

Sex Work in Newark Panel

Dominique Rocker (DR): All right, hello. Welcome, everyone. Thank you for attending our panel on sex work in Newark, presented by the Queer Newark Oral History Project in collaboration with the Newark LGBTQ Community Center and the New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance and it's made possible with a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. My name is Dominique Rocker. I'm a graduate student at Rutgers in American Studies and I am a graduate researcher with the Queer Newark Oral History Project. So this event is going to be recorded and it's going to be up on our YouTube page as well as the social media that I manage, so you'll definitely be seeing me posting different snippets and things from this event. Again, we're very grateful to have you here, especially to our panelists, who will be offering a lot of their incredible and wonderful knowledge. So with that, I'll go ahead and turn it over to our moderators. Thank you. [applause]

Thayane Brêtas (TB): Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Thayane. I am a PhD candidate at Rutgers University Newark. I am in the program Global Urban Studies and I research sex work, social movements, and organizing. So I have the pleasure to be here co-moderating with Professor Whitney Strub. Do you want to present yourself, or?

Whitney Strub (WS): Oh, no, go ahead.

TB: Okay, so I will then present the people, this wonderful panel. So Janet Duran is a co-founder of the New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance, a community organizer, human rights activist, and author who has been directly affected by police violence. Her local community work focuses on Newark, New Jersey, where she has participated in campaigns with Newark communities for accountable policing to help establish the first civilian complaint review board. Janet has also contributed to national shadow reports on the human rights of U.S. sex workers presented during the Universal Periodical Review of the Human Rights Record of the United States by member states of the United Nations. N'jaila Rhee. N'jaila Rhee provides communications, marketing, graphic design and procurement services. Mrs. Reed has been instrumental in New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance's digital outreach efforts and is on the leadership committee. She has advocated for the human and labor rights of sex workers' rights since 2005. She's joining us remotely via Zoom and she's also a journalist, BBW adult web model, and PSO. She's formerly a exotic dancer as well. She has organized and hosted a number of webinars and events for New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance, including panels for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 Commission on the Status of Women in New York City. Aminah Washington is a 35-year-old trans woman of color born and raised here in Newark, New Jersey. She graduated from Malcolm X Shabazz High School, followed by attending Boston Legal. She obtained a bachelor's degree in business communication and started her career path in hospitality customer service restaurant management in 2007. A self-described open book, she welcomes the community—the

opportunity to chat. Angie Raine was born and raised in Newark after her parents moved up from the south. The last of six children, she attended Central High School and worked in various agencies in Newark doing HIV prevention and establishing transgender support groups. She continues to do transgender outreach work and volunteers at the Newark LGBTQ Community Center. Married to writer T.T. Wardell?

Angie Raine (AR): Wardell.

TB: Wardell, thank you, since—since 1998, she has published Newark's first transgender owned and edited magazine, La Raine, since 2006. Nyella Love is an Afro Latina woman of trans experience existing in America today. She was born in Youngstown, Ohio and raised in New Jersey, but her passion for social justice and advocacy led her to New York City. Nyella has served as a peer advocate and trans conversations facilitator at the Him New Jersey and as an—

Nyella Love (NL): HMI.

TB: HMI? HIM or HMI?

NL: HMI.

TB: HMI. And as an assistant program manager at the Ali Forney Center trans housing program. She has featured in a beauty campaign with Sephora for trans and non-binary people alongside Isis King. In 2019, she was a part of Broadly's Gender Spectrum Collection produced by Zackary Drucker and modeled by Payout Magazine. Evita “Lavitaloca” Sawyers is a queer polyamorous author, content creator, educator, influencer, speaker, and peer support guide. She's the subject of the polyamorous documentary "Poly Love," has appeared on several major podcasts including “Inner Hoe Uprising” and “Multiamory”, and has been featured in articles for Yahoo Life and Vice. She covers a variety of topics such as relationships, sex and sexuality, gender, and race. Aaron Frazier, the 40 years—40 years old long-term survival, a poet and writer, self-published two chapbooks, writer—write for La Raine Magazine and several other local and nationally. He has a BS from St Peters College in New—in Jersey City, urban studies public policies, and associate's in liberal art social science from Essex County College. Mother of the House of Divine of Greater Newark, a volunteer for the LGBTQ Center, and currently working for the Center at the library, so come down and play some drag queen bingo or come to some of our upcoming events downtown. A deacon of Unity Fellowship Newark Church, chair of the men's group, a member of hospitality volunteer of Bethlehem—Bethlehem Community Church every third Saturday of the month. Come on through if you can, either to help or get some food. Coordinator of Project Fire II of El Club Del—Del Barrio. Was also the co-founder of the Thread, a long-term survival group est. since 2009, which met at Newark Community Health Center, and was chair of the community planning group, subcommittee counseling and testing,

and consultant with the State Department of Health and Senior Services, a previous member of Hyacinth CAB and Community Promise Program, a Thrive Role Model story as well, a long-term nonprogressor study participant with the National Institute for Health. Community activist as well, and in the journey have learned to adapt, adjust, keep pushing forward even when all they want to do is lay down. It is easy to complain from the sideline and not get involved in the process but someone has to do it. Yeah, that's it, and after this long introduction, these people have a lot of experience so this is definitely going to be an amazing panel and thank you for being here. [Applause] I pass it down to Professor Whitney.

WS: Sure, yeah, thank you so much, everybody, for being here. I'm Whit Strub, I co-direct the Queer Newark Oral History Project at Rutgers Newark and that's part of what leads us to this panel, and so I think part of the imperative here or the impulse for this panel is to take sex work seriously, right, take it seriously historically and politically, which is very much in contrast to the dominant ways that I think our media narrates this topic through sensationalism or trafficking tropes or things like that. You know, we want to recognize sex work as work, as labor, and as part of LGBTQ history, and so maybe as an opening question because we've got such a rich kind of brain trust of people with different life experiences and different kinds of knowledge, maybe we could go around and have all of the panelists say a quick word, you know, however—however, you know, intimate and detailed as you like, you know, this is not a question to pry for sensationalism but just, you know, your own relationship to sex work and how you see it fitting into Newark's LGBTQ history in particular. You can—and you can read that more broadly, you know, if that's too specific of a question, but to get the ball rolling maybe everybody could speak to that. I don't know which order. It probably makes more sense to start on one end of the table and go around. I don't know.

NL: Well, I'll go.

WS: Oh, go for it.

NL: I have a question before I have the statement. What is the history—what do you think is the history of sex work? You said LGBT history. Why do you think that it's a history of sex work?

WS: Oh, you—you mean what's the relationship between the two topics?

NL: You said history so history meaning for the last—it's been, you know, before, like, you know, say, before Christ, or, you know, like—

WS: I'm thinking more recent than that. I guess, you know, of your own personal sense of the history of sex work in Newark and, you know, for instance, whether you've seen change over

time, you know, whether it's the internet or policing or public policy, your own experiences kind of broadly. Does that help kind of clarify? Just kind of broadly interpreted but your own experience.

NL: So your own work experience with sex work.

WS: Yeah.

NL: So, you know, it's different things of different sex work. You know, sometimes people—sometimes people choose to go into sex work and then sometimes sex work comes to a person. You know, in my case, I started doing sex work when I was 17 when I became homeless and, you know, it came to me. I remember the first time me not going—being able to go somewhere or have money, my first thing was—I remember there was a sex shop down the street from where I lived and when I first was homeless, that was the first thing that popped into my mind to go there and it was festival. It was—people was there to—willing to spend money and, you know, it wasn't, you know, for me, if I was—if it was more other things that was acceptable to me as a trans woman, I would have went that route, but at the time it wasn't, you know, so for me, sex work is a survival thing, you know, it's to survive it's to put a shirt on your back, to eat, to live, and to just keep going. That was my experience.

N'jaila Rhee (NR): Can I jump in?

WS: Yeah, please.

NR: So for me, my history, my personal history with sex work is, funny enough, very linked to Newark because I was a freshman at Rutgers Newark in 2005 and that is kind of when I was first introduced to, I guess, like, the realities of sex work and for me, it was—I used to work at the bookstore that was on Bleeker Street and I just—I did—it wasn't enough to survive on and I wasn't in a place where, you know, working at the newspaper and working at the school bookstore was going to cover my tuition and my parents were in a tight spot and it was, you know, I wasn't going to give up on school so I was, like, I guess this is what I'm doing and it just seemed—it was a complicated thing to do because, you know, I'm a fat black woman and at the time, even though I was—I was young and I think everybody feels like they're just the hottest when you're in college, but it—it was empowering for me to be in Newark because it was one of the first times that I was in a space where I was not the minority and not treated like a minority so it felt a lot more empowering than when I was doing sex work and I felt like I was just the other, like, being the exotic other for people of a much higher economic status than you. It's not always as empowering as people would like you to believe but I felt at least because Newark is in this very interesting place where there's just so many intersecting communities, whether you

have all the immigrant peoples that are here, you have all the students because there's so many, you know, universities and you also have, you know, it's one of the—the biggest places where people enter the country, whether that's for business or personal, but Newark kind of felt like a microcosm for America, so I felt like I got a very good introduction to how sex work interacts with so many different parts of American society which is why when I do work advocating for sex workers' rights I'm so emboldened to say, like, I'm just fighting for human rights, like, first and foremost because there's so many different types of people that choose or have found sex work and that is sustaining them and it's valid for them to do so—which, you know, I'm—grew up in Bergen County and it was a little sheltered so when I came to college, it was—well, to put it lightly, an education.

Aminah Washington (WS): So yeah, picking back off of this young lady is, and more directly to your question, in reference to the history, I'm 35 but previous to me, I've had women of trans experience and even some family members that this was their mode of survival. It's sort of like a job. Not gonna like every job, but you're going to find what works for you and that's what's going to carry you through, whether it be survival, whether it be, you know, maybe this just worked for you, maybe it's something that's fun, maybe it is the aspect of, you know, you having control. In my case, I have seen it as I was coming up from women of trans experience prior, but when I learnt that there was a whole block in north New Jersey dedicated to prostitution, it was like, shit, they're making money and all they doing is walking around, still living their lives, whatever the purpose was, okay, it became like, I would like to know a little more about this. But then it became a, like, once you get that first, you know, that first coin it's kind of like, oh shit, and you doing little to nothing so then in your head it's like, okay, you're not hurting anyone but at the same time,, you're not really giving yourself your full potential. So then it becomes a battle within yourself and then some people just get work in it. I'm in restaurant management but I guarantee you the way my mind's set up now based on what I had to live through and, you know, from the first dick I sucked to the first ad I posted, is I'm not going to entertain nobody that's not going to give me what I need and if sex work is just not money. It could be as simple as, like, how these—these vixens do it and they're getting houses and cars. You want what you want, I need what I need, and if we're meeting in the middle, everybody—everybody got to be happy someday. So I just graduated high school. My dad just been killed. I was walking from Penn Station minding my business and going to my—I had a house on Murray Street and this guy just kept circling and circling and circling and circling and I'm like, either he's going to rob me, he's going to rape me, but nonetheless this is some weird shit. When he pulled up and flashed the money and then was like, this is what I need, and then it was so quick, I was hooked since.

Janet Duran (JD): How to follow that? My history goes back a little further. Newark—let me see. I'm originally born in Paterson, raised for a few years .

AW: Girl, Paterson got the best shrooms.

JD: Yeah. And then my mom decided to go to Elmwood Park, which is, you know, East Paterson, the old, old people.

AW: That's where the point is really at, where that is.

JD: Yeah, so, thank you. It was just, you know, different leaving from Paterson to a predominantly white area. Things were different. I guess just, you know, I didn't realize I was doing sex work as a teenager. Every time I got kicked out and I'm sleeping with dudes for a place to sleep, you know, like, just to have a roof over my head, and then it just, you know, from there you just kind of get on a path of the fast and easy path.

NL: Keep coming back.

JD: Yeah. I mean, you gotta leave—you gotta live somewhere every time you're kicked out the house.

AW: Yeah, but see, that was what worked for you.

JD: Yeah. I mean, it had to, you know, I wasn't going to be on the street and it—it presented itself and then we look back now, we're like, yeah, that's why they're always looking for young girls that are from the streets. I mean, I still finished high school. I went to Montclair, did sex work through Montclair to get out of an abusive relationship, and just started working in Newark some—actually, the dancing kind of came to me but I'm really not—I'm kind of tone deaf, no rhythm. But I was like a day girl because, you know, the day girls get away with, you know, not really doing shit. But I mean, I used to—I used to work the parties way back when on, you know, South Orange and, what was it, 16th or something or—

AW: Yeah, I used to—

JD: South 16th and Orange.

AW: Parties and shit.

JD: Yeah, there used to be a bunch of locked doors.

AW: And patrols out here. Yes.

JD: There used to be the locked doors there and then we used to move over to the cop owned after hours on Halsey and Branford.

AW: You remember the one upstairs by the tattoo shop?

JD: There was one that was somewhere that we saw a lot of medical beds, so it's easy to do our thing. I was usually one of the only Spanish girls that actually went and when I'd ask other girls, like, oh girl, you going there? I'm like, yeah, I'm like, they asked, like, I just went. I mean, it wasn't really anything to me, like, I just didn't—I don't know. I'm from Paterson. I mean, it wasn't really—I wasn't really raised or taught about the—how Hispanics and Blacks don't always get along until I started dating and then, you know, then everybody true colors come out. Before then "it's people are all people, it doesn't matter what color they are, purple or yellow or green, we're all people" until you start dating. But yeah, I mean, I just continued sex work because when I graduated, I graduated in '01 the buildings fell, boom, then you have to compete with people, like, competing with the people that lost their jobs and have way more experience, so I just said, there's no way I'm going to go to starting salary of like 30, 40 grand from what I was making, and I was graduated with a second kid in tow. But then I just left. I went to North Carolina and checked out the scene there in sex work, worked for some madams and stuff but I mean, it's still here. I came back up to Newark. I've been here for a while. I've discovered how a lot of the bars throughout the area still have their little—after they shut down, they will still have people tricking and then pretend like nothing's happening. I lived next door to one for a while. Let me see the bars in the Ironbound, same shit. I bartended them and the guys used to come in all the time, like, talking to the bartenders and the—like, I don't understand. One bar used to have 20 [unclear]. Like, you have 20 women just hanging around waiting to dance and drink with guys and they get paid for every drink, like, the guy buys them and dance and I'm like, okay, but I just bartended because again, I can't dance. But I mean, it worked for me. But they all used to come in and I used to hear them talking about the afterwards, the afterwards. I said, so that's how they do it here. And mind you, these were bars in Newark that all had cops manning the door, so I don't think the element of law enforcement not, you know, totally being involved because they look the other way to people they approve of doing sex work or people they can exploit and take advantage of doing sex work. That's when they let them because when our mayor was doing his things—I have to refrain from, you know, anyway, we publicly attacked how they did their things on specific communities, only looking, you know, and it's like, why are you shaming them, putting their info up?

AW: With that, that's what it is more of like where—how the police or law or politics is not more so—they're more quick to shame the trans community or LGBTQ—

JD: That's exactly—exactly.

AW: Because it's a lot—then, nobody was really educated. It was no conversations like this openly. It was, you know, lesbian young women getting killed so it kind of was like, anything in

that spectrum, fuck y'all and we not really, like, too keen on how y'all survive if this is a survival, you know, just out of sight out of mind, but if it's cops at the forefront, they want to criticize it because they're not educated. So in reference to that, it's like, she got a point with some cops in front of other, she—but then you got some cops, they just don't know. They're the client to the sex workers.

JD: They are—some are sex workers are cops.

NL: And the cop probably dates you.

JD: Yes. I used to do dates with cops, like, on their break, like, and not even always on their break. They just have the radio, give me 10 minutes, you know, and it's like, it's—no, I mean—

NR: I did dates for cops while I was in the dorm and they knew I was a student, but it was just like, don't say anything and when a guy, you know, takes his gun off his holster and—and puts it on the table, you know, you just do it. You're not going to question or do anything about it. But yeah, cops, super complacent until they're not or until you say no.

JD: Yeah, until you report them and other fucked up shit they do, like when they're trying to flip you to rat out and then you say, well, why don't you fix the problems within your own policing community? Then they're just—yeah. It gets worse. But it's about calling them out on their hypocrisy. I mean, Newark's pretty bad though. I mean, he's—I mean, no it's—I mean, I literally got chased out of here a couple years ago. Like, we always got alerts on all the prostitution stings and a lot of them were against the trans community, always racist, think about that, and there was a few—and I noticed some either older women are undocumented and then a couple of men thrown in there and then, you know,, you have to start paying attention. Thank God we got those alerts because then we're aware of who they're going to be trying to flip to set you up.

NL: I could say that I watched, like, three girls get arrested in front of my face and the cop told me to go. Go and—right here in Newark. And I'm like, ugh, you know, and—and they was—they was—was Black girls and, you know, like you said, it was—it—is a skin. It is a thing that they—they approve of you or, you know, you look good or you look like this and you're not like that and, you know, type of things and yeah.

JD: Yeah, it's the same thing with violence against us. I mean, if we're not deemed worthy victims, like, I don't know how many times I've been assaulted, how many times I've had broken bones, and they just sweep it under the rug. You can get raped, sodomized, just sweep it under the rug. They're just whores. We're not—no human involved. Like, we don't count. It's like, okay, yeah.

AW: But even still when you take away the whore or the prostitution, as LGBT, they—that is just, like, not really—up until a few years ago they have gotten better. So the spectrum—the history is like, now that it's like thrown in their face and that—then we're making them to understand us, it's so—you got some that are more receptive and more understanding because they want to and take the knowledge, but then you got those who just are so narrow-minded, they're just like, oh no, gay this, gay that, LGBT this, trans this, tranny that, and then it's like a—it becomes a level of disrespect. So yeah. History has changed but not as much as you should in Newark with it being so front and center, especially now we got so many centers, so many agencies, some laws in place, things of that scene, you know, yeah, like, there's some things in order where people are really actually taking the transition serious, now it's becoming more of like, okay, you got some that doing it because, you know, they are educated to do it, but then you got those that are just still stuck in their ways. So we ain't come as far as we possibly could or should have in Newark when it comes to the politics and the respect and understanding thereof when it comes to prostitution and being survival. Like Nyella expressed, I've seen a girl who make her money, get beat, and robbed, and they take her to jail because she was prostituting. What about her injuries? What about what she just went through as a [unclear] type shade?

WS: Moderator, I want to call on Aaron because I know he had a hand up and then we can get this side of the table in too, but.

Aaron Frazier (AF): I'm gonna go from historically. What they know as the stroll now with West Kenny and Mulberry and all that little crap down there, well, you are right in front of what used to be the stroll. The women was down by the Broad Street Station, butch queens was over here.

AW: They still are.

AF: No, not anymore.

AW: They are.

AF: Allow me to finish. You know, over here because of the college and also because several of the—the white johns that used to come around, you know, they would try to—the white johns got into the habit of trying to beat the Black tricks so when they got turned down and they saw running to the Rutgers police and Newark police that—so they started shutting it down for people who was tricking down here. So—and the trans girls used to be across the street going around what you call—100 and the new Verizon building. Well, I used to work over there back in the day, honey, so I would come out on my lunch break, take my lunch, cruise through the bar, have me at least two dates, go back into work and pay no mind, but you could always come out any time of the day. You would always see somebody carrying on in the alleyway of the church

going to the back or any way along that little strip there or in back of that little parking lot there. My reason for saying change—a lot of it has changed. Transitions from there to West Kenny Street. But the girls was really more safe down at West Kenny Street. I used to go down there with my girlfriend Miss Pucci, Pucci. We would stop at the music room. I always had to get me a 40 to walk to the stroll with her and then I go, you know, go on about my way when she, you know, I get her to where her spot was and I do my thing. But I never really had a lot of the problems that the girls that I—I think I maybe I did two tricks, one whereas I had already did the deed and was getting out the car, the hoodlum put the damn knife to my throat so I said okay, he just want his money back, so I gave back his money but I said, he's so lucky that I paid it. The next one was, one of my friends had just taught me how to check somebody with a gun, and I was like, really, and I had just happened to do that and, oh my God, honey, how am I getting out of here? After that, I was so glad for Acting 101. I had to really put on a show and tears and everything, but I could have lost my life then when the guy put the gun to my head. But after that I said, oh no, I'm not built for this tricking shit on the street so I started just picking and choosing, calling different ones, you know, that I knew I could get guaranteed whatever, and that's how I did. I moved away from just being out there on a corner because that's where I saw a lot of the danger. Then you had a lot of people down at—here at Washington Park. I don't care who you were, but if you were more popular and you come out there, you—less than five minutes, you done turn three—three cars, people was setting them up and, you know, they—those kinds of people was getting hurt. That I didn't like. And then some of ones who you thought were your friends, no, if you didn't come up with them and you ain't really judies, like, me and Angie go way back to high school, yeah, you was set up and you were gotten. So I didn't play that. I just traveled. Whatever I—whatever I did out there, I was alone but I always was in a phone call of a tribe that'll come down here and set it off.

NL: Do y'all remember the movie theater that was up here? The sex movie theater?

AF: Which one? Oh, you talking about the Cameo or the Little?

NL: The what?

AF: The Cameo and the Little?

NL: The one that was right—

AW: The Little's still there. It was the Cameo.

AF: Right, the one where the boy, the child got—

NR: The one by Military Park?

NL: No, this one right here on—

AF: It—it was Orange Street—well, really, right around Orange Street and Broad. The boy got—the last—one of the reasons that it got shut down, the boy's ex-lover, whatever, came in and he got stabbed inside.

NL: Right over here? Right in the middle of—

AF: Yeah. So that's when they shut that down, you know, and I had girlfriends that would be in there. Just—

NL: You used to sit in that seat and the next person comes to you and like, you want to do this?

AF: Right in the lobby, just, while everybody else is running around turning dates and this.

NL: I was 16 years old when I was in there.

AF: That was the Cameo.

AW: Aaron's got a point. It's changed but not—not like a major change when it comes to the sex work or, like, however anybody want to label it. But the locations had changed and the—the dynamic of—the demand of what these tricks is wanting has changed, so now that adds a different dynamic when it comes to, like, okay the—the stature or the demographic of what the—the client or the trick is looking for or vice versa. I'm—I'm not a girl that's going to date off the internet any Black boys. It's not going work for me but if I'm in the street, I'm playing with the Black boys all day.

NL [overlapping]: Why are some people so afraid of Black men?

AF [overlapping]: I never understood—say that again?

NL: Why are—why are—why people are afraid of dating Black men?

AF: Well, sometimes, but—one of the—for me—

NL: See, for me, I feel safer with Black men.

AF: Anissa was real. Now, Anissa was so real, but they set her ass up. She went to the hotel. She—one boy—she—once she got in there, all these boys end up coming out of the damn closet

to jump her and I'm like, really, but, you know, it was like, we heard this after the fact. Now if this was, like, she mentioned beforehand, we with her, no, she—they wouldn't have got that off. Because one of the things that we did back then, Pucci, all the—I don't give a damn where you was from in Newark, if you was a friend and we all, you know, I could be two blocks, somebody—nobody gonna fuck with Angie while, you know, I'm rolling around and there was time to—I didn't let everybody know I had a car and I was riding around up on people, you know, and that's how I was rolling, so it's like, no—

AW: No, we don't—they don't have a buddy system.

JD: Yeah.

NL: Yeah.

AF: Yeah. Well, that—

JD: I don't trick by myself.

AW: So that is a part of the evolution too cause they had the buddy system. I can't see for having that many bitches around me, girl. I'm here for my coin. I see you when I see you.

JD: Yeah.

AQ: You know, if I'm out, I'm here for a purpose. So what we doing? Like, okay, I ain't—and I'm not, oh, I'm here just to see what the night is giving. No, normally you got a quota and you want to make your money.

NR: I think the biggest change that I saw, like, you know, in 2005, I'm a college girl so I was way more comfortable in online spaces. Like, I have never done, like, street-based work. Like, bars, yeah, but never, like, on a stroll. But what I noticed when I was doing online work, like, I—I had a neat system. So I had three different price points depending on three different websites. So Craigslist was usually the lowest price point but, like, the faster booking, and then it was City Guy that was, like, the midpoint because, well, City Guy, BigDog.Net, those kind of things were, like, mid price point, and then there was like Eros.Com and the TR, The Erotic Review, those were, like, this—the highest price point that you could go to. So, you know, it's always funny to me when I see people, like, disparage sex workers based on how much they charge. I'm like, we're all charging different things. It's how you find us because, you know, the average user for The Erotic Review, you know, has been in what they call the hobby for a longer time and, you know, they—there's sections for, you know, actresses and adult actresses and, like—

AW: And this shit.

NR: Celebrities down on their luck, but the point where you brought up about feeling safer with Black men,, that is definitely how I felt, but I realized when I was an online worker especially at, like, the higher price point, it was pretty much predominantly white men despite the fact that because I did feel a lot safer with, like, men of color, I specifically put on my ads, like, I only see men of color, like, I'm sorry, I'm not accepting dates from white gentleman at this time. And I went from—my website had about, like, maybe 25, 50 hits a day. After I said oh,, I'm only seeing men of color, I was getting, like, thousands of hits because all the white hobbyists were sharing it and they had this, like, weird bidding war, like, trying to get me to see them and like, those were the worst, most terrifying motherfuckers I've ever had to deal with in my life, so much so that, like, I—that was the first time I was like, well, I'm not doing full service. I can't. I'm not built for this .I'll go back to dancing. And I started doing like cam and PSO work because I'm like, if I'm going to be forced to interact with these mostly white clientele, I do not want to be in the same room with them because it is scary and it's not like I'm saying like, there's something inherently wrong with white men, I just think because these guys—

NL [overlapping]: There is something.

NR: who have the power, they—and they also know that I, you know, a lot of them were booking me because I'm, like, half Asian, so they were looking for somebody submissive and in their mind it—it was just, I want somebody abusable, so it—it was just not a great experience and the racial dynamic in sex work just because we're in this white supremacist country, if you are a sex worker of color and your clients are white, you will be at, like, the fulcrum of full, like, white supremacy, like, and it—it will take a toll on you. Least, it took a toll on me.

AW: I can see what you saying in that spectrum because—and then in reference to history too, it's really about what you present. Because for me, I didn't have the same experience with white men that these young ladies may have had, but I know the first time I've ever felt like my life was burning was by a Black man and you cannot imagine what it feels like to be in that state of mind in your own house. That's not a cool feeling. So naturally it puts in your head, like, a guard that hey, you know if you don't entertain this time—this time, you won't have to engage or have to—that happen to you again or the possibility, whereas with the white man I was—they live by, once you go Black, you never go back, so it was like, they gave me my coin and that's my objective. I ain't—I'm not here to fall in love, you know, cute or not, I need my money, and if you're coming here, you better have my money, so. So that is a part of history too because now some girls is only dating Black boys because of their dick size or because "oh he's cute" whereas it was for prostitution, from what I understand and what I even still to this day—

NL: There's no size, no color.

AW: Yeah, but I need my money and that's just—it is, like, even—even in a relationship, I was explaining this to my cousin yesterday, like, bitch, I prostitute my relationship too because my man's gonna give me what I need, what I want. It's not, no, oh, we just doing this and this is a one sided thing. Sex work is a universal thing. It's all in how you present it. It's all in what you receive. It's all in what you put out. Cause why do men cheat? Because they're not getting what they whatever at home. So if you're giving them everything you need, they need, they're going to give you what you need. That's the form of sex work.

WS: Can I use my moderator privilege to cut back in cause we didn't—we didn't—wait, just to go back to the original questions and hear from everybody. Angie, I don't know if you want to talk.

AR: Well, yeah, i've been listening to y'all because I think I'm, like, one of the oldest on the panel so I got history.

AF: Absolutely.

AR: It's okay. I'm still alive, still here. Thank you. No, sex work in Newark has—is history with me because I transitioned just as they were trying to outlaw male in female clothes. Me and Tracy Africa, we was right there. And there was Cameo, the Little, and the Oremount Theater. Y'all probably never heard of that one. The Oremount Theater was on Orange Street, and as Aaron said, the guys was down here, the girls was at the other end, and for me, you know, when I transitioned, I worked at a club and, like, when the club closed and I had been there for a while, I started wanting to hang out with the girls at the club, and they would go down on stroll and they would just be like, you stay here and, you know, I'm sitting back and watching everything on go on because it was amazing for me and back then, it was kind of crazy because they made their money, then, like, I would hang out with them and, you know, drink, get high, and after I lost my job and I was still hanging out with them, seeing them, I started getting high on something else, opposite of what they were doing, so for a few years, not a lot, but for a few years, I was out there and a lot of what these girls is saying did go on. The robberies and not be involved with certain color of men, the demographics of, the economy of each man, you know, I've seen all that. So for me, my experience was being out there because of my drug use but once I got tired of the drugs, I got tired of the streets. So after that, like, even during that period or before that period, I was always in committed relationships, so after all that ended, I went back to just being in committed relationships and that kind of led me to where I'm at these days because at that period of time, Aaron and a couple of people, William Bell, Bernie, you know, they incorporated me into working for Project Fire, which actually pushed me to work, work, work, work, work. I

didn't have to do the streets. I still knew men and they still was breathing up my ass but, you know, I felt that I didn't want to do that. I was good at it, but I didn't want to do it.

NL: Okay.

AR: Okay, I didn't want to do it because I felt that there was a better life for me, which, it—it turned out to be true. You know, got married, started my own magazine in shit ass job right now but it works for me, you know. Guys that try to talk to me, you know, I kind of stop them in their tracks, you know, it has nothing so much to do with it being about sex work, it's just that at this point, my mind is so committed to doing other things that the first thing that guy says to me, oh well, you know, you look high maintenance and I, you know, I kind of shrug it off and then they keep persisting so I have to just tell them, I am not a gold digger. And they're like, oh well, you look—I'm like, looks can be deceiving. I'm not a gold digger. I'm a diamond miner. That settles that real quick, you know, and going back to the history, Newark's history for transgender and male sex workers was steadily dangerous back then also. It's been a whole lot of girls that died in Newark behind being on the street. There's been guys that they don't document about that have been killed being sex workers, you know, and I'm not going to tell my age, but, you know, in the past few decades, almost everybody I know is dead. I was around for the disco era and everybody I know from back then, with the exception of Christine Hamlet and maybe one more person, they're gone, you know, and—

NL: You think because they stayed on the streets?

AR: Oh, quite a few of them left that way.

NL: Yeah.

AR: Yeah. You know, they did Paris Is Burning where they found the baby in the closet? Well, she was under the mattress. In Pose, they put her in the closet. But—

NL: The baby? The baby? There was a baby?

AR: No, no.

NL: In Paris Is Burning? For real?

AR: No. You know what I'm saying.

AW: But what she's saying is a baby like, like in comparison, like—

AR: Yeah, she is a young girl.

AW: Yeah, a young girl that—

NL: Oh, yeah. Right.

AW: But let see you pulled an amazing—what's name, because just—this is 22. Just in 19, right before all the shit hit the fan, I was working at AAOGC. I'm not gonna get too in deep in it but I have to talk about this because this—this is history, like, she experienced all—losing all of her friends this way and it was survival and the trans and male LGBT gay male had—you know, we had to do what we had to do and then here I am almost 20 years later, and one of my nieces, she was traveling, you know, prostituting as a means of what's the name, and got killed in Philadelphia. And it's like, that part of history is still right here, no matter from—

Angie: Here. It stems from here.

AW: Every year, trans are getting killed and 90% of it, if not all of it, is based off sex work and/or someone not having no—no` respect for them just trying to make a living.

AF: Yeah.

AR: And years ago, right in Military Park, there was a trans woman that I knew. She got beat to death with a hammer. That's the point I was getting to. But these things will not be documented because.

AW: Part of history is still consistent. It's just right now they—they—they really, really got great at hiding shit and—and kind of just, like—

AR: Sweeping it under the rug.

JD: Exactly. Everything gets swept under the rug.

AW: That has that has yet to change over time.

AR: That's going to take—

NL: I personally don't think that would never change because they don't want that to be awareness. That is not something that they want to—want people to know that they allow people to kill these people or brutalize these people and—and their government and their state and their city, nothing. And not doing nothing about it right. Right, and not—and not and not knowing that

they don't care because it's not their kid, it's not their person, it's not bringing money to them, it's not making awareness of what they do to—to make it seem like that they care.

AW: But you got some that be bandwagoning it, i.e., my granddaughter Barton, she—when she was attacked as a LGBT young lady, trans, at East High School, it took for me to call Channel 12 news for the mayor whose office was like across the street to want to get involved and want to put more police out on the street right downtown and it's like, this young lady was going to school and the boy was in her face and now we're pretty much seeing, you can't get an education and be and live your life how you decided to live your life because you're going to have to fear for your life. No one's going to respect that.

AF: Also, some of the—I'm just going to do the I statement. Some of the girls and some of the queens that, you know, that has been killed over the years from my era and Angie's, a lot of them, they dealt with people who didn't want to be outed. They dealt with people—

AR: On the DL.

AF: Who didn't want their business out there and because of how they talked or whatever, you know, they get loud or read them. I found out about several people, young men, nice little queen dealt with somebody and just with the wrong person and in the midst of them carrying on, they threw him off the roof. Miss, one of my other friends, Miss Tiffany was a sweetheart. They did her in and I'm like what the fuck did she do? She didn't do nothing, but because of who she was, and that happened to quite a few of at least my girlfriends who are no longer here today. So it's like, you have to be mindful, yeah, the date or the trick looks good. Yes, the piece may be good, but sometimes it's not even worth.

NL: A lot of the time.

JD: A lot of money is not good money.

NL: And—and, you know, sometimes people do not know the—people do not know the best way to, like, me, I—I have a feeling in my gut, in my stomach, in my soul who I should date or what should I do with this person, because you have to be aware of that. You have to be aware of these certain people because they're out to get us. They're out to—they're out to do so much things, to give us the diseases, to—to kill us, to make us feel—feel less than, and fair, you know, I have a couple dates who asked me if I ever was sexually assaulted when I was young or, you know, that—those things that brings light or—or feeling good to them that—that tears us down, you know, like that—that's a quick, like, you gotta go, like, you gotta get out, or how was—how was—how old were you when you first got touched and those are things that turn them on. I had a date who±who asked me to meet him outside one day and we're driving around and he was

like, can you find me a 12 year old girl? When—let me—I promise you, while he was driving, I smacked the shit out of him, like, a couple of times because number one, that—that could be my sister. That could be my niece. That could be anybody's child and you're out here looking for, like, looking for things like that and you think that I'm going to lead you to that direction? You think I'm going to lead you there?

WS: If we could just—do you want to jump in? I wanted to make sure you got the mic.

Evita Sawyers (ES): I was just really listening to everybody else's story, so. Also—so I don't really have a whole lot of understanding of sex work industry in Newark specifically. I mean, I grew up in New Jersey, but Jersey City, and then I lived in California for 20 years and I just moved back a year ago and I've engaged in sex work personally but very nominally and it was certainly not anything that—to the extent that some of these other people here have engaged in. But I have a variety of experience with sex work because I have a variety of— since I—the work that I do is sex education. I talk about relationships, sex, things of that nature, and so because of that, I have a lot of different people that I'm connected to that are in a variety of kinds of sex work, from cam girls to full service to dancers to sex parties to sex therapists to call girls to all kinds of stuff, and so because of that, have a lot of, like, snapshots of, like, what sex work looks like, the types of people that are involved in it, who, you know, the sex worker, why they do it, what they do it for, from, you know, people—I have friends that have been trafficked before, you know, I have people that are very empowered in how they interact with it, and so it's a very broad, broad, broad, broad topic and no one person's experience with sex work is the same. No person's motivation for sex work is the same. No one's feelings about it is going to be the same and sex work advocacy is something that's very near and dear to my heart, number one, because as a person who does educate around sex education, I understand how important everybody having self-actualized sex lives is and having autonomy over how they engage in sex and with whom and in what ways. And then also based on a lot of the things that the people here have highlighted, not having these nuanced conversations about sex work and decriminalizing it and—and making it so that sex workers can be dignified in this work, it's very, very unsafe. And—and so I'm like, how are we having these conversations so that we can begin to, you know, make sure that the people that are engaging in sex work are—are safe, you know, that they're—they're able to—to engage in it in the ways that they want to, that they're able to consent to how they interact in sex work, that they can leave when they want to? Like, you know, and so that's kind of why I'm here, and like I said, my experience with sex work is much more broad and kind of like I said global, you know, in that I—I have a lot of, like, exposure to a lot of different varieties of sex work in a lot of different places and like what different people go through as they engage in that work and I think, you know, part of this conversation is around the stigma that we have for people that engage in this kind of work and, you know, what kinds of people that they are, like how they were saying, you know, you know, when people get brutalized or they get murdered or they get assaulted, usually the response from not only the police but also the

community is, well, that's what they deserved. That's what they deserved, you know, because, you know, you know, they're lower than human or they're less than human or they're not, you know, reputable people because they're engaging in this kind of work. Even if someone is a patron of that kind of work, they will still hold that—that mindset on the surface, you know, or you know, that they'll have that facade. And so, you know, the stigma around sex work really, really needs to come down because even if you were to, say, decriminalize it, you still haven't changed the hearts and minds of the people and the hearts and minds of people are the ones that enforce the laws. So—so I think it's, you know, there's a broader conversation around, you know, needing to destigmatize the people that engage in sex work, humanize them, you know, it's—it's not, you know, you're not a bad person for engaging in it. Everybody to some extent interacts in sex. Sex is a human need. And so people choosing to sell it for money is no more or less moral than someone who's having sex with somebody because they bought them dinner, you know, so. And so I think that, you know, these conversations need to happen so that way, you know, we can have, you know, people can be safer and as they're engaging in this because, you know, there's nothing wrong with—it's a service to me, no more than a massage or anything like that, and so, you know, people should have the right to—to do these things safely, workers specifically but also clients as well too, so yeah.

AW: She got such a great point because, in Vegas, it's a whole bar, 24 hours, and the police will make sure you're okay and everything. And it's prostitution. They could watch you. They get—you get in a date car and they won't bother you but that—that, like she said, it's about the law enforcers and the politics, like, here in Newark, we're getting there, not fast enough, but it's not no feat open that's like hey, a real life active fight on the commission and the mayor's office for LGBTQIA personnel to sit there and really be able to say, hey, this is a direction that we should be engaging to inform, you know, the policers or—or even the first responders. My—one of my brothers, he had gotten into a situation and he was bleeding bad so the EMTs came. The—the lady was—she was, like, active and agile and trying to help him and the guy, the third guy said to the other guy, oh, this the gay party. Don't you know, the other guy was kind of like, standoffish? That's the stigmatism she's talking about. See, it's so much more broader to LGBTQIA and trans that they just are not educated on and don't really care because they don't give us the opportunity to hold these positions, to be like, hey, this is what you really need to know based off what others are trying to paint the picture of putting your head. So politics wise, Newark is lacking so much.

AF: I want—one of the things that I observed in my journey as a individual, a lot of our community, and specifically men. are emotionally detached. They're not really putting themselves on the receiving end of some of their actions, the behavior, until it is actually—until they are actually confronted, whereas it's like, it's something personal. It's their child. It's somebody that they care about, someone that they actually have feelings for. Then it becomes a problem, and they don't know really how to either nourish it, work with it, share it, when it

comes to relationships, and I'm speaking from experience when—because most of the men that I was dealing with early on were married men and still had problems dealing with me as a person. And I'm not trying to be a lover. We're just intimate, but even though I'm not trying to get no feelings, yeah I might develop some feelings, but what end up happening, they don't know how to really deal with it and they're developing feelings and they become, what you call it, when they—when—when they—they're controlling

NL: Okay.

AF: When they become controlling. That part, that's the issue with them, and because they don't know how to control the emotion, they emotionally detached, they don't know how to—

JD: They don't know how to navigate their feelings.

AF: Right.

NL: About their feelings.

AF: But that's also why and how a lot of our counter sisters and brothers are being hurt. They got involved with somebody and they may want to just leave, and because they want to leave, they get the—the short end of the stick because he didn't know how to deal with it or let go or deal with the rejection of the lead.

ES: And I think that also has to do with the fact that it is illegal, so, and that kind of comes with commodifying intimacy for the highest dolla, is you do see that person as an object. You see that person as an employee of sorts and we live in a society where the customer is king, you know, so—and so if you're giving someone money for an experience, we don't tend to look at that person as being able to say, you know, have boundaries or to be able to say, you know, I don't want to do this with you anymore because I don't like the way you're treating me. And then when you have the stigma of seeing a sex worker as someone who is less than, someone who is not—who should not have the ability to say no or to say, you know, don't treat me that way or I don't want—I don't want to interact with you like that or don't touch me like this or whatever or to negotiate because, you know, you're giving them money. And then it's also illegal, so it's not like they really feel empowered to go to the cops and say, hey, this person did this thing to me or I've been telling this, you know, john to stop contacting me and they won't stop. You know, it's just a—a prime breeding ground for the worst to come out in people, and unfortunately, you know, people that engage in sex work kind of see that—that—that worst side, especially when you're dealing with men too and that sense of entitlement and then, you know, put money in there, it's a hell of a cocktail. And so, you know, that's why decriminalization needs to happen so they can feel empowered to say, hey, you can't do whatever you want to do with me because I

can actually go to the law and—and be taken care of and, you know, and—and you have the fear of someone backing you other than maybe, you know, you know, someone has, you know, someone that they're working with like a pimp or something like that, and sometimes that is the only way that you can assure safety, especially when you're out on the street. But that comes with its own, you know, set of—set of issues and—and—and problems so, you know, that's why decriminalization is so important, you know, so that there is that added layer of like, hey, you just can't do whatever you want to do with me because I actually have the law on my side as well.

AW: Yeah, and when it come to decriminalization, if—if you were to report it, then it wouldn't navigate them to record check you because you reported something and now you're the target versus what came to report. That's crazy.

WS: Yeah, I mean, I've got a million follow-up questions. Thayane, I don't know if you wanted to take the questions.

TB: I—I have this one question that—it was so rich. You touched base with so many points. But there—we see in Newark this move recently, in these few decades, of attracting the ideal citizen, right. You mention, like, the reputable people, the upper middle class people, white, and from—attracting from New York City, these people, right. So how do you see that change and how—how is that impacting your lives, if ever, influencing your lives in some kind of way?

NR: Well, for me, it made me have to leave Newark. I used to—when I graduated from Rutgers and I, you know, I was dancing and then I got my first corporate gig and I feel like I have some, you know, two dimes to rub together and I got my first apartment in Newark right in front of Broad Street Station, the Two Towers, and I would not be able to afford my apartment right now. And I was in that apartment complex, as nasty as it was, just plagued with bedbugs, but they were getting all the—the gentrifiers. So when I got the apartment in 2010, my rent was \$790 and then by the time I had to move, which was only about five, six years later, the rent was over \$1,000. And they were trying to get more of these so-called model citizens, but for me, they were just the worst neighbors. I actually had an incident where a drunk guy, probably some grad student, drunkenly tried to shove himself into my apartment because he was too inebriated to know that he got off on the wrong floor and the security guard was apologizing to him instead of calling the cops on him because he tried to force his way into my apartment because, like, he had fancy clothes on and a fancy watch, but, like, I was the one who was attacked but like, that—I just—I don't see that trying to get these "model people"—and we just call them gentrifiers. The gentrifiers aren't going to improve Newark. They don't love the city. They are openly hostile to the people who grew up there and were there when they got there, and I feel like they—a lot of the—the newer people, especially—when I was trying to get another corporate gig because I was, like, sick of dancing, while I was still living on Broad Street, going to get jobs and I would look at the description and they would literally highlight how you could get to this office without

stepping foot in Newark. Like, you wouldn't have to be on the streets of Newark, and like, why would you want to attract the the type of person who is too afraid to step foot on the street to—to work here? And then, you know, they put up the—the big fancy highrises and remodeled and now, that 1180, that building, when it was new, you could get a junior studio for \$1,800 a month. That's like Manhattan prices, like, who can afford that?

JD: I see gentrification as the new redlining, basically, just—and what she's saying, that's how I see the Prudential people coming now. They entice the New York Prudential workers to come here. They have these shuttles to shuttle them from Penn Station back and forth, and you literally watch them when comes time for them to leave work. It's like they make a beeline, running, hauling ass to them shuttles. It's like they can't get the fuck out of Newark fast enough. But this is the people they're catering to. This is the people they want. And it's—it's sad and pitiful, like I really just—

AW: With that spectrum, it is more coin, but it's also, for those who don't mind, the white men because everybody want their snack at lunchtime. So on the prostitution spectrum, I have, yeah, yeah cause my phone ring more in the daytime than at night, and at night I be ready. But on another spectrum, yeah, gentrification is like—damn, like, how dare you look down on us and we was born here and you know, we're really part of the change here and you're just a visitor or a newcomer or onlooker.

JD: A transplant.

AW: Right. And you feel like we're less than. It's like—then that's kind of like, now what do we have to go?

NL: So—so for me, I look at them like they're less than. Like, I look at them like they're—they're garbage. And, you know, it's no affection. Like I don't have no type of thought or feeling towards them because it's just like, what can you do for me? Type of—type of attitude. And, you know, I make them feel like they're not welcome or—or, you know, scared or—

AR: Well, when it comes to the gentrification thing of people moving in to Newark, all I see it is tricks relocating. That's all it is.

NL: But you know what I do love? I love the—the—the Black—the—the—the Black side of it, you know, because they—you have the gen—you have the—the whites and the Blacks that is making it better, so I love the, like, for Newark, you know, like the feeling of Black culture that is being added to it in a way. That's my favorite.

AR: It's the different race of tricks. That's all. That—that's being honest. I mean—

NL: Well, I'm saying more so like the stores, the—

AR: Well, we're not talking re-gentrification. We're talking regentrified tricks that's coming—that's coming here to Newark and it's making the sex work industry for these young ladies a little harder and they do online dating, which isn't safe, and is

JD: It isn't?

AR: It isn't.

JD: Thank you. I thought I was the only one.

AR: No. And then—

NL: I feel more safer in the streets.

AR: And then—

NL: I love online but—

AR: You know, the—the—these young girls now, they do what is called a tour, and I'm like, you're not a damn musician or an entertainer. What the hell you mean, tour? They do—

AW: Well, actually, prostitution is the same thing.

JD: It is entertaining.

NR: I like to say that I'm an experience, so I feel like my tour—

NL: You know, on my Instagram, it says performer, so.

[Unintelligible crosstalk]

[Laughter]

NR: I actually feel like FOSTA and SESTA is one of the leading reasons why online is no longer safe, because I mean, for—for me, when I started, you know, I'm—oh, I shouldn't say that. I was going to say, I was like, I'm ancient. I started hooking on MySpace, but obviously it's not the case in the room, but like, in that era of social media, we would have the—the sites and the communities where you could do date check, where you could have like—like bad mugs and,

like, report the people who were doing harm. We had, like, a really bad actor that we had to actively go after and that was all done and people had a lot of, you know, proof of his misdoings because we had a system that we were holding dates accountable and now FOSTA/SESTA says that that's illegal. Like, I remember I'd be, you know, walking down Market Street and somebody would try to, like, recruit me and back in the day, I would just, like, look at them. They would be like, what are you going to do for me? I was like, oh, you—you're going to manage me? How? Like, what do you know about SEO? How many hits a day are you going to get me? I felt so much more, like, empowered to do this on my own, not reliant on anybody else, and I feel like FOSTA/SESTA just forced everybody—not everybody, but a lot of people—back into this really unsafe situation, where now, like, it's like the second uprising of the pimp because now it's illegal for me if I meet, like, a young sex worker and I have a blog where I tell her how to do a date check and how to run a background, now that's illegal, or if I make a website for her so that she could handle her bookings and I, like, help her take pictures, now I would be trafficking her. And that's ridiculous. It's just a way to criminalize us further and I feel like we made all these—

Nyella: Well, they never even know if we even do that to—for girls, you know, besides of the girl saying things, so that is, like, a plus because I do that for a lot of young trans women that I—I see or—or that is coming up, and it's not more so—it just—so them—for them to be aware of what they could—that they don't have to deal with everything that comes with sex work because it's a lot of things that comes with it. It's a lot of, you know, you—at the end of the day, you're tired. You will end up being tired. You know, for—I really started sex work at 12, you know, and it—not sexually, but, you know, I had older guys buying things for me and—and taking me shopping from a—from an early age and, you know, where I am today, I'm at a point where in a few years, it's going to be done because this is not that is all to me. You know, this is not the only thing that I could do in my life or this is not the only thing that is acceptable to me in my life, so, you know, there is a point in time that people have to be aware that you have to cut it out because it will take a toll on your mental, your health, and your—your mind and what you think that you could reach to in life and—and have and—and be.

WS: Actually, could I jump in on that because I think before we run out of time, which we're not out of time yet, but we will be eventually, and—and I think it's very important to pose the question, you know, what should the politics of sex work look like? You know, what—what are the political needs and demands of sex workers? What people do to get involved in, I mean, you know, the New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance?

NL: What can they get involved?

WS: Yeah, yeah, what—I mean, how can people, you know, people who are going to watch this online and think, I want to support that cause, you know, how can I be of support? I mean, what—what do people do and what, you know, what needs to happen?

[unintelligible crosstalk]

AW: On politics, understanding, it got to start with education because and—and spectrum to trans Newark, African American, is—it all starts from survival, whether you was put out, whether your girlfriend was doing it, whether you wanted to buy your hormones, because that was the thing at the time. You couldn't just go into a doctor and get your hormones, so you needed to get your juice and how are you going to get this money when you not in school or you're afraid to go to school or get a job because you're living your life and you don't want to be attacked just on doing that. It wasn't looked at as a norm for a trans or a young trans to be getting educated, like, so yeah, it has to be about the education to start. Any way, shape, form, fashion, you have to be one, willing and open to understand that hey, just because this person is selling their experience or this—their time for this money does not mean that they're harming anyone, okay, because little do they know, in some situations, like this young lady said, people need a place to sleep. Not everybody comfortable with sleeping on the train. Not everybody comfortable with sleeping at Penn Station. And then that puts you at a higher risk. If you're not gonna understand me, then it's—we kind of got a dead end.

NL: Yeah, like—like—to bounce back off from her, like I said, when I first got homeless and I went to the booth in Passaic, New Jersey, my first—my first guy I slept—I went with him to sleep with him at a hotel and me waking up, he's beating the shit out of me and having sex with me. So—and—and I'm not even knowing this guy, from—from nothing, so me to—to have a—I put my, you know, myself in harm still trying to get a way of survival and—and have something to sleep on, you know, and that is—those are the things, you know, sex work—a lot of people see sex work with the glitz and glam and the money and the this and that. That is not—that comes with it. That is not—that is a false narrative.

JD: That's the privilege.

NL: Of it. That is the—you know, that is the one—the one you submit to the—to the thing—to the harmony. You not—you never say nothing, but there is real, real life, serious thing that goes on within the sex work industry and being a sex worker, you know, it is very—I would say not—I don't want to say demonic, but it is very—a demonic mental thing sometimes when people don't know how to get—navigate the—the customer or the person or the people that you bring into—that you service.

AF: I'm gonna say—

AW: See how you having this—this group discussion? If you were to have a question and answer open forum with—with political investment or even law enforcement, where it's more one on one like this, that would be a perfect start because they getting understanding from the people front and center versus going on with they saying on Pretty Woman.

NL: But I do have another—what made you guys come up with this—this panel?

WS: You mean, why are we doing this?

NL: Yeah.

WS: Yeah, I mean, I said—

AR: It's been in the works—

WS: I think there can be different interpretations.

NL: Well, because for me, it—it—at first it was very shaky because a week ago, it was a sex work—it was a sex work rally, right, and it was nobody there. It was nobody there, so and—and—

JD: Where?

NL: In Newark, right down the street. And at first they didn't want it to happen because—and I know that people contacted Rutgers, I know that people contacted the—the city hall. One of—the lady who put it together got arrested and everything for—for it to still going—going along, so for me to—to get asked about, you know, this panel and then that happened, it just was like a—like a—a pick up thing for me, like, and—and that was a trans woman who was putting that together, so it just was, you know, a little of a

JD: So they targeted that rally but they're not doing this, probably because it was sponsored by a university.

AW: But even more so, it's all about the—the setting. Like—like I just said, if you were to invite a person in more intimate setting and—and allow them the opportunity to ask and us the opportunity to speak our piece, that's one thing versus you in broad daylight are pushing something that people face that they're not understanding. They're going to receive it completely different.

AF: And also—

NL: Well, I know—

AF: Two things. What she is—what Aminah's talking about with the education, education is key to first, getting their attention, because you can't just get mad because they're not accepting you. They didn't accept a whole lot of things but the educational piece from—they had a focus group, I'm gonna just say this, earlier, and it was young trans people who have grown. I've seen them struggle and I could actually say to the ones who were there, I said, I've seen you struggle, but I've also seen you grow and I've seen you come miles to the point where you're willing to help other young people not go through the same struggles that you went through. And it's the same process and it's an unfortunate situation but that's the way we bring forth change. We bring forth change with ourselves, with our community, and just how—Aminah, you have said, I've seen you light them kids up, but I've also seen you be a mother to a lot of these little wretched kids showing them the right way to do things. From Angie, it's the same thing. So it's like—it's the process. Somebody has to show the younger ones what they need to do and about paying attention to education and a lot of them don't want to listen until they find out, okay, I'm sick of you, I can't deal with it no more, and you do this, then they realize they out there alone and they see where they had their, you know, their back covered. They have to realize what side they're on, you know, got their back. And a lot of them don't do that and that's part of our problem. We have too many people in our community that is turncoat, because if it doesn't affect them personally—

NL: They just watch you. They just watch you go through this. They watch you be homeless, they watch you be hungry, they watch you be rogue, and—

AF: The homeless kids, I'm gonna say this because I have a little wretched little nephew, told that little trumpet what to do but he didn't want to listen, you know, went to four different states, locked up in each one and still locked up right now. I don't care who he is. It his mama or whoever else, but he had what you would call carte blanche here, but he didn't want to listen and follow the rules. I don't give a damn who you are, as a grown person, as a young person, as a older person, you have to follow rules.

NL: Right.

WS: Can we direct the mic to the Red Umbrella Alliance just to get, you know, your sort of organizational analysis on sex work policy?

NR: Oh—

Unknown: Oh, I'm sorry.

NR: Well, I was going to say that there are so many intersections when advocating for, like, the human and labor rights of sex workers because I feel we deal not only with stigma, but there is a

multi-billion dollar lobbying arm that is basically being used by law enforcement, NGOs like Polaris Project and things, that reduce our life experience to just trafficking or criminal without much respect for our humanity or dignity. I feel like we are going to need money. We're going to need the aid of "respectable institutions," as horrible as that sounds. I think there's a reason why, you know, things like Pride have gotten so

AF: Commercial.

NR: Commercial but also gotten more acceptable because they—a lot of the—the things that made people afraid and I'm—I know it's very contentious but the work that was done to "normalize," and I'm using the biggest air quotations in the word normalize LGBT—well, mostly affluent gay white men, but what was done to normalize their gay rights, it's not something that's easily done for, you know, people of color who are trans, genderqueer, people of color that are undocumented, people of color that have been incarcerated, people of color that are drug users. It's so much harder to humanize them within our current legal system that—what we really need are strong advocates and that could be something as easy as writing a letter to your representative, writing a letter to the editor of your local paper saying that you support decriminalization and sex workers rights, that you support trans rights. And I think the next step after that is showing up for groups and advocates who are doing the work and there are groups like New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance, groups like Glitz, groups like African-American Office of Gay Concern. There's Best Policy Practices, who are all trying to make the political changes that will give us our dignity that we're supposed to have, you know, via the Constitution, but we're in America and America isn't America-ing for everybody and it never has.

AR: I agree.

JD: I agree some. I think we need to bridge the gap, like the generational gap, the cultural gap. Can't teach an old dog new tricks. Some of these old folks. Like, what are they calling us? The Gen X, we're bridging the gap between the analog— analog and digital world, like, you know, we had to navigate our way through, but I mean, we deal with the older people that hate us and their views on it and we grew into understanding and knowing what it is because we became the sex worker community, but like she said, we need to make sure that people show up for us. We have to make sure we get in touch with our politicians, the community that actually supports us, and then try to change the hearts and minds of the people that hate us and think that we should be hung from a freaking tree because of who we are and what we do. It's—it's just—we have to really work on that because politicians will—I call it the [unclear]. They'll come and pretend like they care, like, when Murphy's administration first came in, sure, they reached out to Red Umbrella Alliance because they wanted input on the trans community, and that was all they asked about and that was it. Like, they got a little bit of feedback. We never heard back from them. Just that one time and then nothing at all. Yeah.

AW: That's just like—

JD: Yeah, they don't really care. It's all for show.

AW: Yeah, and then it—it becomes of like—don't half ass us. Don't want to just pull up when it's convenient for you, stay consistent. Stay consistent and believe—show your hand and support behind the scenes because, okay, African-American Office is just one facet that stay consistent in this—in this evolution when it comes to LGBTQIA, but then you got some other organizations that will start something and don't see it through and then it becomes about culpability and consistency so now, okay, they done burnt us or made us feel this way just like everybody else. Now what do we do?

JD: Yeah, I mean there's a lot of—

AF: What you—what you could do, this is just a suggestion, trans—y'all have made strides and I'm telling you, you made strides because they put money where their mind is, their mouth is. There's several organizations in the city of Newark that got—well, more than just several. That got trans money. All of a sudden it's a new regime of trans money and programs but I'm like—

AR: They ain't giving it to the trans people.

AF: No. Some of—

JD: They are.

AR: They ain't showing up.

AF: I'm just telling you, from today, what I was part of this focus group was around trans and they—and they—

AW: They weren't talking about sex work.

AF: They—they—were taking care—

JD: Trans first, but they want to ignore the sex work aspect. They want to make it all about the trans community and leave out the sex work aspect.

AF: Here's the—here's what—

JD: Because that's not the respectable part.

AF: What I'm trying to say is—

AR: What Aaron is saying—

AF: That they got the money. Now that they have the money it is the job, the opportunity, of the trans community to now start make—advocating, start pushing their agenda, not their agenda, but y'all agenda to get what you want and with the politicians, there's more money coming and, you know, you can fight—what—what do you call it? Fight about the apples and the oranges, but the thing is, you want them to recognize you for your efforts and what y'all dealing with, so that means, okay, I'll smile.

AR: Aaron.

AF: Yes.

AR: Excuse me, cut you off.

AF: Shut up.

[Laughter]

AR: But see, what you're saying is money is there for the trans community. They're not really showing up but what we're all talking about here today deals with the trans community but sex work. Because they'll show up with that, but it's like, we need more input into the sex work community and a lot of girls will show up for that but they wouldn't be out there selling the truth. You know?

AF: I know.

JD [overlapping]: Honestly, I'm such—I think we'd rather be—let me—

NL [overlapping]: Let me tell you why. I—because honestly I—if I would have not been here. I would—I would have been me—

JD: I would've been working.

NL: Me too, pretty.

JD: Me too.

NL: A long—just—time ago.

AR: I need to hang out with y'all.

NL: Hours. Hours ago, but at the end of the day, yes, we do not—we do not want to go somewhere where you're giving me \$100 or \$50 to—to talk about my experience when I'm about to make \$1,000 for a night. No, I would not. No, I would not show up and give you that. No, because at the end of the day, my time and my—my everything, it is beyond just you getting a piece of information, what you're going to do for the next type of thing that you have going on for your own career. No.

AR: But you know, now, this is something that I kind of looked into and I didn't actually have a chance to talk with anyone but everybody always is talking about, oh, well, prostitution is legal in Paris. Yes, it is.

JD: It's legal in Las Vegas.

AR: But the thing is, I mean, even, what, Nevada?

JD: This county's under 400,000, which is not Clark County, Las Vegas.

AR: But I'm—but I'm saying—

JD: In L.A.

AR: But the thing is, the—the rules differ because in Paris, yeah, you got there selling it but if the guy is caught with you, he's going to be fined or locked up, okay.

JD: Criminalize the client.

AR: Yeah. Okay, and like, here it's like, you have to go to a brothel, you know, and they have to pay taxes and it's just like, with Newark, it's like, take your chances. Flip a coin. You know, that's really the reality of it. If a girl is out there, she's flipping a coin praying that she don't get locked up or hurt and the john, he's flipping the coin praying that he don't get locked up, hurt, or go home with a package that he'll regret picking up.

AF: Absolutely.

AR: You know, so no—no matter where the money is for focus groups, everybody needs to be on board and advocate for whatever they're gonna have out there.

AF: Yeah. I agree.

AR: You know.

JD: Yeah, and it was like you said, if it's not for, you know, we're trying to do it for the greater good and a lot of people aren't concerned with the greater good.

AR: No. They're not. And—and—

JD: They're just concerned with hanging out. But that's what the survival is about . There's really nothing we can do about that.

AR: People haven't listened to me in the past decade or more.

AF: No.

AR: Thank you. When I actually put it to them that when the Compton Cafe Riot started, the Stonewall Riot started, that was for rights for everybody. You didn't see in a group photo—half of on this side was trans and the court over here was—no, it was everybody fighting for rights for everybody, and since then, society's just put it out there, we're going to divide and conquer because they're too strong.

NL: We're going to divide and give—

JD: Yeah, I kind of see that too.

NL: Give—give gays and nonbinary and the—the rights of this and then we make it harder for trans folks.

AR: And then when it comes down to the sex workers, which was also part of that, you know, those riots.

JD: And we always get shit on worse.

AR: You know, they were like, just kick them hookers to the side. They'll be okay. You know?

AF: Continue divide of what was a unified—just one word and everybody was up under their umbrella continue to divide.

NL: Divide, divide.

AF: The groups get smaller and smaller and it's not a united front.

AR: Divide and conquer.

AF: Because, oh well I'm not gay, I'm nonbinary, oh I'm not this. And then at the same time, girl, you out there with the wolves. You need to join forces with everybody.

AR: We need to join forces for sense.

AF: And that's what is really harming us because early on, the impact from a—a gay united front was much stronger than what is going now.

NL: Yeah, yeah.

WS: So can I jump in on that, because it is my grim duty to keep time too and—and we are gonna be running out of time pretty quickly here actually, and that might be a good enough to sort of pivot to wrapping things up. I—I—I guess I—I wonder, you know, talk maybe if you've got a sort of closing question and everybody could sort of briefly weigh in on it, because I think that's probably all the time we have remaining. You know, it's our hope from the Queer Newark Oral History Project that, you know, this is not the end of a conversation but part of a sustained and ongoing conversation that's also connected hopefully to action. You know, we would like very much to think about ways that we can enlist Rutgers and enlist, you know, the kind of academic side of that project in, you know, various struggles for—for justice and liberation including sex worker rights and sex worker decriminalization.

AR: Get some hookers in classes.

JD: And get the school to stop looking down on sex work because I'm a Montclair State alumni and I don't think they even support sex work. Like, I try to do a call with the Hispanic alumni and the—the minute I mentioned sex worker, I could, like, see the face of one of them and I was like, oh here we go.

AF: But I was—

JD: And it's just—yeah.

NL: Because—because they're not—

JD: They're not—that's the generational, cultural gap.

AF: I would suggest, don't just put it out as sex workers and don't go to specific—you have women and gender studies. That is the perfect opportunity to segue into sex work, transgender, and all that aspect of getting at least a conversation about sex work in the particulars of it or the dynamics of it.

AR: I agree with that.

JD: Yeah, and I graduated like over 20 years ago.

AR: I was saying that.

[unintelligible crosstalk]

NR: I graduated Rutgers in 2009 and I know how it feels like to be a sex worker on this campus, terrified that you might get kicked off of campus because the person that checks it in, checks all your guests in, is not stupid and is threatening to turn you in and knowing that that could be something that could have got me kicked out of school. So it's—it's hard to trust the academic structure as a sex worker and hard to trust because, like, all these gay organizations that had a lot of clout and influence, when they went after rentboy.com, they were silent. They weren't sticking up for those gay sex workers. So I do feel like sometimes you do have to kick open the door and start the conversation and clearly stating that you are going to be talking about sex workers' rights, whether they be human rights or labor rights, but you are talking about sex workers because I think it it's—if we try to go on under any other umbrella, we're always the first to be sacrificed.

JD: And I exercise my rights. Like, when I—last time I was living here, I reported my slumlord that he was trying to pimp me out, constantly bringing men by, constantly asking me how much he should tell them, trying to get me to open a brothel. Then I came to realize he was trying to set me up because he had been busted. But still I went ahead and I reported it. I went to Special Victims, right here, Essex County. I told them what was happening. Do you think I ever heard back from them?

AR: No. Course not.

JD: Every assault I've had, I've reported and then I got—then the one prosecutor lady that was just assigned my public defender and I just blacked the fuck out on her last month, she has the nerve to say, why didn't you report it when it happened? Like, she yelled at me, why didn't you report when it happened? Well, gee, I had my nose fucking broke, my head busted open. That was reported and nothing was done. You guys knew who it was and swept it under the rug. Why am I going to report? I report I get raped. What do they do? They don't put in the police report. They don't do anything about it. They lie in the police report and then they act like it never happened and they give them a PTI. Like, okay.

AR: Ask and still—

JD: No, and he only got—no, he only got in trouble for telling me about a prostitution sting. Nothing at all with the fact that he fucking cuffed me and raped me. Nothing at all. But—and he was licensed by the state. He wasn't a cop. But everything I've always reported. I got assaulted January 2020. I reported that because the young white males in a group all busted in, and then they showed me a video of another girl in a bathroom they were doing a date with her then the busted the door open on her. So they were serial offenders of looking for sex workers, doing dates in the bathrooms with them and then letting their friends run in and gang rape or run the train on her. I reported that because I called security from their room. They called the cops. I said uh-uh, I said, I'm not talking to no cops, because they tried to tell me they were cops. I said I'm going to Special Victims. You keep their information. I went and I reported it. You think I've heard anything back? And I keep pressing the issue. I just pressed it again last month. When I had to go to court for my trespass, I said I'm here in court for trying to work. I go, why aren't I being called to court with those guys that assaulted me that said they were cops? That's a crime for them to sit there and try to do a date for me and then tell me they're cops to try to assault me and rob me right back. And of course nothing. And I still try to get attention around it and I keep pressing it and people act like they're tired of hearing about it. I'm like, but you have to be made aware that we constantly report stuff and this is how we get treated and I'm not going to stop reporting. I'm going to keep being up your fucking ass about why you're not doing anything about the fact that I keep getting assaulted.

ES: I probably knew of these boys.

JD: I have been and—but they're told not to. Well, they're just pissed because of those—they're—they're told not to report shit. Remember, mainstream meeting is getting paid. I reported everything to the fact, like, everything down to sending them videos of cops that were tricking and saying, okay, I just got kicked out of this place 50 times but look at me here tricking with this cop for an hour and a half and nobody's kicking me out, and they get pissed.

ES: Well, that's why they—

JD: They get pissed to me because I send the fucking video but the reporters wanted the videos so I wanted there.

ES: You make it. There's always to do that, to do things.

JD: Yeah. Yeah. Well, we're shadowbanned on social media. That's another thing. We're shadowbanned on social media. How do we report and get our issues out when they're shadowbanning us on social media?

AR: There's always ways, baby.

WS: Thayane, I don't know if you had a closing question.

TB: Closing question? Oh, no.

WS: I mean, we are going to run out of time. I apologize. I mean, that's a very heavy note to—to—to follow up on. I really appreciate it though. I don't know people—kind of ending on a chaotic note here, but—because we're running out of time is what I'm trying to say, so I don't know if maybe we want to go around and let everybody make a very brief final statement and—and general tone, if that sounds all right, and you—don't feel obligated, just want to create a space for everybody to just sort of offer a final thought. But again, probably a brief one if that's possible, and—and again sorry for, you know, just sort of ending things like this but you have to watch the time for the library.

AF: Okay, I'll go first. I'm just so glad that I'm on a panel with my niece and how much she has grown and just to see you know and hear her. She's not cussing nobody out or hitting nobody with nothing and just, you know, making her point. I'm just so proud of her and it's like, to see these young people, just the growth is just such a good thing, you know. I just wanted to say that.

JD: Thank you.

AW: So for me, I just want to say like, we are going to forever be us, whether we're LGBTQIA, straight, gay. The fact is, we're human, so understand that everybody's walk of life is not the same and as we've come to this sex work path, respect it and allow us to go through and live what we need to, but at the same time don't shun us or shadowban us because at the end of the day we're human, and our story, pretty much some of our stories are stories that will help the other generations but try to be willing to give us a chance, to the politicians, the law enforcement, and even the higher up when it come to like, when we go to the jail system or the

court system for something that has nothing do with trafficking, don't look at us as our presentation. Know that we're human and we do go through shit and we have feelings.

JD: That's perfectly said. I don't think I could add to that. I'm just—I'm just here for the fight and I'm just trying to change hearts and minds of people who are not willing to fight with us, to make them open their eyes and say even if I don't agree with sex work ,I still agree with you being a human and you deserve the same safety measures and everything and the same labor rights even. Even if I don't agree with your job.

AW: Absolutely, because ultimately, again, for us, this is survival. This is my daughter and I'm here because I—she gonna live her life but I'm gonna live my life but it's certain things I've experienced that I'm not gonna to let her experience. So it's all about understanding we're human. Where—we bleed like you bleed now, whether or not we just sucked you up or vice versa, we still, you know, we're here. We had—we had to do what we had to do.

AR: I agree with them.

NL: I—I just, you know, people who do—who will get involved with sex work, just know that, you know, it's a point in time where you should be aware of when you should exit out and you should want better for yourself and go for things that you—you dream of and—and see for yourself and don't just limit yourself to being a sex worker or limit to yourself being someone that has to be submissive to people or, you know, staying your ground with clients and—and—and people and let them know—treat yourself how you want to be treated in life and—and, you know, let positive things come to you within doing—choosing these things or, you know, if it comes to you. And be safe.

NR: Oh, I guess I want to say to the younger sex workers that are out there or just any sex workers that are participating that if you ever need help or assistance NJ RUA is here for you and we will try our best and you could always find us at njrua.org. We're on all the socials and we will answer and I guess also, just one old ho to the young ones, I guess if I had any advice, the part about leaving the life that no one tells you is you might stop and then realize that corporate life is worse and it's totally okay to feel that way and you may find it—just like sex work is work, it is what you do but it's not all. So even when you are working or not working, I hope that you do not start viewing yourself the way the world is conditioned to view you.

ES: I didn't contribute a whole lot to the panel just because I felt like, you know, cede the space to the people that are actually involved in sex work and have been, and I didn't want to center my voice. However, I will say that sex work is a service, same like getting massage, getting a haircut. They're a service that people provide for other people. We all sell our bodies in our jobs for some way.

JD: And our labor.

ES: And our labor and what we do and so—and so I think we attach these moralistic judgments to the how, but you know, if you are working at a factory, you know, you're using your body to make money. And so I think that—and I feel like, and also when you think about the subject of sex, we are all having sex for something. Validation, love intimacy, you know, relationship, a free meal, whatever. You know, you know, there is an exchange that is happening having sex, and so who is to say which reason is more or less moral than another.

AW: Yeah, and then at that point what constitutes and what doesn't constitute as sex work because like you say, it's always something for something ?

JD: Marriage is sex work.

ES: Something but it's always an exchange. There's always an exchange that's happening when you're engaging in that and so—and attaching these moralistic judgments to it and making it so that it's—it's criminalized means that people are not safe and people are dying and that's really the most important part about this is—is how do we stop people from dying? See, criminalization has not stopped it from happening ever. You know, it's never stopped it from happening.

AR: And it never will.

ES: And so—and it never will. You know, people are always going to do this and they have a right to. People should have autonomy to do what they want with their money and to do what they want with their bodies, within reason obviously, so. And so I think the conversation around criminalization is, okay, we're not stopping people from doing this but criminalization clearly—how do we reduce harm? Because a lot of harm is happening because this thing is criminalized and so we need to—we need to have conversations about decriminalization, same like we do with drugs and the conversation around decriminalization of drugs. It's the same thing as— how do we reduce harm because the fact that these things are criminalized is causing a lot of harm in our communities, a lot of harm in our trans communities and our LGBT communities and—and so how do we open up these conversations so that harm is reduced and that people can flourish and thrive and people can leave if they want to leave and people can do it if they want to do it and people can have autonomy around how they navigate this space.

WS: That's great. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

[Electronic music]