

4-29-2022

## Invisible, yet Criminal: Best Practices for Supporting Student Sex Workers throughout Higher Education

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Invisible, yet Criminal: Best Practices for Supporting  
Student Sex Workers throughout Higher Education  
by  
Anthony A. Ruegsegger  
April 2022

Master's Project  
Submitted to the College of Education  
and Community Innovation  
At Grand Valley State University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Degree of Master of Education



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Anthony Ruegsegger in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in Higher Education, College Student Affairs Leadership.

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April 29, 2022

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April 29, 2022

## Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank the students and staff of the Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center at Grand Valley State University. You have all made this past year an invaluable experience that I would not trade for anything. Next, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for Dr. Reginald Blockett. Dr. Blockett has provided unending encouragement and advice to me on this project. His support has been critical to me being able to finish this project. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my partners and family for their endless love and support. Thank you for supporting me throughout all my endeavors.

Anthony/Tony/Kale (he/they)

## Abstract

While it is not new information that college students may engage in sex work throughout their academic careers, it still remains a somewhat taboo topic throughout academia and higher education in the United States. Student sex workers face institutional and societal barriers typically associated with minoritized identities, and post-secondary institutions rarely have resources in place to support these students. This project aims to help bridge this gap by utilizing the polymorphous paradigm and an anti-savior lens to create a list of best practices for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators to better support students that are engaging in sex work. The project identified five key learning areas for higher education employees to engage in these best practices: general knowledge building, campus climate considerations, physical and mental health resources, financial support, and social support.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

The erasure of students engaging in sex work is quite profound within higher education. While literature has recently started to emerge on the subject, studies show that it still remains a somewhat taboo topic within academia and higher education (Simpson, 2021). Student sex workers face institutional and societal barriers typically associated with minoritized identities. This includes a lack of access to health care to combat negative mental and physical health effects induced by marginalization, stereotyped perspectives, stigmatization and criminalization, the prevalence of the white savior complex throughout higher education spaces, and the creation of policies to prevent these students from engaging in their work (Stewart, 2021).

These aforementioned barriers can have a negative impact on student retention, engagement, and health. However, administrators, faculty, and staff at post-secondary institutions are often ill-equipped to support students engaging in sex work that are experiencing negative effects (Sagar et al., 2015). With these effects being a result of navigating a system - higher education - that frequently contributes to the stigmatization of sex workers. When sex workers are visible in higher education settings, it is often not in positive light (Long et al., 2012). These types of interactions are typically rife with negative stereotypes about both sex work and sex workers. When students are the ones perpetrating these stereotypes, there is generally not much intervention on behalf of administrators, faculty, or staff (Stewart, 2021). This lack of intervention then furthers the erasure of lived experiences of student sex workers.

### **Importance and Rationale of the Project**

Due to the lack of research surrounding college students engaging in sex work, the experiences of student sex workers often go unheard. In most cases, higher education institutions

are unprepared to support students that are engaging in sex work, even going as far as to ignore the existence of these students (Simpson, 2021; Stewart, 2021). Furthermore, there can even be stigmatization associated with researching student sex workers. Simpson (2021) detailed their struggle working with higher education institutions to conduct research on the experiences of cisgender<sup>1</sup> women engaging in sex work during college. Simpson (2021) reported a concerning number of institutions blocking this research by labeling it “inappropriate.” This example of whorephobia present throughout higher education illustrates just one of the ways in which student sex workers are often seen as a stigmatized or even non-existent population on college campuses.

This, in turn, creates further barriers on college campuses for student sex workers. These barriers can then be further compounded by student sex workers’ other marginalized identities. Students may feel hesitant to disclose their work to faculty, staff, administrators, and even other students at their institutions. According to a study done by Sagar et al. (2016), the secrecy involved in sex work was one of the number one drawbacks named by student sex workers in regard to being involved in the sex industry. Student sex workers often fear disclosing their involvement in the sex industry, even when the activities students are involved in is legal within the country in question, because doing so opens them up to stigmatization and biased scrutiny on the part of faculty, staff, administrators, and fellow students (Sagar et al., 2015; Stewart, 2021). Furthermore, because student sex workers do not usually feel comfortable disclosing their work to personnel working in higher education institutions, they are often not able to access needed resources or support services (Sinacore et al., 2014; Stewart, 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> “Cisgender” is used in this project to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth, meaning that the person in question does not identify as transgender in any way. Much of the literature available on student sex work focuses on the experiences of cisgender students, specifically cisgender female students.

Student sex workers may also experience lack of support and access to resources on college campuses if they hold other marginalized identities. Betzer et al. (2015) found that college students engaging in sex work are more likely to identify as queer<sup>2</sup> than other groups of students. In addition, they found that student sex workers are less likely to receive familial financial support, as well as institutional scholarships. This data points to just a few of the barriers and identities that student sex workers are navigating on college campuses outside of engaging with sex work. These identities and circumstances can create unique difficulties for student sex workers that can further lessen their access to needed support and resources.

These difficulties and barriers that student sex workers face when trying to access resources and support within higher education can have a profound impact on students' ability to continue their education. For example, Roberts et al. (2013) found that student sex workers were more likely to consider dropping out of courses due to financial distress, when compared to other students. Additionally, Stewart (2021) found that student sex workers generally have very low expectations when it comes to experiencing a supportive environment at their institutions. While recent studies have focused on exploring the motivations and experiences of student sex workers, as well as institutional response, there is still a lack of guidance for employees of higher education institutions on ways to better support students engaging in the sex work industry. This project will help to bridge that gap and create a more comfortable, supportive, and equitable higher education experience for all students.

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<sup>2</sup> This project uses the term “queer” to refer to anyone whose sexual and/or romantic identity is something other than heterosexual/heteroromantic, or whose gender identity is something other than cisgender. It is worth mentioning that this term has a history of being used in a derogatory manner against LGBTQIA+-identifying individuals. However, the past few decades have seen the term largely reclaimed by those that it was once used to harm, and “queer” has made its way into academic spaces.

## **Background of the Project**

College students engaging in sex work is nothing new. In fact, Roberts et al. (2013) suggest that the sex industry somewhat relies on student labor as a whole. Sex work can be an attractive option for college students because of the flexible hours, greater income, and potential for enjoyment of the work (Sagar et al., 2016). Existing research on student sex work identifies several motivations for students entering the sex industry, including financial, intrinsic, and practical motivators. Contrary to popular belief, the least likely reason for students to engage in sex work is because they feel forced to do so (Sagar et al., 2016). However, most higher education institutions and the employees that work for them operate under a deficit-based understanding of student sex work. Such an understanding often conflates sex work with sex trafficking, victimizes sex workers, and assumes that sex work is inherently bad and an activity in which students should not be engaging (Cusick et al., 2009; Stewart, 2021). As a result, student sex workers often do not wish to disclose their work to faculty, staff, or administrators in fear of retaliation or an attempt of the staff member to “save” the student from sex work (Stewart, 2021).

Furthermore, this deficit-based understanding of student sex work can also manifest in other ways. A study conducted by Sagar et al. (2015) demonstrated a significant discrepancy in the actual and perceived illegality of specific sexual services by higher education personnel. This ignorance of law concerning sex work further contributes to the stigma surrounding student sex workers, while also furthering the white savior mentality. Additionally, a study conducted by Cusick et al. (2009) found that most higher education institutions perceive student sex work as a type of institutional threat. They are often more worried about potential harm to the institution’s reputation, rather than supporting their students engaging in sex work. This lack of institutional

knowledge of student sex work serves to further the erasure and non-support of student sex workers.

It is also worth discussing the evolving nature of the sex work industry and the ways in which students engage in sex work, particularly in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to resources and support services, such as healthcare, for individuals engaged in sex work has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to other marginalized populations, sex workers often experience disparities in healthcare and working conditions. According to Benoit & Unsworth (2022) and Bromfield et al. (2021), these disparities were only worsened by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that while student sex workers may have already been experiencing an unsupportive campus environment, several contributing factors have only gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The main purpose of this project is to provide a list of best practices for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators to utilize in their work to better develop supportive environments and systems for students that may be engaging in sex work. These best practices will include specific practical recommendations for employees that frequently engage directly with students, as well as policy recommendations for employees whose roles focus on big-picture initiatives and policy reform. Additionally, this project will use the polymorphous paradigm and an anti-savior mentality to examine the experiences, struggles, and successes of student sex workers. The project will first introduce and provide background information on the topic of college students engaging in sex work. Next, the project will review and analyze relevant literature, including background information on the polymorphous paradigm and white savior mentalities. It will also contextualize the realities of sex work in the United States and the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sex work industry. Lastly, the project will detail the list of best practices for higher education personnel. These best practices will assist in lessening the gap of knowledge present throughout higher education faculty, staff, and administrators in regard to student sex work. Furthermore, these best practices will assist higher education employees in creating a more supportive and just learning environment for college students that are engaging in the sex work industry.

### **Objectives of the Project**

This project has two main objectives. The first objective of this project is to provide guidance for higher education staff, faculty, and administrators on supporting college students engaging in sex work. While research on student sex workers has increased in recent years, there is still a lack of any general guidance for higher education employees to use when working to support students that are engaging in sex work. Much of the existing research on student sex workers aims to understand the motivations and experiences of students engaging in sex work. And while this is also an important pursuit of knowledge that helps to combat the erasure of student sex workers, there is still a disconnect in presenting this information to faculty, staff, and administrators in a way in which they can apply the knowledge to their work with students. Therefore, this project will provide a list of best practices for higher education employees, utilizing existing research and knowledge of student sex workers and their support needs, to create a better campus environment for college students that engage in sex work.

The secondary objective of this project is to assist in combating the erasure of the existence and experiences of student sex workers. Several researchers have started the work of increasing the visibility of college students engaging in sex work (Cusick et al., 2009; Roberts et al., 2007; Sagar et al., 2015; Simpson, 2021; Stewart, 2021). However, the literature on the topic

still remains sparse, and the experiences of student sex workers remain often overlooked. This project will add to the work that is already being done to render these experiences visible and to further support student sex workers in a way that does not victimize or criminalize them.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Polymorphous Paradigm:*** The polymorphous paradigm was developed by Weitzer (2010) in contrast to the typical oppressive lenses used to examine sex work. The polymorphous paradigm attempts to account for nuances and complexities present in the sex work industry, rather than automatically victimizing and/or criminalizing those engaging in sex work. The paradigm counters popular narratives that insinuate that sex work is inherently violent, preys upon women, and is only a last resort as a means to sustain an income.

***Prostitution:*** In this project, prostitution is defined as the consensual selling of in-person sexual services to one or more parties.

***Sex Trafficking:*** The illegal practice of exploiting, transporting, and/or trading human beings for the purpose of having them engage in sex work through tactics such as force, coercion, or fraud. Opponents of the sex work industry often consider sex work to be a form of sex trafficking, assuming that sex workers are only engaging in the industry because they are being forced to do so. This conflation of sex work and sex trafficking often results in the further victimization and criminalization of sex workers.

***Sex Work:*** Sex work includes both legal and illegal scenarios involving a consensual exchange of sexual services for money, material goods, or other payment. Such sexual services may include but are not limited to prostitution, webcamming, pornography, and stripping. Opponents of the sex work industry often consider sex work to be a form of sex trafficking, assuming that sex workers are only engaging in the industry because they are being forced to do

so. This conflation of sex work and sex trafficking often results in the further victimization and criminalization of sex workers. This project will differentiate sex work from sex trafficking through the presence of consent in the transaction in question. Activities associated with sex work involve the presence of consent on behalf of all involved parties, whereas activities associated with sex trafficking do not necessarily involve such consent.

***Sex Worker:*** A sex worker can be defined as any person that is consensually involved within the sex work industry by selling sexual services to others in exchange for payment.

***Student Sex Worker:*** In this project, a student sex worker is defined as any sex worker that is enrolled in any sort of post-secondary education experience while simultaneously working in the sex work industry. This includes but is not limited to full-time students, part-time students, undergraduate students, graduate students, community college students, and trade school students.

***White Savior Mentality:*** White savior mentality, or the white savior complex, is a mindset acted upon by privileged individuals that leads them to perform altruistic acts and rescue narratives in favor of their own self-interest (Jefferess, 2021).

***Whorephobia:*** Whorephobia can be defined as “the hatred, disgust and fear of sex workers” (Simpson, 2021). Whorephobia is quite present within higher education environments, emphasized by the ways in which student sex workers are often rendered invisible on college campuses.

### **Scope of the Project**

This project will address the lived experiences, support levels, and retention of college students engaging in sex work in the United States. This project will also analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student sex workers in the United States. Utilizing relevant



literature and research, as well as the polymorphous paradigm and an anti-savior lens, this project will then outline a list of best practices for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators to use when engaging with student sex workers.

The main limitation of this project is the lack of existing research on college students engaging in sex work specific to the United States. Criminalization of any type of sex work is rampant in the United States. This is just one reason that research on U.S. college students engaging in sex work remains extremely sparse. As a result, much of the literature concerning student sex workers that is reviewed in this project focuses on western European countries. However, this project also utilizes literature on the sex work industry in general, specific to the United States, as a way to help contextualize the experiences of student sex workers in the U.S.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines a review of literature and studies concerning student sex workers and sex work as an industry. It first details two theoretical lenses that have been applied to students engaging in sex work throughout this project. Next, the literature review focuses on studies conducted regarding motivations and experiences of student sex workers, the context of sex work in the United States and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and institutional policies, responses, and perspectives relating to college students engaging in sex work.

### **Theory/Rationale**

This project utilizes two theoretical lenses to understand the experiences and stigmatization of college students engaging in sex work. This includes the polymorphous paradigm and a rejection of the white savior complex. The polymorphous paradigm is used to understand the variations present across the sex work industry and in the experiences of sex workers as individuals. The rejection of the white savior complex is also crucial in viewing sex work in the United States, as white saviorism is often used as a means to justify the criminalization of sex work and those that participate in it. This has a profound effect on local, state, and federal responses to sex work, as well as institutional and individual responses to student sex workers.

### **Polymorphous Paradigm**

The polymorphous paradigm was proposed by Weitzer (2010) in opposition to the oppression paradigm. The oppression paradigm defines sex work in very prescriptive, narrow terms, including a notion that sex work is inherently harmful to all sex workers and exploitative of all women. In contrast, the polymorphous paradigm allows one to view sex work in a more

complex matter, accounting for the vast variations across sex work and sex workers (Weitzer, 2010). The polymorphous paradigm, therefore, challenges patriarchal, heteronormative, cisnormative, victimizing, and criminalizing views of sex work and those that engage in the industry. This allows researchers to consider the lived experiences of sex workers outside of a universal sex worker narrative that labels all sex work as oppressive.

This project uses the polymorphous paradigm as a method of framing student sex work outside of an inherently positive or negative means of work. It allows for the consideration of individual constructions of student sex worker identities and realities, while also allowing for a broader definition of what constitutes sex work.

### **Moving to an Anti-Savior Mentality**

The white savior complex is quite prevalent in the United States' legal and social response to sex work. Jefferess (2021) describes the "white savior complex" as a mentality reflective of a performance of a hero narrative that supposedly "saves" others, but really serves to further one's own self-interest. Flaherty (2016) specifically discusses the ways in which white savior complexes present themselves in relation to sex work. Media in the United States frequently portrays white, privileged women being forced into selling sex. This often contributes to the conflation of sex work, entered into of one's own will, with sex trafficking (Sagar et al., 2016). Because sex trafficking and sex work have been portrayed as one in the same, the response of the American government and the general public has been to devote countless resources to anti-trafficking causes. In reality, these causes usually serve to criminalize sex work and sex workers, make it more difficult for sex workers to access fundamental services, further patriarchal ideals, and reinforce white supremacy (Flaherty, 2016). The anti-trafficking organizations and activists that have been produced as a product of this phenomenon then

propagate savior narratives back to the media and public, creating a cycle of ideals rooted in colonialism and white supremacy. Due to the inherent sexism present in this cycle - that being the notion that women engaging in sex work need saving - men, transgender<sup>3</sup>, and gender non-conforming people engaging in sex work are often erased from the industry (Flaherty, 2016).

This project utilizes an anti-savior lens to examine various aspects of the lives of student sex workers. This is done in order to more accurately interpret the lived experiences of student sex workers and search for appropriate methods and strategies to support these students in a way that does not classify them as a criminal or a victim.

### **Research/Evaluation**

The current literature concerning college students engaging in sex work is sparse. While some research has gained footing in places such as Australia and the United Kingdom, the topic still remains fairly unexplored in the United States. As a result, this literature review utilizes studies conducted internationally, as well as studies conducted concerning sex work in a broader sense and applies them to the contextualizing of student sex workers in the United States.

### **College Students in the Sex Work Industry**

#### ***Motivations***

It is widely assumed that the majority of college students engaging in sex work do so because they have no other options or feel “forced” to engage in such work (Sagar et al., 2016; Stewart, 2021). However, a study conducted by Sagar et al. (2016) showed that this feeling of “force” experienced by student sex workers was one of the least prevalent motivating factors for

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<sup>3</sup> “Transgender” and “trans\*” are used in this project to describe a person whose gender identity does not entirely align with their sex assigned at birth. Much of the literature available on student sex work focuses on the experiences of cisgender students and overlooks students that identify as transgender or outside the gender binary. In this document, the asterisk in “trans\*” is used to denote the variety of gender identities that fall under the transgender umbrella, including but not limited to non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender identities.

engaging in sex work among college students. This study in particular showed that there are many motivating factors that lead students to engage in the sex work industry. Researchers generally agree that financial considerations are the primary motivating factors that drive college students to engage in sex work (Betzer et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2013; Sagar et al., 2016; Sinacore et al., 2014; Stewart, 2021). According to Betzer et al. (2015), college students engaging in sex work are less likely to receive financial support from family members and less likely to receive scholarships from their institutions. The financial stress associated with these situations may lead students to pursue sex work as a means of supporting themselves.

However, several studies note financial or economic considerations as just one of the primary factors that student sex workers listed as their reasons for doing sex work (Roberts et al., 2013; Sagar et al., 2016; Stewart, 2021). The 2016 study by Sagar et al. found that along with financial compensation as a motivating factor for student sex work, a majority of student sex workers indicated that they entered the industry due to intrinsic motivators. This includes genuine enjoyment of the work, sexual pleasure, and curiosity about working in the industry, among others. Knowledge of such motivators are often not known among higher education administrators, faculty, staff, or even other students (Stewart, 2021). Later sections of this literature review will further discuss this deficit-based perspective of student sex work.

Knowledge of the motivations of student sex workers will help higher education faculty, staff, and administrators to better implement programs and services that support student sex workers. For example, financial aid staff and administrators may learn that student sex workers are less likely to receive federal, familial, or institutional financial aid, and work to better meet the needs of all lower-income students through office initiatives. This is a practice that Stewart (2021) discusses - working to better campus conditions for student sex workers by creating

resources that benefit the campus community at large. Supporting student sex workers in this manner will allow them more opportunities to keep their status as a sex worker confidential, if they choose to do so. Additionally, acknowledging the prevalence of intrinsic motivations that encourage students to enter the sex work industry will allow higher education employees to more easily employ an anti-savior lens when working with students that engage in sex work.

### *Experiences*

The experiences student sex workers have before, during, and after engaging in the industry vary tremendously. This is partially due to the fact that sex work can take many forms. Some students engage in more direct kinds of sex work, like prostitution, escort services, exotic dancing, or stripping (Roberts et al., 2010). This type of sex work usually requires student sex workers to contribute to some kind of in-person interaction with whoever is buying the service. On the other hand, students may also engage in indirect types of sex work, like making pornography to post online, maintaining a sexually explicit account on websites with a payroll for accessing content, operating a phone sex line, or hosting a webcam channel.

Student sex workers report both positive and negative experiences when it comes to their work. Some notable positive experiences reported by student sex workers include high payouts, flexible hours allowing for greater academic performance, enjoyment in sexual interactions with clients, and a sense of empowerment (Sagar et al., 2016; Sinacore et al., 2014). On the other side of the spectrum, student sex workers often note the secrecy involved with sex work as the most common negative experience while working (Sagar et al., 2016; Stewart, 2021). Student sex workers also report other negative experiences such as unpredictable earnings, unpleasant customers, social stigmatization, and lack of career development (Sagar et al., 2016; Sinacore et al., 2014; Stewart, 2021). Additionally, research has found that students engaging in direct types

of sex work report feeling less safe when working, compared to those engaging in indirect types of sex work (Sagar et al., 2016).

This knowledge will enable higher education employees to understand the realities that student sex workers live. Knowledge of the lived experiences of student sex workers will greatly help higher education faculty, staff, and administrators in countering negative stereotypes and stigmatization that they may come across on college campuses. It will also help to resist the notion that the combination of sex work and students is inherently bad. There are many forms of sex work, and many ways that students engage in that work. This means that no two student sex workers are going to have the exact same experiences when working in the sex industry. However, higher education employees should be able to at least create generalized resources and services that benefit student sex workers once they understand the barriers and successes that student sex workers experience on a regular basis.

## **Contextualizing Sex Work and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### ***Sex Work in the United States***

Depending on where you socially situate yourself in the United States, sex work can be quite the taboo topic. Weitzer (2020) discusses such attitudes while examining the moral crusade against sex work in the United States. Both the religious right and abolitionist feminism contribute the furthering of this moral crusade, typically through the conflation of sex work with sex trafficking, anti-pornography campaigns, the medicalization of sex work, and political lobbying (Weitzer, 2020). Such tactics have been used to criminalize sex work and shape federal, state, and local policies in the United States for decades (Weitzer, 2010). This criminalization of sex work serves to further marginalize sex workers and limit their access to much needed resources (Lennon, 2020).

Criminalization of sex work is also furthered through unjust policing in the United States, which disproportionately targets sex workers of color and queer and trans\* sex workers (Jackson, 2019). According to Jackson (2019), queer and trans\* sex workers and sex workers of color are more likely to experience violent police encounters and experience over-policing of sex work in neighborhoods of color. This profiling present in police forces across the United States serves to further the racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia that drives the country's approach to sex work. Furthermore, the prevalence of the white savior complex and the criminal/victim binary that persists in American views of sex work leads many sex workers to be offered social services or "rehabilitation" instead of receiving charges for prostitution. However, such services often fail to take into consideration the complex realities of sex workers, especially those with marginalized identities, and require sex workers to agree to stop selling services and stop talking to family and friends in the industry. As a result, this approach is rarely effective in actually supporting people engaging in sex work (Jackson, 2019).

Additionally, the use of the internet as a means to engage in sex work and access information on sexual activities, services, and products has grown greatly in the United States throughout the past two decades. This is particularly true among college students (Döring et al., 2017). Sex workers may even use digital means to connect with clients and further facilitate in-person sexual services (Sanders et al., 2018). The flexibility of online sex work is particularly attractive for college students, who cite such work as allowing them to spend less hours working at a higher pay rate, which leaves them more time to study (Roberts et al., 2007; Sanders et al., 2018). Furthermore, Simpson (2020) found that engaging with the sex work industry online helped student sex workers to maintain a more positive sense of self and build community and solidarity with other sex workers.



Understanding the ways in which sex work is viewed by and situated in American society is crucial for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators in the United States to successfully support student sex workers on their campuses. Recognizing the differences between sex work and sex trafficking will help higher education employees to start challenging any tendencies of viewing sex workers within a victim-criminal binary. Furthermore, understanding who student sex workers are and how their other social identities can play into their experiences on campus will provide a more accurate starting point for higher education employees to base their support efforts on.

### ***Sex Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic***

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused extensive harm to a variety of different aspects to our lives, including economically, socially, psychologically, and physically. Along with many other marginalized populations, these effects are only multiplied for anyone engaging sex work. Several researchers discuss that compared to other industries, sex workers have a higher likelihood of holding other marginalized social identities as well (Benoit & Unsworth, 2022; Ditmore, 2010; Filoteo et al., 2021). According to Benoit & Unsworth (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic worsened working conditions of sex workers, while increasing barriers to accessing social and health services.

One would think that municipal, state, and federal lockdowns would lead to a large movement from in-person sexual services to those provided online or over the phone. However, Bromfield et al. (2021) notes that there has only been a small movement towards online sex work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In reality, many sex workers that were providing services remotely before the pandemic have found themselves facing more pressure to provide in-person services in order to make ends meet during turbulent economic times (Bromfield et al., 2021).

Bromfield et al. (2021) and Benoit & Unsworth (2022) also note that one of the reasons sex workers are risking their health to provide in-person services during the pandemic is because most sex workers were not eligible for emergency funding and other government assistance that was provided to others, such as small business owners. Understanding the issues that COVID-19 has presented to those in the sex work industry is crucial for higher education employees wanting to better support student sex workers at their institutions.

### **Institutional Perspectives, Responses, and Policies**

Even among liberal higher education institutions, sex work remains a largely ignored topic. Student sex workers often experience stigmatization and stereotyping from higher education administrators, faculty, staff, and even other students (Long et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2010). Faculty, staff, and administrators are often working off of a deficit-based view of sex work. This means that they view sex work as an activity that is inherently harmful and in which students should not be participating (Stewart, 2021). Stewart (2021) also notes that student sex workers often perceive higher education faculty, staff, and administrators as wanting to “save” students from sex work, being unable to fathom why someone may be willing to work in the industry of their own volition.

Furthermore, researchers have found that faculty, staff, and administrators typically have an uninformed understanding of laws regarding sex work. Sagar et al. (2015) conducted a study that examined the higher education administrator, faculty, and staff’s perceived illegality of different sex work activities and compared it to the actual illegality of said activities. The researchers found that administrators, faculty, and staff perceived several sex work activities as illegal, when those activities were actually permitted under law. This ignorance of legality regarding various sex work activities likely contributes to the stigmatization experienced by

college students engaging in sex work, as well as the prevalent conflation of sex work with sex trafficking.

On a more organizational level, higher education institutions have a history of further contributing to the stigmatization around sex work and student sex workers. While conducting a study on the experiences of cisgender women engaging in work as strippers while attending higher education institutions, Simpson (2021) found their research requests frequently blocked by colleges and universities. These institutions claimed that such research was “inappropriate,” thus contributing to whorephobia already present within higher education. Cusick et al. (2009) received similar responses from institutions when conducting research regarding Freedom of Information inquiries about higher education policies and student involvement with sex work in the UK. While institutions could not necessarily block such a request in this instance, all responses received by researchers conveyed universal disapproval of students engaging with the sex work industry. Another major component of institutional responses received by Cusick et al. (2009) consisted of a perceived threat to the reputation of the institution. Several institutions noted that while they maintained no official policy, students or staff engaging in sex work would be subject to disciplinary processes because such acts would be detrimental to institutional image.

Additionally, student sex workers are often faced with stigmatization from fellow students. Most commonly, this student-to-student stigmatization takes the form of “jokes” made by other students, usually something along the lines of dropping out to become a stripper or coming up with “stripper names” and outfits to use for themed parties (Stewart, 2021). Such jokes and comments usually imply that sex work is a form of lesser, illegitimate work, while further compelling student sex workers to maintain secrecy concerning their work.

Overall, the literature points out how critical it is for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators to improve their awareness of the ways in which sex workers are harmed on their campuses, whether by the campus community or the institution at large. It would seem that many institutions may even further marginalize student sex workers by implementing practices that penalize student sex workers for being engaged in such forms of labor and do not intervene when stigmatization is spread by students and staff on campus. Building awareness of these avenues for harm will allow faculty, staff, and administrators to implement practices that work to counter stigmatization. But it will also allow for them to take further steps to support student sex workers in more tangible ways by establishing resources and services that aim to improve institutional policies campus conditions for student sex workers.

### **Summary**

College students engaging in sex work is nothing new. However, the ways in which students engage in the sex work industry have been evolving over the past decade, especially when one accounts for the COVID-19 pandemic (Bromfield et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2010; Simpson, 2020). The widespread nature of online sex work has led to a bit more visibility of the existence of student sex workers, though research shows that most student sex workers are unlikely to disclose their engagement with the sex work industry (Bromfield, 2021; Sanders, 2018; Stewart, 2021). This limited visibility has resulted in a skewed view of student sex work by higher education faculty, staff, administrators, and other students. And social services aimed at assisting sex workers outside of the university community typically paint sex workers as either criminals or victims that require rehabilitation (Jackson, 2019). Contrary to popular belief, student sex workers do not typically feel forced to enter the sex work industry. Rather, they do so for financial or intrinsic motivations (Sagar et al., 2016).

The deficit-based understanding and approach to student sex work that is prevalent in higher education has led student sex workers to struggle in finding a sense of belonging and adequate support at their institutions (Betzer et al., 2015; Stewart, 2021). Higher education institutions are currently doing little to support their students that are engaging in sex work. Instead, the main worry of colleges and universities, when it comes to student sex work, is the possibility of damage done to the institution's reputation - a response that furthers the notion that engaging in sex work is inherently bad for students (Cusick et al., 2009).

### **Conclusions**

Little research has examined or proposed methods and strategies for supporting college students that are engaging in sex work. Many student sex workers also hold other marginalized social identities that can further affect their ability to access vital services and supports. Social support services that do exist often conflate sex work with sex trafficking and put unreasonable demands and burdens on the individual engaging in sex work. This is why it is crucial to the well-being of student sex workers that the higher education institutions that they attend stop ignoring their realities and work to develop methods of support and education for faculty, staff, and administrators.

Based on the reviewed literature, it is obvious that the majority of higher education institutions and employees lack an un-biased perspective of student sex work. Even awareness of the existence of student sex workers is often accompanied by the perception of an institutional threat that needs to be remedied. Developing awareness around the barriers and realities faced by student sex workers will be imperative in assisting faculty, staff, and administrators in bettering higher education experiences for students that engage in sex work. Once this awareness is built,

faculty, staff, and administrators will then be able to create and implement resources and services that address the needs of student sex workers.

## **Chapter Three: Project Description**

### **Introduction**

It is generally agreed upon that all students attending a post-secondary institution should feel comfortable in their environment and supported by faculty, staff, and administrators. However, it is also known that students that are a part of marginalized communities will not necessarily feel this way in a space that is not built with them in mind. Furthermore, one of these marginalized populations of students on college campuses - students engaging in sex work - are often not even visible to faculty, staff, administrators, or other students. When student sex workers are the topic of discussion in institutional spaces, it is often assumed that they are not in the room, not worthy of study, and do not need institutional support structures. This is far from the truth. Student sex workers should not be expected to navigate higher education barriers unaided because of the whorephobia ingrained in the fabric of the United States and its higher education system.

The main goal of this project is to provide guidance for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators on supporting college students that are engaging in sex work. These best practices will aim to improve retention, mental and physical health, and overall campus climate for students that are engaging in sex work while in college. A secondary goal of this project is to add to the sparse amount of literature and research focused on student sex workers in an effort to combat whorephobia in academic spaces, particularly in the United States. While recent efforts have been made in other countries to examine this marginalized population of students and their needs, the topic still remains relatively unexplored within the United States. Additionally, political efforts in the United States have generally focused on victimizing or criminalizing sex workers and sex work more broadly. This has led to limited visibility of the existence of student

sex workers and their realities, struggles, and successes. The goal is that this project will provide some method of assistance in helping to illuminate those realities and provide increased awareness of the existence of college students that engage in sex work.

The following chapter will provide a list of best practices for faculty, staff, and administrators of higher education institutions. These best practices will be described in the project components section, but it should be noted that this list is not exhaustive and should be considered a living document that can be amended and rewritten to fit the needs of student sex workers in the most current moment. Next, this chapter will discuss how the project will be evaluated, what conclusions can be drawn from the project, and the ways in which the project will be implemented.

### **Project Components**

The project that is described in this section constructs five branches of different learning areas<sup>4</sup>. These learning areas include general knowledge building, campus climate considerations, physical and mental health resources, financial support, and social support. Each learning area describes best practices that relate to supporting college students that are engaging in sex work for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators. Some of these best practices may vary depending on whether the employee reviewing the document is a faculty member, staff member, or administrator. However, several best practices will coincide, regardless of employee position. Additionally, it may be beneficial for some of these learning areas to be incorporated into new or existing professional development and training opportunities. This would allow for greater discussion and understanding among colleagues to process the information presented. Lastly, it should be noted that it is good practice to provide support and services that will benefit the

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<sup>4</sup> The five learning areas described in this project were developed by the author, Anthony Ruegsegger, based on a systematic literature review.



student body at large, as well as those engaging in sex work, whenever possible (Stewart, 2021). This allows space for student sex workers to receive services and support without disclosing their status as a sex worker.

A brief overview of this project can be found in Appendix A, and a detailed list of best practices may be found in Appendix B.

### **General Knowledge Building**

Knowledge building is essential to creating better support structures for college students engaging in sex work. First and foremost, faculty, staff, and administrators at higher education institutions simply need to be aware of the existence of student sex workers. However, this is not enough in and of itself. In addition to the acknowledgement of student sex workers, higher education professionals should also actively work to challenge any pre-conceived bias that they may hold regarding sex work and sex workers. It has been found that when faculty, staff, and administrators at higher education institutions do acknowledge the existence of student sex workers, it is often from a deficit lens, steeped in whorephobia, worry of institutional reputation, and other misconceptions (Sagar et al., 2015; Simpson, 2021; Stewart, 2021; Weitzer, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that faculty, staff, and administrators receive accurate, unbiased information regarding the realities of student sex workers. Optimally, this knowledge-building process could take place in a staffed professional development environment, where participants may ask questions and gather information among colleagues. It could also be appropriate to offer an asynchronous mode to allow for greater accessibility to such knowledge-building. However, it is important to note that, with any professional development or training program that centers marginalized students, there would need to be checks in place to ensure that knowledge is genuinely being built and information is not being misconstrued.

A knowledge-building training program should cover the following topics: the existence of student sex workers on college campuses, the importance of maintaining confidentiality when a student discloses their engagement in sex work, information regarding the motivators and lived experiences of students engaging in sex work, the differences between sex work and sex trafficking, information on federal, state, and local laws that impact student sex workers, any institutional policies that may impact student sex workers, and an overview of the polymorphous paradigm and methods for viewing sex work from a non-judgmental lens. Best practices for all of these topics can be found in Appendix B of this document.

Acknowledging the existence of student sex workers and maintaining confidentiality when a student discloses their engagement in sex work is recommended for faculty, staff, and administrators. However, administrators should take this one step further and work to avoid perceiving the existence of student sex workers as an institutional threat or a problem that needs to be solved. Students that engage in sex work exist and will continue to exist for the foreseeable future. Knowledge of the motivators and experiences of student sex workers will enable faculty, staff, and administrators to combat common stereotypes about student sex workers. Frequent misconceptions include the notion that students only engage in sex work because they have no other options or feel “forced” into it. Another way to combat common stereotypes about student sex workers is to learn the difference between sex work and sex trafficking. The two are often conflated, furthering popular myths that frame sex workers as heterosexual cisgender women who need to be saved.

Furthermore, it is important for faculty, staff, and administrators to understand what federal, state, and local laws are potentially impacting the students engaging in sex work at their institutions. This allows for greater understanding of the specific needs of student sex workers.

On this note, faculty, staff, and administrators should also be aware of any institutional policies that could be impacting the lives of student sex workers and do what they can to reform such policies. For faculty, this could include changing classroom or syllabus policies. For staff, this may mean reforming office policies that could negatively impact student sex workers. And for administrators, this may mean the reforming of policies that encourage discrimination, heighten barriers, or gatekeep access to higher education for student sex workers. Additionally, faculty, staff, and administrators should gain a general understanding of the polymorphous paradigm. This lens will allow higher education employees to view student sex work outside of the stereotypical tragic or empowerment perspectives and allow for the complex realities of student sex work.

### **Campus Climate Considerations**

The way in which student sex workers perceive campus climate is also an important factor to consider for faculty, staff, and administrators that want to better support these students. Far too often, student sex workers have reported campus environments which allow or even facilitate stigmatizing views of sex work. While these do often manifest in interactions among higher education professionals, it has also been noted that these views are often disseminated through student-to-student interactions (Long et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2015; Sagar et al., 2016; Stewart, 2021). These stigmatizing interactions can lead student sex workers to feel out of place, disengaged, and unwelcome on campus. That is why it is crucial for faculty, staff, and administrators to counter negative stereotypes and educate colleagues and students on the realities of sex work.

Training for faculty, staff, and administrators concerning campus climate for student sex workers should cover the following topics: stereotypes and stigmatization disseminated by

students, colleagues, course material, and institutional materials, the prevalence of research on student sex work, institutional policies banning sex work, programming and outreach centering sex work, and anonymous assessment to gauge student sex worker perception of campus climate. Once again, best practices for all of these topics may be found in Appendix B.

Faculty, staff, and administrators can actively work to counter stereotypes and stigmatization surrounding sex work that is being cultivated by students and colleagues in classrooms and campus offices. It would also be constructive for faculty members to point out and counter any stereotypes or stigma perpetuated by course materials to their students. Calling out negative stereotypes will help to create an environment more conducive to learning and growth for all students. When it comes to research surrounding student sex work, faculty members conducting such research should take into consideration the perspectives, experiences, and realities of student sex workers. Additionally, staff members should work to support and promote research being conducted within their offices and administrators should work to ensure that this research is allowed to be conducted in appropriate manner on their campuses. Allowing and encouraging research on student sex work will expand the sparse knowledge base on the topic, while also combating the stigmatization and whorephobia that is often present when researchers attempt to conduct research on sex work and its relationship with higher education.

Another best practice for faculty, staff, and administrators is to oppose and discourage institutional policies that ban students from engaging in sex work while enrolled at the higher education institution in question. Attempting to ban students from engaging in sex work accomplishes nothing, except penalizing a student that is participating in a form of labor to make ends meet - a statement that is true of many students on college campuses. Incorporating information about sex work, outreach, and support networks into your work with students is

another best practice that can be beneficial to the campus climate for student sex workers. Faculty members may include any relevant information, history, and research about sex work into course curriculum, when appropriate. Staff members can incorporate information about sex work, outreach organizations, and support networks into programming efforts. And administrators can encourage public statements to be made about their institution standing in solidarity with student sex workers and their commitment to improving campus climate for all students. Creating a normalcy that includes the existence and knowledge of sex work will go a long way in making student sex workers feel safe and supported on college campuses.

Lastly, higher education administrators should advocate for and implement an anonymous assessment on their campuses that focuses on the perception of climate and needs of student sex workers at their respective institutions. The assessment should be written in a way that enables students to participate in the assessment, whether or not they engage in sex work (See Appendix C). Faculty and staff members can support the assessment efforts by encouraging student participation in the assessment. Since student sex workers are more likely to hold other marginalized social identities, it is important that outreach for student participation occur in marginalized spaces on campus, such as LGBT centers and multicultural offices (Betzer et al., 2015). Once the data is collected from the assessment, it should be analyzed by an experienced assessment team and the team should create a list of recommendations that can be implemented on campus to meet the needs of student sex workers. This assessment can be repeated periodically to monitor improvements in the perception of campus climate and to update recommendations.

## **Physical and Mental Health Resources**

The physical and mental health of student sex workers often lacks when compared to that of students not engaging in sex work (Betzer et al., 2015). This was found to be especially true when considering past trauma endured and the higher prevalence of STIs among students that were currently engaging in sex work (Betzer et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2013). Therefore, it stands to reason that student sex workers are in need of on-campus healthcare professionals that are familiar with their unique experiences and are competent in providing judgement-free care to students of varying backgrounds. The best practices provided below will only scratch the surface of what support can be given to student sex workers in regard to healthcare.

Training for faculty, staff, and administrators concerning physical and mental health resources for student sex workers should cover the following topics: existing and needed on-campus mental health services, existing and needed on-campus physical health services, STI awareness and testing, birth control accessibility, and comprehensive sex education resources. Once again, best practices for all of these topics may be found in Appendix B.

One of the basic steps that faculty, staff, and administrators can take to support student sex workers in accessing healthcare is to become familiar with what resources and services are offered on and off campus. Faculty and staff should also know how to refer students to these resources, in an effort to make the process of accessing care less cumbersome. Administrators can take this a step further by encouraging health center and counseling center staff to engage in professional development opportunities to increase professional knowledge around sex work. Counseling staff on college campuses should aim to provide robust and diverse mental health services to students of all backgrounds, including those that engage in sex work. When student sex workers are able to receive services from a mental health professional that is knowledgeable

about student sex work and abstains from passing judgement during their practice, student sex workers will be more willing to seek out these services and feel more comfortable disclosing their involvement in the sex industry to those professionals. Quite similarly, health center staff should aim to provide robust and diverse health services to students of all backgrounds, including those engaging in sex work. Providing a judgment-free space with healthcare professionals that are knowledgeable on health issues common among sex workers will allow student sex workers to access healthcare without having to worry about the burden of educating their service providers.

Another best practice in this area involves the provision of free, accessible, STI testing and contraceptives, as well as comprehensive and inclusive sex education for all students. It may primarily fall under the responsibility of on campus health center staff to provide these services. However, campus staff, faculty, and administrators can also support in providing these services. Faculty can become familiar with what resources are available on and off campus and how to refer students to those resources. Staff members can become familiar with these resources as well, but may also consider incorporating STI awareness, prevention, and testing, along with sex education and contraceptive knowledge into their respective programming efforts. Lastly, administrators can play a part in advocating for STI testing, contraceptives, and inclusive sex education to be free and accessible to all students on campus. Providing such services in a judgement-free environment on campus will directly address some of the most prevalent health issues for student sex workers, while also benefiting the larger campus community.

### **Financial Support**

It has also been found that student sex workers are less likely to receive financial support from familial, federal, or institutional sources (Betzer et al., 2015). And financial factors are

often named as the prevailing motivators for why students enter the sex industry in the first place (Roberts et al., 2013; Sinacore et al., 2014; Stewart, 2021). Setting up financial support that benefits all students, will especially benefit student sex workers who are struggling to make ends meet or wish to leave the sex work industry.

Training for faculty, staff, and administrators concerning financial support for student sex workers should cover the following topics: emergency funding resources, basic needs programming and services, and student employment programs. Once again, best practices for all of these topics may be found in Appendix B.

One best practice that higher education administrators can follow is to implement emergency funding programs through their institution's financial aid office. Faculty and staff members can also support emergency funding initiatives by advocating for the creation of these programs and becoming familiar with the requirements and methods of referring students. These types of emergency funding programs would be available to all students and requests for funding could be reviewed on a case-to-case basis. It should be a given that these requests remain confidential when reviewed by staff members. This will allow student sex workers a safe space to disclose their engagement in sex work, if they choose to do so. However, higher education professionals should take caution when implementing emergency funding programs, to not make the requirements for funding to be granted too strict or make the process too difficult to navigate. Students should be able to easily access and understand the information required to request funding, and student sex workers should be able to choose not to disclose their status as a sex worker and still be given an opportunity to receive funds.

Another financial support program that can be implemented by higher education administrators is a student employment program that assists students in finding employment



opportunities on and off campus and developing career skills. This program would specifically focus on assisting student sex workers that wish to exit the sex work industry. While student sex workers frequently cite genuine enjoyment and fulfillment from their work, there will always be those that find themselves wishing to leave sex work but may feel unable to acquire another job. This program would provide support for students in finding new employment opportunities and building on their existing career skills. It is likely that an employment program such as this one could be housed under a student employment office and which students are participating should remain confidential. Faculty and staff members should be aware of any programs like this on campus and know how to refer students to it when needed.

Lastly, higher education staff members should implement programming and services that are centered around meeting the basic needs of all students. This may include the creation and staffing of resources like free clothing closets, food pantries, and programs that assist with obtaining and affording student housing. This will help alleviate financial stress on student sex workers that may be experiencing issues like housing and food insecurity. Faculty members and administrators can also help by advocating for the creation and funding of such programs, as well as referring students to these resources when they are needed.

### **Social Support**

The final area that this list of best practices covers is methods for socially supporting student sex workers. Student sex workers can often feel out of place and disconnected among their peers, leading to isolating and stigmatizing experiences while on campus (Benoit & Unsworth, 2022; Sagar et al., 2016). Some students may feel a need to connect with other student sex workers, while others may simply wish to know that there are others on campus that hold similar experiences. Either way, there is a need for support structures on college campuses that

enrich the social development and experiences of student sex workers. Research has shown that generally speaking, sex workers find social benefits in connecting with organizations that focus on outreach and supporting sex workers, as well as connecting with other sex workers in online and physical spaces (Jackson, 2019; Simpson, 2020). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that student sex workers would find solidarity and support in similar spaces.

Training for faculty, staff, and administrators concerning social support for student sex workers should cover the following topics: on and off campus support networks, virtual solidarity and community spaces, and programming focusing on the destigmatization of sex work. Once again, best practices for all of these topics may be found in Appendix B.

One best practice in this area for higher education staff would consist of implementing programming that focuses on the destigmatization of sex work and sex workers. Once again, this is a practice that would benefit all students on campus but would also help center the experiences of a marginalized group - student sex workers. Such programming would allow students to better understand the lived experiences of those engaging in sex work and debunk widespread stereotypes and myths relating to sex work and sex workers. Similarly, faculty members can also work to destigmatize sex work in the eyes of students by implementing such content into course materials when relevant. Additionally, administrators can assist in these efforts by encouraging programming that focuses on destigmatization of sex work and ensuring that institutional homophobia does not prevent such programming from taking place.

Another best practice for administrators and staff members is to encourage confidential, student-led, support networks, as well as virtual solidarity and community spaces. Faculty members can support by knowing that these spaces exist and how to refer students to them. However, it is imperative that administrative involvement in these groups is limited. This will

allow student sex workers to truly feel comfortable enough to engage in these spaces. Research has shown that there is a deep mistrust of institutional administration by student sex workers, and although it may be tricky, supporting student sex workers in this context may involve administrators taking a step back (Stewart, 2021). Additionally, virtual spaces are already known to be successful safe places for sex workers to engage with each other. This may be an optimal format for student sex work support networks, because it will allow for greater anonymity for students that are not keen to share their engagement with the sex industry.

### **Project Evaluation**

The way in which these best practices will be evaluated is actually, in part, described as one of the best practices recommended by this document. The assessment to collect data on the perception of campus climate by student sex workers that was discussed in the previous section will be expanded upon to also gauge knowledge of available resources, programming, and awareness of institutional supports for student sex workers once the best practices presented by this document have been implemented on the campus in question. The assessment will utilize a five-point Likert scale to collect this data. Positive indicators, such as “strongly agree” and “agree,” will demonstrate a greater awareness and sense of support for student sex workers, suggesting that the best practices have been successful in contributing to a positive campus environment for student sex workers. A full example of the assessment can be found in Appendix C. Participants in this assessment will consist of the entire campus community, including institution employees. Participants will be recruited through social media outreach, mass email outreach, and physical and digital advertisements. Ideally, this assessment will be conducted both before and after the best practices are implemented on the campus in question, to provide baseline data to measure progress against.

## Project Conclusions

Overall, the best practices presented in this project are a good start for supporting college students who are engaging in sex work. Current literature has shown that there are several ways in which higher education institutions fail to support their students that engage in sex work (Stewart, 2021). This results in consequences that are detrimental to the student, as well as the institution. Student sex workers need institutional structures and supports put in place that acknowledge their labor and view all aspects of their wellbeing as an institutional priority. With support and resources in place, student sex workers will be able to better navigate the system that is higher education.

The best practices recommended by this document aim to support student sex workers in five different areas of their college experience (see Appendix A). The first, and most general, is simply spreading an awareness among faculty, staff, administrators, and students that student sex workers exist. Student sex workers have existed on college campuses for quite some time, are not going anywhere, and are aware of the support that higher education has failed to provide them thus far. The best practices concerning general knowledge building are a small step toward correcting that failure. The second area in which student sex workers can benefit from institutional support is campus climate. Student sex workers often cite campus environments that are unsupportive or even hostile towards sex workers. The best practices presented in this area contain suggestions for faculty, staff, and administrators to actively combat negative stereotypes that are perpetuated on campus regarding sex workers. The third area that is in need of support development for student sex workers concerns physical and mental health resources. While student sex workers may find themselves in need of resources for their physical and mental health, they can be met with unwarranted judgement when they attempt to seek out these

services. That is why these best practices provide higher education employees with some guidance on how to better support student sex workers that are in need of healthcare services on campus. The fourth area that needs improvement to better support student sex workers is the financial support available at higher education institutions. Since student sex workers name financial reasons as their top motivators for entering the sex industry, and are often the ones receiving less federal, familial, and institutional financial support, it stands to reason that improving available financial resources for these students would help to lower the financial stress associated with pursuing a degree. That is why the best practices in this document provide some ideas for how to increase monetary student support. Lastly, the fifth area in which student sex workers would benefit from further resources is social support structures. Because of the secrecy and stigma that is often associated with sex work, student sex workers can tend to become isolated from their peers and consequently become disengaged. To combat these effects, this document recommends creating virtual, and possibly physical, spaces in which student sex workers can stand in solidarity and community with each other, while maintaining a degree of anonymity for their safety and comfort. As previously stated, the list is by no means exhaustive and should be amended and improved upon as research progresses in this area.

### **Plans for Implementation**

These best practices may be implemented by any higher education institution or professional that wishes to better support their students who engage in sex work. While these recommendations can be implemented at any point throughout the academic year in the form of professional development sessions, it may be beneficial to include these practices in employee training that typically takes place at the beginning of the academic year, or when onboarding new faculty, staff, or administrators. This will allow new employees to gain an understanding of the

experiences of student sex workers and take those experiences into consideration when implementing their practice, especially if they have previously not had exposure to working with students engaging in this labor. Incorporating these best practices into employee training will help to create a more inclusive campus environment for all students.

Additionally, it may be beneficial for administrators to create benchmarks for student sex worker supports that they plan to implement on campus. This way, when the knowledge of institution employees is assessed in each learning area, implementation procedures may be adjusted on a case-by-case basis. Overall, these best practices will provide general guidance for supporting student sex workers on college campuses, but it will be up to faculty, staff, and administrators to put these recommendations into practice.

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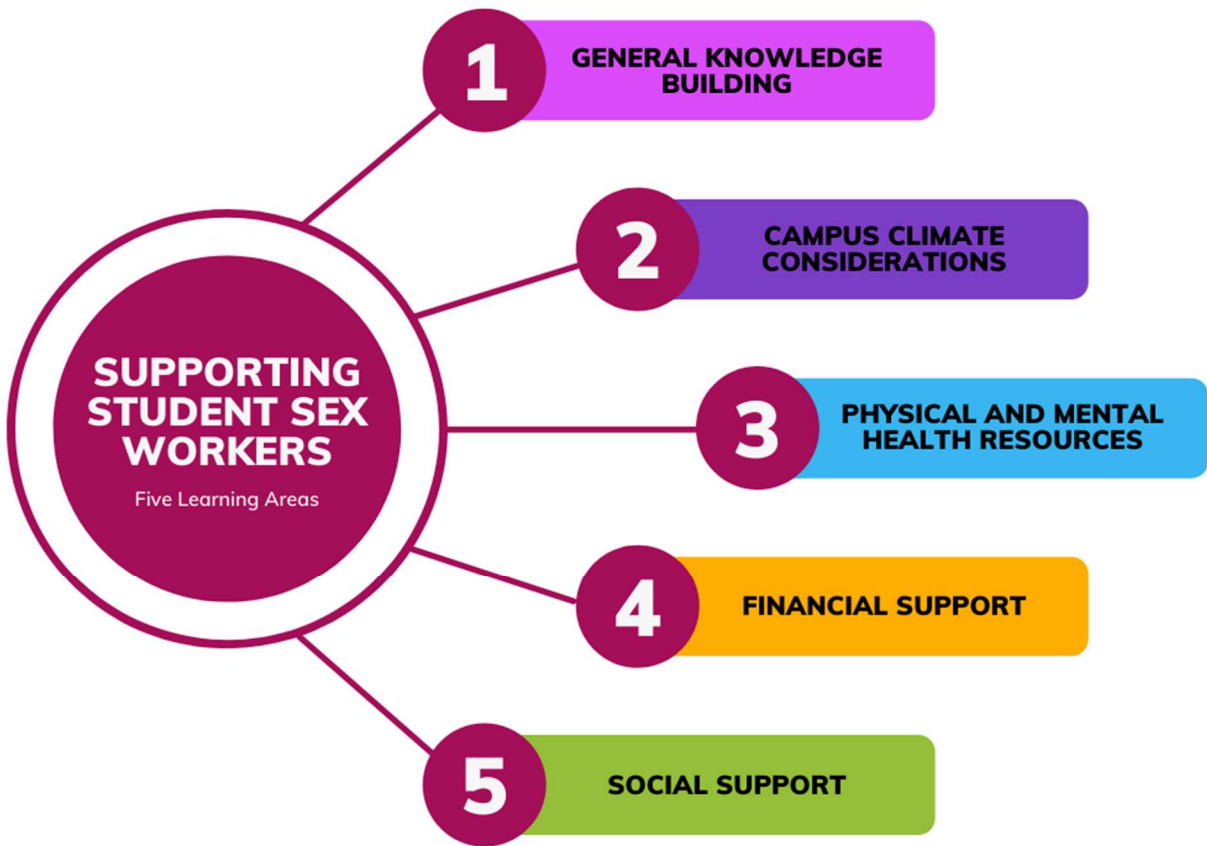
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## Appendix A

### Supporting Student Sex Workers: Five Learning Areas



## Appendix B

### Best Practices in Supporting Student Sex Workers for Higher Education Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

Note: Creating programs and services that benefit all students, as well as those that engage in sex work, will allow for greater student control over the disclosure of their status as a sex worker.

#### General Knowledge Building

Role of Faculty	Role of Staff	Role of Administrators
Know that student sex workers exist on your campus and in your classrooms.	Know that student sex workers exist on your campus and in your offices.	Know that student sex workers exist on your campus and avoid perceiving it as an institutional threat or a problem to remedy.
Maintain confidentiality when a student discloses their engagement in sex work to you.	Maintain confidentiality when a student discloses their engagement in sex work to you.	Maintain confidentiality when a student discloses their engagement in sex work to you.
Become familiar with lived experiences of student sex workers.	Become familiar with lived experiences of student sex workers.	Become familiar with lived experiences of student sex workers.
Become familiar with the motivating factors that influence a student's decision to engage in sex work.	Become familiar with the motivating factors that influence a student's decision to engage in sex work.	Become familiar with the motivating factors that influence a student's decision to engage in sex work.
Know the differences between sex work and sex trafficking.	Know the differences between sex work and sex trafficking.	Know the differences between sex work and sex trafficking.
Understand what federal, state, and local laws are impacting the lives of student sex workers.	Understand what federal, state, and local laws are impacting the lives of student sex workers.	Understand what federal, state, and local laws are impacting the lives of student sex workers.
Understand what institutional policies are impacting the lives of student sex workers, reform classroom policies	Understand what institutional policies are impacting the lives of student sex workers, reform office policies that	Understand what institutional policies are impacting the lives of student sex workers and encourage reform of

that may negatively impact student sex workers and share strategies with administration to make institutional policies more inclusive.	may negatively impact student sex workers and share strategies with administration to make institutional policies more inclusive.	policies that encourage discrimination, heighten barriers, or gatekeep access to higher education for student sex workers.
Utilize the polymorphous paradigm to view student sex work from a non-judgmental lens.	Utilize the polymorphous paradigm to view student sex work from a non-judgmental lens.	Utilize the polymorphous paradigm to view student sex work from a non-judgmental lens.

### Campus Climate Considerations

Role of Faculty	Role of Staff	Role of Administrators
Actively counter stereotypes and stigmatization from students, colleagues, and course material in your classrooms.	Actively counter stereotypes and stigmatization from students and colleagues in your offices.	Actively counter stereotypes and stigmatization from students and colleagues on campus.
Consider the perspectives and realities of student sex workers when conducting research.	Support research that contributes to the wellbeing of student sex workers.	Push to ensure that research regarding student sex work is allowed to be conducted in equity with other research on your campus.
Oppose policies that ban students from engaging in sex work while enrolled at your institution and recognize that sex work is a valid form of labor.	Oppose policies that ban students from engaging in sex work while enrolled at your institution and recognize that sex work is a valid form of labor.	Oppose and discourage policies that ban students from engaging in sex work while enrolled at your institution and recognize that sex work is a valid form of labor.
Include relevant information, history, and research about sex work in your course curriculum. Ex: The prevalence and history of sex work in xyz industry.	Incorporate information about sex work, outreach, and support networks into your programming. Ex: guest speakers, resource tabling, etc.	Make it public that your institution stands in solidarity with student sex workers.
Encourage student participation in an anonymous assessment focused on learning about the	Encourage student participation in an anonymous assessment focused on learning about the needs of student sex	Advocate for and implement an anonymous assessment with a goal of learning about student sex worker needs on your campus.

needs of student sex workers on your particular campus.	workers on your particular campus.	
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### Physical and Mental Health Resources

Role of Faculty	Role of Staff	Role of Administrators
Know what mental health resources are available on campus and how to refer students.	<p><u>Counseling staff:</u> Aim to provide robust and diverse mental health services to students of all backgrounds. Become educated in providing services to clients engaging in sex work, from a non-judgmental lens.</p> <p><u>Other staff:</u> Know what mental health resources are available on campus and how to refer students.</p>	Encourage counseling staff to engage in professional development opportunities that increase knowledge around student sex work.
Know what health resources are available on campus and how to refer students.	<p><u>Health center staff:</u> Aim to provide robust health services to students of all backgrounds. Become educated in providing services to clients engaging in sex work, from a non-judgmental lens.</p> <p><u>Other staff:</u> Know what health resources are available on campus and how to refer students.</p>	Encourage health center staff to engage in professional development opportunities that increase knowledge around student sex work.
Know what STI testing resources are available on and off campus and how to refer students.	<p><u>Health center staff:</u> Provide free and accessible STI testing to all students.</p> <p><u>Other staff:</u> Know what STI testing resources are available on and off campus and how to refer students. Consider incorporating STI awareness and testing into the programmatic efforts of your office.</p>	Advocate for free and accessible STI testing to be available to all students.
Know what birth control and sex education resources are available on and off campus and how to refer students.	<p><u>Health center staff:</u> Provide free, accessible birth control and comprehensive, inclusive sex education to all students.</p> <p><u>Other staff:</u> Know what birth control and sex education resources are available on and off campus and how to refer students. Consider</p>	Advocate for free, accessible birth control and comprehensive and inclusive sex education for all students.

	incorporating sex education into the programmatic efforts of your office.	
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### Financial Support

Role of Faculty	Role of Staff	Role of Administrators
Know what emergency funding resources are available and how to refer students.	Advocate for emergency funding programs for all students.	Implement emergency funding programs for all students.
Know what basic needs programming and services are available on and off campus and how to refer students.	Implement programming and services centered on meeting the basic needs of all students (housing, food, clothing, etc.)	Encourage programming and services centered on meeting students' basic needs (housing, food, clothing, etc.)
Become familiar with student employment programs on campus and how to refer students.	Advocate for a confidential student employment program with a focus on students that decide they do not want to engage in sex work.	Implement a confidential student employment program with a focus on students that decide they do not want to engage in sex work.

### Social Support

Role of Faculty	Role of Staff	Role of Administrators
Become familiar with any support network on and off campus and how to refer students.	Encourage confidential, student-led support networks.	Encourage confidential, student-led support networks, but limit administrative involvement.
Become familiar with any sex work-focused, virtual solidarity and community spaces and how to refer students.	Encourage confidential, student-led, virtual solidarity/community spaces.	Encourage confidential, student-led, virtual solidarity spaces, but limit administrative involvement.
Work to destigmatize sex work through material relevant to course curriculum.	Implement programming for all students that focuses on the destigmatization of sex work and sex workers.	Encourage programming for all students that focuses on the destigmatization of sex work and sex workers.

## Appendix C

### Assessing Support for Student Sex Workers on Campus

Purpose of this Assessment: This assessment aims to help [University Name] better understand the needs and barriers of student sex workers on campus. Participation in this assessment is voluntary and completely anonymous.

#### Demographic Information

Please complete the following questions regarding demographic information if you feel comfortable:

1. Race/Ethnicity: [Write in Option]
2. Gender Identity: [Write in Option]
3. Sexual Orientation: [Write in Option]
4. Have you ever participated in any form of sex work (remote or in-person)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe
5. Do you know of someone at [University Name] that has participated in any form of sex work (remote or in-person)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe/I am Not Sure

#### Perceived Support for Student Sex Workers

Please mark within the corresponding table column to indicate to what level you agree with each statement on the left.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral or N/A	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employees and campus officials at [University Name] appear knowledgeable of sex work and student engaging in sex work.					
I am a student sex worker and I feel safe on campus.					
I have a positive opinion of students that engage in sex work.					
[University Name] offers sex education services that are inclusive to student sex workers.					
[University Name] offers healthcare resources and services that are accessible and safe for student sex workers.					
[University Name] offers mental health resources and services that are accessible and safe for student sex workers.					



<p>[University Name] offers adequate financial services and resources that are accessible to student sex workers (examples: emergency funding, scholarships, grants, basic need fulfillment services, etc.).</p>					
<p>I have <u>not</u> seen negative stereotypes of sex workers represented on campus.</p>					
<p>If a student disclosed that they were a sex worker to a [University Name] employee, I believe that information would be kept confidential.</p>					
<p>I think students should <u>not</u> be penalized if they engage in sex work while enrolled at [University Name].</p>					
<p>If a student I knew was a sex worker, it would not change my opinion of them.</p>					
<p>I have seen events and programs on campus that center the voices of sex workers.</p>					