

UNDERCOVER AS A

WEBCAM GIRL



Hannah blows a playful kiss to her 'audience'



Hannah makes an exhibition of herself, while giving a whole new meaning to 'tea for two'

Welcome to the world of webcam voyeurism – a world where people broadcast live images of themselves for strangers to watch. This growing trend has led to some disturbing incidents, including a 'live suicide' in the US, where some viewers actually encouraged a 17-year-old boy to take more pills. Hannah Borno (left) sets herself up online, and enters the underground world of the webcam girl...

It's 3am and I'm alone in front of my computer, drinking wine and typing frenetically. I'm pouting at a camera pointing straight at my face and occasionally I jump to my feet and strike a pose. I've barely eaten all night and must present a curious picture, waving and cackling, as I slowly get drunk on my own. But I don't notice – I'm too busy conversing in my personal internet chatroom with my 'fans' – eight men who've I've never met. I can't see them, but they can see me. This is the world of the webcam girls – where women hook cameras up to their computers to broadcast themselves live on the internet for everyone to see.

It's a world that thousands of women are eager to become part of – just type 'camgirl' into any search engine and you'll come face-to-face with the proof. Paul Carr, Editor of internet magazine www.thefridaything.co.uk explains, "Personal webcam sites, where people show their intimate lives on the internet, were first seen in the US in 1996, but we're now seeing a massive explosion in the numbers of such sites in the UK. More computers are being sold as packages with webcams, so more and more are finding their way into people's

houses." The most popular webcam sites on the internet are female webcams. "Around 80 per cent of personal webcam sites have been set up by young women themselves," says Carr.

Lights, camera, action...

There are two very different breeds of camgirl. Those who 'perform' to the lens, and those who just live out their day-to-day life. Camgirls who perform will wave, dance, blow kisses to the camera and engage in flirtatious online chat with their fans. Most camgirl performers are happy to pose just for the thrill of it. Many young women's websites include optimistic personal lists or 'wish-lists' comprising books, DVDs, underwear and even laptops. So, if a fan feels so moved, they can buy their favourite camgirl a gift. At the other end of the camgirl spectrum are the thousands of commercial webcams offering live sex chat in which women graphically

respond to explicit sexual requests, such as opening their legs and rubbing their breasts. Their motivation is clear – money (usually about £2 a minute).

But what drives those camgirls who don't make money from their sites? When first asked to investigate what it feels like to be a camgirl, I'm intrigued. I sense I'll be a camgirl who performs. I've always been an exhibitionist at heart, but my show-off tendencies have never been fully exploited. It slowly dawns on me that from now on I can show off as I eat my dinner, watch TV – and even show off in my sleep! Because from now on, live images from inside my home will be available to anyone who cares to look.

In order to set myself up I need to choose a name for my website and plump for the short and sweet www.hancam.co.uk. A friend designs my website and I get

Webcam activities on the internet range from frivolous voyeuristic websites, such as Stephanie Walker's (below), to more sinister and dangerous set-ups in which suicides have been 'broadcast' live (bottom)



PHOTOGRAPHS: GEMMA DIX; HAIR AND MAKE-UP: PAOLA REGARRENI

there. The cameras have become a part of me and I don't think I'll give them up for a while yet. I've been doing this for four years but, as you're new, you quickly need to get your site known and should link up to as many others as possible."

It's now that I become aware of camgirl camaraderie. Stephanie expertly helps spread my website address around the Net and puts me on her camgirl directory – www.top100camgirls.com. By checking my website statistics, I discover people are already visiting my site, so I hastily connect my webcam in three easy steps: I buy the relevant software needed to connect the camera, I plug in the webcam and switch it on. It's no more tricky than setting the timer on my video. Now it's time to go live.

And there I am, in all my glory, live online, my moving image visible from Tyneside to Tokyo. Everyone I know, should they wish to, can spy on me – my boss, my enemies, even malevolent ex-boyfriends. I'm sitting in my living room drinking tea and the experience seems very surreal – I'm aware of every sip I take. Although it's the weekend, I find it impossible to relax. The camera, perched on the TV, dominates the room; I keep glancing towards it and pouting. I've mentioned on my site that I'll be conducting live video chat at 6pm and am strangely nervous – as if I'm hosting a party – so I go and get changed and put on some make-up for my webcam. I then place lamps around the room, creating a blaze of light to ensure the broadcast image is clear, and set the webcam on top of my computer – at a cheekbone-flattering angle.

Web of intrigue

Upon entering my chatroom I find four visitors – Tulip, Kamikaze, Michael and Jimbo – are waiting. I wave hello to the camera, eerily aware of the small computer image of myself on my screen, and we start chatting. Tulip is a quick-witted, 23-year-old Dutch civil servant; Kamikaze is a 41-year-old warehouse director from California; Jimbo, 32, is an accountant from Gatwick; and Michael, 28, is a London Underground driver. They are all men. The chat is fast and furious as we get acquainted. After the initial small talk we end up talking about everything and nothing: favourite books, Cameron Diaz's eyes, the state of British railways and politics. Puns and jokes fly thick and fast, and at times I laugh out loud. Initially, I find it strange they can see me while I can't see them, but soon get used to being watched and rapidly

develop a massive crush on the witty, intelligent Tulip. I also glean inside information about the state of London Underground from Michael, and am offered cut-price DVDs by Jimbo.

There's a constant stream of other visitors – German Fan, Pornstar and Doggo100 – but my core group remains loyal. At one point I take the cam on a tour of my living room and everyone comments on the mess. It's then that I actually realise I've got visitors! Within seconds, I'm vacuuming and tidying up to make the place more presentable. I loathe domestic chores, but the fact people are watching makes them seem exciting. By this time I've cracked open a bottle of wine and, when I raise my glass, everyone types 'Cheers!'

There's no doubt that most of my visitors are men, and that their motive is sexual. Their approaches range from sweet compliments, fun flirtatious innuendo to brazen demands for me to strip (which I laugh at and ignore).

My visitors tell me they've been watching me most of the day. But what's the fascination? "If you're attracted to someone who's live on a webcam you can obtain sexual gratification by watching them,

even if they are doing the ironing," says Dr Mark Griffiths, an internet psychologist from Nottingham Trent University. But even if you aren't sexually attracted to that person, it's still voyeuristic to watch someone who can't see you. And voyeuristic behaviour is addictive.

"Once you are familiar with certain characters, watching them becomes meaningful. We become interested in the minutiae of their lives and invest in them socially. That's what gossip is all about," observes Dr Griffiths.

Throughout our chat I obsessively watch my face on the flattering computer screen. It's a bit like having a conversation with my ideal self. I'm animated and vivacious, and the camera angle means I have massive eyes and cheekbones and no double chin. I soon adopt the celebrity habit of referring to myself in the third person, exclaiming that "Hansy needs another glass of wine, BRB (webspeak for 'Be right back')." As I get tipsy, I flamboyantly take off my cardigan and do a little dance. I receive a wave of compliments. "Go Hansy!", types Jimbo. I'm in show-off heaven!

Suddenly it's four in the morning. I log off, exhausted. My fans have left me, the adulation has disappeared and all ▽

"And there I am, in all my glory, live online, my moving image visible from Tyneside to Tokyo"

Hannah

Cosmo's all-new LOVE-YOUR-BODY-MIND TRICKS

We've all had disastrous bad-hair days. But what do you do when you wake up to a full-on bad-body day, when all you want to do is crawl back under the duvet? Relax. Cosmo has once again come to your happiness rescue. Here, we teach you how to banish body blues from your life – with plenty of cheat's tips and fashion advice to suit your figure. We asked three readers to keep personal body-hang-up diaries for our experts to help solve their problem areas. So, if you're having a bad-body day, prepare to flick your feel-good switch and learn to love your looks just like our readers do now (no gym required, we promise!)



NAME: EMMA BERTENSHAW
BODY BUGBEAR: BROAD ARMS
AGE: 24
VITAL STATISTICS:
Height: 5ft 3ins
Weight: 8st 4lbs
Size: 10-12
Top size: 12

Meet the experts



THE PSYCHOLOGIST: Deanne Jade founded the National Centre for Eating Disorders 20 years ago. She runs 'Love-Your-Body' workshops and advises the government on issues concerning body image and eating disorders.



THE CONFIDENCE EXPERT: Ruth Gilbert is a motivational management consultant and life coach. She runs her own company, teaching people how to make the most of their potential.



THE STYLIST: Jo Sawkins Cosmo's Fashion Assistant, Jo, knows all the tricks to make the most of your shape. In the meantime, you can get on with just looking fabulous and not worrying about your body.

"I LOVE MY ARMS"

Emma's Body Diary

Winter is great because I can hide my chunky arms underneath big jumpers. But I'm dreading the warmer weather because I don't like to wear vest tops. This all started when I was 15 and I began to develop what my mother called 'womanly arms'. I started to feel very self-conscious. Then a girl at school confirmed my beliefs

when she said, "You're broad across the shoulders, aren't you? Your arms make you look chunky". That silly schoolyard remark has stayed with me for the past eight years, and I still refuse to wear strappy dresses or vests because I feel my arms look huge'.

I was invited to an evening work do at a smart hotel recently. It was black-tie, so

I was expected to wear a cocktail dress. All my colleagues were really excited about the thought of dressing up, but it sent me into a panic. How could I cover up my horrible arms? I rushed to the shops and ended up buying a long, red dress I would never have chosen, apart from the fact it had sleeves. I felt envious that the other girls were in black, strappy dresses. It upsets me that I can't wear the same things they do. I always feel like the odd one out.

Went out to a nightclub with friends. I knew it would be hot inside, but still wore my usual black, long-sleeve, V-neck T-shirt. I was boiling so I couldn't really dance and enjoy myself.

Woke up with a bad hangover and mistakenly packed my flatmate's vest from the laundry pile to take to the gym. Decided to just get on with my workout. Before I left the changing room, I caught my reflection in the mirror and was relieved the top didn't look as bad as I'd imagined. But when I was on the running machine, I caught sight of my rippling arms in a big mirror and thought, "Oh god, I'm turning into Popeye". I want to get fit, but I hate feeling so self-conscious.

Went on a girls' night out. When I told some of my friends about my diary, they couldn't believe it – they had no idea I had such a problem with my arms. They were all really complimentary about my figure and said I didn't have anything to worry about as far as my arms were concerned. Then they told me about the body parts they're not happy with. It was reassuring to know I'm not alone.

EMMA'S STEP 1 TO BODY CONFIDENCE

Deanne says: The first step to body confidence is realising we don't know how we truly look. When Emma looks at herself, it's not just her image she sees, but all of her old feelings, fears and beliefs.

I recommend Emma should try the following exercise – in which she has to imagine an artist is going to draw her. But because the artist has never seen Emma, she needs to make a preliminary sketch of herself, showing how she believes her body looks and is proportioned. Then Emma should show it to her partner or a close friend and ask what they think. Emma will be surprised how others don't even notice what she perceives as her faults.

To start loving her body Emma must view it as her friend rather than her enemy. She should learn to appreciate her arms and say to herself, 'I love my arms because they allow me to stroke my boyfriend's back when we're in bed'.

EMMA'S STEP 2 TO BODY CONFIDENCE

Ruth says: Does Emma look in the mirror and think that sometimes she looks better than other times? If this is the case, it isn't her body that is changing, but her perception of herself.

To change the way she sees herself, Emma should try the following mind trick. Sitting comfortably, she should close her eyes, count backwards from 10 to one, then think about a place she likes, perhaps a favourite holiday spot, and picture it clearly – the colours, textures and sounds. She then needs to bring one of her close friends into the picture, asking them questions she has about her body, and imagining all the positive things they'd say – phrases such as, 'of course you look lovely!', 'don't be silly, your arms aren't big'.

It may feel unnatural at first, but Emma must try to tap into what she thinks they'd mention. She should open her eyes while holding on to all the positive things they've said to her. If she practises this for five minutes each day, she should start to see herself differently in the mirror, or whenever she feels those issues coming to the fore again.

EMMA'S STEP 3 TO BODY CONFIDENCE

Jo says: Emma can make herself feel more glamorous without feeling too exposed. This spring she'll have a huge choice of tops with chiffon, floaty sleeves – so she can feel more feminine than in a long-sleeve, black T-shirt, and show her arms off in a way she feels comfortable.

Something else Emma should watch out for on the High Street this summer are tops with pretty, floral prints, polka dots or stripes. They're going to be the height of fashion, and small prints can make broader arms look a lot slimmer. Delicate bracelets will help too, by diverting attention from the arms to the wrists.

EMMA'S VERDICT

After keeping a diary, I soon realised that everybody has something they'd like to change about themselves. This really helped me put the amount of energy I waste worrying about my arms into perspective. Most of us believe we live under the spotlight but, the truth is, everybody is so concerned about what others think of them, they have no time to study anyone else. I will definitely be wearing summer vest tops with pride this year!

"I LOVE MY BREASTS"

Gemma's Body Diary

Every morning, I stand in front of the wardrobe worrying about what I'm going to wear. I don't want to choose anything that will draw attention to my chest. I spend most of my time trying to cover up by wearing black, round-neck tops under a cardigan, so that men don't stare at my breasts when they talk to me. Even if I did wear a smart shirt, like the other girls in the office, a size 14 would gape across my chest and a size 16 would swamp me.

One morning, I try to squeeze into a shirt I haven't worn for ages and find the buttons won't do up. I'd like to lose a few pounds, but am worried my body will shrink and my boobs will stay the same – and that I'll look out of proportion. If only someone would invent a way to lose weight exactly where you want to lose it from!

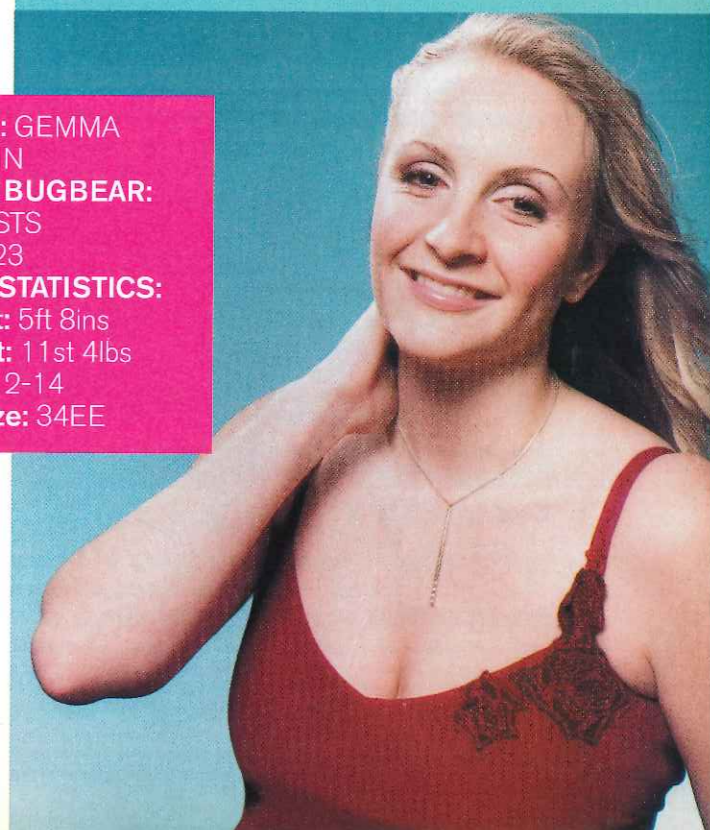
I go shopping to buy some new bras. Find a pretty bra I like, but it doesn't come in my size. Nor does the next one I find. Or the next. It makes me feel 15 again, when Mum took me to a high-street store to be fitted for a bra. I was told I was an E-cup, and the assistants brought me some granny-style bras with chunky straps. I cried in the fitting room. I just wanted to wear pretty bras like my friends. Although there's more

choice now, it's still not easy.

Stayed with my boyfriend Neil, 24, a security guard, last night. We've been together for 18 months. Even now, I don't feel comfortable being naked in front of him. I change into my pyjamas in the bathroom so he doesn't see me undress. I feel so self-conscious – even in bed. My breasts don't make me feel sexy at all, because they're too large to ever look pert. Smaller boobs look so much more feminine. But Neil says he loves me exactly the way I am. Before our first date, when he mentioned to a friend that he was meeting me, his friend said, 'She's got great boobs!' – which made Neil look forward to the date even more.

Went out clubbing with the girls. I always wear black, to make my chest appear smaller, and I avoid anything that shows off my cleavage. Even so, no sooner had I walked across to the bar than a man called out, 'Look at the pair on that!'. Then he turned to his friends and asked whether they thought my breasts were real or not. It makes me feel awful but, over the years, I've learned to blank out comments like that. Being with Neil makes it easier to cope with, too, and when he's with me, other men don't say anything. ▶

NAME: GEMMA BADKIN
BODY BUGBEAR: BREASTS
AGE: 23
VITAL STATISTICS:
Height: 5ft 8ins
Weight: 11st 4lbs
Size: 12-14
Bra size: 34EE



BY LILLIE BARR. PHOTOGRAPHS: CAROL FINNIS. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: PAOLA MEGARRDEN. STYLING: ANGELA WINDERS