

# The Australian Human Rights Commission

## Submission: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.

Addressing the terms of reference:

- The drivers of workplace sexual harassment, particularly the workplace characteristic of the freelance, or what is now called the gig economy.

I was born in [REDACTED], and worked in the Australian film and TV industry from the mid 1980s until [REDACTED]. The employment was always freelance. This account tells how subtle sexual harassment can be, or maybe more accurately how embedded it is in industry and cultural thinking.

In 1988 I met a [REDACTED] director I got along very well with, and we worked together regularly. That's what you want as a freelancer, to meet someone who uses you from job to job, so you can make a regular income. It wasn't long before people started saying to me that the director and I must have been having an affair. Which was absolutely not true. He was married [REDACTED]. The next year, he and his family went to [REDACTED] to live. After a period of unemployment, other directors from the same production company started employing me.

At first the second director was ok. Then one night I went to a party put on by someone from the production company. The second director asked me if I wanted to go to his place and listen to some music. [REDACTED]. He was married, we were in the middle of a job. There was no question in my mind it would be ok. When we got outside he suggested we go to my place, which I thought was strange because I didn't have a fabulous collection of music, but, we went to my place anyway. Of course, as soon as we got there he was on top of me. I got the biggest shock, pushed him away and went to bathroom. When I came out he went. We worked together on the following Monday and it was stressful.

He continued to employ me but a pattern started at work. I'd go in for a preproduction meeting. Then in the preproduction period, which varied, say two weeks, at each meeting he would be angry, nothing was right. So, I'd try harder. And get into a frazzled state. Then on the first day of the shoot he'd abuse me in front of the whole crew, I was then frazzled *and* humiliated. Then, maybe the next day, he'd come up to me and just as I thought I was going to get into trouble again, he'd tell me I'd done a great job. I was so relieved, happy. I felt so grateful that I would probably get another job. This repeated many times and I tried to play the game. I was at lunch one day with a group of industry women when the subject of sexually aggressive directors came up. I found out that he had done the same thing to two other women that we knew. But I kept on with working with him. Then one day on set he was standing closely behind me, sort of leaning against me, whispering something, and without me realizing it, I swung around and punched him in the stomach ... hard. I wasn't employed by him after that.

Some time after that, I was at a party celebrating the end a long job with a third director, who knew the two previous directors, and had treated me in a similar way to the second director. The third director was very drunk and said "I really like you [REDACTED]", I was so relieved, because he'd been so aggressive through the job, I thought he'd never employ me again, I thanked him. He said, "No, I mean, I *really* like you", at which point I realized what he was saying and I left the party. I was never employed by him again. A film was coming up that I more or less assumed I'd get, but didn't.

These are not the only events of sexual abuse. This example shows how it just goes on, and on. There were many more situations, similarly banal, with varying details. Indeed, when the subject came up recently with an industry colleague I hadn't seen for a number of years, she just burst out laughing, because it was unthinkable that it wasn't a universal experience. At the time, my solution was to deliberately repress my discomfort, what that means is I had to look like I enjoyed it and the people who perpetrated it. It was only recently with the revelations of Harvey Weinstein that I've realized how pervasive abuse is.

Because there are other abuses one endures as a freelancer: Producers were often aggressive to a freelance employee to unnerve them reduce their

confidence and ultimately get them to charge less. I was often forced to carry costs, which I did so I'd get the next job.

I had an ambition to run my work life less like freelance and more like a business, so I got a workroom and employed [REDACTED] people. This meant that I could take on more work, my employees got more regular money and so did I. I had a lot of aggression from producers who hated that I was not being a freelancer, and 'accused' me of making more money. Disorganised people are easier to take advantage of. I always worked a lot, yet while I had my studio was the only time I made enough money to save a deposit for my very modest flat.

As I got more experienced I got to know what I could achieve with a budget. So, as I got more experienced I got less and less work. A young and/or inexperienced freelancer can more easily be bullied and charges less. In the end, I wasn't getting enough work [REDACTED] to make it worth paying the insurances, and by then I was totally exhausted.

So [REDACTED] I had to find another path. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But for the last 10 years I've been barely employed. In fact for the last 6 months I haven't been employed at all [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I am only surviving due to my husband, and actually to survive we are eating into the equity of our home. So, like Jane Caro points out in her article on the ABC News site, called 'Women over 50 are living out two fates that show feminism is an incomplete project', although there are many good things about getting older, the "structures of inequality" handicap women for their whole lives, and as I have found out, sexual biases quietly but relentlessly acted out in the freelance economy, fundamental to the film industry I worked hard to be part of, have pretty much run me dry creatively and financially. In other words, I am horrified to now realise I have worked very hard to reinforce the biases that eventually almost destroyed me.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] the recent revelations of biases in the film industry world-wide caused me to realise

more fully the results of the abuse I put up with when I was a [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. The most distressing result is that in an effort to adapt to the  
workplace one becomes an empty shell, unreal. There are some programs  
being implemented in the film industry to help the situation but I also can do  
something now to show how abuse and bias, sexual and otherwise, is  
embedded in the freelance employment of women behind the camera in the  
Australian film industry and ultimately is seen in the representation of  
women on screen. Hopefully that will make a more substantial contribution  
to those women and men in the present-day gig economy, to develop their  
talent and creativity, rather than using up all their creative energy trying to  
adapt to a work environment that is set up to crush them.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]