Learning From Polyamory’s Experiences With The Media

by Pepper Mint
Outline

Polyamory in the Media
Engaging with Media
Cultivating Spokespeople
Diverse Representation
Human Interest Focus
Alternatives to Mainstream Media

Open Discussion
Polyamory in the Media

Surprisingly positive treatment
 Mostly human interest stories
 Articles on polyamory typically interview poly people
 Minimal coverage of criminal cases
 Rarely sensationalized or sexualized
 Not yet a right-wing target

Significantly outsized mindshare
 Small community with a lot of press
 Go-to community for comments on non-monogamy
Polyamory in the Media

But, some negative aspects...
- Poor representation of non-mainstream poly folks
- Coverage often misrepresents due to cluelessness
- Sound bites are often inadequate
- Pieces often end with therapist/expert “zinger”

Frequently combative relationship with media
- Media has trouble finding poly people to interview
- Poly people often hate poly media coverage
It Could Be So Much Worse

Heavy focus on criminal cases or legal issues
  Or local community backlash
  For example: BDSM, swinging, sex work

Scandalous exposés or over-sexualization
  Or accused of causing moral decay
  For example: BDSM, sex work, porn

Invisibility
  For example: male bisexuality, sacred sexuality, nudists
Engaging With Media

Engage as much as possible
  Take opportunities when they appear
Have a clearinghouse that requests go through
Search out and pitch opportunities
Leverage members and allies in media organizations

Not engaging is generally detrimental
  Contributes to invisibility
Criminal and legal cases define the community
Clueless journalists or conservatives frame the issues
Hostile Media

Try to anticipate which media outlets will be hostile
   Check for warning signs when engaging
   Be willing to walk away from problematic engagements

Handling hostile interviews
   Stick to positive sound bites, sidestep leading questions
   Get hostile interview training

Expect a certain level of misrepresentation
   Audiences can always look up stuff later
Cultivating Media Personalities

Need good media figures
  Out of the closet
  Diverse
  Well-trained or experienced
  Channel media opportunities to promising activists

Almost no one is paid for appearing in media
  They speak because they believe they are doing good
  Or they are selling something
Diverse Representation

Mainstream media diversity issues
- Media almost always prefers less-diverse representation
- Game the system by providing diverse spokespeople
- Refuse to engage if outlet will not accept diversity

Lack of privilege makes it harder to be out
- People who show up by default will be highly mainstream
- Focus on and cultivate non-mainstream folks who are out
- Find anonymous media opportunities
Human Interest Focus

Primary focus on community members’ lives
Pursue and generate human interest media opportunities
Have a hook – what makes this community interesting?
Present as “this is just what we do”
Media personalities should be very open to questions

Match sexuality discussions to audience
In the US, keep it appropriate
Sidestep over-sexualizing questions or portrayals
Alternatives to Media

Alternative press
  Indie papers, people of color channels, etc
  Media websites: Huffington Post, Salon, etc
  College radio shows

Online media
  Blogs
  Podcasts/Videocasts
  Online forums
  Social media
Open Discussion

How do these lessons apply to a particular sexual community/minority? Or not?

What lessons can we see from other sexual communities/minorities?

What are the media/publicity challenges faced by a particular sexual community/minority?
Thank you!

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