



USW STATEMENT REGARDING ONLYFANS

24th August 2021

As sex workers, we find it unsurprising that OnlyFans have decided to update their policies to exclude us from their platform. It is also absolutely devastating. The pandemic has been especially hard for workers in the sex industry where there has been little state support¹. Now we are forced, once again, to find new ways of sustaining our livelihoods.

OnlyFans has been a lifeline for many. It gave us a way to pay our rent, bills, and even earn our way out of poverty. During the pandemic, online work provided safer working conditions for in-person workers. It allowed us to continue providing for ourselves and our families without risking our health to COVID-19. It put food on the table for those of us who lost our jobs in other industries and turned to online sex work.

Now, yet again, we are being forced to start over.

It's not the first time that we, as sex workers, have been put through the debilitating panic of having our financial security snatched from us. In 2018 we felt the repercussions of SESTA/FOSTA, US legislation criminalising important online spaces for sex workers to share invaluable safety information and control over their own work². As a result of these laws, our Instagram accounts are frequently erased without warning³, we learn to live with the continual threat of legal crackdowns. And of course,

¹ English Collective of Prostitutes, 'Survey of sex workers' access to Covid-19 support in the UK', 16/06/2021, <https://prostitutescollective.net/survey-of-sex-workers-access-to-covid-19-support-in-the-uk/>

² D Blunt and A Wolf, 'Erased: The impact of FOSTA-SESTA and the removal of Backpage on sex workers', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 14, 2020, pp. 117-121, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201220148>

³ Dawson, Brit, 'Instagram's problem with sex workers is nothing new', *Dazed*, 24/12/2020, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/science-tech/article/51515/1/instagram-problem-with-sex-workers-is-nothing-new-censorship>

with the pandemic, many of our workplaces, such as strip clubs, remain closed. We receive no furlough.

We know, first hand, that it's not that easy to just get another job, to exit sex work, even when we are forced out of the spaces we work in. Many of us are precluded from the wider job market due to LGBTQI+, racist or ableist discrimination. Often our caregiving duties and health needs ensure it's impossible for us to work a 9-5. Sometimes we are excluded after being outed as a sex worker. Sometimes fines⁴ and arrests leave us poorer⁵ or with a criminal record, effectively trapping us in sex work.

These crackdowns don't begin and end with OnlyFans. Like SESTA/FOSTA, the policies of payment processors like VISA/Mastercard claim to tackle exploitation but only serve to remove our income streams while further marginalising us⁶. PayPal continues to shut down the accounts of sex workers, or those suspected of sex work. This happens without warning and without allowing us to withdraw our funds beforehand. Bank accounts are frozen and money made inaccessible overnight. Sex workers are taxpayers – yet the policies of most major banks exclude them from being able to access COVID19 government support loans.⁷

It is clear we cannot continue to allow big tech companies, payment processors and right-wing evangelist organisations to act as our moral arbiters. Adult content apps are not allowed in the Apple app store, and PornHub were forced to take payments in cryptocurrency after Exodus Cry and the NCOSE (National Center on Sexual Exploitation) found a convenient chokehold in payment processing and lobbied VISA/Mastercard to withdraw their services⁸. These two institutions evolved from

⁴ Smith, Laura, 'Asbos 'are bringing back jail for prostitutes', The Guardian, 25/5/2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/may/25/ukcrime.prisonsandprobation2>

⁵ Miren, Frankie, 'Sex Workers Reveal What Cops Took from Them During Police Raids', Vice, 6/4/2016, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/nz888d/sex-workers-reveal-what-cops-took-from-them-during-police-raids>

⁶ Blue, V. 'PayPal, Square and big banking's war on the sex industry', Engadget, 2/12/2015, <https://www.engadget.com/2015-12-02-paypal-square-and-big-bankings-war-on-the-sex-industry.html>

⁷ 'Escort calls for law change after Santander Bounce Back loan refusal' BBC Sheffield & South Yorkshire, 15/04/2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-56758745>

⁸ Gira Grant, Melissa, 'Nick Kristof and the Holy War on Pornhub', New Republic, 10/12/2020, <https://newrepublic.com/article/160488/nick-kristof-holy-war-pornhub>

extremist, far-right religious organisations and they know how to use certain evocative buzzwords such as abuse, exploitation and trafficking to push through their true abolitionist moral crusade⁹. They know such terms are hard to argue against and, as such, provide a perfect cover.

Removing us from spaces, online or otherwise, will not remove exploitation, abuse, misogyny, trafficking or gender inequality. It will push us further out of view, where we are left to work in even more unsafe and precarious conditions in order to earn money, in order to survive.

Such decisions will always hit the most marginalised sex workers disproportionately, such as those without the time and savings to build up a new platform. In particular, sex workers who are LGBTQ+, with disabilities, or from ethnic minority groups, who were able to earn money on OnlyFans when the discriminatory practices of the wider workforce failed them.

As United Sex Workers, we stand in solidarity with all workers who are struggling to make sense of this decision. We are here for you. We feel you. There is power in our community and we will continue to look after each other as we have always done. In the coming days, we will be signposting to alternative options, and in the meantime, we will continue to shout until our voices are heard.

If you want to join us in this fight – please do. Get in touch with us. We welcome you with open arms.

In solidarity, anger, and resilience,

United Sex Workers

⁹ Evans, Alana, 'The Real Reasons Why OnlyFans Is Banning Porn' The Daily Beast, 20/8/2021, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-real-reasons-why-onlyfans-porn-ban-is-taking-place>