



SEX WORK MEDIA GUIDE

RESPECTFUL & APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE



Stigma and discrimination against sex workers are rife in society. The use of stigmatising language has negative impacts on sex workers' wellbeing, mental health and how sex workers are treated in the community. The word 'prostitution' is suggestive of crime, wrong doing and the need to be rescued; whereas words like sex work are linked to respect, labour and workers' rights. 'Prostitution' should only ever be used when directly quoting legislation (e.g. the Prostitution Act 1999) or when referencing a legal charge.

1 USE: SEX WORKER/SEX WORK NOT: PROSTITUTE/PROSTITUTION/WORKING GIRL

Sex work is work. The terms sex work/sex worker reflect a level of empowerment and autonomy that is denied to us by those who oppose the exchange of consensual sexual services between adults. The terms 'prostitute' and 'prostitution' are not used because of the historical negative and criminal association with these words. Other terms like 'working girl' or 'call girl' don't reflect the diversity of the sex worker community. Not all sex workers identify as female.

2 SEX WORKERS DO MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF SEX WORK

The most sensitive way to approach a sex worker in an interview about any sector of sex work, or when referring to any form of sex work, is to ask how they would like you to refer to them and their work or workplace. In general, the most widely accepted terms used to describe different types of sex work/ers are full service sex work/sex workers, online sex work/sex workers, street-based sex work/sex worker, brothel sex work/sex worker, BDSM work/worker, dancer or porn performer. If someone does not identify with any of these forms of sex work, ask what work they do. There are many other settings and types of sex work that exist and which are performed by sex workers in our community.

3 QUOTATION MARKS

Use of quotation marks around sex industry terms undermines the expertise and authority of the person being interviewed on the topic of sex work. E.g., 'Sarah, who identifies as an "adult content creator"...'.

4 PRONOUNS (SHE/HER, THEY/THEM, HE/HIM)

The sex worker community is diverse. Please check with the person you are interviewing, speaking with or writing about as to what their pronouns are. Never assume someone's gender or pronouns. This shows respect to both the person you are interviewing and to our community.

5 USE: CLIENTS/CUSTOMERS NOT: JOHNS/TRICKS

A person who pays for services from a sex worker is called a client or customer. Throughout history, our clients have been given different names like 'Johns' and 'Tricks'; however, these words are used to dehumanise the people that see sex workers by blurring them into one nameless, faceless category. Not all clients identify as men. These terms also don't reflect the individuality and diversity of our clients.

6 USE: DECRIMINALISATION

'Decriminalisation' is the removal of criminal and administrative penalties that apply specifically to sex work, so that sex work is regulated just like other forms of work by existing laws and regulations. It does not mean that sex work is unregulated. It creates an enabling environment for sex worker health, safety and rights. For decriminalisation to be meaningful, it must be accompanied by a recognition of sex work as work, allowing sex workers to be governed by labour law and protections similar to those who work in other workplaces. While decriminalisation does not resolve all the challenges that sex workers face, it is a necessary condition to realise sex workers' human rights.

7 USE: LICENSING

'Licensing' refers to the model of regulation in Queensland. The model creates a two-tiered industry with only a small number of sex industry businesses able to meet the licensing requirements and the majority of the industry (more than 80%) forced to operate outside of this system. All those operating outside of the licensed system are at risk of fines and arrest, and heavy levels of policing, including entrapment. In addition, the model in Queensland only allows for boutique-style brothels to access a licence and all other business models are excluded from operating (e.g. massage, escort, co-operatives and sex workers working in pairs).

The sex industry is not legalised in Queensland, it is regulated by a licensing system and sex workers and our peer organisations are campaigning for the decriminalisation of sex work.

See http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/library/principles_2014 (Scarlet Alliance: 'Principles for Model Sex Industry Legislation') for more information on different laws, the harms and why decriminalisation is proven best practice.

