

WHAT DO TRANS/NONBINARY YOUNG ADULTS WANT CLINICIANS TO KNOW ABOUT ONLINE SEX WORK?

A growing number of young adults earn money from online sex work, including content platforms like OnlyFans and ManyVids. Online sex work may be particularly common for trans/nonbinary young adults, who often face discrimination in traditional jobs.

We interviewed 18 trans/nonbinary young adults about their online sex work and what they want medical and mental health clinicians to know. Here's what they told us:

ONLINE SEX WORK CAN BE FULFILLING.

Many interviewees found online sexual content creation affirming, flexible, and enjoyable. They built friendships and community, and learned skills like social media marketing, customer service, photography, and editing.

By sharing this content and by being authentic about who I am, I have gotten jobs that valued me specifically for who I am, and I get to work on things that align with my values [and] my identities...

– Dreamer, 25 years old, trans/nonbinary

[Sex work clients] tend to be some of the nicer people, because they're buying things that they enjoy. I feel like I get treated significantly better than the average, like, McDonald's employee.

– Clara, 23 years old, transfeminine/trans woman

Illustrations: @meidiocre



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IT CAN ALSO BE STRESSFUL.

Interviewees discussed challenges including opaque platform rules, disrespectful customers, income insecurity, pressure to downplay their gender, and stigma against sex workers.

[Clients] want exactly what they want, exactly when they want it... They see me as a sex doll who is made up waiting in bed for them to contact me 24/7...and that doesn't feel great.

– Harley, 28 years old, agender

[Assumptions about my gender are] probably the most stressful. There was a period of time where...I took out the “he/they” out of my bio... My nervous system would react and then I would not feel good posting.

– Pecan, 23 years old, transmasculine

CLINICIANS CAN HELP THROUGH AFFIRMATIVE LISTENING.

Interviewees wanted medical and mental health clinicians to avoid stigma-based generalizations—like assuming their sex work is harmful, coerced, or rooted in trauma—and instead listen nonjudgmentally to their individual experiences.

It's just a job.... I'm not depressed [or] anxious because I'm a sex worker... Sex work might have something to do with some things, but it's generally not it.

– Lemon, 25 years old, nonbinary transfemme

[Clinicians] shouldn't make assumptions about the reasons why someone is doing that and should leave it open for that person to tell them... It just varies so much...

– Charlie, 20 years old, trans man

Being alarmed about my experiences makes me not trust you... And [only seeing] the negative aspects and [not] the positive things.

– Dreamer, 25 years old, trans/nonbinary

[My advice for clinicians is] just to, like, listen a lot...

– Poopoo, 26, nonbinary/neutral

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