



# FSC

Free Speech Coalition

# FINANCIAL DISCRIMINATION AND THE ADULT INDUSTRY

May 2023



# ISSUES AND METHODOLOGY

**The adult entertainment industry has changed dramatically in the past several years. The explosion of 'fan' platforms – and the millions of new adult content creators they brought to the industry – have raised questions about how widespread issues like banking discrimination and social media censorship are for adult industry businesses and workers.**

To gain a better understanding of this changed landscape – and its effect on members of the adult industry – the Free Speech Coalition partnered with SexWorkCEO to map out how the makeup of the industry has shifted and document the extent to which unfair banking and social media censorship affect our businesses.

## FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

- **How widespread is the discrimination?**
- **What forms does it take?**
- **Who is most affected?**
- **How does it impact our legal businesses?**

## METHODOLOGY

To get a picture of the adult industry's current makeup, we shared the survey through multiple channels, including:

- Free Speech Coalition's email newsletter
- Industry message forums
- SexWorkCEO's creator newsletter
- Social media platforms utilized by creators
- and creator channels on adult platforms

Over 600 adult industry members took the survey between December 2022 and April 2023. The results below are specific to those who currently earn an income through the adult industry. It is important to note that 73% of respondents indicated that they were currently based in the United States.

This report presents one of the first portraits of this new population of workers and their experiences as powerful financial institutions refuse to keep pace with the rest of society.

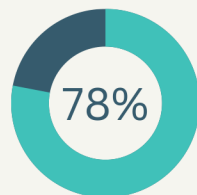
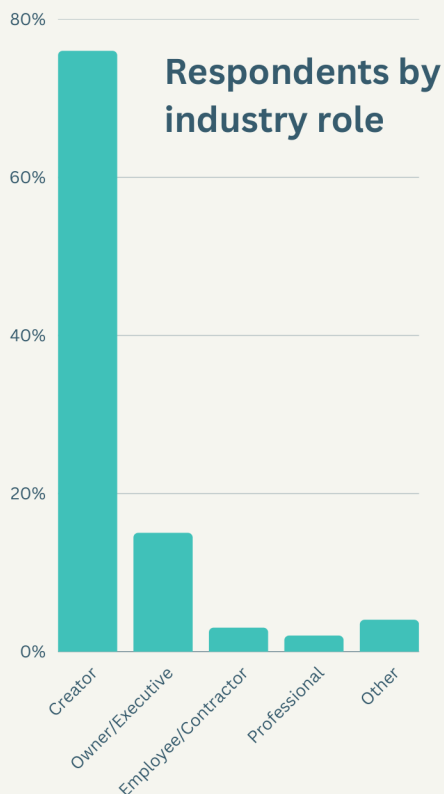
This is an interim report. We will continue to collect data to provide a fuller picture of the challenges facing the industry.

# INDUSTRY DEMOGRAPHICS

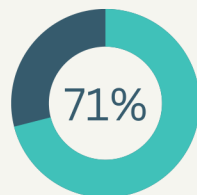
## PROFESSIONAL ROLES

Respondents were asked to self-identify their occupation within the adult industry. Included among the options were performer/creator, adult business owner and others. Of course, in today's industry, most performer/creators are also business owners, handling all aspects of production, marketing and distribution of their content online, so we asked for their primary identity.

In other cases, we offered respondents the ability to choose additional identities (such as "sex worker") and used these differing identities and roles to better understand which communities are being affected most by which aspects of banking discrimination.



of respondents identify as a sex worker



of respondents identify as a performer/creator

## DEFINITIONS

### *"Performer/Creator"*

Someone who appears on camera, either in a studio production or in content they created and sold themselves. Most studio performers also sell 'creator' content on fan, cam or clip platforms. Within the report "creator" and "performer" are used interchangeably.

### *"Sex Worker"*

A broader category than "performer/creator" that can also include escorting, dominatrix work, stripping or any other sex-related labor is engaged in for income.

### *"Adult Business"*

Business owners or executives at platforms, billing companies, web hosts and other companies. Some business owners have previously been performers, and may identify still as "sex workers," but for the most part we use "business" in the report to identify banking issues significant to platforms and larger businesses (such as payroll or credit card processing.)

### *"Worker/Member"*

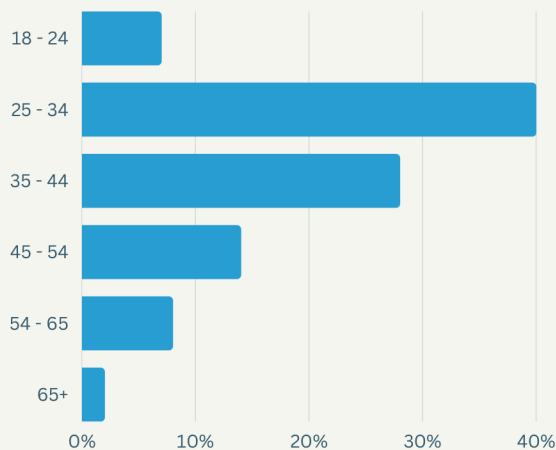
Throughout the report, we use terms like "worker" or "member" to signify any one earning income in the industry in any capacity.



26% of adult business owners *also* identify as a sex worker

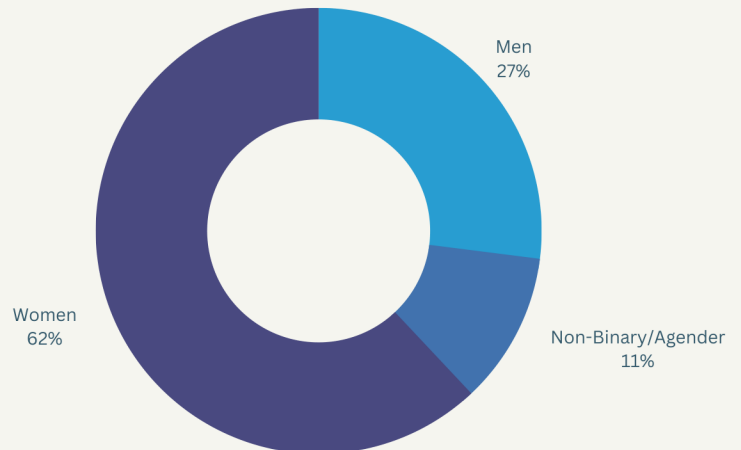
## AGE

Despite the stereotypes, we're not an especially young industry. 93% of respondents are 25 or older. (Even among creator/performers, just 9% are under 25.)



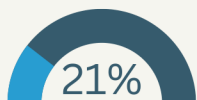
## GENDER

The adult industry is largely dominated by women and women-owned businesses. 63% of all respondents were women, compared to 27% men. Trans folks (all genders) make up 7%. Women make up 70% of creators.



## RACE

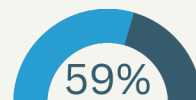
18% of respondents identify as a person of color. About 1 In 5 creators (21%) identify as a people of color. Creators of color are less likely to be full-time industry workers, but those who are are more likely to experience many forms of financial discrimination based on their adult work.



of creators identify  
as a person of color

## SEXUALITY

More than half (51%) of respondents identify as LGBTQ+. Nearly 2 in 3 creators do. LGBTQ+ creators are more likely to be people of color, more likely to be trans/gender non-conforming, and disproportionately impacted by content restrictions imposed by credit card companies.



of creators identify  
as LGBTQ+

***64% of adult creators have no other significant source of income***

# DEBANKING AND DISCRIMINATION

We asked respondents about their experiences with various financial tools and services. Respondents reported many forms of discrimination, from unexplained debanking to being charged processing fees uncorrelated with risk to losing the ability to process payments altogether, nearly everyone in the adult industry is impacted by arbitrary and discriminatory practices in the financial services industry.

## BANKING

The most common manifestation of financial services discrimination is loss of basic banking services. 63% of those earning money in adult have lost a bank account or financial tool (Venmo, PayPal, CashApp) due to their source of income.

Not only does the loss of an account make it difficult to run a business or pay bills, it can have a domino effect. Loss of a banking or financial tool can make securing new accounts or keeping old ones more difficult. Those who have lost accounts are more likely to *keep* losing them, as well as other financial services.

***Half of adult businesses say that financial discrimination is the biggest issue they face***

# 63%

of those working in adult  
have lost a bank or financial  
tool due to their work

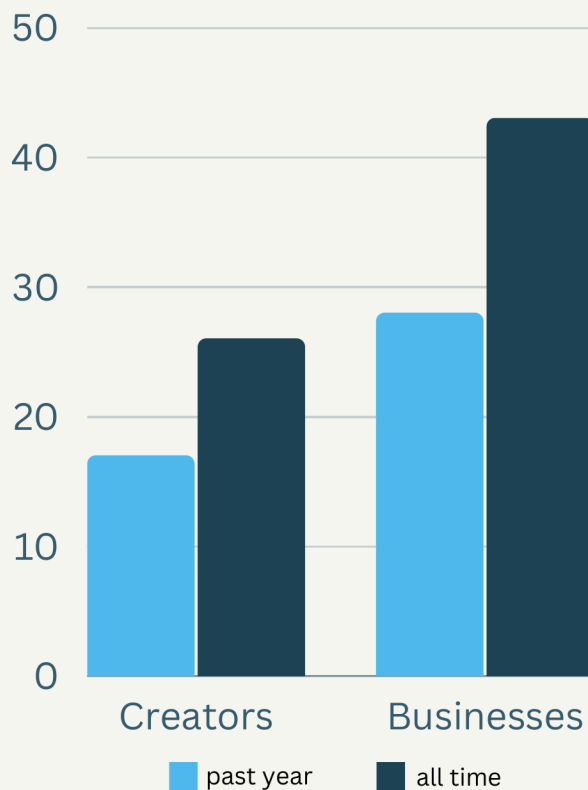


# BANKING AND PAYMENTS

In an online world, loss or denial of credit card processing is business-ending. Faced with higher scrutiny, adult businesses are meticulous about limiting chargebacks and staying within regulations. Despite our high-risk designation, we are not statistically high risk.

Credit card issues range from denial or loss of an individual card to denial or loss of processing on a platform. While issuing or acquiring banks can act as intermediaries, guidance by credit card networks make this a distinct form of financial discrimination within the adult industry.

**Credit card denial/loss as experienced by adult industry members**



36%

of adult businesses  
have lost a **bank account**  
in the past year

45%

of adult businesses  
have lost a **financial service**  
account in the past year

46%

of creator/performers  
have lost a **financial service**  
account in the past year

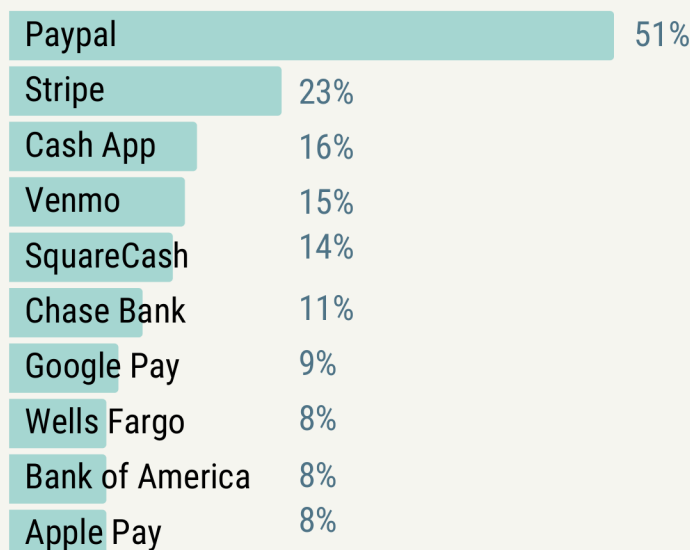
# ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Adult businesses are routinely prevented from accessing capital or business stabilizing tools like business insurance. In fact, given the high rates of denial, those in the adult industry often avoid applying for loans and insurance since a closer examination into the source of income can trigger account closures and other financial discrimination.

This is reflected in the data. 88% of those who have applied for a business loan, and 85% of those who have applied for insurance, have had a bank account closed or denied due to their involvement in the adult industry.

## CLOSED FOR BUSINESS

Accounts and Financial Tools, by  
Frequency of Loss by Respondents



# 50%

of those who have applied  
have been **denied a loan**  
due to their adult work

# 55%

of those who have applied  
have been **denied insurance**  
due to their adult work

# 39%

have **lost access to a  
credit network** due to  
their adult work

# THREATS AND DISCRIMINATION

**Financial discrimination does not happen in vacuum, but instead is part of a system of risks faced by those working in the adult industry. Loss of banking or poor credit can impact access to other essential services.**

## EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING

Adult industry workers, particularly for those in front of the camera, are also at high risk of experiencing other forms of discrimination.

Employment and housing discrimination can be triggered or exacerbated by many of the same factors inherent in financial discrimination – the lack of a traditional employer, an unexplained gap on an employment history, the name on a payment stub or stigma related to the work if disclosed.

Women are twice as likely as men to experience housing discrimination due to their adult work. Trans/non-binary people are three times more likely than cis. People of color are twice as likely to report housing discrimination within the past year.

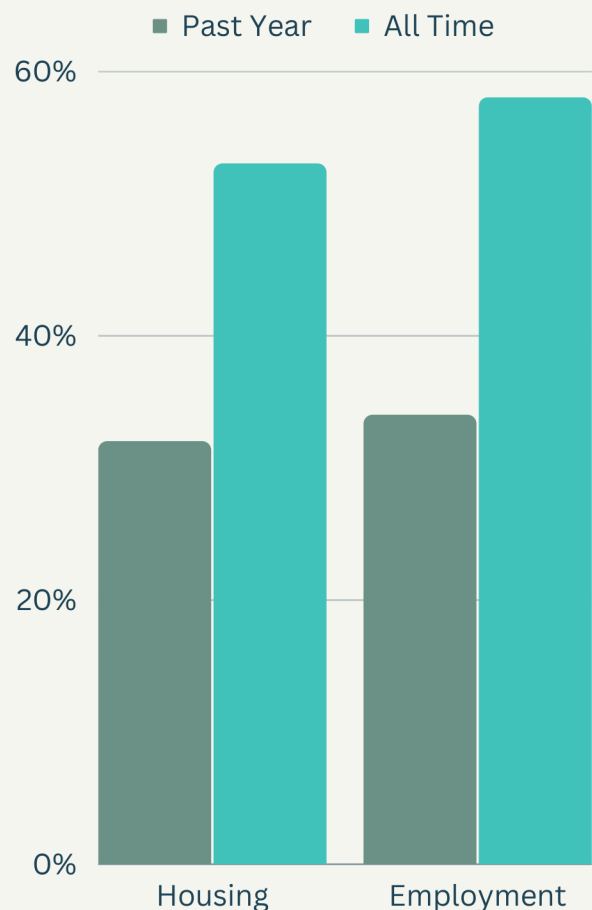


**3 in 5 performers  
have experienced  
employment  
discrimination\***



**2 in 3 performers  
have experienced  
housing  
discrimination\***

## Housing and employment discrimination\* against adult industry members



*\*Rates of discrimination among those who have applied for non-adult work or new housing since entering the industry*



# DOXXING AND HARASSMENT

Adult workers attempt to avoid debanking and other forms of discrimination by not fully disclosing their adult work. They may generically refer to themselves as actors or content creators, their businesses as tech platforms or media production.

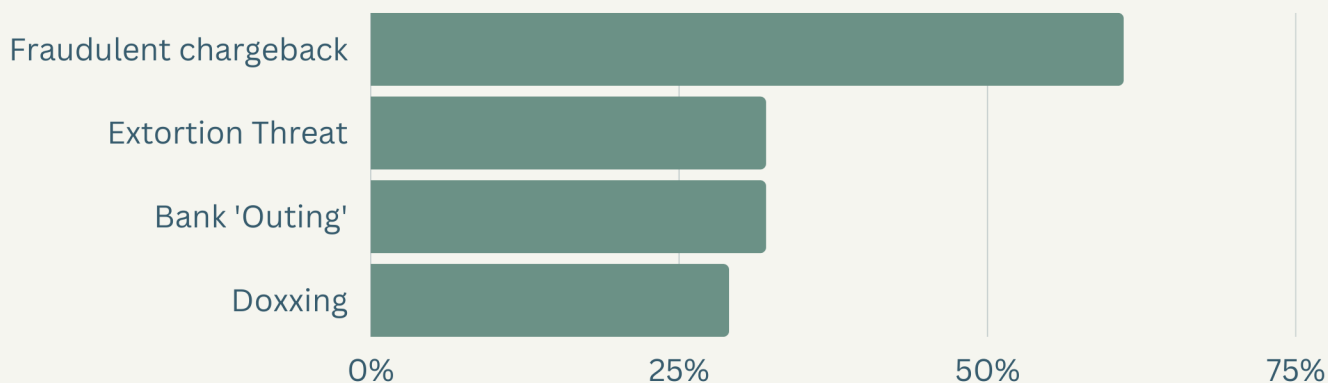
For performers and creators, this risk is even more acute. Legal names are zealously protected to guard against stalkers and stigma in courts, family or school. Doxxing – the release of one's legal name and or address – can result in debanking, loss of employment, housing or custody.

In their online work, creators fight to avoiding negative reports like chargebacks (the rejection of a charge by a consumer) which can result in high financial penalties for both the platform and creator.

*Banking vulnerability puts creators at risk for exploitation.*

*Stalkers, fans and other bad actors use legal name exposure, 'outing' to banks, and fraudulent chargebacks to pressure, threaten or extort adult workers.*

## Threats, harassment and privacy violations experienced by adult creators



# CONCLUSIONS

**Banking and financial discrimination is experienced broadly throughout the adult community. We hope the numbers in this report help highlight the lived experience of hundreds of thousands of adult workers.**

While this report shows the scope of such discrimination, it can not show the root causes. Banks and financial institutions are opaque, and rarely disclose why they've closed and account, denied a loan or discontinued insurance.

Our goal in compiling this data is to make the discrimination visible. We need the help of legislators, regulators, experts and advocates – and ultimately, the financial institutions themselves to bring an end to this discriminatory and damaging practice.

*Survey of over 600 members of the adult industry conducted between December 2022 and April 2023 by Free Speech Coalition in collaboration with SexWorkCEO and SWR Data. The global adult industry is vast, and the study may not reflect the experience of every facet of the industry, or every demographic within it. No reliable demographic baseline is available for our community. However, we expect that respondents for this survey are disproportionately likely to be English speaking, based in North America and more actively engaged in the established industry.*

## Further Information

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# FURTHER READING

[OnlyFans CEO Blames Porn Ban on Bank of New York, JP Morgan](#) (Business Insider)

[OnlyFans Creators Are Experiencing Payout Problems](#) (Buzzfeed News)

[Sex Workers Say Wells Fargo Is Shutting Their Accounts](#) (Rolling Stone)

[The Morality Police in Your Checking Account](#) (Electronic Frontier Foundation)

[PayPal, Square and Big Bankings War on The Sex Industry](#) (Engadget)

[Sex Workers Detail Financial Damages of MasterCard's Discrimination](#) (VICE)

[Inside the Secret, Almost Bizarre World That Decides What Porn You See](#) (Financial Times)

[Bitcoin is a Lifeline for Sex Workers](#) (CNBC)

## *Additional Studies*

Valerie Webber, [The Impact of Mastercard's Adult Content Policy on Adult Content Creators: Survey Results and Analysis](#) (Feb. 2022) (unpublished manuscript)

Zahra Stardust, Danielle Blunt, Gabriella Garcia, Lorelei Lee, Kate D'Adamo & Rachel Kuo, [High Risk Hustling: Payment Processors, Sexual Proxies, and Discrimination by Design](#), 26 CUNY L. Rev. 57 (2023).

Spencer Watson & Kate D'Adamo, [Shut Down and Shut Out: Access to Financial Services and Online Payments for Sex Workers in the US](#) (2021)

Bianca Beebe, ["Shut Up and Take My Money!": Revenue Chokepoints, Platform Governance, and Sex Workers' Financial Exclusion](#), International Journal of Gender, Sexuality and Law 140 (2022)