

Media Survival Guide for Sex Workers
from Alexandra Beesley
(submitted for distribution via newsletter re the Olympics in Australia)

The sudden invasion of Australia by print, television and radio media due to the impending Olympics, all looking for a different angle on the games, has made my phone and e-mail run hot. The current trend amongst the producers and journalist from media organisations world-wide seems now to be focusing on the "steamy" side of the Olympics ... everyone is looking for a story on the anticipated boom that will supposedly occur in the Sydney sex trade due to the sudden influx of tourists, athletes and officials from around the globe.

As a documentary maker and sex worker I have worked with such people as Sky Television, Granada, ABC, BBC, SBS and ITV, and have experienced first hand how easy it is to manipulate, titillate and use footage and sound bites out of context.

The media's power to influence our culture is obvious, and mainstream media's tendency to gravitate towards the superficial and sensational means that people who work in the sex industry are generally portrayed under a negative light, enforcing and perpetuating stereotypes.

I know first hand the impact of my "outing" by the media - it changed my life.

If you've been approached by any media organisation or representative to do a documentary or interview, here are a few tips that may help you decide whether you will participate or not:

- Establish who the Producer, the Director, Broadcaster and Production Company are.
- Find out how long the Broadcaster holds the Rights to the program, in which countries or territories it will initially be shown, and how many times.
- Will there be video or cable distribution of the program?
- Will the program ever be shown on the Internet?
- Will your image be used to promote the program?
- Make sure you see a treatment or draft of the program, or list of questions if an interview. Establish the premise behind the program, and if possible, ascertain the motivation of the program's creators.
- If you feel you must remain anonymous, don't participate in the program. Wigs don't work, and promises of "fixing it in post-production" or "fixing it in the edit" should not be depended upon.
- Armed with this information, see if the production company or program makers have done any previous work, and if so, locate or request a copy to view. If it is an Australian production company, try contacting the Cinemedia Film Library in most capital cities, or look up the production company / program maker in the Australian film & TV who's-who, "Encore", published yearly and available at all good libraries. Overseas production companies or program makers can perhaps be researched on the Web.
- Payment: It is not unreasonable to request payment. Remember, without your participation there is no program. As a documentary film maker, I make sure everyone gets paid, but most Australian media do not pay documentary participants. American and European pay rates vary dependent upon how much time is involved. I pay \$1,000.00 (Australian) for a 5 day shoot, for a 4 hour maximum day. This takes into account loss of wages and covers other incidental costs such as catering and transport. Payment for interviews varies from \$150.00 - \$1,000.00, depending upon who you are, what you're saying and who the production company is, sometimes known in the trade as "cheque book journalism". The British tabloid press are a classic example.
- Asking for part payment up-front for programs in which you are going to be used for an extended period of time (a week or two), is also not unreasonable.
- Release forms: By signing a release and consent form, you are signing away all your rights to the work you have just done for the program in perpetuity. Once you have signed a release and consent form, there is usually little you can legally do to then prevent your likeness being used in any way by the broadcaster / production company. Also be aware that any production company / broadcaster will usually insist that you sign such a document.
- This is often tricky, my suggestion would be to try and sign the form after you have completed your role in

the program (ie. at the end of the day), and only sign if you feel confident that the work you've done for the program maker, combined with the integrity of the program maker themselves, will not cause you any adverse effects at some future date. You may also attempt to request to view the final cut, though often program makers will agree to almost anything in order to obtain your release and consent, and if you really want them to follow through, ensure that your requests are actually included in the document you are signing. This also applies to any payment that may have been offered, and the release and consent form could also possibly include such inclusions as requests for a copy of the finished product. Always make sure you get a copy of the release form, as well as a copy of the finished program at the end of it all.

The final point to remember is that Film and Television programs (and to a lesser extent, radio, print media and Internet) are forever. Who knows when and where the program will be shown 5, 10, 15 or even 20 years from now. How will this program going to air, going to video, going to cable or being endlessly repeated on late night television impact upon you. Think about where you may be at in your life at this time and how it could impact upon it before making any decisions.

Alexandra Beesley (outside link)

"I run fun media workshops in which I show examples from films and documentaries and how the subject matter or characters have been 'media manipulated', then workshop how to manipulate the media!"

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