

Sex Work and Disability: Cross-Collective Collaboration

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Abstract

There is a large overlap of disabled people who are sex workers. The various forms of sex work enable people with disabilities to have bodily autonomy and economic sovereignty that is otherwise societally withheld. However, several similarities also exist between the whorephobia sex workers experience and the ableism disabled people experience; stigma around visibility, being seen as disposable or needing to be saved/cured, and being excluded from designing solutions intended to help, to name a few. This thesis explores some of the overlapping discriminations faced by disabled people and sex workers, in order to ascertain if cross-coalitional partnerships would be beneficial for these two groups. Using an online survey format to gather anonymous answers from 15 participants, the researcher investigated in-depth answers about participants' experiences within various aspects of U.S. society. Findings reveal that people with disabilities and sex workers faced similar struggles across every category this study inquired about, particularly with healthcare and housing. These results suggest mutual gain from cross-coalitional solidarity. Further, participants revealed several suggestions for solutions to getting these two groups working and advocating together for each other's fundamental human rights.

1. Introduction: Sex Work and Disability as Interconnected

I started working in the sex trade¹ in the summer of 2012, about two years after my official diagnosis with an autoimmune disorder that explained years of bodily distress. In my time as a sex worker, I have read countless narratives from other disabled sex workers that tell a story not unlike my own: that sex work in all its forms gives disabled folks financial independence, financial security, control over our unique bodily needs, and even important visual representation in erotic media. My research is first and foremost informed by my own experiences as a disabled sex worker floating between these two identities.

1.1. Context for the Study

U.S. society as a whole tends to view with contempt those who are unable to provide for themselves financially or achieve complete independence. In the dating scene, over half of the disabled population are unpartnered, and 48% report being ghosted after disclosing their disability.² When looking at the traditional job market, employers privilege applicants who do not have gaps in their resumes; however, many sex workers do not disclose sex work on their resumes. Additionally, living with chronic illness/disabilities will also frequently result in

¹ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

² "Disabled Dating Statistics 2026: The Definitive Research Guide," Positive Singles, accessed March 14, 2026, at

<https://ablesingles.com/2026/02/05/disabled-dating-statistics-2026-the-definitive-research-guide/>

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employment histories that are intermittent.³ When disabled people do secure employment, a regularly reported experience is that workplaces do not allow for accommodations that would grant them the ability to sustain that employment.⁴ Things like restrictive work schedules, requiring employees to stand for the whole shift, denying virtual options, etc., make for a hostile work environment for disabled people who are expected to sacrifice mental and bodily needs for the company.⁵ Disabled people are provided with fewer economic opportunities than non-disabled people, which has a trickle effect of ensuring disparity in every aspect of our lives—education, housing, medical, social, romantic, sexual, familial, and so forth.⁶

It is for all these reasons and more that numerous disabled people gravitate towards the sex trade. Research out of Canada found that 73% of sex workers reported having one or more disabilities.⁷ Sex work is one strategy that many disabled people have found that benefits our mental and bodily challenges while giving us financial independence to support ourselves and our families.⁸ The various forms of sex work function with crip time,⁹ enabling people to have flexible schedules that give the availability to take

time off for bad health days, self-manage for one's own bodily and mental needs, and make enough money for basic human necessities, sometimes even in relatively short bursts of work.¹⁰ People with disabilities will frequently have a higher cost of living due to special diets, treatments, medication, devices, and hospital trips.¹¹ By restoring some economic power to disabled people, sex work provides independence from relying on insufficient Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) payments, provides higher salaries than other service industry professions in similar fields, and pushes boundaries of citizenship outside the middle-class nuclear family ideal.¹²

In addition to these links between sex workers and disabled people, there is also an overlap in the stereotypes experienced by these two communities. For example, disabled people and sex workers are regarded as not making good long-term romantic partners, partially due to the stigma that these groups face.¹³ The media routinely adds to this stigma by depicting disabled people and sex workers in harmful ways. In particular, the dead hooker trope that drives the plot narrative of a murder mystery or the

³ Angela Jones, “‘I Can’t Really Work Any ‘Normal’ Job:’ Disability, Sexual Ableism, and Sex Work,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9094/7750>

⁴ Zee Xaymaca, “Sex Work as resistance to marginalization—Lessons from Black Feminist Theory, Disability Justice, and Black-led sex worker organizing,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9116/7733>

⁵ Ness Cooper, “The Experiences of a Disabled Dominatrix” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9127/7731>

⁶ Leyla Savloff, “Putas y Discas: Sex Work Activism and Disability Justice in Argentina,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9111/7732#top>

⁷ “By Us, For Us: Needs and Risk Assessment of Sex Workers in the Lower Mainland and Southern Vancouver Island,”

ByUSForUsBC, accessed September 18, 2025, at http://www.byusforusbc.com/uploads/1/4/1/8/141829945/by_us_for_us_-_a_needs_and_risks_assessment_of_sex_workers_in_the_lower_mainland_and_southern_vancouver_island_-_web.pdf

⁸ Zee Xaymaca, 2022

⁹ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

¹⁰ B. Ethan Coston, “Disabled Trans Sex Working College Students: Results from the 2015 U.S. Trans Survey” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9134/7748>

¹¹ See Leyla Savloff, 2022; Zee Xaymaca, 2022.

¹² Leyla Savloff, 2022

¹³ Nieweglowski, K. & Sheehan, L., “Relationship Depth and Associative Stigma of Disability” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i3.5527>

heartwarming family drama of a cripple overcoming disability with the help of friends.¹⁴

The necropolitics¹⁵ of disabled people and sex workers are apparent through the blatant attacks these groups suffer. The Trump administration has rolled back protections for disabled people. Under the guise of restoring public order, President Trump issued the executive order “Ending Crime and Disorder on America’s Streets,” which permits the broad institutionalization of people with mental illnesses. Unwilling institutionalization of people with mental disabilities was previously deemed a “deprivation of liberty.”¹⁶ Sex workers are targeted by murderers, the police force, and policy.¹⁷ Both communities tend to rely on mutual aid and community support for dispersing information, resources, and supplies in order to survive in a system that would rather have us dead.¹⁸ The Section 504 sit-in was an iconic example of this. In 1977, over one hundred disabled people occupied San Francisco’s Health, Education, and Welfare Federal Building for almost a month despite water and phone lines being cut. They organized meals, access needs, medication, getting things stealthily delivered, connecting with outside activist groups

such as the Black Panthers. After 28 days, they got their demands met.¹⁹ International Sex Workers Day commemorates the day over one hundred sex workers occupied the Church of Saint-Nizier in Lyon, France, for eight days in 1975. They did this to draw attention to their inhumane working conditions and bring an end to police harassment.²⁰ Sex workers and disabled people are at the forefront of calling out many injustices.²¹

1.2. Research Question

Disability Studies Quarterly (DSQ) released a special edition of essays from disabled sex workers,²² and my research question emerged from this body of work. My study begins to address an issue brought up in some of these essays, understanding the gap between disability and sex worker communities. I explore the overlapping discriminations faced by these two groups to answer the question: How can sex worker and disability communities, which appear to be so closely linked, come together over commonalities to participate in cross-coalitional rights movement building? Sex work activists have observed that many of the sex worker organizations and events tend to exclude disabled voices from the

¹⁴ “When They’re Dead, They’re Just Hookers,” PULP Public School, accessed March 5, 2026, at

<https://www.thepulpmag.com/articles/when-theyre-dead-theyre-just-hookers>

¹⁵ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

¹⁶ “Trump’s Executive Order Rolls Back Decades of Disability Rights,” American Bar Association, Accessed March 10, 2026, at <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/disabilityrights/news/trumps-executive-order/>

¹⁷ “Symposium Introduction: Sex Workers’ Rights, Advocacy, and Organizing,” Columbia Human Rights Law Review, Accessed March 10, 2026, at <https://hrlr.law.columbia.edu/hrlr/introduction-sex-workers-rights-advocacy-and-organizing/>

¹⁸ Emily Coombes, Ariel Wolf, Danielle Blunt, Kassandra Sparks “Disabled Sex Workers’ Fight for Digital Rights, Platform Accessibility, and Design Justice” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2022): <https://dsq.sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9097/7727>

Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi. *Care work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018.

¹⁹ “The History Behind the Americans With Disabilities Act,” Disability Law Center of Virginia, Accessed March 14, 2026, at <https://www.dlcv.org/ada-history-blog>

²⁰ “200 Prostitutes of Lyons in Siege at Church,” The New York Times, Accessed March 14, 2026, at <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/06/07/archives/200-prostitutes-of-lyons-in-siege-at-church.html>

²¹ Zee Xaymaca, 2022

²² Lindsay Blewett, Angela Jones & Milo Osbourn, “Sex Work and Disability: Introduction To The Special Issue,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42, no.2 (2022): doi: <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v42i2.9121>

conversation, where there is inclusion of other marginalized groups.²³ Disability activists and sex worker activists have a lot to gain from collaboration and cross-coalitional movement building. The overlapping discriminations and inherent ties between these two groups will lead to significant cross-collective collaborations within advocacy spaces.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The overlap of sex workers and people with disabilities has had very little formal research, and much of what has been written is from the perspective of a disabled client seeking the services of a sex worker to get their touch/sexual needs met.²⁴ Much of sex work is illegal or in a legal grey area in Oregon, so there are significant risks associated with being an out sex worker, including but not limited to fines, jail time, losing custody of children, and a permanent record. However, despite the risk, there are sex workers who speak openly about their experiences, advocate for better working conditions, and educate on sex worker struggles. Emily Coombes²⁵ and other disabled sex workers have called out the disability community for ignoring the fight for the rights of sex workers, but it is also unclear if the sex worker community has made their advocacy spaces accessible. My research begins to bridge this gap in knowledge by assessing the spaces of overlapping discrimination faced by these two

groups and brainstorming methods for fighting for our mutual rights.

For this research, I am using an intersectional feminist and crip lens. Intersectional feminist theory addresses the many different ways individual women and LGBTQIA+ people experience differing levels of discrimination based on identities such as class, citizenship status, sexuality, age, race, ability, etc. It analyzes the systems of oppression that create unique and compounding impacts on people. This feminist lens is not exclusionary of non-binary or trans people, or, I would argue, sex workers. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a U.S. law professor, civil rights advocate, and intersectional feminist—who coined the term intersectionality in 1989—details the way discrimination has been primarily thought about as occurring within a single category.²⁶ She draws attention to the way racism and sexism doubly burden some people (e.g., Black women) and their experiences are not encompassed by looking at a single axis of their identity. Others have expanded on this concept to include class, sexuality, immigrant status, caste, disability, gender nonconformity, etc. Some people experience several of these oppressions, and the experiences are not disconnected. The effects that produce unequal opportunities have impacts that extend across generations.²⁷

Crip theory was popularized by Robert McRuer and takes pieces from queer theory and

²³ “Sex Work is a Disability Issue. So Why Doesn’t the Disability Community Recognize That?” Rooted in Rights, Accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://rootedinrights.org/sex-work-is-a-disability-issue-so-why-doesnt-the-disability-community-recognize-that/>

²⁴ “Sex Workers and Persons With Disabilities,” Psychology Today, Accessed March 19, 2026, at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/women-who-stray/202203/sex-workers-and-persons-disabilities>

²⁵ Emily Coombes, 2022

²⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex:

A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 8, no.1 (1989): <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>

²⁷ “The Intergenerational Trauma Experiences and Healing (ITEH) model for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (LGBTQ+ BIPOC) individuals,” American Psychological Association, accessed September 16, 2025, at <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2026-40116-001>

critical disability studies to critique norms and social pressures of compulsory able-bodiedness that are used to reify capitalism and normative sexuality. Critical disability theory is rooted in the history of disability and explores the social norms that delineate what constitutes impairments.²⁸ On an institutional level, definitions of who might be considered normal exclude people with disabilities and exclude disabled people from full participation in society. McRuer, in his book *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, was also one of the founding scholars involved with creating queer disability studies.²⁹ The word crip is a reclamation of the word cripple that was used as a slur against people with visible disabilities. Crip theory highlights and utilizes the methods of queer theorists to reinvent language typically used to harm, and exhibit pride in disability statuses. Affirming lived and embodied experience as knowledgeable subjects, while recognizing some disabled people are more marginalized than others, is paramount to crip theory. Alison Kafer has had a significant impact on this theory. In her book, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, she speaks to the interdependence of disabled communities versus the independence that non-disabled people value.³⁰ Kafer argues that there is no future for disabled people, especially queer disabled people, because of the way society seeks to eradicate these groups.

My results were analyzed through these frameworks because they perfectly encapsulate the topic of my research and the shared identities of my participants. Out of my fifteen participants, twelve identified as LGBTQ+ and fourteen identified as

disabled. Keeping society's treatment of these marginalized identities in mind while reading participants' responses was essential for analyzing my results.

2. Methods

I utilized the online survey platform, Qualtrics, and focused on qualitative data gathering. My target demographic for respondents was people with marginalized identities, so I received IRB approval before beginning my research. Responses were anonymized and did not record respondents' IP addresses, location data, or contact information. Once consent was given, the participants completed a series of three screening questions to determine if they were a suitable fit for the survey. They had to be an Oregon resident, 18 years of age or older, and either a current or former sex worker or a currently or formerly disabled person. Other than the participants being 18 years or older, I did not collect information on participant age or age range for safety reasons. I also did not collect participant names and used randomized flower names such as Poppy and Foxglove for the purposes of reporting my findings. The survey used simple language for accessibility reasons and asked 10 questions about participants' personal experiences.³¹ I distributed the survey flier on the University of Oregon campus using bulletin boards and going to disability related clubs, on social media, and using online sex worker forums, and through sex work organizations that distributed my flier.

²⁸ "Critical Disability Theory," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 15, 2025, at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/disability-critical/#CripTheo>

²⁹ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, (New York University Press, 2006), 5.

³⁰ Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, (Indiana University Press, 2013), 115.

³¹ See Appendix B: Survey Questions

2.1. Participants

I had 15 participants who completed the survey.³² Five of my participants were current or former sex workers, 14 were currently or formerly disabled, and four were current or former disabled sex workers. My analysis focuses on these 15 participants, many of whom are college students. The majority of my participants identify as LGBTQIA+, with only two people identifying as straight. Eleven out of my 15 participants identified as white. I use she/her to refer to people who identified as a woman/female/trans woman/trans femme; similarly, I use he/him for people who identified as a man/male/transman, and I use they/them for anyone who indicated identifying as nonbinary or any other category not previously listed above.³³

2.2. Key Concepts

I use the terms sex work and sex trade interchangeably to be inclusive of people who have traded sex for resources other than money and for people who are trading sex for survival and may not consider it work.³⁴ Sex Trade is used within an anti-colonialist framework, and discussions of sex work must not distance these lived realities from the conversation.³⁵

The disability community is rapidly evolving to use identity-first language (i.e., disabled person), in place of person-first language (i.e., person with disabilities). Disability is often viewed as a core component of identity, much like race and gender. However, some members of the community, such as people with intellectual and

developmental disabilities, prefer person-first language. In this report, I use these phrases interchangeably for inclusivity and because my respondents did not disclose the type of disabilities they have.

3. Overlapping Discriminations of Sex Workers and Disabled People

Building on chapter one, in which I illustrated some of the connections between sex workers and disabled people, I will use this chapter to expand on a number of areas of society where people with disabilities and those in the sex trade tend to feel highly impacted. Within each section, I detail a bit of the historical context that informed why I asked the questions I did. In what follows, I will closely examine the topics of sex work, supplemental security income/social security disability insurance, housing, school, healthcare, police, and finances.

3.1. Key Findings

Within my years as an advocate for disabled people and sex workers, I have seen the concept of intersectionality³⁶ being held as a core value of advocacy groups, yet a distinct lack of collaboration between these two groups, which I see as inherently entwined. What I found was that, in every area that I inquired about, both sex workers and disabled people expressed similar struggles. However, some aspects of engaging with society appear to be more problematic than others for these two groups. Housing was one such area. The experiences disabled participants

³² 25 individuals began the survey. Of these, only 15 people completed it beyond the demographic questions. I will only be including the responses from these 15 participants in this thesis.

³³ See Appendix B: Survey Questions and Participant Demographics for overview

³⁴ Emily Coombes, 2022

³⁵ Madolyn Wesaw, Course on Indigenous Perspectives on Sex Trade, May 10, 2023

³⁶ See Appendix A: Glossary of terms

discuss include having to pay a premium for subpar accessible housing, while sex workers struggle with proof of income. Housing is expensive and only made more inaccessible by the regulations that particularly affect disabled people and sex workers, pushing these groups into unsafe or inaccessible situations.

Healthcare is another area with significant overlapping experiences. People with disabilities experience discrimination in the form of ableism, fatphobia, and having one's lived experiences discredited. Both my disabled and sex worker participants reported not disclosing certain information to their care providers out of fear of discrimination. Inadequate or incomplete healthcare has far-reaching consequences and results in worse health outcomes.³⁷

3.2. Sex Work

Q: What are your reasons for currently or formerly starting sex work?

Oregon achieved statehood in 1859, making it one of the oldest states in the West. Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, prostitutes, now called full-service sex workers (FSSW), played a prominent role in creating Oregon's culture. They arrived in the Pacific Northwest in large

waves, and their presence was initially broadly accepted.³⁸

When settler-colonizers arrived in the area, camps for mining and logging began to pop up, and by the 1860s, there were hundreds of these camps all over eastern Oregon. Within the cities, bawdy houses, also known as bordellos, or brothels, were the primary locations that sex workers and their madams set up. Pendleton, Oregon, had 18 brothels running by the mid-1800s, and by 1890, Portland, Oregon, had 400 brothels in operation.³⁹

Portland's history is particularly rich in sex work. It was a frontier city filled with unmarried working men in the 1800s. Pool halls, saloons, and brothels generated a significant amount of income. Licenses and fees for these establishments provided the majority of the city's regular revenue.⁴⁰ Currently, Portland has the highest number of strip clubs per capita of any city in the United States, with 54 unique club locations, some dating back to the 1960s.⁴¹ This is likely due to a Supreme Court decision in 1987, *State v. Henry*, which ruled to protect all-nude stripping under the First Amendment.⁴² The ruling stated that "any person can write, print, read, say, show or sell anything to a consenting adult even though that expression may be generally or universally considered obscene."⁴³ In Oregon, under our free

³⁷ "2021 National Healthcare and Disparities Report," National Institute of Health, Accessed May 18, 2026, at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK578537/>

³⁸ Jan MacKell Collins, *Good Time Girls of the Pacific Northwest: A Red-Light History of Washington, Oregon, and Alaska*, (TwoDot, 2020), 12.

³⁹ Jan MacKell Collins, *Good Time Girls of the Pacific Northwest: A Red-Light History of Washington, Oregon, and Alaska*, (TwoDot, 2020), 15.

⁴⁰ "Commerce, Climate, and Community: A History of Portland and its People," Oregon History Project, accessed June 25, 2025, at <https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/narratives/commerce-climate-and-community-a-history-of-portland-and-its-people/the-mature-distribution-center/portlands-laboring-class/>

⁴¹ "America's Strip Club Capital Sees Push for Fair Terms, Labor Rights, and Food," The Guardian, accessed July 4, 2025, at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/29/portland-strippers-sex-workers-labor-rights-food#:~:text=According%20to%20research%20by%20Priceonomics.as%20it%20has%20public%20restrooms.>

⁴² "State of Oregon v. Henry, 302 Ore. 510; 732 P.2d 9; 14 Media L. Rep. 1011 (Ore. 1987)," University of Oregon, accessed September 5, 2025, at

https://pages.uoregon.edu/tgleason/j385/Henry_j385.html

⁴³ "Stripping in Oregon," Oregon Encyclopedia, Updated July 23, 2024, at https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/stripping_in_or

speech laws, adult businesses cannot be zoned differently from other businesses. The wording of the ruling, which includes showing anything considered obscene, has allowed strip clubs to thrive without excessive regulation or censorship. In contrast, other states, like Washington, have zoning regulations that limit where adult businesses can set up and limit the number of adult businesses in a building.⁴⁴

On the flip side, there are plenty of laws that have not worked in sex workers' favor. For example, the 2018 Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA), passed by the first Trump administration, put up barriers that make it difficult for sex workers to screen clients for safety, advertise on social media, or build safety networks and communities.⁴⁵ These acts made the websites responsible for the content users posted, which resulted in many websites voluntarily shutting down, like Backpage, or heavily censoring, like Instagram, or removing features, like Craigslist's Personals section. Many sex worker safety tools are built online, such as digital black books that let sex work providers look up if a client has been reported as dangerous. SESTA/FOSTA also made disabled sex workers more vulnerable to violence from clients.⁴⁶ Some sex workers have an easier time pivoting when laws like this are passed, whereas disabled sex workers or people of color who experience more financial precarity struggle more.⁴⁷ The inability to screen clients creates situations where sex workers need to take larger risks. These two laws

in particular made websites responsible for the content their users post, so many platforms had to shut down entirely, which is what happened with Backpage and Craigslist's Encounters section. Alternatively, websites had to ban or heavily police any content to do with sex, sexuality, and even gender expression, which is what happened to most social media platforms. This drastic change affected sex educator content creators, queer content creators, and, of course, sex workers' advertising, by restricting their accounts from viewership.⁴⁸

Five of my participants spoke to their experiences as sex workers, and survival was a recurring theme—3 out of 5 of the sex workers who participated in my study engaged in survival sex work. Jasmine, for example, says,

I needed money and at 17 was severely struggling to be taken seriously enough to get a good job. I was just an emancipated teen in college so I had no real leverage getting better jobs than food service and entry retail even having qualifications. Sex work felt like one of my better options as a fem presenting person (at the time at least).⁴⁹

Survival sex work can look many different ways, but primarily comes down to little or no other work options. For Jasmine, sex work was their best alternative to traditional jobs that would not have a sufficient wage for their needs. Moreover, being a young person, not yet legally an adult, creates extra barriers like difficulty acquiring a bank account or renting on one's own.

Aster describes a much different survival situation:

[egon/#:~:text=The%20boom%20in%20strip%20clubs,to%20att empts%20to%20eradicate%20it](#)

⁴⁴ "Adult Entertainment Regulation," Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington, accessed March 16, 2026, at <https://mrsc.org/explore-topics/business-regulation/types/adult-entertainment>

⁴⁵ Emily Coombes, 2022

⁴⁶ B. Ethan Coston, 2022; Emily Coombes et al., 2022

⁴⁷ Emily Coombes, 2022

⁴⁸ Joanna Williams, "Deplatforming Sex Education on Meta: Sex, Power, and Content Moderation," *Sage Journals*, 149, no. 1 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X231210612>

⁴⁹ Within my definition of sex work, this would not qualify because Jasmine is not a legal adult.

I was in a domestic violence situation with financial abuse at the forefront. I felt like I had limited options to be able to provide for my son and myself, while he was a young child. For almost 2 years, I worked under a Madame who had people up and down the West Coast but after that two years, I broke away from her and did independent sex work because I didn't feel that she respected my well-being.

A commonality between Aster and Jasmine is that they both felt that they had no reasonable alternatives to working in the sex trade. Capitalism forces us to produce in order to survive;⁵⁰ however, sex work can have alternative benefits.

Daffodil wrote about reclamation regarding sexual abuse:

I have been assaulted and raped many times, to me sex work is a way I can control the situation and past. It may not be the most healthiest way to deal with trauma but [it's the] way that brings me control and to some extent comfort.

His description of taking back his sense of autonomy through sex work is likely based on power, explicit negotiation, and consent that go along with much of sex work. As part of the service, sex workers often take the time to first discuss what kind of experience the client is looking for, set boundaries, and receive payment. This container can feel very empowering, especially for people who have had experiences of helplessness in sexual encounters. Daffodil's perspective is valuable because, primarily, when this topic is discussed, it is done from the perspective of healing the client.⁵¹

The overarching trend from these responses is that sex work tends to be the option that provides enough money to survive. Four out of 5 of the sex worker participants reported being disabled. When answering this question, Camellia cited her disability as the reason for getting into sex work: "It is hard to live a normal life with my disability, there is always some wall [I] hit in my work where my disability comes apparent." Entry-level jobs tend not to pay enough and have shifts that are not accessible to disabled people and/or single parents. Minimum wage jobs in Oregon pay less than sixteen dollars an hour.⁵² In contrast, sex work rates vary depending on many factors such as type of sex work, legal or illegal, hourly rate or paid in tips, street workers or brothel workers; however, many online sex worker forums reveal that FSSWers rarely charge less than one hundred per hour and often much more.⁵³ Something unique to sex work in comparison to other forms of labor is the way in which it can provide a cathartic or rehabilitating experience for someone who has endured sexual abuse. The sex trade can be used as a controlled container to explore bodily autonomy and consent.

3.3. SSI/SSDI

Q: Do you use SSI/SSDI? If so, what is your experience using these programs?

Supplemental security income (SSI) and social security disability insurance (SSDI) are governmental assistance programs in the U.S. that provide monthly payments for people with

⁵⁰ Erik Ringmar, *Surviving Capitalism: How We Learned to Live with the Market and Remained Almost Human* (Anthem Press, 2005), 26.

⁵¹ "Can Sex Work Help Heal Trauma and Anxiety," Vice, accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://www.vice.com/en/article/can-sex-work-help-heal-trauma-and-anxiety/>

⁵² "Oregon Minimum Wage," Bureau of Labor and Industries, accessed March 13, 2026, at <https://www.oregon.gov/boli/workers/pages/minimum-wage.aspx>

⁵³ "r/Sex Workers," Reddit, accessed March 13, 2026, at <https://www.reddit.com/r/SexWorkers/>

disabilities and/or older adults.⁵⁴ SSDI is colloquially known as "disability" and is tied to an individual's previous work history and payments into Social Security. In contrast, SSI is not tied to work history and provides money to cover survival basics for people 65+ years and/or those with a disability. As of January 2025, an individual can receive a maximum of \$967 a month for SSI and a maximum of \$4,018 a month for SSDI.⁵⁵ The Social Security Administration website has been unavailable to me for much of the duration of this report due to ongoing maintenance as a result of President Trump's executive orders. However, as of January 2026, the cost of living adjustment increased from 2.5% to 2.8%.⁵⁶

The application process for these programs can be lengthy, with three notable steps for the claims process. First, the local field office checks if the applicant meets the basic requirements; if so, they send it to the state level. This second step, at the state level, is considered the most detailed step. Third, the field office issues the approval or denial decision letter.⁵⁷ It is common that on an applicant's first try, they will be denied and need to request reconsideration. In Oregon, 44% of applicants are approved on their initial application.

To start the application process, several documents are required, including one's social security number, proof of age, proof of citizenship or non-citizenship status, proof of income, resources, and living arrangements, as well as

medical information and work history.⁵⁸ For things like income, medical history, and work history, it is expected of applicants to produce up to date, original copies of bank information, health insurance, dates of all diagnoses, prescription and non-prescription medication, medical tests, doctors, hospitals, and emergency room visits, names and contact information for any medical provider seen, proof of dates worked, work pay stubs, tax returns, lease or rent receipt, title registration for any vehicles, and college financial aid for the past 15 years. This list, though lengthy, is not exhaustive of everything someone applying may need to provide. These are submitted to the local social security office, but the local office does not make the eligibility determination; they send it to the state agency, Disability Determination Services (DDS), to make the determination. DDS will review all the paperwork and contact the applicant's doctors, therapists, instructors, relatives, hospitals, and schools to gather information about the applicant. If the information gathered from secondary sources is insufficient, the DDS "will arrange and pay for an examination or testing by a qualified medical professional."⁵⁹ After all that, it is possible to be randomly selected for a quality assurance review of the decision, which will prolong the process, which already takes, on average, 6–8 months from the date of application. If denied, an applicant can go through a reconsideration appeal

⁵⁴ "SSDI and SSI benefits for people with disabilities," USA GOV, accessed May 20, 2025, at <https://www.usa.gov/social-security-disability>

⁵⁵ "SSI Federal Payment Amounts For 2025," Social Security Administration, accessed May 9, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/SSI.html>

⁵⁶ "SSI Federal Payment Amounts For 2026," Social Security Administration, accessed March 14, 2026, at <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/SSI.html>

⁵⁷ "Social Security Performance," Social Security Administration, accessed May 10, 2025, at

<https://www.ssa.gov/ssa-performance/disability-processing-time>

⁵⁸ "Documents You May Need When You Apply For SSI," Social Security Administration, accessed June 10, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-documents-ussi.htm>

⁵⁹ "If You Have a Disability or are Blind," Social Security Administration, accessed May 29, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-disable-ussi.htm>

process, which, in Oregon, has an average processing time of 262 days.⁶⁰

If an applicant is approved, there is an additional 5-month waiting period for benefits to start.⁶¹ Throughout that time, there are limitations on one's monthly income and allowable assets. For example, people who receive SSI cannot have resources that exceed \$2,000 for an individual at any given time.⁶² As for income, there is a long list of what is and is not considered income. According to the Social Security Administration, "Income is anything you receive during a calendar month and can use to meet your needs for food or shelter."⁶³ The restrictions on earnings make it challenging to prove sufficient income for rental applications or to attain financing, which affects a person's ability to apply for loans. Many disabled people turn to criminalized work, such as sex work, in order to utilize under-the-table methods of employment and get around these restrictions.

In my survey, I asked participants if they had ever received SSI/SSDI. Only two participants said yes, including Camellia, who understandably provided a brief and concise answer: "Yes, but it's a lot to deal with." All but one of my study participants (14 out of 15) were currently or formerly disabled, and not a single person discussed SSI/SSDI in distinctly favorable terms. The majority of people answered no, they do not use either program. However, two individuals described wanting to receive benefits, but either did not apply or were unsuccessful. Jasmine, who sought outside support, said, "...I've been disabled

by [the SSDI's] definition since [I was] 19 but it wouldn't be even worth the effort to apply. Professionals I've asked agree, my case would not be approved." The Social Security Administration defines disability as "not able to engage in any substantial gainful activity (SGA) because of a medically determinable physical or mental disability(ies) that is either expected to result in death or has lasted or is expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months."⁶⁴ Most notable in this definition is their inclusion of the phrase medically determinable disability, because it is not clear who has the medical authority to provide sufficient proof for disability benefits. In addition, this definition creates barriers for those who have self-diagnosed for various reasons, such as not having medical insurance or being unable to afford doctor's appointments. These people will not have a long paper trail of medical evidence to prove disability status. The Social Security Administration's definition also discusses SGA, which states that if a disabled person is able to make more than a set dollar amount, which changes with the national average wage index, then they can engage with SGA and, therefore, do not qualify for SSI/SSDI benefits.

For 2025, the monthly SGA amount is \$1,620.⁶⁵ Anemone, a disabled college student, said, "I have tried to apply for [SSI/SSDI] but [I was] told I was not disabled enough. [Their] evidence is I have been able to work a job before." If a disabled person can make just under \$2,000 a month, then they are considered able to support themselves

⁶⁰ "Social Security Performance," Social Security Administration, accessed May 10, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/ssa-performance/disability-decision-reconsideration-time>

⁶¹ "SSDI and SSI benefits for people with disabilities," Social Security Administration, accessed June 10, 2025, at <https://www.usa.gov/social-security-disability>

⁶² "What are Resources," Social Security Administration, accessed May 21, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-resources.htm>

⁶³ "Countable Income for SSI Program," Social Security, accessed May 15, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/countableincome.html>

⁶⁴ "How Do We Define Disability," Social Security Administration, accessed June 12, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/definedisability.htm?tl=0>

⁶⁵ "Substantial Gainful Activity," Social Security Administration, accessed June 12, 2025, at <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/sga.html>

and are denied SSDI benefits. "Ability to do previous past work," which, to reiterate, means the ability to make \$1,620 in a month, is one of the primary reasons cited in 2021 that people get denied, along with "impairment is not severe," "impairment is not expected to last 12 months," and others.⁶⁶ Some of these reasons overlap, such as the severity of a disability in relation to a person's ability to perform past work or other types of work.

Nevertheless, someone may also be denied benefits if they return to work before disability status can be established, provide insufficient medical evidence, or fail to follow prescribed treatment. Jasmine and Anemone's statements give a personal story to the experience of being rejected by a system that was created to help low or no-income disabled people get their basic needs met. Extrapolating from the statistic I mentioned earlier, 56% of applications are initially rejected, meaning these two accountings shape a common story.

For all of the challenges and long periods of waiting for a determination, it is no wonder that this is a last resort for many disabled people. However, it can be the best option for people with disabilities who face barriers and discrimination in the workplace. There is a long-standing employment gap between people with disabilities and those without disabilities. In 2024, the employment rate for people with disabilities was 38%, as opposed to the 75% employment rate for non-disabled people.⁶⁷ Wisteria writes, "I am in the process of applying for SSDI due to [my] inability to make [a] substantial gain from wages." Often, when employed, disabled people experience

lower wages, are not given proper accommodations, and are expected to sacrifice our mental and bodily well-being for the workplace.

As a disabled sex worker and the Principal Investigator (PI), I am in the unique position to be able to describe my own experience with these systems as well. I found navigating the job market as a disabled person ultimately led me to finding sex work as a means to support myself when traditional jobs continuously failed me. I chose not to apply for disability because I observed that there was very little in the way of guidance through this complicated process. Additionally, I did not think that it would be sufficient to pay for my housing, medication, food, and other basic necessities, especially with rising rent and food costs. In Oregon, the average cost of rent is \$1,850, which the max SSI payment does not even cover. Sex work can provide independence from relying on insufficient SSI/SSDI payments by restoring some economic power to disabled people through providing higher salaries than other service industry professions in similar fields.

Relying on SSI/SSDI and adhering to the rules on income and assets typically means that people with disabilities will also need to engage with other forms of public assistance, such as housing, transportation, and food assistance. Individual transportation can be another ongoing list of expenses that may not be affordable for people with disabilities. Reliance on public transportation, such as buses, light rail, and streetcars, is one of the primary ways of getting around. Medical programs like Medicare/Medicaid help provide medical

⁶⁶ "SSI Annual Statistical Report, 2021," Social Security, accessed June 4, 2025, at https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_asr/2021/sect10.html#table74

⁶⁷ "Trends in Disability Employment," Trendlines Employment and Training Administration, accessed June 10, 2025, at

https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/opder/DASP/Trendlines/posts/2024_10/Trendlines_October_2024.html#:~:text=In%202024%20Q2%2C%20the%20employment,years%2C%20but%20the%20gap%20persists

insurance. In Oregon, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is used to provide food assistance for low-income people. If someone qualifies for SNAP, they are also likely to qualify for programs that assist with energy bills and phone bills.⁶⁸ Pacific Gas and Electric (PGE) has an income-qualified bill discount program that provides people with 15% to 80% off their electric bills.⁶⁹ Oregon Lifeline is a program that provides monthly discounts on phone and internet services for low-income households. Phone service discounts are up to \$15.25 per month off, and high-speed internet discounts are up to \$19.25 per month off.⁷⁰ Relying on Disability creates a cascading effect of dependence on more government assistance and keeps disabled people in perpetual poverty. A person receiving Disability payments is prohibited from making any substantial income, even if the Disability payment is not sufficient to live off. Disability becomes synonymous with poverty.

3.4. Housing

Q: What is your experience finding and holding onto stable housing as a disabled person and/or sex worker?

The issue of housing comes up within sex worker and disability communities for many reasons. Securing stable, affordable, and accessible housing can be challenging and sometimes impossible, regardless of whether someone is single, partnered, or supporting a family. In a 2023 report on Annual Homelessness, it was found that in Oregon, 59% of families

experiencing homelessness were living unsheltered, which translates to almost six out of ten homeless families living on the street, in unsanctioned camps, cars, parks, and without running water (see Fig. 1). Meanwhile, within Oregon's urban locations, an increase in shelter capacity in 2023 did very little to decrease the number of unsheltered homeless people due to a shortage of affordable housing.⁷¹

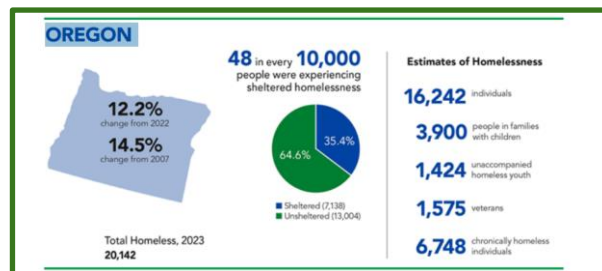


Figure 1. Oregon statistics from the 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

Many of my participants stated affordable housing as a barrier to their ongoing housing security. Zinnia said, “It is hard as a disabled person to find housing that is affordable but also meets my needs of certain accommodations.” Disability activist, Luna Fera, spoke to me about things like counter height, the size of bathrooms, floor plans, roll-in showers, strong grab bars, accessible light switches, proximity to public transportation, a reliable elevator, wide doorways, square footage that gives enough room for equipment, push buttons for door automation, lighting of units, type of flooring, ramps, and if the amenities like laundry room, pool, or workout

⁶⁸ “SNAP Food Benefits,” Oregon Department of Human Services, accessed June 2, 2025, at

<https://www.oregon.gov/odhs/food/pages/snap.aspx>

⁶⁹ “Income Qualified Bill Discount,” Portland General, accessed June 12, 2025, at

<https://portlandgeneral.com/income-qualified-bill-discount>

⁷⁰ “Oregon Lifeline,” Oregon Public Utility Commission, accessed June 11, 2025, at

<https://www.oregon.gov/puc/pages/oregon-lifeline.aspx>

⁷¹ “The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress,” The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed July 7, 2025, at

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

room are accessible as things that disabled people have to consider when looking at rentals. Moreover, that list is not exhaustive, as disabled people also have to think about the cost of the accessible units.

According to Zillow, a U.S.-based real estate marketplace company, the average rent in Oregon is \$1,850.⁷² It is also entirely within the landlord's rights to charge several additional fees such as late rent fees, a lease break fee, a dishonored check fee, a fee for violating the pet agreement, a fee for removing a smoke detector, a fee for failing to clean up pet waste or garbage, parking violation fees, and a fee for "improper use of vehicles within the premises."⁷³ Improper use of vehicles often refers to a tenant allowing someone to reside in their vehicle on the premises. Landlords also commonly require potential tenants to make three times the rent amount and be able to prove their income in the application process in order to be considered as a renter. Proof of income is often a barrier that is common for many sex workers, especially FSSWers. Carnation, a straight, white sex worker, talks around this topic: "It's never been an issue because I've also had w-2 jobs with which to apply for housing." What she is saying is that, in addition to sex work, which is challenging to prove one's income with, she has also held other jobs that help her have a provable income by way of bank statements, pay stubs, tax returns, etc.

On the other hand, Aster, a disabled former FSSW, stated, "I found that it was nearly impossible to find housing while I was actively in sex work due to the income requirements, and proof of employment." Some of the reasons for

this difficulty include being paid in cash for work sessions, an inability to use payment processors such as PayPal, Venmo, and Cash App, which are not sex worker-friendly, and the need to hide income to maintain continued access to food and disability assistance. Aster goes on to say, "...there was also the stigma of [being] a single mom with a young son, which kept me stuck in many subpar unsafe housing situations." In Oregon, it is legal for a landlord to give a tenant a 24-hour notice to vacate their dwelling if they have committed certain acts considered extreme, including, but not limited to, FSSW.⁷⁴ This is precarious because neighbors making complaints about frequent traffic to the home can be a cause for landlords to issue this notice. It also leaves sex workers vulnerable to exploitation by their landlords.

For this question in particular, it is telling that I was able to divide the majority of my respondents into two categories: people who stated frustration in trying to hold onto safe, stable housing, and people who stated feeling fortunate for the support systems that have kept them in stable housing situations. Poppy writes, "[I]'m lucky enough to be stable but without a support system [I] wouldn't be able to afford housing as a disabled person." The participants who are not struggling with housing acknowledge the fortunate position they are in, recognizing that it is hard out there. In contrast to Poppy's experience, Jasmine says they struggle greatly with housing insecurity. They comment on how the rental market has been for them:

[IT'S] AWFUL. FUCKING TERRIBLE. I've lived nowhere in Oregon longer than 18 months. [E]very move I've had has left

⁷² "Oregon Rental Market," ZillowRentals, accessed August 1, 2025, at <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/or/>

⁷³ "Landlord-Tenant Rights," Oregon Legislature, accessed August 1, 2025, at

<https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro/Publications/LandlordTenantRights.pdf>

⁷⁴ "Landlord-Tenant Rights," Oregon Legislature, accessed August 1, 2025, at

<https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro/Publications/LandlordTenantRights.pdf>

[noticeable] harm on my body. The last two times my family of 4 (all of us adults) had to hire 6 or more hours of moving help. [I]t's just too much in such a short time. [O]ur current place is getting worse by the week and we've been new place-shopping since November or December.

They took this survey in February, so it had been approximately four months of searching for available rental units. Often, after many months of looking for and contacting rentals and being stuck in a holding pattern, deciding what to pack and what is necessary for daily use, getting accepted at a place can be jarring. Depending on the move-in date, work schedules, etc., the turnaround time may not be feasible for a family to accomplish on their own, especially for disabled people. They go on to talk about the accessibility of the spaces they have been viewing:

[Zero] wheelchair accessible houses. ZERO! We are stuck viewing houses that are able to be modified and repeatedly spending hundreds to apply for places we'd also have to modify before I could live there. It is a bummer, it sucks.

Jasmine, a disabled, queer, white, lesbian, describes an experience that several of my disabled participants described: housing is often not accessible. It has to be modified, more often than not, at the tenant's expense in order to be livable. The costs that add up over time are not just monetary but also physical, emotional, and psychological.

3.5. School

Q: What is your experience within school systems as a disabled person and/or sex worker?

In 2021, a former sex worker by the name of Niki Gililand sued Southwestern Oregon Community College (SWOCC) for \$1.7 million in

damages for discrimination. She was working her way through the nursing program, doing well in all her classes. She was even on the Dean's list when one of her instructors caught wind of her former career in the adult industry and began failing her out of the program, saying, "unclassy women should not be nurses."⁷⁵ The jury sided with Gilliland based on unfair treatment; however, they decided that Title IX did not provide protections against sex worker discrimination, against the judge's recommendation, and despite the profession being highly gendered. Trials like these take lots of time, emotional and physical energy, money, and attorneys who are willing to work with sex workers. Many people are not in a position to pursue legal action against an academic institution.

Of my 15 participants, only five reported any experience with sex work, four of whom also reported being currently or formerly disabled, and four having attended any college. Across the board, my participants described issues within the field of academia. For example, Aster highlights the distinction between intention and impact,

Oh my goodness it's hard to know where to start with this [question]. I feel that school systems so often neglect people who experience disabilities of all kinds. On the surface, they seem to have programs [and] services but the daily life aspect can be mediocre at best.

The programs offered to her as a disabled person seemed to be accommodating in theory; however, in daily practice, they were not as assistive as she would have liked. She goes on to talk about her experience as a sex worker enrolled in school,

[A]s a sex worker, I often actually found it to be a fairly accommodating form of employment. I was able to be flexible with my schedule, which helped my mental

⁷⁵ "Former Sex Worker Prevails in Discrimination Lawsuit," Decriminalize Sex Work, accessed August 5, 2025, at

<https://decriminalizesex.work/former-sex-worker-prevails-in-discrimination-lawsuit/>

health, and therefore kept my disability at bay, so to speak.

The difficulty Aster had in navigating academic accommodation systems was offset by her ability to mitigate for her own needs. The various types of sex work function well with crip time by enabling people to have flexible schedules. Engaging with crip time is especially beneficial for college students and parents because it provides the ability for individuals to self-manage for one's own physical and bodily needs.⁷⁶

Looking around most college campuses, it is not hard to spot the ableist architecture: long stone stairways, old and faulty elevators, significant distances between buildings, steep slopes that non-wheelchair users often overlook, and basement classrooms without windows for fresh air and ventilation. None of my participants deeply discussed difficulty getting around campuses—this may have been because of the wording of my question, or because some people did not have trouble getting around, or it is possible that many disabled people are desensitized to inaccessible architecture and are resigned to or have just gotten used to it as a daily part of life.

However, the majority of my disabled participants had quite a lot to say about the academic accommodation systems in place in schools. Disabled participants described the topic of school systems with almost universally negative experiences. Higher education is built on systems of learning that privilege whiteness and neurotypicality.⁷⁷ When talking about the University of Oregon specifically, Orchid said, "They try to make systems for helping disabled people a one-size fits all when people have unique needs. The UO is better than my high school, for

example, but there are still so many barriers to entry." Different disabilities require different accommodations. Someone who is immunocompromised may need to sit next to an open window, or someone with ADHD may need a seat at the front of the classroom to avoid distractions. These may sound like small requests, but they require assigned seating and require the instructor or disabled student to advocate for this need, which instructors are not always willing to do. For example, Foxglove describes experiencing, "[e]xtreme ableism with faculty members, inaccessibility across campus, discrimination, [and] people literally shoving me aside, etc." Ableism with faculty members is something I personally relate to. A skill most students are not taught is how to stand up for our accessibility needs. For me, it has felt like an especially vulnerable situation to be in a power dynamic where an instructor is in charge of my grade and the successful accomplishment of the course and is not receptive to my accessibility needs. Zinnia also mirrors my experiences,

I feel as a disabled person that I cannot use the accommodations provided by the university because they either will not be respected by professors or I do not deserve them because I am not "disabled" enough.

The idea of not being disabled enough or disabilities being dismissed came up for seven of my participants. What this alludes to is needing to go through extensive, expensive testing, having plenty of documentation, which requires an invasive disclosure of medical history, and even still, invisible disabilities⁷⁸ are often disregarded.

Architecture and classroom space can be a challenge for people with physical disabilities,

⁷⁶ B. Ethan Coston, 2022

⁷⁷ "The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing," National Education Association, accessed March 12, 2026, at

<https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/racist-beginnings-standardized-testing>

⁷⁸ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

but invisible disabilities create different obstacles. Dahlia stated, "school systems are unequipped to deal with the issues [o]f students with invisible disabilities." Invisible disabilities make up a significant number of people living with disabilities—autism, dyslexia, ADHD, chronic fatigue or pain, lupus, diabetes, cancer, autoimmune disorders, arthritis, anxiety, personality disorders, asthma, sensory or processing disorder, depression, etc. According to the CDC, approximately 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. is living with an invisible disability.⁷⁹ Many people do not bother with seeking accommodations because there is a social stigma around disability and needing help, or the accommodations do not seem sufficient to put in the effort.

Another seemingly ongoing issue is establishments getting away with the bare minimum. Almost every public space is required to be ADA-compliant, with very few exemptions. In order to be ADA-compliant, things like interpreters, adjustments to coursework, accommodating employees, etc., are required by law to provide people with disabilities access and opportunities. The bare minimum of what is legally required is still largely inadequate for the diversity of needs disabled people require for full participation. Begonia discusses how, at the University of Oregon, the needs of disabled students seem to overwhelm the staff's capacity to help:

The UO's support systems for disabled students and employees are largely run by unqualified and overworked staff who do not have the resources needed to be able to help students do much of anything but

request a set of inadequate and narrow accommodations that do little to serve most students with disabilities. They often seem more interested in covering themselves legally than actually helping anyone.

As mentioned here and above, a frequent topic that comes up is that the support offered is not extensive enough to provide the kind of help many people with disabilities need in order to thrive in an academic setting. The accommodations available are not tailored to individuals and often fail to address obstacles meaningfully.

3.6. Healthcare

Q: What is your experience with healthcare as a disabled person and/or sex worker?

The medical system thrives on standardized visions of health. Being thin and able-bodied are extolled to be the objective for the average person in the U.S. The fabrication of disability as a personal obstacle to overcome was based on capitalist modes of production. Non-normative bodies would be sent away to hospitals, asylums, and prisons.⁸⁰ Government budget cuts to disability programs, especially for programs helping disabled people live independently, such as in-home attendant care, force disabled people into nursing homes.⁸¹

The views of ideal bodies still have lingering effects today. Fatphobia is highly prevalent in society and has real-world consequences. Anemone describes the fatphobia she experiences within medicine:

Along with having ADHD I also have rare stomach issues, I am also a plus sized

⁷⁹ "Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic," Disability and Health, accessed September 5, 2025, at <https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html>

⁸⁰ Jeanne Hayes and Elizabeth M. Hannold, "The Road to Empowerment: A Historical Perspective on the Medicalization

of Disability," *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, accessed August 20, 2025, at <https://www-jstor-org.uoregon.idm.oclc.org/stable/25790713?seq=1>

⁸¹ Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 49.

person. I have been told that my main problem is not my rare stomach issue but that I am fat. No matter how many times I test for it I always am told I have diabetes because I am plus sized. My doctors always assume I am purposefully unhealthy and that is why I am plus sized. Fatphobia and ableism both speak to an ideal body type that fat people and disabled people do not adhere to.

Within the medical system is embedded the medical model of disability, which focuses on medical treatment with the intention of curing the disabled person.⁸² Under the medical model, disability became a clinical term and concept, and the medical system became the way of managing people with disabilities.⁸³ Historically, the medical model has caused people with disabilities to distrust the medical system because of its complicity in eugenic practices.⁸⁴ This model ignores the societal factors that challenge a disabled person's day-to-day life and emphasizes the physical limitations of disabled people. It also ignores environmental factors that lead to disability. Focusing on cure is not inherently good or bad, and it can be life saving; however, it becomes problematic when disability is funneled through this narrow view of possible solutions because it leads to medical trauma and a distrust of the medical system as a whole. Foxglove says, "[h]ealthcare caused a lot of trauma [and] usually doesn't help me but [it's] still necessary [because

I'm] disabled." She describes a reliance on a system that has caused her harm and delivers minimal support because the alternative is not getting her medical needs met. Wisteria explains, "I'm so used to my needs being dismissed and my pain not being believed. I'm either told to get over it or they don't know what's wrong with me." Disabilities bring complexity to navigating the healthcare system, and many respondents stated feeling dismissed by healthcare workers when attempting to discuss their disabilities. The way disabilities are talked about or not talked about in the medical field can leave people unaware that they even have a disability. Many people take a long time to recognize chronic pain, asthma, or ADHD as a disability. Poppy, a queer Hispanic/Chicana woman, wrote, "my disabilities are often ignored by healthcare workers and [I] was not properly diagnosed for years." Over 35% of Black and Hispanic adults in the U.S. have a disability.⁸⁵ Unequal access to care leads to worse health outcomes for people of color, leading to more disabilities within this group.⁸⁶

Additionally, disabled people often have a higher cost of living due to treatments, special diets, medication, emergency room visits, assistive devices, and more, further isolating this group from important support systems. The way diagnosis and treatment of disability have been used contributes to the stigma of disability and maintains systems of social and economic

⁸² "Medical and Social Models of Disability," Accessible Education Center, accessed August 20, 2025, at <https://aec.uoregon.edu/content/medical-and-social-models-disability#:~:text=The%20Medical%20Model%20views%20disability.a%20person%20more%20%22normal.%22>

⁸³ Jeanne Hayes and Elizabeth M. Hannold, "The Road to Empowerment: A Historical Perspective on the Medicalization of Disability," *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, accessed August 20, 2025, at <https://www-jstor-org.uoregon.idm.oclc.org/stable/25790713?seq=1>

⁸⁴ Zosia Zaks, "Changing the medical model of disability to the normalization model of disability: clarifying the past to create

a new future direction," *Disability and Society* 39, no.12 (2024): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2023.2255926#d1e233>

⁸⁵ "Disability Doesn't Discriminate: Health Inequities at the Intersection of Race and Disability," National Library of Medicine, accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10357509/>

⁸⁶ Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, (Indiana University Press, 2013), 53.

inequity. "Healthcare is one that I must fight against people/doctors who don't believe me that something is wrong," expressed Zinnia, "especially because I didn't start out my life as disabled." Zinnia brings up an important struggle. It is often recognized within disability advocacy spaces that the majority of people will become disabled in their lives, whether through age, accident, medical issue, environmental influence, or something else.

The World Health Organization (WHO) asserts that "access to sexual and reproductive health services is a human right and should be available to all people throughout their lives."⁸⁷ However, disabled people, especially people with visible disabilities that impede motor function and people with intellectual disabilities, are primarily seen as asexual. Dahlia stated, "healthcare workers are a product of their teachings, environments, and lived experiences. [P]hysicians [I've] had in Oregon are generally okay about my disabilities, but those in Georgia where I also lived at a point were not." Healthcare workers are given approximately 3-10 hours of sexual health education in their four years of schooling, and the topics on sexuality, sexual health, and gender that are taught are largely inconsistent across the U.S.⁸⁸ Aster discusses the range of experiences from healthcare workers:

I find that it is very hit and miss when it comes to healthcare and sex work. I have had some healthcare providers be empathetic, supportive, and encouraging while on the flipside had the experience minimized, I looked down upon, and

frankly not believed, I found it to be incredibly dehumanizing and frustrating. It can be a challenge to find medical professionals who treat all of their patients with respect, and it is often outside of our control who we see—it depends on healthcare insurance companies. The stigma of sex work and discrimination against sex workers leads to some medical professionals denying access to essential services.⁸⁹

Both sex workers and people with disabilities have reported not feeling comfortable disclosing information to their physicians for fear of discrimination. People with disabilities are frequently not taken seriously in healthcare settings, especially concerning sexual health care, such as STI testing. Daffodil, a trans male sex worker, talks about his experience of discomfort, saying:

I tend to not tell healthcare [workers about] my [j]ob aspect except for sexual health concerns and check[ups] as they may not take me as seriously. I already get taken weirdly [because of] my disability and have been medically gaslit and abused by the [medical] system. I would rather have better chances with one issue [than] both.

As a disabled sex worker, he describes not disclosing his work in the sex trade to his medical providers as a strategic move in order to be considered an appropriate authority on his own experiences. Sex workers and disabled people are often infantilized and considered not to know what is best for our lives or bodies. Marigold says, "...I try to hide my disability more than attempt to embrace it." Being taken seriously is a frequent

⁸⁷ "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights," World Health Organization, accessed on August 8, 2025, at https://www.who.int/health-topics/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights#tab=tab_1

⁸⁸ "Sexual Health Training and Education in the U.S.," National Library of Medicine, accessed August 8, 2025, at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3562751/>

⁸⁹ "Prevention and Treatment of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections for Sex Workers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Recommendations for a Public Health Approach," NIH, accessed September 9, 2025, at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK304111/>

concern for my participants. Jasmine describes their odious experience of healthcare services while attempting to address a specific issue. I will warn readers in advance that their experience, which I quote at length, discusses vomit:

So, so so bad. Somehow obgyn care is the only place I've ever been treated well and listened to consistently. I had a chronic issue of throwing up during sex that literally took away a form of income and a form of pain relief/self expression!! I asked my pcp for help and he tried to refer me back to my normal psych for my "psychological issues" from going 0 to 60 randomly and puking when I feel great and happy. I came back months later now throwing and coughing up pink bloody spit daily and was once again gaslit—he pulled up google to search what to do for psychosomatic vomiting. I quit him the following month. I've been incredibly lucky to have access to std/i testing when I need it and was never questioned about why I wanted to be tested.

Sex work is a unique form of work that allows people to explore their sexuality and explore themselves sexually. Jasmine conveys the ways that the ineffective healthcare system not only is unhelpful for addressing their medical issue, but that this disregard also affects their livelihood through an inability to work. This direct tie from medical dismissal to inability to make a living further deepens the poverty gap for already marginalized people.

3.7. Police

Q: What is your experience with the police or prison system as a disabled person and/or sex worker?

⁹⁰ "Policing Under Disability Law," Stanford Law Review, accessed August 22, 2025, at <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/stflr73&div=35&id=&page=>

⁹¹ Audre Lorde, *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference* (Crossing Press, 1984), 2.

Disabled people are particularly vulnerable to police killings and excessive use-of-force instances.⁹⁰ People with psychiatric disabilities or invisible disabilities are more likely to be read as non-compliant and be met with harshness and violence. Almost all of my participants stated having very little or no experience with police officers or the carceral system; however, the fear of police interaction came through in many responses. Wisteria, a disabled non-binary person, said, "Being [autistic] I get worried around [the] police, but recognize that I have a lot of [privilege] being white and visibly 'a weak feminine woman.'" They bring up that as a white, non-binary person presenting feminine, they can fly under the radar of law enforcers who might otherwise profile them as a threat. Civil rights activist and author Audre Lorde talks about the concept of the mythical norm.⁹¹ The closer a person is to the mythical norm, which entails being white, thin, able-bodied, male, young, financially secure, heterosexual, and Christian, the more security and power they are granted. Aster echoes this sentiment by saying, "I somehow missed getting into legal trouble while doing sex work, which I attribute mostly to the fact that I am a White woman. Which is abhorrent to think about but I know that it's true." So many trans people of color are regularly profiled, targeted, and criminalized as sex workers by the police.⁹² Loitering laws have been used to target and arrest trans women and have been

⁹² B. Ethan Coston, Tyler Gaedecke, Kristian Robinson, "Disabled trans sex working college students: Results from the 2015 U.S. trans survey," *Disabilities Studies Quarterly*, 42 no.2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9134/7748>

colloquially called "walking while trans laws."⁹³ Zinnia describes their peripheral experience with law enforcement, "My father worked in the prison system so I had the outside experience of hearing how [they] were treated by the officers and I never wanted to be a part of it." The policing of sex workers is fraught with racist profiling, violence, corruption, and coercion. People who are incarcerated for sex work often trend towards being trans and/or people of color. One in six trans people have been incarcerated, and that number goes up to one in two for trans people of color.⁹⁴ Amnesty International, the National Institute of Health (NIH), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have all put out recommendations to decriminalize sex work.⁹⁵ Amnesty International says its recommendation is based on evidence that shows that laws that criminalize sex work often make sex workers less safe, and these laws provide impunity for abusers.⁹⁶ I have first-hand experience with this. I never reported on the job abuse or violence because I was concerned that going to the police would mean that I would be punished, not the client/abuser.

NIH takes the stance that sex workers are essential partners when considering effective HIV and sexual health programs that directly respond

to the realities of sex workers' environments and lived experience.⁹⁷ Laws that penalize sex work, which affects clients as well as sex workers, and abusive law enforcement practices can undermine the effectiveness of and access to sexual health programs. ACLU's report focuses on incarcerated trans sex workers who are often intentionally and aggressively misgendered, targeted for sexual violence, and denied health care.⁹⁸ They say, "sex workers deserve the same legal protections as anyone else." Camilla, a disabled multiracial sex worker, described her experience with police interactions as, "I am sub human and that they just want to get what they can from us and toss us back." In this context, it is unclear what "get what they can from us" is directly referring to, but there have been reports of law enforcement using their position of authority to gain sexual services from sex workers.⁹⁹ Human trafficking sting operations are most notorious for this; however, something I notice regularly is that police and news writers will conflate anti-prostitution stings with anti-trafficking stings.¹⁰⁰ This may be because it is viewed more favorably by the public to be working on saving human trafficking victims. That being said, research shows that police raid operations do not reduce the instances of sex trafficking.¹⁰¹ In

⁹³ "Walking While Trans: Policing Women's Sexuality," University of Miami Law Review, accessed on March 12, 2026, at <https://lawreview.law.miami.edu/walking-trans-policing-womens-sexuality/>

⁹⁴ "Sex Work is Real Work and it's Time to Treat it That Way," ACLU South Dakota, accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://www.aclusd.org/news/sex-work-real-work-and-its-time-treat-it-way/>

⁹⁵ "It is Time to Decriminalize Sex Work," ACLU, accessed on August 24, 2025, at <https://www.aclu.org/news/topic/its-time-to-decriminalize-sex-work>

⁹⁶ "Amnesty International Publishes Policy and Research on Protection of Sex Workers Rights," Amnesty International, accessed on August 22, 2025, at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights/>

⁹⁷ "Prevention and Treatment of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections for Sex Workers in Low- and Middle-

Income Countries: Recommendations for a Public Health Approach," National Library of Medicine, accessed on August 24, 2025, at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK304111/>

⁹⁸ "It is Time to Decriminalize Sex Work," ACLU, accessed on August 24, 2025, at <https://www.aclu.org/news/topic/its-time-to-decriminalize-sex-work>

⁹⁹ "Ex-Portland Police Officer Among Dozens Charged in Human Trafficking Sting," KOIN, accessed March 16, 2026, at <https://www.koin.com/news/crime/ex-portland-police-officer-arrested-human-trafficking-sting/>

¹⁰⁰ "Camas man named in Portland anti-human trafficking sting," The Post Record, accessed March 16, 2026, at <https://www.camaspstrecord.com/news/2024/jul/18/camas-man-named-in-portland-anti-human-trafficking-sting/>

¹⁰¹ "Over-Policing Sex Trafficking: How U.S. Law Enforcement Should Reform Operations," International Human Rights Clinic, accessed August 25, 2025, at

fact, the raids make the lives of sex workers and trafficking survivors harder. Criminalization creates a record that disadvantages people through the use of background checks for housing or jobs; it limits opportunities, and generally, criminalization works to systemically further marginalize those who already have marginalized identities.¹⁰² My sample size for this research was relatively small, and my participants had few experiences with law enforcement; the overall sentiment was summarized by Azalea: "...Fuck cops."

3.8. Finances

Q: Have you ever had difficulty with proving or needing to hide your income?

Western society condemns those who are not able to provide for themselves financially, which puts many disabled people, who find it challenging or impossible to achieve or maintain employment, at a significant disadvantage. Utilizing government assistance programs comes with a stigma and, for many people, a sense of shame. The potent stereotype of the welfare queen, which is based on a woman born in the 1920s whose existence was criminalized by being biracial, is still widely circulated.¹⁰³ Linda Taylor lived a remarkable life and committed crimes far more egregious than welfare fraud, such as child abuse, kidnapping, and murder; however, these offenses did not spark the political outrage that her crime of welfare fraud did. Politicians used

handpicked parts of her life to weave a narrative that people of color are too lazy to work and will take advantage of government programs in order to live a life of luxury. Ronald Reagan, who spearheaded the welfare reform, would often tell a story of a woman who drove a Cadillac and made six figures a year.¹⁰⁴ Taylor was indicted in 1977 for just about \$9,000 and charged with three to seven years in prison.¹⁰⁵ This story fueled a crackdown on poor people by significantly reducing benefits and creating stricter eligibility criteria.

Despite all the misinformation and context around the concept of the welfare queen, the real-world consequences and social stigma are still prevalent today. As Aster illustrates,

When I started to finally have enough money to feel empowered to take weekend trips with my son, get him new shoes and backpacks that weren't donated to us, many people judged me and wondered how I could possibly have the money to do such things even though everyone around me [l]ives excessive lives...

Most of us have been fed a story about the ways that poverty looks: meager, frugal, worn, dirty, plain, second-hand, basic. When in poverty, anything over essential necessities to live is considered superfluous. In order to deserve government assistance, one must appear destitute, and anything perceived as showy is socially scrutinized. Examples of showyness can include new clothes, makeup, jewelry, and doing

<https://humanrightsclinic.usc.edu/2021/11/15/over-policing-sex-trafficking-how-u-s-law-enforcement-should-reform-operations/>

¹⁰² Melissa Ditmore, Juhu Thukral "Accountability and the Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking," Anti Trafficking Review, no.1 (2012): <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218>

¹⁰³ "The Myth of the Welfare Queen," The New Republic, accessed August 26, 2025, at <https://newrepublic.com/article/154404/myth-welfare-queen>

¹⁰⁴ "National Commission on Social Security Reform," Federal Register, accessed August 30, 2025, at

https://archives.federalregister.gov/issue_slice/1981/12/18/61633-61635.pdf

¹⁰⁵ "Book: 'The Queen' Follows Original Welfare Fraudster Linda Taylor," National Public Radio, accessed August 27, 2025, at [https://www.npr.org/2019/05/26/727190933/book-the-queen-follows-original-welfare-fraudster-linda-taylor#:~:text=LEVIN:%20Reagan%20would%20say%20\\$150%2000,the%20scope%20that%20Reagan%20described.](https://www.npr.org/2019/05/26/727190933/book-the-queen-follows-original-welfare-fraudster-linda-taylor#:~:text=LEVIN:%20Reagan%20would%20say%20$150%2000,the%20scope%20that%20Reagan%20described.)

fun activities such as going out for a meal, movie, or trip. There is a double standard that falls heavily on the shoulders of racially marginalized groups, such as Black women, who are expected to look as if they are not struggling in order to be considered for a job, but are simultaneously scrutinized for looking well-maintained while using government assistance.¹⁰⁶ For example, Black women are expected to stylize their hair through the use of straighteners, weaves, wigs, and anything to mask the natural curls of their hair; this maintenance can be perceived as acts of vanity, rather than methods of survival. Social policing entails things from microaggressions to calling authorities. Being consistently surveilled and aggressed on can be really damaging to mental health and may inadvertently result in police violence towards disabled people, especially those with mental disabilities.

Discussing the need to hide income for purposes of keeping government assistance can be tricky, as it is illegal to do so.¹⁰⁷ As discussed in the previous section on SSI/SSDI, there is a narrow margin for earning a wage and maintaining benefits. As benefits do not give sufficient funds to live off of, it becomes a delicate balance to get one's needs met. Aster continues:

I also have had to hide income when seeking social services many times because as we know [in] sex work, the income can be very spotty and you never know from month to month if you'll need food, benefits, or access to affordable healthcare.

The inconsistent boom or bust nature of sex work produces a need for sex workers to think ahead. Strippers will sometimes leave a shift having paid the club to work and not made any money, FSSWers will sometimes not have a client for

weeks, Onlyfans creators will sometimes have multiple people unsubscribe in a month, porn models will sometimes get a yeast infection and not be able to work—there are so many factors to sex workers making a good wage. Additionally, sex workers have extra barriers to proving their income. Many payment processors do not accept adult work under their terms of service (TOS) and will freeze accounts with money in them for any suspected breach of their TOS. It is essential to be able to prove income when it comes to engaging with social services or financial institutions that control one's mobility in creating a comfortable life.

Many disabled people struggle with gaining upward mobility on the life ladder and rely on meager government assistance. Anemone, who also has had to hide their income, said,

Yes. I am currently on both foodstamps and Oregon Health Plan, if I make more than \$2500 a month I will lose these benefits. I had a job that I got paid a lot for little hours and I had to ask my job to pay me less so I could keep my benefits from the state.

Similarly to Aster, the fear of losing access to healthcare and food benefits prevents Anemone from being entirely truthful about their income, compelling them to get creative in finding ways to meet government assistance requirements. In my experience of engaging with social services that gave me access to SNAP benefits and government-sponsored healthcare, there was a period of time where I was making too much to qualify for benefits but not enough to feed myself adequately. The services I was utilizing, which offered discounted electric bills and low-income phone plans, were suddenly no longer available to me. I did not feel like there was much of a transition; I

¹⁰⁶ Cheryl Thompson, "Black Women and Identity: What's hair got to do with it?," *Politics and Performativity* 20, no.1 (2008): <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark5583.0022.105>

¹⁰⁷ I made sure my participants' identifications were anonymous, and no tracking was done of their IP addresses.

felt suddenly forced into the deep end financially because I truthfully reported my change in income.

However, the majority of my participants stated that they did not need to hide their income or experience any trouble proving it. I believe this is because many of my participants are college students.

4. Regulations and Areas of Resistance

In the previous chapter, I focused on some areas of society where disabled people and sex workers often experience obstacles. Going forward, I will be discussing public policy making, community activism, and solutions for sex workers and disabled people to advocate together. Policies shape our experience of the world. The slogan "nothing about us, without us"¹⁰⁸ has been used in many different activism spaces to relay the importance of marginalized voices having a say on policies that affect them. The World Health Organization used this slogan to bring attention to the need to listen to youth and adolescents within policy development.¹⁰⁹ Sex worker organization, Desiree Alliance, and the Best Practices Policy Project used the slogan to report on the impact of HIV policies on sex workers, focusing on trans sex workers.¹¹⁰ Community activism is best done with intersectionality as a core principle. Allowing for different communities to come together and show

up for each other and fight for each other's rights is essential in moving forward.

Advocacy is a space where change is possible. Disability advocacy and sex worker advocacy both have a rich history. For example, on March 12, 1990, demonstrators marched from the White House to the U.S. Capitol, where they cast aside their mobility aids to climb around eighty steps, illustrating the inaccessibility of the infrastructure.¹¹¹ The Capitol Crawl, as this historic event was named, was one demonstration in a series of demonstrations focused on strengthening disability rights.

June 2nd is observed as International Whores Day in order to commemorate the approximately one hundred sex workers who occupied a church in 1975.¹¹² This event followed the ramping up of police harassing sex workers that led to harsher and more dangerous working conditions. The culmination of police neglect, increased stigma, and more dangerous work conditions was two sex workers who were murdered. In response, sex workers filled the halls of the Saint-Nizier Church for eight days with political chants and a demand for better working conditions. This event started the international movement for sex workers' rights.

4.1. Policy Making

Q: Within policy making spaces do you think your communities have a say in shaping the policies that affect them?

¹⁰⁸ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

¹⁰⁹ "Nothing About Us Without Us," World Health Organization, accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/nothing-about-us-without-us>

¹¹⁰ "Nothing About Us Without Us," Best Practices Policy Project, accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/nothing-about-us-without-us/>

¹¹¹ "When the Capitol Crawl Dramatized the Need for Americans with Disabilities Act," History, accessed May 17,

2026, at <https://www.history.com/articles/americans-with-disabilities-act-1990-capitol-crawl>

¹¹² "International Whores Day," Wikipedia, accessed September 17, 2025, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Whores%27_Day; "International Whores Day," Survivors Against SESTA, accessed September 23, 2025, at <https://survivorsagainstsesta.org/june-2-isd/june-2-is-isd-a-day-of-direct-actions/>

In Oregon, the crime of prostitution is a Class A misdemeanor, which can mean almost a year in jail and/or a \$6,250 fine.¹¹³ However, the ambiguous language of the law leaves the crime of prostitution with a very broad definition. As the law is written, "a person commits the crime of prostitution if the person engages in, or offers or agrees to engage in, sexual conduct or sexual contact in return for a fee."¹¹⁴ This language could apply to strippers, Dominatrixes, and arguably cuddle therapists. The same ambiguous language is present for committing the crime of commercial sexual solicitation. Definitions of sexual conduct include touching genitals or pubic regions, buttocks, or breasts, which does not absolve sex work that is not FSSW from criminalization as it pertains to the law as written. This means that what the public generally considers legal forms of purchasing and providing sex work have the potential to be criminalized under the current wording of the law.

Currently, in President Trump's second term, he has signed 196 executive orders.¹¹⁵ To put that number into perspective, the highest number of executive orders created in a single year was 381 by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941, amidst World War II. Several of the executive orders that Trump has signed directly affect disabled people—"Restoring Gold Standard Science," "Improving Safety and Security of Biological Research," and

"Ensuring American Pharmaceutical Supply Chain Resilience by Filling the Strategic Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients Reserve"—these all have impacts on the way that the government is handling the COVID-19 virus. The COVID pandemic was a mass death and disabling event that, years later, has become endemic with permanent consequences.¹¹⁶ Government pages have had their information altered; details such as information on long COVID, sexuality, and gender identity have been removed from federal webpages. Additionally, Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law on July 4, 2025, cuts approximately \$1 trillion from Medicaid, which will result in millions of Americans losing their healthcare coverage.¹¹⁷ The executive orders that have focused on rolling back LGBTQ+ rights, such as redefining sex, have resulted in dangerous outcomes for transgender people who have mismatched gender markers on their government identification.¹¹⁸ With all these ongoing drastic changes to the law and the attacks on the lives of queer and trans people, people of color, and people with disabilities, it is no wonder the majority of my participants said they feel as if they do not have any or very much of a say on shaping the policies that affect them.

There seems to be a consensus among my participants that, on the local level, there is some possibility for electing people who align with one's

¹¹³ "Oregon Misdemeanor Crimes by Class and Sentences," Criminal Defense Lawyer, accessed September 1, 2025, at <https://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/oregon-misdemeanor-crimes-class-and-sentences.htm>

¹¹⁴ "ORS 167.007," Oregon Laws, accessed September 1, 2025, at https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_167.007

¹¹⁵ "2025 Donald J Trump Executive Orders," Federal Register, accessed August 31, 2025, at <https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/donald-trump/2025>

¹¹⁶ "Long Covid and New Onset Disability Nearly 2 Years After Initial Infection," American Journal of Preventative Medicine, accessed March 15, 2026, at

[https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(25\)00076-5/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(25)00076-5/fulltext)

¹¹⁷ "House Republicans' Big, 'Beautiful' Bill Would Make Health Care More Expensive for Americans With Medicare and Other Insurance," Center for American Progress, accessed September 1, 2025, at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/house-republicans-big-beautiful-bill-would-make-health-care-more-expensive-for-americans-with-medicare-and-other-insurance/>

¹¹⁸ "Impact of the Executive Order Redefining Sex on Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex People," UCLA, accessed May 18, 2026, at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/impact-eo-redefine-sex-tbi/>

values; however, on a larger scale, our communities do not have a say on policies that affect us. Begonia makes this point:

Honestly? Very few. There are some opportunities to take a stand at the state and local levels, but sometimes these are overridden by federal policy. [Probably] a lot less so as the U.S. slides headlong into open fascism.

President Trump's attacks on minority populations such as people who are queer, disabled, and/or migrants have many people, myself included, fearing what the future holds. Local laws and policies can help protect vulnerable community members as state and city-elected officials work to align themselves with their constituents' values. However, as Begonia stated, sometimes that is not sufficient to override what has been enacted on a federal level. Marigold speaks to city-specific policy shaping, "in Eugene, specifically, it's more of a 'yes' than a 'no'. I do not believe that we have enough of a say on a wide scale." Jasmine mirrors this sentiment for Portland:

Sometimes? Yes, but to an extent. Who we elect for sheriff, for example, feels like having a say in policy making. [B]ut also showing up for school board meetings, submitting comments, and doing surveys like this one or whatever trimet¹¹⁹ is fucking asking about lately.

Furthermore, within specific spaces, like universities, Orchid states not feeling like she has any say in policies, "...It is clear that the university does not intend to hear student voices, much less marginalized ones or ones that differ from the UO's standard ideology." The University of Oregon

has come under fire for various issues lately. Both the United Academics and the Student Workers Unions have fought for fair contracts.¹²⁰ There is a threat of layoffs for student workers and tenured professors, as well as the potential closure of entire departments. The University of Oregon speaks with these groups regularly, but without significant movement or acknowledgments of their concerns, there are ongoing protests, meetings, and so much more to fight these changes. People with disabilities and sex workers have long since been at the forefront of political action, activism, calling out injustices, and working for the betterment of those most marginalized.¹²¹

Many of my participants, both disabled people and sex workers, have expressed that they do not feel they have any say in policies that affect them. Anemone points to an issue that gets brought up within the disability community often:

[N]o, not at all. Disabled people still do not have marriage rights. If a disabled person gets married they lose social security money and health insurance. And although there are laws about receiving accommodations for disabilities I have had to quit jobs because they refused to give me those accommodations I needed.

People working in advocacy spaces have fought long and hard for the rights we currently have. The current administration's stripping of so many civil and human rights will be challenging to come back from. The queer rights movement struggled for marriage equality to legalize same-sex marriages; however, that same fight is absent when disabled people say there is no marriage equality until disabled people can marry.

¹¹⁹ TriMet provides bus, light rail, and commuter rail service in the Portland, Oregon, region

¹²⁰ "United Academics ratifies the Collective Bargaining Agreement," Daily Emerald, accessed September 12, 2025, at <https://dailyemerald.com/164328/campus/united-academics-ratifies-the-collective-bargaining-agreement/>

¹²¹ Zee Xaymaca, "Sex work as resistance to marginalization: Lessons from black feminist theory, disability justice, and black led sex worker organizing," *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 42, no.2 (2022): doi: <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v42i2.9116>

4.2. Community Activism

Q: Do you see any benefits in sex worker rights activists and disability rights activists working together for mutual gain?

In disability advocacy spaces, disability is repeatedly left out of every collaborative, political, resistance, and/or accessibility discussion.¹²² Meanwhile, sex workers have called for assistance from disability advocacy groups to involve sex workers' voices as essential speakers on the topic of disability. Zinnia discusses one reason why it is important to have sex workers discussing disability: "Yes, I've seen many disabled people who are sex workers because they cannot physically afford to work in traditional settings so they turn to work they can do and support themselves." A great deal of disabled people find it challenging to work a standard 9-5 job, and discriminatory hiring practices make it difficult for disabled people to find employment. Anemone agrees with this sentiment, "I would say yes. Mainly because sex work is some of the only work that disabled people can get." I was unable to find any quantitative studies on the overlap of people with disabilities seeking sex work; however, Anemone's statement is widely accepted within sex worker spaces.¹²³ Studies on sex work are notoriously tricky to get funding and support for. In 2023, there was a plan for a first of its kind, large-scale research project, requested by the Oregon legislature, looking into the impact of Oregon's laws criminalizing sex work. The study was shut down when Oregon Governor Tina Kotek

vetoed it, stating that it should be privately funded.¹²⁴ However, an initial pilot study was still released in 2024.¹²⁵ The researchers moved forward, doing what they thought they could manage without funding because they believed in the importance of the project, and the findings could be used by organizing groups as a community resource.

Sex workers and people with disabilities are often left with unmet needs, and community is a significant way those needs get met. Dahlia describes: "Yes. [B]oth are communities that need easier access to aid and resources." Mutual needs are a great place to start collaboratively building up resources and information-sharing sites. Carnation brings up the collaborative aspect of working together: "Definitely. There's so much crossover in these communities and working together improves the reach." Orchid talks about this as well, "yes because marginalized communities are so much more powerful together and we can advocate on behalf of one another." When governments fail their vulnerable populations, those groups are left to fend for themselves, and this is where many justice organizations are forged. Jasmine speaks to the importance of an intersectional approach,

Oh absolutely! Disability justice is, for me, intersectional first. Many clients I met online could easily be described as "red pill" but they're going to listen when I a [sex worker] say "cash economy only, no paypal/cashapp" vs when I, a disabled person with needs unmet says "cash only please, I don't have an amazon wishlist or

¹²² "Activism Limited by Disregard for Disability," The Oberlin Review, accessed March 15, 2026, at <https://oberlinreview.org/12148/opinions/activism-limited-by-disregard-for-disability/>

¹²³ "Sex Work is a Disability Issue. So Why Doesn't the Disability Community Recognize That?" Rooted in Rights, accessed March 12, 2026, at <https://rootedinrights.org/sex-work-is-a-disability-issue-so-why-doesnt-the-disability-community-recognize-that/>

¹²⁴ "With 2 quiet vetoes, Gov. Tina Kotek pushed back on drive to decriminalize sex work in Oregon," OPB, accessed September 3, 2025, at

<https://www.opb.org/article/2023/08/18/oregon-governor-tina-kotek-vetoes-bills-funding-research-on-prostitution-laws/>

¹²⁵ "Impacts of Sex Work Criminalization on Sex Workers in Oregon: A Pilot Study," PDXScholar, accessed May 9, 2026, at https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1750&context=socwork_fac

any online payment apps". Advocating for my right to a mask in every healthcare appointment is setting up the future client who regularly services a homebound homie when she suddenly needs to get tested and needs providers to mask. There is much intersection between our access needs and also being seen as undesirable guests in many situations.

Jasmine describes the community aspect of healthcare, the things we can do as individuals to advocate for our own and others' well-being. Things like wearing a mask in public spaces have become an incredibly divisive topic, one with consequences at the expense of older people, immunocompromised people, and people with disabilities. This simple action shows disabled people that we are welcome in the space. Solidarity is something Begonia brings up as well, "yes, absolutely. I believe the working class desperately needs solidarity across every subject position, not least these two that could learn so much from each other and among whom there are so many points of similarity." They bring up an important point about learning from one another. Sex worker advocates have been fighting for safety, dignity, and decriminalization of sex work, and disability justice advocates have been fighting for the safety, dignity, and fundamental human rights; however, approaches differ, and there is so much value in sharing what led to victories and what methods could be improved.¹²⁶ Azalea discusses the similar stigma faced by these two groups as a reasonable basis for collaborating.

I only see benefit. Puritan values hurt everyone and sex workers, by nature [of] their work in a puritan-based country, have one of the most vulnerable jobs there is because of that stigma. It's difficult enough for sex workers to access legal,

medical, and financial resources while being non-disabled, let alone with a disability. Disabled people know all [too] well this bottom of the barrel last place feeling. I think the stigma around the nature of both of our existences could be combined to a deadly effect.

Sex workers and people with disabilities face stigma around public visibility, which leads to discrimination in so many areas. However, while not everyone agreed that there was cross-over or similar discrimination, the call for intersectional approaches to advocacy was still universal among my participants.

Marigold, who did not perceive distinct overlap, said, "While they do not necessarily protest for the same things, it is often better than not to join forces as minorities, so that more overall influence can be made." They recognize the mutual benefit in two marginalized groups working together; however, they are the only participant who did not acknowledge the specific benefits of sex workers and disabled people banding together out of shared experiences of harm. While the perception of shared experiences can be beneficial for creating a sense of belonging, Marigold points out that it is not a necessary element of cross-coalitional solidarity.

4.3. Advocacy

Q: What do you think is needed for sex work advocacy and disability advocacy to work together for mutual rights?

I firmly believe that people experiencing discrimination and mistreatment are the best people to come up with solutions for their shared struggles. Listening to the voices of the most marginalized will result in the best outcome for everyone. My participants had many unique ideas

¹²⁶ Different approaches include relying on foundation funds for organizing, grassroots methodologies, centering

accessibility, focusing on legislature, focusing on harm reduction, and so much more.

for this question. Creating or using an online platform for these two groups to communicate openly was an idea that came up a couple of times. "A shared platform or social connection that allows people to come together," shared Orchid, since "Everyone is divided and separated and all of these different communities just need a place to coexist." Orchid discusses an important aspect of many disabled people's realities, separation from broader society isolates people and makes it more challenging to connect, commiserate, or organize. This division is common for many sex workers as well, especially online sex workers and people who do not leave their homes for work. Aster discusses specifically ways to move forward with policy work:

I think, active ongoing community, forums, committees, and work groups to really hone in on what the challenges are, and how we can face them together is a beautiful way to move forward, and to find some footing in policy work together.

The idea of homing in on what the challenges are is going to be important for these groups to have any success working together. In the previous section, a couple of participants were unsure about the overlapping issues between these two groups. Azalea talks about both online and in-person options for collaborative efforts:

I think it can be hard for people to share that they're disabled or a sex worker just because people unfamiliar with either have so many judgements already in place. I think a platform is needed where this can be discussed without people getting banned (increasingly impossible). I could see a night at As You Like It¹²⁷ to help get the ball rolling, disabled people

are often very kinky already. For many it won't be a far gap to bridge at all.

They bring up a great point about accessibility. Some people will have a better time engaging in-person, while others will be more comfortable with online meeting spaces. They also bring up disabled people often being kinky, which has been written on fairly extensively. In her essay, "Experiences of a Disabled Dominatrix," Ness Cooper discusses how BDSM allows her to use her mobility aids in scenes and use people as furniture when her body tells her she needs to sit. She says, "I use a cane not only to produce satisfying sensations for submissives and clients but also to help me move and access the world in ways that, without it, would be a struggle."¹²⁸ Ness, a disabled sex worker and clinical sexologist, discusses how their physical disabilities can be accommodated within kink spaces. Personally, as a neurodivergent sex worker, I have found my own kinky sessions to produce the most satisfying interactions with clients. Kink requires explicit negotiation of roles, expectations, limits, protocols, safety, aftercare, etc. These types of unambiguous interactions often align with neurodivergent inclinations.¹²⁹

Another recurring suggestion for this question was communication. Camellia makes the call for "lots of conversations and an action plan." Having a clear action plan and stated goals can help organizers and those politically motivated to find where they best fit into a movement. Marigold expands on this by saying, "communication, as well as some sort of clear partnership. An organization." I have not personally seen any U.S.-based organizations that specifically home in on

¹²⁷ An eco-conscious, gender inclusive pleasure shop in Eugene, Oregon.

¹²⁸ Ness Cooper, "The Experiences of a disabled Dominatrix," *Disabilities Studies Quarterly* 42 no.2 (2022): <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/9127/7731>

¹²⁹ "Exploring the Overlap Between Kink and Neurodivergence," Sexual Health Alliance, accessed May 10, 2026, at <https://sexualhealthalliance.com/nymphomedia-blog/kink-and-neurodivergence>

disability and sex work. However, intersectional groups are fairly common among sex worker organizers. For example, GLITS is a Black, trans-led advocacy group, The Outlaw Project focuses on migrant sex workers and trans sex workers, and Red Canary Song is a grassroots collective of migrant massage workers, sex workers, and allies of the Asian diaspora. Having a distinct and public alliance could be beneficial in moving mutual goals forward. Daffodil discusses the need for awareness in order to "understand how big of an overlap there actually is in the communities." This could manifest as events showing solidarity with one another, as well as creating spaces to educate the public. Which ties into Zinnia's answer, "a space that is free of judgement." Stigma shapes our experience of the world. If we do not make our protests, rallies, or other political actions accessible, we cannot expect people with disabilities to show up. Accessibility includes wearing a mask in public, as emphasized by Jasmine:

Masks! when and where possible! The understanding that sex work is labor, valid labor, and why someone is in that job doesn't matter more than any other professional or role. [T]he bar is sometimes so high for sexworkers to be perfected and well rounded and also the expectation that disabled people have little to no agency or self, those both gotta go. it sets too high of a bar for most people to reach.

Jasmine makes several important points. For both sex workers and disabled people, there is a social desire for these groups to display joyful expressions. There is a concept in the disability community called inspiration porn¹³⁰ used to describe people living with disabilities as monuments to be revered. Disabled people live

under this false dichotomy of being either pitiable or inspirational. These extremes do not represent the entirety of the disabled experience and reduce people to a single thing. In the sex work community, the concept of a happy hooker¹³¹ was influenced by a sex worker by the name of Xaviera Hollander. This phrase has received plenty of feedback from the sex worker community. The primary critique of it is that the emphasis on empowerment overlooks the challenges of the profession. There is so much work and change that needs to happen for sex workers to feel safe in the field, but the ideal of the happy hooker prevents critical reflection. The fear of openly critiquing or advocating for safety and better working conditions is that these arguments will be used to fuel the people who endorse anti-sex work rhetoric. However, I cannot think of another profession where empowerment from the work itself is a requirement to be taken seriously, or any industry that does not necessitate critiques from the workers in order to improve.

5. Conclusion: Commonalities of Sex Workers and People with Disabilities

Every question I asked yielded fruitful results and demonstrated that sex workers and people with disabilities regularly experience similar ongoing issues within U.S. society. The sex workers who participated in this study described getting into the sex work field out of a need for a livable wage; however, the inconsistent nature of the profession necessitates diversifying revenue streams. Sex work is a unique form of labor that allows for opportunities of sexual reclamation, self-

¹³⁰ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

¹³¹ See Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

expression, and sexual exploration, things often denied to disabled people.

Financial precarity was a theme woven throughout all of the answers I received. My participants expressed a fear of losing housing, healthcare, food access, and an inability to sustain ongoing work. Many of my participants noted that without a strong support system, they would be homeless.

My participants talked at length about inadequate school accommodations. Disabled people felt neglected within the school system, disrespected by faculty and staff, and that accommodations were a one-size-fits-all model that was not conducive to the learning environment. One sex worker was able to describe her experience of struggling through the accommodation process, but finding some ease in sex work because of how flexible the work is.

Within policy making spaces, my participants said that they do not feel like they have any say on large-scale impacts. When it comes to local levels, there was a general consensus that our voices matter and that who we elect locally matters.

Thirteen out of fourteen disabled participants expressed negative experiences within school systems, several of them writing impassioned responses. Disabled sex workers mostly spoke on their experiences as disabled people in academia, with only one person describing the flexibility of sex work as being beneficial to her academic journey. This could be because it carries risk to be an out sex worker within higher education spaces, so sex workers may choose not to divulge that information. On the flip side, there was quite a bit of solidarity sentiment; many participants who expressed not personally struggling in one area or another, made sure to note that they felt fortunate or noted

recognition that their circumstance was not the norm.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There were large gaps in my research since many of my participants were young white college students, and their experiences are not representative of the most marginalized identities. For example, very few of my participants were able to speak on the topic of personal experiences with police or the carceral system. Sex workers and disabled people are too often taken advantage of for their free knowledge and labor. In the next iteration of this research, I want to prioritize paying participants for their time. In the future, I would like to see participant input from unhoused populations, older generations, more people of color, and different forms of sex workers. It would also be beneficial to interview some participants because conversations yield richer results. Additionally, I would like to include questions about romantic relationships and parenthood. The rhetoric around who is deserving of love, family, and happiness restricts access to these things. I believe the stereotypes of sex workers and disabled people making poor partners and/or parents merit earnest investigation.

In completing this first iteration of my research, I am finding myself a little disappointed by how challenging it was to get many of those in my sex work communities to engage with this project. My survey was distributed widely among sex work communities and even made it to sex worker communities in Canada. I regret limiting respondents to Oregon residents because I believe I could have gotten some more valuable responses. I believe that by restricting my participants to Oregon residents, I greatly limited my opportunity to engage in conversations with

diverse sex worker groups. This topic is not unique to the experiences of Oregonians. Additionally, limiting my participant pool in this way had the unfortunate side effect of producing a small sample size to draw from. Therefore, my results are not representative of these communities but rather give us a sliver of the whole picture.

7. Implications

I set out to answer the question: How do these two communities that are so strongly linked can come together to work towards mutual rights/justice? I asked my participants about various aspects of living in U.S. society (and Oregon in particular) in order to determine areas of discrimination that sex workers and disabled people both experience. My participants described very similar struggles in every category I asked about. These findings suggest that people with disabilities and sex workers face significant overlapping discrimination.

The majority of my participants reported that cross-coalitional collaboration between sex work advocates and disability advocates would be mutually beneficial. They stated that marginalized communities are more powerful together, and working together improves their reach. Even disabled people who knew very little about sex worker struggles said that working together would be beneficial. Things like educational workshops, accessible, judgment-free spaces, and aid distribution promote working-class solidarity. The survey responses suggest a need for accessibility to be at the forefront of activism, in-person and online/recorded options for meetings, wearing masks whenever and wherever possible, spaces set up for wheelchair users, providing food and beverage options, and the list goes on.

Organizations that work to disseminate information and resources could hire ASL interpreters, prioritizing Deaf interpreters, as requested by the Deaf community. Captions, image descriptions, and alt text provide a more inclusive experience for blind people. Investing in air purifiers for in-person events for immunocompromised people or people with allergies or sensitivities. Some accessibility tools cost money, but prioritizing and investing in accessibility is essential, and there are alternative options to purchasing outright. Mask Bloc¹³² is an organization that provides free masks to events and lends out air purifiers with locations all over the U.S. Disability activists could use their social media platforms to amplify the views of sex workers who are regularly suppressed and censored within online spaces. We have seen sex worker communities and disability communities come up with creative solutions to the issues we face. We can find creative ways to ingrain accessibility and include sex workers into our movements! Sex worker rights are disability rights, and disability rights are sex worker rights. We need recognition, solidarity, and an end to the stigma that clings like a miasma to these two communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Crip time:

This term, popularized by Alison Kafer, refers to both a flexible standard for punctuality and the extra time disabled people and chronically ill people need to arrive or accomplish something. This may come up for many reasons, including encountering ableism in the world, inhibiting ease of mobility, or needing more time to accomplish projects for personal reasons.

Disability:

A disability is any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for a person with the

condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them. This includes restrictions in normal daily activities like working, social, or recreational activities, and accessing services.

Happy hooker:

Within the sex work community, this term is used to describe the phenomenon of overproduction of happiness in the sex trade in order to be taken seriously. Xaviera Hollander published a memoir in 1971 by the title *The Happy Hooker: My Own Story* that popularized the term and heavily influenced the wave of empowerment rhetoric within sex work narratives.

Inspiration porn:

Within the disability community, this term, coined by Stella Young, is used to describe the way the media portrays people with disabilities partaking in society as inspirational. Some examples include: people who use wheelchairs doing sports and Deaf people owning businesses.

Intersectionality:

This analytical framework was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how systems of power overlap and complicate oppression. In her essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, she talks about the experiences of Black women who are discriminated against in ways that are not encompassed by looking at one aspect of their identity. Identities are multifaceted, and one part of a person's identity cannot be separated from them as a whole. Some more examples of identity markers are gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, and physical appearance. These markers can lead to both empowerment and oppression.

Invisible disability:

Physical, mental, or neurological impairment that affects a person's daily life but is not apparent to others. This could include chronic pain or fatigue, mental health disorders, learning disabilities, and others.

Necropolitics:

A sociopolitical theory coined by philosopher Achille Mbembe, to describe the use of social and

political power to dictate who lives and dies, or marked as disposable through things like exclusion and manufactured vulnerability. The term is derivative of Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, which is social and political power used to control people's lives.

Nothing about us without us:

This slogan has been used in political activism spaces across the globe. It is meant to communicate to legislators that no policy or law should be passed without the active participation and input of people who the law would affect. This is especially true for people who are marginalized because laws that cause harm will most greatly damage those who are already disadvantaged.

Sex trafficking:

Sex trafficking is distinct from sex work but can be hard to spot. Someone engaging in the sex trade through threat, abduction, or coercion is a sex trafficking victim. Trafficking is a serious issue and a human rights violation.

Sex work:

A job, and/or scope of work, that involves act(s) between consenting adults, related to sex, in exchange for financial and/or other forms of compensation. As a term, sex work encompasses a diversity of experiences and types of sex work, which may be broader than the act of sex alone, and may also include activities such as stripping and/or dancing, online entertainment or engagement, pornography, and/or other acts of sex, stimulation and/or companionship. Many activities that are defined as sex work are currently legal in Oregon; others (including services legality defined as prostitution) are not. However, when I speak of the sex labor field at large, I will be using the terms 'sex industry' and 'sex trade' interchangeably because I wish to be inclusive of people who have traded sex for resources other than money and for people who are trading sex for survival and may not consider

it work.¹³³ Sex Trade is used within an anti-colonialist framework, and it is important that discussions of sex work do not distance these realities from the conversation.

Appendix B: Survey Questions and Participant Demographics

Survey Questions

I have written these out in the order that they appeared on the survey.

- **Sex Work:** What are your reasons for currently or formerly starting sex work? If you have never taken part in sex work type: N/A.
- **Disability:** Do you use SSI/SSDI? If so, what is your experience using these programs?
- **Housing:** What is your experience finding and holding onto stable housing as a disabled person and/or sex worker?
- **School:** What is your experience within school systems as a disabled person and/or sex worker?
- **Healthcare:** What is your experience with healthcare as a disabled person and/or sex worker?
- **Police:** What is your experience with the police or prison system as a disabled person and/or sex worker?
- **Finance:** Have you ever had difficulty with proving or needing to hide your income? Please explain.
- **Policy:** Within policy making spaces do you think your communities have a say in shaping the policies that affect them?
- **Community activism:** Do you see any benefits in sex worker rights activists and disability rights activists working together for mutual gain? Please explain.
- **Advocacy:** What do you think is needed for sex work advocacy and disability

advocacy to work together for mutual rights?

Participant Demographics

Participant demographics (e.g., gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity) as they show up in the charts below (fig. 2 and 3) are exactly as they were written on the survey.

Pseudonym	Gender	Sexuality	Race/Ethnicity
Anemone	Nonbinary	Pansexual	White
Aster	Female	Straight	White/Turkish
Azalea	Genderfluid	Lesbian	White
Begonia	non-binary	bisexual	white
Camellia	female	self-love I am sexually attracted to myself	mix white and hispanic
Carnation	Female	Straight	White
Daffodil	Transmale	gay	white
Dahlia	queer	queer	black, hispanic/latino, white
Foxglove	Female	Lesbian	White
Jasmine	Queer	Sapphic/Lesbian	white, non hispanic
Marigold	Nonbinary	Queer	White
Orchid	she/they	bisexual	White
Poppy	female	lesbian	hispanic/chicane
Wisteria	Non-binary	Asexual/Queer	White/European
Zinnia	Gender fluid	Queer	white

The participants who completed all or a majority of the survey got a pseudonym. These are the participants that I focused my analysis on and quoted directly from throughout this thesis.

Gender	Sexuality	Race/Ethnicity
female	straight	white
girlfail	t4t	white
Non-binary	Queer	white, Latinx, multiethnic
Two Spirit Quariwarmi (Quechua Indian)	Lesbian	Latino/Peruvian/Ecuadorian
female	Straight/questioning	White
non-binary	queer, t4t	white
Non Binary	Bisexual	White
Trans masc	Queer	White
Female	Bisexual	Black and White
Non-binary	Aro/Ace	White

¹³³ Emily Coombes, 2022

The participants who only filled out the demographic section did not get a pseudonym. I did not count these participants or their answers towards my analysis of demographics. I suspect

the first question on the survey having to do with sex work may have intimidated some participants and prevented them from going further in the survey.