to find out is to track them down and hope they are willing to talk.[14]

This quote is packed with multiple forms of linguistic violence against gender-diverse people. First, the use of 'shemales' is not a neutral descriptor, it emerges from pornographic categorization and is widely recognized as a dehumanizing slur (Serano, 2007, p. 100). Its use here signals the article's roots in cisnormativity and transphobic discourse, reducing trans women to sexual spectacle. From a CDA lens, the naming strategy "shemales" uniforms a stigmatized group, while the predication that they are "available 24/7" and perform extreme sexual acts constructs a hypersexual, excessive, and degrading subjectivity. The sentence does not name labor or context; it names submission and a pornified fantasy.

The passage then shifts to moral judgment: "Very few people choose such a life entirely of their own free will.". This is a presumption disguised as empathy. It argues that such work cannot possibly be freely chosen, thus depriving the possibility of agency in trans sex work altogether. As Gill (2007) argues disguising moral disgust as common sense (p. 161). Rather than interrogating structural exclusion or economic marginalization, the article locates the problem in the sex worker supposed deviance. The final sentence, "The only way to find out is to track them down and hope they are willing to talk", is particularly telling. From a feminist CDA perspective, this is a classic rescue narrative that reinforces the role of the state as savior and renders trans labor always already suspect.

The most over the top moralizing frame appears in de Volkskrant, where a quote makes trafficking the inevitable endpoint of digital sex work:

"The girls and women are not infrequently groomed, seduced, blackmailed or threatened. Models are also traded between digital pimps who, often without the women knowing, offer 'their' models for sale in Telegram groups. Human trafficking, then."[15]

This quote constructs a clear topos of danger and uses repetition "groomed, seduced, blackmailed or threatened" to intensify moral panic. The framing identifies digital sex work with trafficking through

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[14] "De shemales zijn vrijwel allemaal 24 uur per dag, zeven dagen per week beschikbaar. En vaak ook voor seksuele handelingen als gangbang, fisting of anale seks zonder condoom. Er zijn maar weinig mensen die geheel vrijwillig voor zo'n leven kiezen. En dus is er voortdurend het vermoeden van mensenhandel. De enige manier om daarachter te komen is ze op te sporen, en hopen dat ze willen praten." (Kunst, 2024, para. 15).
[15] "De meisjes en vrouwen worden daarbij niet zelden gegroomd, verleid, gechanteerd of bedreigd. Modellen worden ook verhandeld tussen digitale pooiers die, vaak zonder dat de vrouwen het weten, 'hun' modellen te koop aanbieden in Telegramgroepen. Mensenhandel, dus." (Aboutaleb, 2024, para. 3).

the conclusive phrase "Human trafficking, then", which leaves no interpretive space. Nomination strategies use terms like "girls and women" and "models," both of which erase the individuality of the women involved and present them as needing protection. This aligns with Van Gorp's (2007) concept of a framing package, where deviance and victimhood are bundled together in recurring patterns. Crucially, no male or non-feminine subjects appear in these accounts. The structural and algorithmic factors that might expose creators to coercion are backgrounded, while the media frame heightens the salience of female vulnerability (Goffman, 1974). This selective emphasis reinforces a sensational narrative in which risk is gendered and individualized, removing all attention from systemic conditions on the platform.

Even when creators speak for themselves, their voices are framed through misunderstanding. In AD, one woman reflects on the social perception of her work:

"But I don't work from home and what I do is legal. People think it's illegal because it's often written about that way."[16]

This quote shows how stigma is produced not by law, but by discourse. Despite her reassurance of legality and professionalism, the speaker is marked by suspicion, her labor rendered illegible within dominant frames. From a feminist perspective, this quote shows that doing something legal does not protect against stigma. As Butler (2009) and Rubin (1984) argue, sexual labor is often excluded from respectability politics, meaning that legal recognition does not shield against cultural stigma. The repeated framing of sex work as risky or criminal seeps into public imagination, creating what Van Dijk (2012) describes as symbolic governance: the discursive shaping of legitimacy and illegitimacy (p. 1). This symbolic logic is made explicit in a final quote from AD:

"We sometimes get the impression that the fight against human trafficking is also used to target prostitution in general. That reinforces the stigma and works against sex workers."[17]

While the intention may be to protect, the effect is to erase the difference between coercion and consent, and to impose a rescue narrative on labor that some undertake by choice. This quote is rare in the dataset for acknowledging that harm can arise not just from work itself, but from how it is framed. From a CDA lens, it introduces an awareness: a recognition that the discourse of risk is itself a form of power. The Dutch media's portrayal of gendered risk is not simply about concern; it is

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[16] "Maar ik werk niet thuis en het werk dat ik doe is legaal. Mensen denken dat het illegaal is, omdat er vaak zo over geschreven wordt." (Rosman & Wassenaar, 2024, para. 11).
[17] "We krijgen soms de indruk dat de strijd tegen mensenhandel ook wordt gebruikt om prostitutie in het algemeen aan te pakken. Dat versterkt het stigma en werkt sekswerkers juist tegen." (Rosman & Wassenaar, 2024, para. 24).

about control. Through a blend of moral framing, selective visibility, and discursive erasure, women's labor on platforms like OnlyFans is rendered inherently dangerous, suspicious, and culturally marginal. While moral concern may be genuine, it is seldom extended to male-coded sex work. These framings reinforce traditional gender norms while silencing the structural conditions of digital sex work. Feminist theory helps make clear that risk, in this context, is not a neutral descriptor: it is a frame that disciplines, stigmatizes, and delegitimizes women's choices in the digital economy.

5. Conclusion

"It may seem like empowerment."

That single sentence, taken from one of the articles analyzed in this research, captures the double edge that runs through the media coverage of OnlyFans. On the one hand: autonomy, money, control. On the other: risk, stigma, and structural doubt. When Dutch newspapers write about women who sell erotic content online, they rarely ask what labor they perform - they ask whether she's safe, real, empowered, or deceived.

Each of the previous sections has built toward understanding how Dutch legacy media discursively construct women in digital sex work. The steps from theory to the findings for this research were essential to uncover how power operates through language. By moving between quantitative patterns and critical readings, the analysis made a layered discourse visible in which women's digital labor is celebrated, backgrounded, and stigmatized.

How do the discourses in Dutch legacy media depict women that engage in sex work on the OnlyFans platform?

The analysis of Dutch legacy media reveals not only four separate themes, but a tightly woven discursive landscape. Each narrative offers a partial view of how women on OnlyFans are shaped, controlled, and made culturally distinct. Taken together, these discourses reveal not just what kind of labor is being framed, but what kind of woman.

Dutch legacy media frequently frame women on OnlyFans as self-made entrepreneurs, foregrounding narratives of empowerment, self-branding, and financial independence. However, this framing is deeply entangled with the logics of neoliberalism and postfeminism. Drawing on Gill's (2007, 2017) concept of postfeminist sensibility, the analysis shows how women's choices are foregrounded, but only because they align with the neoliberalism view of individualism, consumer agency, and market-based success. Autonomy is broadly celebrated, but the terms of that autonomy are ideologically loaded: success must be visible, profitable, and emotionally uncomplicated. The entrepreneurial woman appears in legacy media not as a sex worker per se, but as a canny content creator. Erotic labor is reframed as influencing, detaching the labor from its material and affective costs. Through this discourse, OnlyFans becomes a platform of possibility: one where women take advantages to flexible work, lifestyle freedom, and eventually climbing the social ladder. Yet this depiction keeps the underlying structures that constrain such agency out of sight: algorithmic visibility, fan management, and the precariousness of gig-based monetization. Importantly, these framings flatten the labor itself. It constructs empowerment as a surface narrative, only legible when labor disappears.

While the entrepreneurial narrative offers the illusion of independence, affective labor reveals its hidden burden. Women on OnlyFans are expected not just to perform erotically, but to cultivate intimacy, sustain emotional availability, and manage their audiences' expectations of digital closeness. Drawing on Hochschild's (1983) foundational concept of emotional labor, and Duffy's (2015) theory of aspirational labor, this dimension of sex work is shown to be central but hidden between the lines. Media coverage gestures toward relationship-building and GFE but frames these as natural extensions of femininity rather than forms of labor. Creators are rarely described as workers managing emotional exhaustion or strategic intimacy. Instead, they are framed as relatable attributes: chatting, comforting, bonding. These interactions are portrayed as genuine, rather than as strategic responses to platform systems that reward constant engagement and punish absence. As a result, emotional labor is presented as a sign of a good creator, not a structural demand. Gill's (2007, 2017) notion of postfeminist affect is especially relevant here: emotional labor is recoded as empowerment-through-care. Creators are painted as active agents to offer intimacy, but this "choice" is shaped by algorithms, economic survival, and platform design. As Butler (2009) might suggest, these performances of care and availability are not freely chosen identities, but gendered expectations reinforced by market logic. In this way, emotional labor becomes both a condition of success and a source of precarity.

The visibility and profitability of creators on OnlyFans depend not only on emotional or erotic performance, but on platform infrastructure itself. Yet this dimension is largely underplayed in media discourse. Drawing on van Dijck et al. (2021) and Nieborg and Poell (2018), the analysis reveals how creators are entangled in a system of platform capitalism that determines who gets seen, who gets paid, and under what conditions. Algorithmic influence, cross-platform dependency, and monetization barriers are central to creators' experiences but remain on the outer layer in journalistic narratives. Media representations do occasionally hint at platform dependency: the need for constant phone access, the necessity of marketing across Instagram and Twitter, and the lack of discovery tools on OnlyFans itself. But these are often presented as quirks of the job rather than structural constraints. There is little analysis of how platform governance, through policy shifts, moderation, and financial partnerships, shapes what kinds of content is allowed or profitable. Platformization also restructures the sex industry itself. Where sex work was once scattered across forums, cam sites, and direct services, platforms like OnlyFans centralize sex work under corporate control. Creators do not own their audiences, their infrastructure, or their income pathways. They work in a system that limits their autonomy by design, even as it presents itself as empowering. Media discourse largely ignores this contradiction, reinforcing the myth of self-employment while creators absorb the risks of platform labor on their own.

Of all the thematic patterns, the framing of risk was the most explicitly gendered. While men on OnlyFans were always portrayed in terms of nudity or entrepreneurial success, women were consistently linked to narratives of danger, exploitation, or moral decline. Drawing on Goffman's

(1974) and Van Gorp's (2007) theories of framing, the analysis shows how risk is not treated as a structural feature of platform labor but as a threat uniquely attached to female-coded sex work. This gendered risk discourse creates a binary: women are either empowered or endangered, often both in the same breath. Feminist theory reveals how this framing reinforces control. As Butler (2009) argues, language that claims to protect could potentially end up justifying control. In Dutch legacy media, concerns about trafficking, grooming, and moral decline are unequally applied to women. Even when women speak for themselves, their accounts are framed through suspicion or paternalism. What emerges is a mode of symbolic governance (van Dijk, 2012), in which legitimacy is consulted through discourse. Female sex workers are often treated with suspicion. Their work is seen as inappropriate even when it's legal, and emotional rather than professional. Risk is used as a way to control them, dismiss their choices, and hide the larger problems that make digital sex work unstable. Taken individually, each theme reveals a facet of how Dutch media construct women in digital sex work. Taken together, they form a discursive field that frames women's labor as economically valuable, emotionally demanding, structurally constrained, and morally dangerous - simultaneously. These contradictions are not exceptions, but part of the deeper structure that shapes how media portray sex work in the age of platforms.

This research has shown that Dutch legacy media construct women who engage in sex work on OnlyFans through contradictory discourse that switches between empowerment and moral concern, autonomy and danger, visibility and marginalization. Rather than presenting women as complex subjects navigating through the digital sector, the media discourse simplifies their presence into tropes: the entrepreneur, the emotional caretaker, the risked body, and the content creator vulnerable to platform whims. Each of these representations is shaped not by neutral observation but by discursive patterns.

The entrepreneurial framing aligns women with the ideals of neoliberalism: self-made, optimized, profitable. Yet, these narratives of agency are often disconnected from the emotional and infrastructural labor that sustains them. Media texts celebrate visibility without accounting for what it takes to remain visible - affective investment, emotional labor, and continuous interaction with opaque platform systems. The emotional dimension of digital sex work is rendered feminine but not professional, intimate but not difficult. At the same time, the discourse of risk disproportionately attaches itself to women, particularly cisgender and trans women. The threat of harm, trafficking, and deviance is rarely extended to male creators. Instead, women are subject to what Goffman and Van Gorp would call a cultural script of moral danger. This discourse becomes a powerful form of symbolic governance, it marks some forms of labor as unacceptable, even when legal or chosen. Here, feminist theory illustrates how concern becomes a form of control.

Taken together, the discursive framing constructs a narrow path through which women's labor on OnlyFans is made publicly understandable. Success must appear effortless, labor must

remain invisible, and risk must be gendered. These patterns do not simply reflect cultural worries; they actively shape how sex work is legitimized, debated, and governed in Dutch media. The public image of OnlyFans is thus neither neutral nor complete, it is a negotiated product of intersecting discourses that render certain forms of female digital labor legitimate, and others illegitimate Beneath the surface of these discourses lies a temporal logic: the newness of OnlyFans itself shapes how legacy media depict it. Because the platform does not yet have a rooted cultural identity, it becomes a symbolic site onto which competing worries are projected. As a newly visible form of sex work, OnlyFans serves as battleground where ideas about gender, labor, visibility, and morality are negotiated in real time.

This study shows that OnlyFans' newness leads to unstable and shifting media narratives. Narratives shifting more dramatically because the boundaries of legitimacy are not yet fixed. The lack of rooted history allows media to frame OnlyFans as both threat and opportunity, often within the same article. It is this instability that enables conflicting frames to coexist. This means the platform's newness plays an active role in shaping how its users, especially women, are portrayed." The moral panic is sharper because the cultural script is still being written.

This research contributes not only to academic discourse but also raises questions for journalism, public debate, and platform governance. The findings reveal how Dutch legacy media frame women on OnlyFans within limiting binaries. These frames have real-world consequences. Media stories mold how sex work is seen, governed, and evaluated instead of just giving reports. Even when well-intentioned reporting exists, Dutch newspapers risk reinforcing stigma and misrecognition by disproportionately linking women's digital labor to victimhood or moral decline. One practical implication lies in the need for more careful, inclusive, and critically reflective journalism. News coverage simplifies complexity while it flattens digital sex work into common tropes. These risks serve to reproduce cultural scripts because they background structural issues such as income precarity, algorithmic bias, or financial surveillance. Journalists and editors could benefit from ethical frameworks that treat sex workers as work rather than as moral subjects. In terms of platform governance, this research suggests that OnlyFans' promise of empowerment is conditioned by opaque rules, shifting policies, and economic dependencies beyond creators' control. This calls for platforms and financial institutions to be much more transparent in respect to how they decide concerning moderation, monetization, and visibility; most particularly when they disproportionately affect marginalized workers.

Finally, the research contributes to ongoing debates around the legal and cultural recognition of sex work in digital spaces. As sex work moves online, old forms of regulation and stigma are rearticulated in new, platform-specific ways. Understanding these discourses can help inform policy approaches that distinguish between coercion and consent and that center the voices of sex workers themselves.

This study is limited in scope to forty articles across four Dutch legacy newspapers. While this allows for a qualitative analysis, it cannot claim full representativeness of Dutch media as a whole, nor of wider European or global media landscapes. The selection focused on legacy print outlets, meaning that online-native platforms, social media, and more niche publications were excluded. Since this topic has been interest of mine for many years, the niche publications and social media are highly interesting for further research. Furthermore, although the coding process was systematic and guided by both theory and inductive insights, it remains interpretive in nature. As with all CDA, the findings reflect a particular analytical lens. Another researcher, using a different framework or set of priorities, may have highlighted other patterns. Finally, this study focused exclusively on textual media coverage. Visual elements such as images, and layout were not analyzed, even though they may significantly shape audience interpretations. Nor were audience responses or interpretations included, which could provide important insight into how these discourses are received.

The scope for this study could be expanded through future research both in breadth and in depth. A dataset that is larger could confirm that consistency of those discursive patterns identified. It would have to include a broader range of the media outlets all across the media landscape. More subtle or counter-hegemonic representations could be able to be revealed. This may occur when online-native journalism, feminist media, or sites such as Cosmopoltian.nl and VICE are present. Moreover, comparative research across national contexts could illuminate how local cultural values, legal systems, and media traditions shape the framing of digital sex work. For example, how do French, British, or Scandinavian media represent OnlyFans, and how do these narratives intersect with broader discourses around gender, morality, and technology? Studying the audience involves another direction that is highly interesting. Interviews, surveys, or focus groups could explore how the public interprets these media discourses. The investigation into the matter could reveal if it is the case that these discourses reinforce existing beliefs or challenge existing beliefs. This would improve any media study in scope. Future research, in short, should continue on to question how those portrayals circulate, stick, and shape the lives of those they claim to describe, and how sex work is represented.

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