



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

A weatherman was fired when his webcam photos leaked. Will how we think about sex ever change?



David Oliver

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Key Points

NY1 weatherman Erick Adame recently lost his job after his employer discovered his nudes.

Should someone be fired for consensual sex practices made public?

Expressing yourself sexually is healthy, experts say, but society isn't always on board.

Erick Adame, a New York weatherman, recently lost his job after his employer discovered he appeared on an adult webcam website. Though every circumstance differs, Adame's situation raises an important question: Should someone be fired for consensual sex practices made public?

That depends.

"It's a healthy expression of sexuality," says Courtney Watson, licensed marriage and family therapist. "And no one should have that policed because other folks don't agree (with) the way that their individual sexuality should be expressed. That's no one else's business."

In a court filing, first reported by The Daily Beast, Adame alleges an anonymous user of an adult website leaked screenshots of him to his employer, Spectrum News

NY1, and also sent the images to his mother.

Adame apologized to his employers, family, friends, colleagues and viewers in an Instagram post this week for embarrassment he may have caused, and alluded to "compulsive behavior" he needs to keep in check But he did not apologize "for being openly gay or for being sex-positive – those are gifts and I have no shame about them."

Spectrum declined comment on Adame's dismissal, but a person with knowledge of the situation who was not authorized to comment publicly said the incident is complicated and the news outlet attempted to resolve things privately with Adame prior his dismissal. The source added the company is supportive of Adame speaking out.

Important: Americans are being misled on comprehensive sex ed. Here is what it actually does.

Expressing yourself sexually is healthy, experts agree, but society has not yet caught up to said quests for expression in the digital age.

"We are not equipped, as a society, to deal with the ubiquity of social media and technology in our lives," says Sheila Addison, a licensed marriage and family therapist. "We have already seen so many cases where people's legitimate, legal, private or semi-private behavior has been used to harm them and their employment."

What is sexual health? A conversation with sex educator Emily Nagoski on sexual well-being, pleasure and porn

Sexual taboos, sex positivity and 'revenge porn'

American society has strong puritanical roots and has historically scoffed at sex. The internet age made sex and sexual expression more accessible to the masses – and made pornography more popular.

It's "a very robust source of people's sexuality and sexual outlet," says Laurie Mintz, professor of human sexuality at the University of Florida. "And maybe it's considered especially taboo because other people can see it."

The percentage of Americans who find pornography morally acceptable grew from 36% in 2017 to 43% in 2018, according to a Gallup poll. That number stayed about flat at 41% in 2022.

"Generally, we are moving in the direction of sex positivity," Waston says. "But that's because as a society where we were at is so far back."

Online incidents such as these happen widely under various circumstances – some nonconsensual, others allegedly accidental. Take former CNN legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin who exposed himself to colleagues on Zoom; he was not fired but has since left the network. Company morality clauses may require updating to account for online sexual behavior as anyone from teachers to newscasters seek an outlet for consensual sex online.

Despite endless opportunities to engage with and share pornography online, "many of us still consider sexuality to be something private, between consenting people," says Ian Kerner, licensed psychotherapist and sex therapist. "This creates the illusion of that, and in some ways, takes advantage of the impulsivity. And it's easy to forget that this is happening over the internet with a stranger and has the potential to be posted and spread."

Sex and relationship therapist Joe Kort says clients of his use subscription service OnlyFans (where many users upload sexually explicit content other social networks prohibit) to make extra money. They encounter all kinds of issues with work or family finding out – but they personally have no issue with expressing themselves this way.

Kerner's clients question whether they should post at all.

"I've seen a lot of guys be incredibly scared and get incredibly anxious and be incredibly regretful that they acted out of a moment of impulsivity," Kerner says. "And generally, someone evaluates the risks and usually that anxiety and that fear will prevent someone from doing it again, if there is a risk to be avoided."

That risk may be the threat of leaked images. Members of the LGBTQ community face further scrutiny for any expression of sexuality and are at higher risk for "revenge porn" – nonconsensual image sharing – according to at least one study.

"People who are in the queer community face far more scrutiny when it comes to their sexual lives than people who are straight," says Kristen Mark, professor in family medicine and community health at the University of Minnesota Medical School's Institute for Sexual and Gender Health.

Interesting: Is it healthy to have sex? Is daily sex healthy? Experts answer Googled questions about sex

The internet and sex: 'It's not really any of our business'

Crisis manager Howard Bragman, who represents Adame, says there's a burgeoning disconnect between corporate executives and their underlings.

"Every case has to be looked at individually," says Bragman, founder and CEO of LaBrea Media, "and they certainly have to modify some of their thinking for the new generation. That black-and-white thinking isn't necessarily going to work."

Everyone has sexual lives outside of work. And private businesses and organizations can, of course, stipulate certain rules, but in 2022, should they?

"Many people have robust sexual and very healthy, positive sexual identities and sexual experiences," says Jeremy Goldbach, a professor in sexual health and education at Washington University in St. Louis. "For the most part, it's not really any of our business, how they choose to spend their time outside of work."

Advice: 4 tips for keeping things fun, sexy in your long-term relationship

What happens next?

In general, Americans need stronger comprehensive sexual education from the start. People need "accurate information on decision-making and boundary-setting around sexual behavior that teaches (them) to develop the critical thinking skills they need to evaluate what kind of sexual behaviors and connections they want to have based on their interests, preferences, and values," Addison says.

Goldbach adds: "Not being able to have open and honest and direct communication about what we like and don't like in our own personal sex lives leads us to places where we are much more likely to be exploited, and abused and hurt and unable to talk about when things happen."

Let's talk about (queer) sex: The importance of LGBTQ-inclusive sex education in schools