

Woodhull Freedom Foundation Response: Federal Trade Commission Request for Public Comment Regarding Technology Platform Censorship

Woodhull Freedom Foundation is a national organization whose mission is to affirm sexual freedom as a fundamental human right. Since its founding in 2003, Woodhull protects and defends individuals' rights across the United States to enjoy sexual dignity, privacy, and consensual sexual expression without societal or governmental interference, coercion, or stigmatization. In carrying out this mission, Woodhull monitors freedom of expression online to ensure constitutionally protected sexual speech is not unlawfully censored. Based on this expertise, we prepared the following response to inform the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) request for public comment regarding technology platform censorship.

In developing this response, Woodhull specifically calls attention to the widespread censorship of sex workers in digital spaces. We also sound the alarm at how this censorship has accelerated significantly since the passage of a set of bills in 2018, the Senate bill, Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, and the House bill, Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (collectively known as SESTA/FOSTA), which together represent the most broadly-based censorship of internet speech in the last 20 years.

SESTA/FOSTA has driven large swaths of constitutionally protected speech off the Internet and created real-world dangers for sex workers and survivors of human trafficking. Woodhull was the lead plaintiff on a federal challenge to this legislation, [*Woodhull Freedom Foundation vs. the United States of America*](#), based on violations of the First Amendment (free speech), the Fifth Amendment (due process/vagueness), and the Ex Post Facto Clause of Article I, Section 9 (retroactive punishment). In our submission, we include the [final court ruling](#), which documents Woodhull's and other plaintiffs' experiences with technology platform censorship practices linked to SESTA/FOSTA. Although the Court did not issue the constitutional ruling Woodhull sought, it held that the law must be interpreted narrowly to avoid "grave constitutional questions."

Woodhull not only challenged the law but also funded urgently needed research led by Dr. Samantha Majic and Dr. Melissa Ditmore at John Jay College of the City University of New York which documented the myriad harms caused by the deplatforming of sex workers. To answer the questions from the FTC, we use the findings of this Woodhull-funded research, "[440 Sex Workers Cannot Be Wrong: Engaging and Negotiating Online Platform Power](#)"¹. This peer-reviewed study highlights the fact that sex workers² have a long history of using online platforms for advertising, providing services, screening clients, collecting payments, and peer interaction, among other activities.

¹ In answering the FTC questions, we refer to the publication as 'the study'.

² Sex work is defined in the study as encompassing what Dr. Angela Jones (Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Stony Brook University, State University of New York) terms "any internet-mediated exchange of sexual commodities and/or services," ranging from actual service delivery (such as a webcam show) to marketing for in-person services.

The research answers the following questions relevant to the FTC request:

1. How and to what extent do sex workers engage with online platforms?
2. How do these platforms' policies and practices shape the conditions of their work?

The research findings are based on a national survey of 440 sex workers, which the researchers developed in partnership with sex workers across the United States. The overall findings are that sex workers use a range of online platforms for their work, on which policies and practices have a significant impact. Namely, platforms frequently remove and/or limit sex workers' platform access, thereby restricting their ability to earn income and compromising their safety. These effects stratify along the lines of race, gender, and ability.

Woodhull includes a PDF copy of the publication in our submission to the FTC.

As detailed in the answers below, the research also concluded that government interventions that lead to further restrictions on content is not the way to address technology platform censorship. The comments we are submitting highlight how prior government efforts to restrict the type of content that online platforms may host have created *more*, not less, censorship as proven by the outcomes from SESTA/FOSTA. Therefore, we urge the FTC to recognize that giving the government more power to make content moderation decisions jeopardizes freedom of expression and violates the First Amendment. As part of this inquiry, the FTC must consider and analyze the constitutional implications of interfering with private companies' content moderation decisions, which the First Amendment fully protects. [See generally *Moody v. Netchoice*, 603 U.S. ____ (July 1, 2024), at 2 ("laws curtailing [online companies'] editorial choices must meet the First Amendment's requirements").]

- 1) Under what circumstances have platforms denied or degraded ("shadow banned," "demonetized," etc.) users' access to services based on the content of the users' speech or affiliations?
 - a) What specific adverse actions did the platform take?
 - i) In the aforementioned study (Majic, Ditmore, and Li 2024), respondents reported losing access to online platform accounts and being shadow banned. Losing access, also termed 'de-platforming', was more common than shadow banning.
 - (1) De-platforming: "...many sex workers reported losing access to a range of platforms; however, we found that sex workers were most likely to experience de-platforming on social media (32.0%), dating and hookup sites (24.4%), and payment processors (22.1%)." (p. 12)
 - (2) Shadow banning: In response to the question, "On any website you are on, is your account hidden from search results?" The study found that 43.8% of respondents found their accounts hidden from search results. In response to the study question about tagability ("When people try to tag

- you on social media or other platforms, does your name show up?”), 27.4% found their name did not show up when others tried to tag them on social media. (p. 12)
- ii) Full survey results related to online platforms' de-platforming and shadow banning sex workers are available in the study in section 3.2 RQ2. “De-Platforming and Shadow Banning: How Do Online Platforms’ Policies and Practices Shape the Conditions of Their Work?”. (pp. 12-15)
- b) Did the platform take such adverse actions in response to its users’ speech or actions on the platform?
- i) De-platforming and shadow banning often occurred after users shared sexual content or engaged in activities perceived as promoting sex work, even if legal (e.g., camming, sexting).
 - (1) “...an overwhelming majority of our respondents (78.2%) experienced de-platforming, and a significant number also experienced shadow banning. Across platforms, we found that 41.7% indicated that they were most likely removed from these for unallowed sexual content, particularly from social media, dating and hookup, and payment-processing platforms.” (p. 18)
 - ii) Necessary to understand online platform policies related to sexual content, the study addresses the socio-legal landscape in which sex workers engage in online spaces and utilize online platforms in section 1.1.2 “Law, Policy, and Platforms.” (pp. 3-4)
 - iii) Section 4. “Discussion” also addresses crucial issues related to stigma against sex workers, which fuels adverse actions by online platforms as well as the legal context in which sex workers exist online.
 - (1) “...it is imperative to note here that many sex workers who are affected by these measures do not engage in criminal activity. To name just some examples, creating and sharing sexual content like pornography online is legal for adults; communicating work schedules in licit sex work venues such as strip clubs is legal; and interpersonal communication of a sexual nature between consenting adults (e.g., sexting and chatting) is legal.” (p. 18)
- c) Did the platform take such adverse actions in response to users’ off-platform activities?
- i) The study posits that online platforms take adverse actions because of an assumed link between sex workers' online content and offline activities that may fall within criminalized activities, including prostitution and sex trafficking. The study details the harms of conflating sex work and human trafficking, which is also addressed in answering questions 1b above and 5c below.
 - ii) Critically, “...platform-led policies and practices—which are ostensibly meant to protect users and prevent sex trafficking—actually compromise sex workers in

- many ways. Our study, like others, shows that practices such as de-platforming and shadow banning have deleterious effects on sex workers' safety in an already dangerous occupation." (p. 18)
- iii) Section 1.1.1 "Sex Work and Online Platforms" (p. 3) and section 1.1.2 "Law, Policy, and Platforms" (pp. 3-4) of the study provide important context in answering this question. These sections detail how sex workers use online platforms, including to develop safer income streams via webcamming or other remote sexual services. They also explain how the discourse around sex trafficking, along with concerns of it being facilitated in digital spaces, has led to ineffective and harmful anti-trafficking measures that reduce sex workers' access to technological tools that make their work safer.
 - d) How and when, if at all, did the platform notify its users about such adverse actions or explain its decisions?
 - i) The study found that platforms rarely gave clear reasons for adverse actions. Survey respondents described vague or no explanations, limited transparency, and minimal avenues to appeal decisions.
 - ii) Sections 3.2. "RQ2. De-Platforming and Shadow Banning: How Do Online Platforms' Policies and Practices Shape the Conditions of Their Work?" and RQ3. "Resistance: How Do Sex Workers Negotiate Platforms' Power?" (pp. 12-17) provide details related to platform notification and explanation procedures. Notably, the study highlights that respondents reported higher rates of de-platforming compared to shadow banning, which may be because it is much more difficult for respondents to definitively confirm that platforms have shadow banned them, as indicated not only by their relatively high "unsure" responses but by the fact that platforms variously deny and otherwise "gaslight" users about their experiences with shadow banning." (p. 13)
 - e) Did countervailing benefits to consumers or competition justify the platform's decisions to deny or degrade its users' access to services?
 - i) The study found that platforms cited compliance with laws or community standards, but there is no evidence that these actions improved user safety or competition. Instead, they harmed sex workers' ability to work safely and earn an income. The study specifically focused on compliance with SESTA/FOSTA (the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) signed into law by President Trump in 2018. Section 1.1.2. "Law, Policy, and Platforms" (pp. 3-4) provides necessary context and analysis of SESTA/FOSTA's impact on platform policies and justifications for shuttering sex workers' accounts.
 - ii) As described in the study, "SESTA/FOSTA significantly accelerated the subsequent sex work-related platform closures and other censorious actions by amending Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to open platforms to

criminal and civil liability where there is content related to trafficking for sex. They also amended the TVPA to include the as-yet-undefined “participation in a venture which has engaged in trafficking” to hold websites accountable for promoting sex trafficking.” (p. 4)

- iii) Additionally, the study highlights that, “While both government agencies and platform companies claim that the aforementioned policies and practices will help to keep individuals safe and prevent crimes such as sex trafficking, sex workers and other affected communities have indicated otherwise.” (p. 4)
 - iv) In the 4. “Discussion” section the study also explains crucial context regarding the importance of online platforms to sex workers’ economic wellbeing, “Sex workers’ use of online platforms—and payment-processing and social media platforms in particular—further indicates the extent to which sex work has entered the mainstream (Brents and Hausbeck 2010; Sanders et al. 2020). That sex workers reach clients through widely popular social media sites and, in turn, collect payments through the likes of CashApp and Venmo indicates that it is no longer a cash-only business that operates on the fringes of the economy. Instead, our findings confirm that—similar to other workers in the increasingly “gigified” economy (Berg 2022, p. 35)—sex workers in the USA depend on online platforms to facilitate their work and earn income. Most (72.4%) of our respondents reported that they took up sex work to meet their economic needs, and they earned most, if not all, of their income from sex work, using it to support themselves and at least one other person.” (p. 17)
- 2) At the time of the adverse actions, did the platforms have policies or make other public-facing representations about how they would regulate, censor, or moderate users’ conduct on and off the platform?
- a) Did the policies or other public-facing representations describe how, when, or under what circumstances the platform would deny or degrade users’ access to its services?
 - i) The study did not report on specific platforms’ Terms of Service (TOS) but did report on the extent to which sex workers read such policies. The study found that most survey respondents read or skimmed platform TOS, “...sex workers informed themselves about the platforms’ own specific policies. Namely, they read the platforms’ terms of service (TOS): 81.3% of respondents claimed to have read the TOS for the platform that was most beneficial for their business, with 49.1% indicating that they read the terms closely and an additional 32.2% reporting that they had skimmed them.” (p. 16)
 - b) Did the platform adhere to its policies or other public-facing representations?
 - i) The study found inconsistent adherence to platform policies or other public-facing representations.
 - ii) The study also recommends further research related to shadow banning because it is challenging to determine the platform’s practices here. “While we found that

sex workers reported being shadow banned, it is difficult to conclude the extent and effects of this because platforms have denied its occurrence. Moreover, even as users can see that their accounts and related activity are suddenly less visible to their audiences, this may have multiple causes, including but not limited to shadow bans, the quality of their content, and changes to platform algorithms that determine what is shown to others.” (p. 20-21)

- c) Has the platform revised, updated, or changed its approach to regulating users’ speech or actions, or for denying or degrading users’ access to services? If so, what, if any, revisions, updates, or changes have been made? How and when did the platform notify its users of these revisions, updates, or changes?
 - i) The study does not directly address this but makes the recommendation for further research on online platform censorship that tracks and analyzes the experiences of sex workers, “...we encourage scholars to engage in more in-depth, qualitative research so that we may develop more intersectional analyses of sex work in online digital spaces.” (p. 20)
 - ii) With this recommendation for further research, it must be understood that platform algorithms are proprietary making it difficult to investigate how they function. In some studies on this topic, scholars refer to platform algorithms as “black boxes” resulting from corporate secrecy and technical complexity which is further detailed in the article, [“Shadowbanning is not a thing”: black box gaslighting and the power to independently know and credibly critique algorithms](#) (Cotter, Kelley. 2021).
- 3) Did the platform represent, implicitly or explicitly, whether users had the ability to challenge or appeal adverse actions that deny or degrade the affected users’ access to services?
 - a) Did the platform offer a meaningful opportunity to challenge or appeal adverse actions that deny, or degrade users’ access, consistent with its users’ reasonable expectations based on its representations?
 - i) The study found sex workers had limited and often opaque opportunities to challenge or appeal adverse actions.
 - ii) The study highlights that, “When sex workers were affected by de-platforming, they did not passively accept this. We asked how those who reported de-platforming reacted to this. For the 312 respondents to this question (which listed nine choices, including “other”), the most common responses included complaining to the platform (49.7%), starting a new account (44.6%), and moving to another platform (41.7%). The respondents also reported speaking out about their loss of platform access, with 23.1% posting online about their experience and 11.2% talking to the press. A number of respondents (4.5%) also reported paying someone who said they would be able to restore their account.” (p. 16)

- iii) The study also determined that, “...even as they complained and contested platforms’ policies in various ways, sex workers did not always have favorable interactions.” (p. 17)
 - b) How long did the platform take to adjudicate such challenges or appeals?
 - i) The study found that overall, sex workers experienced long delays or never received resolutions when they were de-platformed.
 - c) Has the platform applied a consistent challenge or appeals process in response to analogous conduct by different users?
 - i) The study found that platforms were inconsistent in the challenge and appeals process.
- 4) How did the platforms’ adverse actions affect users (including creators of content)?
 - a) How were users’ ability to earn money or build followings affected?
 - i) The study reports on myriad hardships, including income loss by sex workers after being de-platformed. De-platforming significantly reduced income for 88.4% of sex workers surveyed, while many also lost clients (64.1%) and subscribers (53.3%). In section 5. “Conclusions”, the study also details how income loss from de-platforming not only harms the individual sex worker but also family members they support. (p. 20)
 - ii) Section 3.2. RQ2. “De-Platforming and Shadow Banning: How Do Online Platforms’ Policies and Practices Shape the Conditions of Their Work?” (pp. 12-15) provides an analysis of hardships experienced by sex workers due to de-platforming.
 - iii) The study found that, “...of the 344 respondents who reported that they were de-platformed, 88.4% of these respondents reported their income declining as a result.” (p. 13)
 - iv) “We also asked the 344 respondents who experienced de-platforming (across a range of platforms) to indicate other resulting hardships in addition to income loss. Across 270 respondents who responded to this branched question, Table 5 below indicates that these hardships were wide-ranging, with the most common hardships related to income loss: a loss of clients (64.1%), a loss of subscribers (53.3%), and a loss of content they created (40.4%).” (p. 13)
 - v) In section 5. “Conclusions”, the study makes important recommendations to address these hardships, “If lawmakers are going to expand online platform-related laws and policies, our findings support *enhancing* those governing *platform companies*. In short, platforms need more regulations that reduce their power and prevent them from harming workers rather than restricting content. For example, payment-processing platforms should not be allowed to keep people’s money *when they have not committed a crime or otherwise violated the platform’s terms of service*. This is important not only for sex workers—especially marginalized people, including racial minorities, disabled,

and gender-non-conforming people who rely on this work to support themselves and their families—but for many more people who depend on online platforms for income. However, in developing any policy related to online platforms (and, relatedly, sexual labor), we strongly suggest that lawmakers consult with sex workers first—they need to be key advisors on policy because they know their needs best.” (p. 20)

- b) Did competing technology platforms engage in analogous conduct against the same users?
 - i) Sex workers reported being de-platformed or shadow-banned across multiple platforms, including social media, payment processors, and dating sites.
 - ii) The study specifically reports on adverse actions taken by platforms in response to SESTA/FOSTA, “...a number of platforms developed their own policies and practices to avoid investigations and prosecution. To name just some examples, in 2018, Craigslist’s personals closed in March, and in April, the Department of Justice’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and the US Attorney General’s Office for the Central District of Arizona, with support from various other state-level agencies, seized and shut down Backpage, a site hosting classified ads, including those for escorts and other (legal) sexual service providers. Reddit also banned four subreddits that were frequented by sex workers, including r/Escorts, r/MaleEscorts, r/Hookers, and r/SugarDaddy, and Tumblr introduced a sweeping adult content ban in December (soon after, Apple removed Tumblr from its app store (Bronstein 2021)). Platforms have also taken measures to avoid prosecution. For one, they have restricted content. To illustrate, in December 2020, Pornhub decided to remove 10 million videos alleged to contain images depicting rape and underage sex from its platform. Platforms have also implemented practices that reduce or eliminate certain users. One of these is shadow banning—a cross-platform moderation technique that restricts content deemed inappropriate, often by preventing users from appearing in a search or by hiding users in feeds (Are 2021). And another is de-platforming, which, generally speaking, involves removing an account on social media (or other platforms) for breaking platform rules (Rogers 2020; Molldrem 2018).” (p. 4)
- c) Were users induced into joining and investing their time and money in a platform under the expectation of one set of moderation policies, only to have the rules changed from under them?
 - i) The study does not address this issue except as related to a threatened policy change from OnlyFans.com described in section 4. “Discussion”, “...in August 2021, in response to pressure from the banks, OnlyFans.com announced that it would ban sexually explicit content on its platform, but it backtracked within the week after both content creators and people who purchase content voiced their

- opposition to the ban (Barry 2021). (The OnlyFans.com platform was initially used primarily by sex workers.)” (p. 19)
- d) Were users targeted by such adverse actions able to find adequate substitutes in other platforms?
- i) In section 3.2. “RQ2. De-Platforming and Shadow Banning: How Do Online Platforms’ Policies and Practices Shape the Conditions of Their Work?”, the study provides an overview of reactions by sex workers to de-platforming and hardships they experienced. The study reports that 36.8% of respondents, “explored alternative platforms.” The study does not specifically address how adequate these substitutes were. But the study did report that 31.6% of respondents indicated that their income never recovered after being de-platformed. (p. 15)
 - ii) The study also provides important details regarding the “most beneficial” types of platforms for sex workers’ business which provides insights into the challenges these workers face if they are de-platformed and are not able to find other adequate alternatives. In section 3.1. “RQ 1. Platform Use: How and to What Extent Do Sex Workers Engage with Online Platforms?,” the study details that, “Among the 385 respondents to the subsequent question, “Your responses indicate that you use (or have used) the following platform type(s). Which one of these is (or was) the most beneficial to you, for your business?”, the most common responses were advertising platforms (20.5%) and camming/phone sex/sexting/video call platforms (15.8%). Other popular responses included payment processors (12.2%) and social media (12.2%), followed by feed sites (10.1%) and chatting platforms (9.9%).” (p. 11)
- e) Were users able to reach similar audiences and achieve similar goals (such as monetization and reach) on competing platforms?
- i) The study addresses overall harms to sex workers, including financial losses, when they are de-platformed or the sites they rely on shutter but does not specifically address the success of moving to alternative platforms beyond that reported in question 4d above. Further research is necessary to determine if sex workers were able to reach similar audiences and achieve similar goals on competing platforms.
- 5) What factors motivated platforms’ decisions to adopt their policies or to take the adverse actions?
- a) Were they made in response to pressure from advertisers or other businesses?
 - i) The study indicates that platforms acted preemptively to avoid legal liability under SESTA/FOSTA and may also have been influenced to avoid advertiser backlash. In section 1.1. “Literature Review”, the study provides context regarding platforms business interests to moderate users’ content due to platforms’ dependence on ad revenue and sales of user data, “Because most online platforms are for-profit

enterprises that depend on ad revenue and sales of user data, they have a vested interest in moderating the content and activity of users, using some logistics of detection, review, and enforcement.” (p. 2) In section 1.1.2. “Law, Policy, and Platforms”, the study provides further context related to sex work in digital spaces and how “anti-sex work actors” influence public discourse by conflating consensual sex work with coercive sex trafficking. The study does not provide explicit examples of this harmful and inaccurate conflation influencing advertisers or other businesses to pressure platforms to enact certain discriminatory policies but as evidenced in question 5b below, this rhetoric has influenced government actions. Further research is necessary regarding advertiser or other business influence on platform policies related to sex work.

- ii) Section 4. “Discussion”, does provide additional context relating to the importance of sex workers to platform profitability and provides an example of the limits of pressure from banks to influence policies of the site OnlyFans.com which is predominately used by sex workers, “Sex workers—like many workers in the contemporary economy—are certainly part of the platforms’ captive consumer base, but their experiences with de-platforming may challenge their loyalty to them. Indeed, one may argue here that the platforms do not “need” sex workers to support their political/regulatory advocacy, but sex workers, like many others in the economy, use platforms for myriad activities. Many platforms also know that their profitability relies on sex workers to drive consumer traffic to them (even if they do not admit it). For example, in August 2021, in response to pressure from the banks, OnlyFans.com announced that it would ban sexually explicit content on its platform, but it backtracked within the week after both content creators and people who purchase content voiced their opposition to the ban (Barry 2021). (The Onlyfans.com platform was initially used primarily by sex workers.)” (p. 19)
- iii) This section further details the power of banks to influence policies related to sex workers’ access to financial services and that these experiences must be considered to understand de-platforming more broadly. “Attending to sex workers’ de-platforming experiences may, therefore, help us better understand de-platforming in the broader economy. To illustrate, de-platforming initially happened to sex workers, with financial platforms shutting their accounts without warning (Bernard 2023); now, other non-sex workers’ bank accounts have been closed without warning or justification (Lieber and Bernard 2023a; Lieber 2023). Losing access to financial services this way has become so common that The New York Times published articles describing “suspicious activity reports” and explored how banks determine whether to close an account (Lieber and Bernard 2023b). Such examinations indicate how sex workers are often “canaries in the coal mine,” particularly about the limits and challenges of relying on—and failing to regulate— private, online platform companies. Given sex workers’ long history

- of technical savvy and adaptation, platform companies—and scholars studying and developing theories of their power—ignore sex workers’ needs and experiences thereon at their peril.” (pp. 18-19)
- b) Were they made in response to the actions of state, local, or federal governments?
 - i) Post-SESTA/FOSTA platforms acted to avoid legal repercussions from vague trafficking-related liability language.
 - ii) As detailed in section “1.1.2. Law, Policy, and Platforms,” “Regarding government actions in the USA, various agencies have taken measures to close websites that, they allege, promoted prostitution and sex trafficking, such as the 2014 FBI raid on and closure of MyRedbook.com and the Department of Homeland Security’s 2015 raid and closure of Rentboy.com (Majic 2020). However, SESTA/FOSTA significantly accelerated the subsequent sex work-related platform closures and other censorious actions by amending Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to open platforms to criminal and civil liability where there is content related to trafficking for sex. They also amended the TVPA to include the as-yet-undefined “participation in a venture which has engaged in trafficking” to hold websites accountable for promoting sex trafficking.
 - iii) In response to SESTA/FOSTA, a number of platforms developed their own policies and practices to avoid investigations and prosecution.” (pp. 3-4)
 - c) Did platform employees or executives encourage, or collude with, outside parties to pressure the platforms to change their policies or take the adverse actions?
 - i) The study was unable to determine if platform employees or executives colluded with outside parties to pressure platforms to change their policies. However, the study did report that “anti-sex work feminists and conservative religious figures” have significant influence over policies that directly harm sex workers by conflating their work with human trafficking. The study details how this influence has quickly made online technologies “the new battleground spaces upon which longstanding disagreements about sex work, human trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of youth are enacted.” (p. 4)
 - ii) For further context which is also important in answering question 5b above regarding government policies and actions, section “1.1.2. Law, Policy, and Platforms,” explains, “The socio-legal landscape in the USA has evolved in response to the current trafficking panic, particularly since 2000, when Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). As McDowell and Tiidenberg (2023) document, while this and subsequent laws may seem somewhat recent, they are a product of a decades-long effort by so-called moral entrepreneurs “lobbying for the creation of obscenity legislation and its ‘rigorous enforcement’ in the United States” (p. 2). Among those involved with shaping the TVPA, anti-sex work feminists

and conservative religious figures who conflated human trafficking and sex work—and were particularly concerned with young girls’ involvement in the sex trades—were especially influential here (Baker 2018; Ditmore 2023a, 2023b; Zimmerman 2012). Many of these anti-sex work actors also emphasized the relationship between technology and sex trafficking in public discourse, often without distinguishing between consensual sex work and coercive sex trafficking, and they were especially concerned that traffickers were recruiting girls and young women into the sex trades online (see, e.g., Farley et al. 2014). As a result, online technologies quickly became “the new battleground spaces upon which longstanding disagreements about sex work, human trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of youth are enacted” (Thakor and Boyd 2013, p. 279).” (p. 3-4)

- 6) Were platforms’ adverse actions made possible by a lack of competition? Did the practices and policies affect competition?
 - a) Did platforms adopt similar policies to and take similar adverse actions as other platforms?
 - i) As detailed in answering questions 1e, 4b, 5a, and 5b, the study identifies that platforms did adopt similar policies to and take similar adverse actions as other platforms in response to avoiding legal liability under SESTA/FOSTA. However, the study does not investigate the role of competition in the platform marketplace as a factor in these policies. The role of competition is an area requiring further research.
 - b) Did platforms agree or otherwise coordinate (including directly or through trade associations, certification bodies, or other means) with other platforms as to their policies and adverse actions?
 - i) Many platforms adopted similar policy changes in response to SESTA/FOSTA and other government actions. However, the study does not determine if platforms coordinated with each other to develop policies or carry out adverse actions.
 - c) To what extent have platforms funded or collaborated with organizations, for profit or non-profit, that advocated for or enabled censorship? Were such activities, such as advertising boycotts, designed to facilitate collusion on censorship?
 - i) The role of “anti-sex work feminists and conservative religious figures” to influence the socio-legal landscape in which sex work in digital spaces takes place is addressed in answering question 5c above. The study details how “moral entrepreneurs” have lobbied for harsh and rigorously enforced obscenity laws which have in turn influenced US policy related to sex work in digital spaces and subsequent platform policies. However, the study does not provide direct

evidence of platforms funding or collaborating with organizations that advocated for or enabled censorship. This is an area for further research.

- d) Were platforms able to achieve market dominance under permissive content policies, only to change policies after they had achieved market power?
 - i) Also discussed above in answering questions 4c and 5a, the study highlights the case of OnlyFans.com threatening to ban sexually explicit content, which created significant panic among adult content creators. The platform ultimately backtracked but there were still harmful effects from the threat of de-platforming millions of adult creators who relied on the platform due to its market dominance.
 - (1) As described in section 4. “Discussion,” “...in August 2021, in response to pressure from the banks, OnlyFans.com announced that it would ban sexually explicit content on its platform, but it backtracked within the week after both content creators and people who purchase content voiced their opposition to the ban (Barry 2021). (The Onlyfans.com platform was initially used primarily by sex workers.).” (p. 19)