Actor and producer Aubrey Plaz on taking control

August 7, 2025 - Aubrey Plaza is a comedian, actor, and producer. She's best known for her role as April Ludgate on the sitcom *Parks and Recreation*.

As told to Charlie Sextro, 1502 words.

Tags: Acting, Film, Process, Inspiration, Focus, Anxiety.

After you complete a role, how do you look back and evaluate yourself? Where do you find comfort?

My favorite part of the process is being in production, and actually doing it. Anything after that always feels like a letdown to me. The movie, even if it's a good movie, is never the movie that was in my mind while I was making it. I have such a big imagination which I think most actors probably do. In my mind it's like I know exactly what it is but then when I see it I'm always like, "Alright. It's that now." I feel like I try to not focus so much on the aftermath of any of it, but it's hard not to, because I just have such a fun time doing it. It's really hard and tricky to get caught up in the success of the movie itself because it has nothing to do with the process of making it. I have a hard time separating those things sometimes.

How do you wrestle with the success of a movie?

There's something about that kind of attention that creeps me out a little bit. Of course, I want everything that I do to be successful. I want people to see what I'm doing because that's why I'm doing it. For me, it's more about how I want people to connect to what I'm doing and for that to affect them. I don't necessarily want to have that kind of attention on me. That stuff starts to become toxic and it's very distracting.

Even when I was at Sundance this year I felt like I was getting really good response from both of the movies I was in. There was even some parts of that where I was just like, "Woah, woah, woah. Calm down a little. Just for a minute." It wasn't even that big of a deal. The tiniest bit of that feeling… I remember feeling that way and being like, "That doesn't feel good to me. I don't want that either."

I don't know what I want. I constantly feel like I am pulling a scam, like I've convinced everybody of something that is completely not true, that I am a complete fraud, and I have no idea what I'm doing so I just need to keep my head down and not get fired. I feel that way all the time. I don't know what it is. It's just some kind of weird childhood thing where it's not good enough. I guess you have to do what scares you.

I'll always feel like I need to prove something. In some ways, it's good for me because I'll just always keep pushing myself. I sometimes think about how if I did something that was really successful it would actually terrify me. Maybe even more than something that is considered a failure. When I say "failures" or "I feel like I'm a failure", I know I'm not a failure. In fact, I kind of find comfort in rejection sometimes. There's something about rejection and failure that feels like it's okay. It makes me feel connected to the world.

It can be a struggle for actresses to find well-rounded roles in Hollywood so it's impressive to see how you've pulled off a resume of distinctive characters full of agency. How were you able to pull that off?

I gravitate towards the parts that have something going on. I'm always fighting for those kinds of roles. I wouldn't say they're just handed to me. I've also been offered parts that are really paper thin and have nothing going on. I'll either say "no" or I'll have my own take on it and just try to fill it in. That was the case for

Dirty Grandpa where there wasn't much going on on the page. I saw all these things I could do with it. I think it's more the way I approach things than just looking for a role that's more complex. I'd say that now I wouldn't do a part that's paper thin or that has nothing going on with it. There was a time when I was being offered a lot of the same kind of parts, like the "weird/sarcastic best friend." At a certain time, I was just trying to make the best out of what I had available to me or what I could control.

Was that a challenge for you when you were less in control?

It's always difficult for me, because I'll never be satisfied. I am never satisfied. I always want something else. It's a weird thing though because I always also feel grateful for the opportunities I have. Being on a television show first was something that I'd never planned on. The way that role shaped the parts that I'd be offered was frustrating because I never saw myself as just playing April Ludgate kind of characters. If there was any frustrating part, it was trying to constantly show people that I could do something else. It's just hard not to be labeled and put in a box.

Was there a specific moment when you actively chose to change people's perception of you as a performer?

I don't have a plan in that way. It's more about the people I'm working with. I've been through the process of working on independent films with first-time directors so many times, which I love. I love working with all the people that I've worked with. For me, at this point in my career, I want so badly to work with experienced directors who have a real point of view.

I like being directed. For movies, I love that collaboration. It's important for me; I'm realizing that about myself. I didn't really know that until probably the last year or so. I don't want to direct myself, I guess, is what I'm saying. The more complicated parts that I do or want to do, the more I want to feel like I can just get lost in what I'm doing. I lose perspective really easily. I don't know if that's something that I need to have happen all the time. I like feeling like I'm in the hands of someone that can guide me rather than control me. I really like being inspired because I don't always approach things with a plan so much. I always work thoroughly on everything that I'm doing. I have a plan, but I like that plan to change. I like other people's ideas. I think that's what I'm into right now. But I don't know… Maybe someday I'll be like, "No one better fucking tell me what to do." I have no idea.

You could direct yourself in a one woman show.

I know. I think, "Could I direct myself?" I don't know. I have no idea. It's so unappealing to me. I'll never say never. I might do it. The idea of it doesn't seem appealing to me, again, because I feel like I lose perspective on myself. I second guess myself all the time. I never think anything that I'm doing is good. If it were up to me I would do the same scene all day long because I'd never get it right. Do you know what I mean?

Comparing your experiences on TV sets to your work with first-time movie directors or even established movie directors, is one more psychologically draining on you as a performer?

I think *Parks and Recreation* was different because that was a sitcom, and it's just different. I still approach the character in the same way that I would approach something else that is serious. Just the emotional space that you're in is way more light hearted and kind of fun. You're joking around all day. Parks and Rec was less draining because of the ensemble nature of it. When you're doing a movie where it's from your perspective and you feel you have to carry this thing, that's always more stressful. When I do movies I always have to be aware of where I'm coming from and where I'm going. More so where I'm coming from because movies aren't always shot in order. It's just crazy to maintain that consistency. It requires me to stay in that head space as much as I can. I think some people approach it differently and maybe they can just go in and out of it. Sometimes I can do that too but I find that it's better for me to just give over to it.

Aubrey Plaza recommends:

Doctor - a short film by Jim Hosking



Never-aired TV Pilot featuring Aubrey Plaza and Nathan Fillion - “Terror Team”

Salty Sea Hags

Darling Joots — Instagram account is dedicated to the “Worlds Greatest Entertainer,” “Miss Show Business” — JUDY GARLAND

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Vocation
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Fact

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Peter Yang