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As told to Brandon Stosuy, 3472 words.

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On doing everything yourself

Adult film performer Pepper Hart on the DIY nature of making porn, creating a healthy life for yourself outside of the industry, and being in control of your own work.

Do you have a manager?

I'm under contracts with porn and dancing agents, but I basically work for myself. I've had agents who'll hook me up with jobs, but that's it. There are supposedly "super agents" who manage the performers, but it's all very touch and go, and it's mostly on me.

You really just have to have the videos to watch and then post them on an adult streaming site. I'm still telling personal friends this. As far as strategy, they're like, "What if I did this? What if I did that?" And I'm like, "You can just make it, and people will download it." I wish the beats I make would do as well, but they're not that good.

How useful is social media to getting the word out about yourself and your work?

Twitter has always been the number one way I've made money for adult jobs—for gigs as well as for letting people know about my custom stuff and my personal stores. Instagram has always been more auxiliary to that. It's fun to use, and it's great to get to know people or to see cool things you like, but it never got me a job.

The industry is a whisper network, and Twitter is perfectly adapted to that. If I want a job, I don't ask for a job. I just show my work, and then directors and companies, or whomever, will contact me. The porn community is DIY. There's a need for us to network with each other, and Twitter is solving that need.

Instagram is against that. I can't use it to get jobs. I do miss it, though. I didn't choose to not use it, I'm banned. So I'm just trying *not* to get banned on Twitter.

Does a site like Pornhub work like Spotify? You get a percentage for your work that gets streamed?

I do get a percentage from a site like Pornhub. I also have a working relationship with them. I don't work for them, but they don't want me to post on other websites. But I do, and other people post my stuff on other websites as well, and they'll deliver takedowns for me whether I'm exclusive or not. Because of that, the first mature, professional relationship of my whole life is with them because I go up to them and say, "Hey, you know what? I know that you take my videos down from your competitors, but not your fake competitors that you also own, so how about when someone puts me up there, you give me money?" They comply, but the thing is, I'm completely and personally in charge of finding those videos.

But I search myself anyway—it's an emotional thing. I've been watching my own work posted online in order to bond with my overall character and cherish the work. I won't always be young and I don't want to ignore my work while I'm in it. Our community has lost some of the best people and I sometimes wish they'd made more. At least journals. Anyhow, I make money off of searching myself, so I'm not too mad.

You make music, too, as you mentioned, and are starting to soundtrack some of your videos. Eventually do you want to pursue music full-time? We often talk to people about avoiding burnout, and finding ways to take breaks. Does music work this way in regard to your adult film work?

I was already burned out from being a dancer. I was lost then. Then I started doing porn, so I had to work on that. Porn is what I was meant to do, though. I'm good at it. I love it. I was missing it before I did it. That's always a sign. Music's not exactly the same. Music is something that I've always wanted to do, even as a child—but for me, it's something that has nothing to do with money or even talent or knowledge.

In porn, I think the audio and music is the easiest thing to improve. People are dying for it. I've been asked for music from people who make this content on all levels. They want music, or some people make their own music. Some people are musicians I talk to, but we can't really collaborate. We're all too busy.

I pay my bills with porn, and it's also an artistic expression for me. It's a media art form and it's DIY. I've gotten a lot of freedom from that, from not having to think about how unsatisfying my day is going to be. I'm sure there are plenty of other jobs like that for other people, but I've not really had them before this.

You're controlling these different aspects of your career, and it's up to you to take videos down, to find things that will pay the bills. How do you manage to keep going?

It's hard. Sometimes there is the feeling of, "Oh, I have to do this again today." I've been on a variety of different sets for different companies. I don't even know how many right now, but it's been a lot at this point because I haven't had a lot of repeats—so, like, 50 different sets with different people at each one.

With dancing, I had a moment where I thought, "Where do I go from here?" I'm an ambitious person, and so that's my burnout. It's not about having too much work, it's about reaching a limit. I don't work too much—I don't believe in that. I think that if you can have a middle-income life with health insurance, that's great. I want to get rich, of course, like anyone, but really, why would I want any more than I have right now? So I'm going to just work as hard as I can. It's allowed me to find a next level.

I was unable to do that with dancing. It hurts your body. My bones are different now. With acting, it's not like that at all. You can't eat and stuff, but that's modeling, and that's athleticism. Whenever people complain about that I'm like, "Learn how to not eat then, because it's perfectly healthy to go without food for a day. Just don't do it two days in a row, dumbass." But I don't have any criticisms beyond that, and I love everybody I've met who is doing my job, and who's working with me, other performers. We get together and spend time with each other, and it's really fun.

I want to capture this all for myself in the future—when I'm an old lady—by interviewing other porn ladies. I've actually filmed the first episode of a show I'm making. It's always been stop-and-start. I'm making it with me and other porn girls, and I'm putting all of myself into it.

So when you do get burnt out in the sense of, "All right, I've done what I can do in this area of making porn," you want to make this film where you're interviewing people and documenting and archiving this community that you're a part of?

I learned from Tim Ferriss that you've got to make the thing that you might be the only listener for. You might be the only audience member, and that's a huge challenge. I have some archival stuff I can use to fill in empty spots in the future footage—I could've put all that together, what is essentially B-roll for the future. I could put that in and call it a project. I didn't go to film school or anything, and I've just been on these little sets and stuff, but I'm not going to want to be the audience member of that. I need to watch the thing I want to see.

Unfortunately, I'm picky, but it still shouldn't cost too much money. It's all talent costs anyway. People are disappointed that you have to pay talent. They think everyone does it for free. Or they think that this must be why we're trafficked, even though I'm a 30-year-old suburban mom. People have said to my face that they assume I have to be on drugs or something to do this, and it's like, "Well, no." I thought about this for a long time, and I watched these kinds of films before I did them. Some people don't do that beforehand—they just go in. But that's them.

Do you see being in adult films as a creative project? Or, do you see it as your day job? How do you view it? Sasha Grey has said she saw it as performance art. Like, "I'm going to inhabit this character."

I'm gonna say it pays my bills, first, because that's something I don't get to say when they're asking me on the camera. They say, "Oh, why'd you join?," and I can't say the money because it's a weird thing to say. I bring my most intimate self to the camera. It's not like cannibalism. It's not about the other people I was with. It's just about what I did and my limit and stretching that and everything I've done—on camera.

I'm not like Sasha. I'm a huge fan of hers, but I'm not like her. She's doing performance art. I'm a clown stuck in the clown suit, but I'm bringing what's really made me sad to the clown act, or in this case, what has made me happy. And it's funny because I have changed since I started—how I act on film—but I am always trying to channel the energy where it's like I've never done it before. Like I've never done whatever I'm doing before, because that's just always the best time for everybody. I don't know why, because it's better to be experienced, but there's just something about the first time.

It's funny, I was on a reality TV show. It's never going to be shown, but I think that's extra artistic because I never became a reality star. People, of course, thought I would be "upgraded" from porn star to reality star. Like, it would be an upgrade in my clout or stature. But, I don't really need to be on a reality show. It was funny because I got a free breast augmentation through it, and I got to act and not do the full monty, so I got to be treated differently by a camera crew and a director.

What do you consider a successful scene?

Success is always finishing the mission. It has a very specific mission. I wouldn't call it "art" in that sense. It's art in the sense that it's a bunch of people putting together a project, and they all have wonderful artistic, aesthetic sensibilities. That's what makes it an art project. Success is when everybody's happy, and I get paid more than they wanted to pay me. And, physically, I'm pushing it. I don't want the director's job. I want my job. I want to be in front of the cameras. It's a pretty interesting feeling once you finally actually get into it like, "Oh, I don't want to be the director of this." With acting, I feel so lucky, like I'm immortal.

What did you learn when you first started out in adult films that you found surprising?

Everybody who's just starting out needs to know queer theory, because it's very queer to do it, and you're never usually alone. If you think you're just going to be with some hottie that day for an hour—the way it looks in the video—you're wrong. You have to spend time with people you've never met before, and they will be seeing you and asking you to do things that you've never been asked to do before. I can see how that could really drive someone insane.

But that's not what drives me insane about it. It's that I don't live in Los Angeles, but I refuse to because I'm not going to go down there and downgrade my life, where I'm supposed to be this glamorous person who happens to be living in a house full of roommates. No offense to people with roommates. I've been there, but now I have such a peaceful life in Oregon. Thank god for airplanes.

What can break someone down is not understanding that you're joining something you can never leave. It's a nonviolent gang, though, and so it's all about love and trying to end on good notes. It's not like film as an art, where you can end on any message you like, or you're trying to bring a bit of excitement to someone, even if it's very dark. The feedback from fans is always the same, and I love that. They're never like, "That made me cry." If it did, they're not going to type that. They're going to get done crying, and then type, "That was awesome."

Do you ever try to mess with that formula, or experiment with what people would assume they're getting and try to break the format?

It can be hard because there's a specific mission. I wouldn't say it's a script, but there are scripts, and there's an archetype that I'm apt to play even when I'm not scripted. Subverting that has to be a part of the original collaboration. I've had luck with one director I've worked with. Normally, I don't work with people more than once, so we don't have necessarily a collaborative relationship at all. But there was this one director who I worked with three times. He let me ad lib, and I'd go and watch the edited take, and it would be all what I said and none of his forced stuff. If any of those people are reading my interviews, please stop forcing us to speak the way you speak with weird enunciation and all that. The way that these women actually speak is the most alluring. We need to hear them more.

Do you imagine that the longer you're in the industry, the more control you can have? Perhaps, at some point, you can edit and soundtrack, for instance?

It's about meeting that one person who's been doing it for 15 years and has enough time to nurture me through the processes. It's a very bottleneck thing, but once you get there, you're fine. But I've had to overcome people putting me down on my face. "You shouldn't learn to edit," because you're an actor, or whatever. Or, "Oh, wow, you can use a computer?" Like that kind of thing. There's a really big confrontational aspect to what I do, which is pretty much what I feed on and what I love—but it is crazy.

You'd think of porn as being collaborative. It's people having sex. But you're saying you work with a director once and never again. Do the scenes themselves feel collaborative, with the other actor, or does it feel very much like it's your own thing, and you're on your own?

It's very directed, and I'm on my own, so I have a lot of responsibility to hold the character. The people in the scene are like my opposites. I'm one archetype. This male is the opposite, or this dominant woman, or whatever, is the opposite. With them, their responsibility is more to watch out for me.

How do you keep going on a physical level?

Definitely downtime, and it's a lifestyle, which is something I've learned from the other performers. Some do a lot of world travel, and some people just have beautiful homes. I have my recharging station when I'm working in LA. I always make sure that I do things that have nothing to do with the rest of my life. Like, some of my friends wouldn't even understand if I said it. Go see an Ozu film or something with a live score. Go swimming in the ocean, and not for Instagram. Not to be seen, but to connect with my current self.

And, I consider myself a billionaire in regards to family. My family reminds me who I am. They don't judge me. They're not hippies or anything, they're just the next best thing. They don't want to get to know "Pepper," but they think I'm an extremely successful person. I'm very lucky in that sense.

I have a friend, a musician, who lives in a small town. She was saying how her neighbors don't know what she does for a living, and that gives her the space to feel sustainable. Do you find that being in Oregon gives you a little bit of remove and gives you a space to separate your work from your life?

Yeah, though it doesn't have a hugely different attitude than Los Angeles or San Francisco, because people are the same everywhere. Also, there are still performers in town, so if I want to talk to people I can. I've worked in town, too, so I feel like I'm doing something. I don't feel isolated here.

It's funny—I have more friends in Los Angeles, but I can feel very isolated there because it's just too big. I like being somewhere too small for my personality. I know better than to try to force myself to live in a huge city, even though I love them.

Do you read the comments?

I'm an internet baby. My home is in the comments. I have a "sexy baby" voice, or whatever, and I'm a performer, so I said to myself, "Am I going to let these people get to me?" It could get to me. People

don't like my teeth, or whatever. But what those people don't understand is that they mean nothing to me. I honestly could be sitting next to them and they wouldn't know, and they can't do what I do. It's a contrarian culture.

No one's going to challenge my intellectual prowess. They can't do what I do. They can't do what these other girls do. They can't do what these men do. They can't do what these directors do. But I do read the comments. I see it as a community. And, I've gotten some of the best comments, too. One of my favorite things is this one where I cast the male talent—which is rare, FYI. This girl, who has a girl Pornhub account, god bless her, she was like, "I wish I could do that." That comment helped me.

Pepper Hart Recommends:

Some things currently driving my ideas.

Computer Science: I'm interested in computer science and how apps are made, and their mechanics. I bought a book called *How To Build A Billion Dollar App*, by George Berkowski, because I went to university almost seven years ago and needed the latest book on business and technology to feel fresh.

Porn: I don't watch porn to get to know the performers; I watch to get to know my own sexual fantasies and needs. On a daily basis, I find myself most attracted to German-made content overall. When I was 18, I stayed in Japan and watched their national porn all night on cable. I couldn't go to clubs yet, which was probably for the best.

Non-Violent Communication: I use these for my inner life, and I beg everyone to learn about Non-Violent Communication through Melanie Joy and Marshall Rosenberg. "Non-violence" is a one-word mantra that has protected me in every single difficulty I have had since reading their books.

Big books: I read as a child because I had nothing to do during long winters and while camping in the summer when everything was sticky. Now, I read long books to have a relationship with an author. I admittedly never finished *War and Peace*, but I still feel accomplished at page 500. I've read all the books written by Maya Angelou, as well as from the reading lists she's put out.

Learning online: I dropped out of every single school and I travel constantly. That said, I don't let my brain atrophy. I would be lost without Coursera and EdX.org.

Also: When I first started striking out on my own, my skin went nuts from stress. Adding art to work and personal life made a whole entire new column of life responsibilities for me. I had to find a custom skincare regime because I model for work and get a lot of confidence from hydrated, clear skin. No matter how I feel about how I look, or my past, or my day, I can wash up and feel relaxed.

Name

Pepper Hart

Vocation

Adult Film Performer

Fact

Gustavo Turner

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