

The Art of Asking Everything

Madison Young: Can Porn Be Feminist? (Spoiler Alert: Yes It Can)

Amanda 00:36

This is the Art of Asking Everything podcast, I am Amanda Palmer.

Greetings from Aotearoa New Zealand, it is the end of January 2021, and I'm trying something a little bit new with the format of the next few episodes of the podcast. Not too different, but mostly I am framing it around a question. It is the Art of Asking Everything, after all, I figured that made sense. And the podcast, as you know if you've been listening from the beginning, has sort of been an ongoing experiment, format-wise. It's my podcast, and I'll do what I want to!

So here is the question: why can't porn be normal?

This week's guest is Madison Young. So a little bit about this: right now, as arguably through most of human history, there has been a global war waged around what 'normal' even means. What social norms are. And whether you are right now watching abortion controls tighten, or the social responsibility of certain news organisations loosen and fly away, one thing is clear: the western world is getting, in many ways, in many aspects, more conservative.

So let's talk about porn. What does that mean for porn? The porn industry has come so far since the internet enabled those of us who are not straight white men to exercise our desires for porn, and as a porn user, hello, thank you internet for that, it's really nice! But progress is never a straight line, excuse the pun. Profit rules, sexism and misogyny still shape the narrative, and the flow of information, even if that information is boobs.

Luckily, we have experts in the field like Madison Young, this week's guest. Madison entered the world of erotic film-making as a performer in 2002, then started directing films in 2005. She is a noted expert on sex, BDSM, and sexual power dynamics, and has taught workshops, given lectures, and acted as a panelist on the topics of sexuality, feminist porn studies, and the politics of BDSM at institutions such as Yale University, UC Berkeley, and the Berlin Porn Film Festival.

I will come out right now, I've come out many times before, and remind you, yours truly, Amanda, your host, was briefly a sex worker, I was a stripper and a dominatrix, and so the world of BDSM, and the politics of the work around BDSM, are of particular interest to me.

Madison is also, like me, a parent. And she is also the founder of the Erotic Film School, a three-day erotic filmmaking training program held in San Francisco, that introduces students to the pre-production, production, and post-production process of making erotic film - ie porn school! She's also the founder of the now closed Femina Potens Art Gallery, which is a nonprofit art gallery and performance space in San Francisco that served the LGBTQ and kink communities. And she published a memoir called [Daddy](#) in 2014, and if you want to go further into Madison-land, there's a lot of places you can go, there's gonna be lots of links on the site, and definitely get her book, we're gonna start a book club on the Patreon about her memoir.

Her new scripted series, [Submission Possible](#), is on RevryTV, you can also see her there, and her feminist-erotic web series [Fragments](#) is on Lust Cinema.

We had an amazing conversation when I was on tour in Portland, Oregon, when I was there on the There Will Be No Intermission tour. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did.

Everybody, Madison Young.

Madison 05:04

I grew up in conservative southern Ohio. I knew very early on that I was different from the people around me. I knew that I was queer, I knew that I was kinky, and I felt a whole lot of shame. I was in this pocket of homophobia. Everything and everyone around me was telling me that I was going to burn in hell, and it felt like I was living in hell. And I really found my escapism through art. I knew I wanted to be an artist, and work in theatre, and I convinced my parents, I made a deal with them that if I got a 4.0 for two years, they'd let me audition to go to the performing arts school downtown. I did, worked very hard, and auditioned, and got into the school, and I finally started to kind of find my people.

This was in Cincinnati, and it was after that I went off to college, to Chicago, and then San Francisco...

Amanda 06:09

And to Antioch.

Madison 06:10

The way Antioch works is you're there for a semester, and then you go anywhere in the world, and you do a co-op living experience that's supposed to be based on your major, and I was a theatre major, so I went to San Francisco, and I opened a feminist art gallery and performance space, called [Femina Potens](#), and then I was like, okay, I'm doing what I wanna do for the rest of my life, why would I go back to Ohio? So I stayed in San Francisco and ran a feminist art gallery and performance space there for over a decade.

Amanda 06:\$6

Now, one does not just accidentally start a feminist art gallery. What happened? So you were what, 18? 19?

Madison 06:53

I was 20.

Amanda 06:54

20, okay, and so you show up in San Francisco. How did you wind up starting a feminist art gallery?

Madison 07:00

I'm a witch, and I'm very magic, and pretty much any time that I want to do something...

Amanda 07:05

It manifests.

Madison 07:06

It manifests.

Amanda 07:07

You're a master manifestor.

Madison 07:08

I am. I'm a Virgo with an Aquarius rising, and an Aquarius moon, which I say means that I'm a dreamer that gets shit done. I knew I wanted to manifest this gallery, and that it was really important, and the only spaces that I really saw for queer women in San Francisco were bars, and I wasn't even old enough to drink. I knew I wanted to start...

Amanda 07:31

Just a space.

Madison 07:36

This art gallery, this space, where we could celebrate our culture, and art, and have these conversations. And so I found that space. I didn't even have a place to live, I was living on couches, I was couchsurfing. Found this space, and I only had enough money for the deposit and for the first month, and then once I got into the space, I was like, okay, well, other queers are doing sex work in order to pay for their art, let me get on Craigslist erotic section, and started selling my dirty underwear, and doing porn. It was kind of like I became the porn star that did anal scenes to support the feminist art gallery.

Amanda 08:24

Do you remember the first time someone pointed a camera at you, and you were being intimate, and what it felt like? Cos I had kind of a similar story, and I did a lot of photography, and I was a

stripper, and I was a dominatrix. But your comfort level, you don't just start right there. Maybe some people do, but how did you feel the first time you were nude in front of a camera?

Madison 08:51

Yeah. Especially when I started modelling, I never really thought of myself as beautiful, or what a porn star looks like, porn stars were tall, and had big breasts, and had a different kind of body, and I was full of piercings, and I had this way of cutting my hair where I would close my eyes and then chop at my hair with scissors.

Amanda 09:19

But you're a witch, so it always came out great.

Madison 09:24

So I didn't think I was exactly what they were looking for, but I kind of thought about it as performance art, and I was very comfortable using my body as a material, and as a medium, so I thought about it in that way. And for me, especially BDSM, and doing bondage modelling, made a lot of sense, because it didn't feel like it was about what I looked like, it was how fucking strong I am. It's like, you can hit me with a whip as hard as you want, you think that fucking hurts? Give it to me.

And then not only that, taking all that energy and then transcending it, and melting it into this delicious pleasure, and then orgasming from that, and then being paid, and then funding a feminist revolution with it. The whole thing was just amazing.

Amanda 10:15

Were there any points, especially early on there, where you looked around and you were like, ooh, this is not amazing, this is suspect, this is sleazy, I'm a little bit squicked?

Madison 10:28

Yes. Definitely. I did a lot of performing, it was how I made most of my money during a certain point of my life, 2002 until like, 2010?

Amanda 10:40

2002, that is pre-YouTube. So where was the media winding up?

Madison 10:46

I mean, I'm definitely on some VHSes.

Amanda 10:50

Right!

Madison 10:52

And DVDs...

Amanda 10:52

Vintage.

Madison 10:54

And yeah, a lot of DVDs, a lot of websites that don't exist anymore. A lot of clips that are still floating around out there. My specialty for five or six years was that I worked specifically in bondage, I was a bondage model. Some people that were bondage models didn't even consider it to be porn, that that was something else. I did a lot of really tight rope bondage, a lot of suspension. I love to be off the ground, I love to push my body.

Amanda 11:34

There's an element of theatricalness to that, and also sort of acrobaticness. It's just like, can you do this thing with your body?

You were in San Francisco, which, if you're gonna choose this as your line of work, better than Cincinnati, probably. You mentioned performance art, to even have the language for that, I remember a time in my life when I didn't know what performance art was, or what it meant. Where did your education come from?

Madison 12:04

Some of it was from college, I was a theatre major there, but then once I moved to San Francisco, I really fell into this scene of really vibrant, queer performance art that I addressed sexuality very head on. Many of those folks were also a part of this queer sex work community. [Annie Sprinkle](#) was definitely one of those. Annie Sprinkle and [Carol Queen](#).

Annie and I met in 2003. Annie Sprinkle is so many things, Annie Sprinkle was a porn star in the 70s, 80s, into the 90s, but is also a brilliant performance artist, and had many one-woman shows, was a feminist porn director, is a sex educator, and is now leading the movement of ecosexuality, as a filmmaker, and an incredible artist who makes work with her wife, [Beth Stephens](#), and they're my two mamas.

Amanda 13:08

That's amazing. I had a rough ride in college and didn't really enjoy it, but there were a few things that I did take away that were amazing, and one was a class that I took called Postmodern Performances, this was at Wesleyan University in like, 1995 or something. And we were being schooled in performance art of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, and as part of the course, we watched one of Annie Sprinkle's ten-minute orgasm videos. And I was like, this woman is amazing! Whether or not that orgasm is real, it doesn't matter! She is just having an amazing time, and I can't believe this exists! I can't believe this is real, I can't believe she's real, she is so amazing! Cos she's also Annie Sprinkle, she has the perfect sense of humour, mixed with gravity, to send you the message of sexual liberation, she's just incredible.

Madison 14:01

She's fucking brilliant, and she's also just... Her and Beth are just... They're the kind of people that when you walk into the room, you feel the love. I feel like there's only a few people that I've met that you enter the room, and it's like, thick. It's palpable. You feel it. They generate that much love, and when I met them, they were really making a whole lot of work. Their work is still very centred on love, love surrounding the environment, and they have the Love Art Lab, and they were doing cuddle art...

Amanda 14:38

Cuddle art!

Madison 14:40

Yeah, so good, and I was like, this is fucking radical! Love is so fucking radical! This is what is going to change things. Love! Of course! The biggest taboo.

Amanda 14:53

And the ultimate word for it, which to me is compassion. I mean, they're the same thing. You could feel that from Annie Sprinkle's work, is that it was compassion-based. It wasn't performance narcissistically-based art, it was love-based, compassion-based, like I want to liberate you and help you and delight you, and I'm so happy to know that she's in your life like that. That's amazing.

Madison 15:18

Yeah, she's amazing. And she's an amazing grandmother to my kids, and a mama to me.

MUSIC BREAK - Look At All The Women In The Street

Amanda 15:26

I've also used my body in various ways for my work, I mean as a performer you're using your body period, right? Any kind of work, you're using your body. You said something like you were not the typical looking porn star, you weren't 6 feet with blonde hair and big boobs or whatever, but how did you find that your own relationship with shame, and your own relationship with your body, your boobs, your legs, your hands, your face, your hair, your lips, how did you find that relationship evolve, not just through being on one side of the camera, and performing, and knowing that your body is being used as this tool, but what happened? Because you were doing this for years and years and years, right? Your relationship with your body must have evolved in certain directions. What happened?

Madison 16:24

When I started, I was so young, I was, I guess 21, when I first stepped in front of the camera. I was insecure, and awkward, and still developing a sense of my sexuality, and sexual pleasure, and exploring my sexuality, and so many of my firsts, including my exploration of kink, happened in front of the camera. All of my 20s are in front of the camera. Which is amazing, and

I have so much documentation of me, and different lovers that I love, that I had incredible sex with, and amazing experiences with. And the very first time that I met my husband, and the father of my children, and my dominant, and the love of my life, we've been together since 2005, that moment that we met is on camera.

Amanda 17:28

Wow.

Madison 17:29

Within moments, he had me in an inverted suspension. And I can look at that, I can see that moment where we were testing each other's boundaries of, 'oh really, you're that much of a badass?' 'Yes, I'm that much of a badass, do you know who I am?' 'Yes, I know who you are.' 'How about this?' 'Yeah, I can take that.' Just testing each other out. And we still do that. It's like finally meeting your match, and he continues to challenge me.

Amanda 18:01

There you were, sort of growing up in a performance mode, sometimes on camera, with your own sexuality and your own body, but did you just get more comfortable because that's just what happens when you're in front of a camera again and again and again and again?

Madison 18:15

Yeah, I developed a relationship with the camera, I feel like the camera, like a blackbox theatre, or a camera, they're these safe spaces, they're these containers of... And the camera has been there, I have a relationship with the camera.

Amanda 18:35

What about the people on the other side of the camera? The ones who are sticking that DVD into their players in their own living rooms? Do you think about them?

Madison 18:44

You know, if I'm looking directly at the camera, I'm thinking about... I guess I'm kind of thinking more about the universe as a whole, and sending my erotic energy out to the entire universe through this portal, so it's manifesting this sexual energy, and then sending it out through this portal, and it's like, enveloping the universe.

Amanda 19:13

You are a witch.

Madison 19:16

Yes.

Amanda 19:18

So did you watch yourself shedding shame? Did any of it have to do with the outside world validating you, authenticating you, reaching out to you and going, it doesn't matter if you aren't a triple-D, you're still an amazing porn star? There's always balance there, how much of it came from your own battle royale with yourself, and how much of it came from others?

Madison 19:47

I think when it comes to porn, I feel like it's been very much a documentation of my own sexuality, and it's a way that I have documented my sexual evolution, and I think that it's really important to show authentic orgasms, and healthy communication about sex, and some of the videos of me and my husband surrounding kink are some of the only real couples that you'll find in BDSM having an authentic experience that involves negotiation, and involves very active consent.

For me, being in front of the camera, the way that I could do it was really not making it so much about the outside. I'm way more of a hippie, I've never been an uber-femme, I can't do my nails or my make up. If I'm getting make up done, someone has to do the make up, because I just can't. It's not my thing. And being in front of the camera, it was about talent, it was about how good of a bondage model I was, how tight I could take bondage, how I could perform in it, making it a performance. If it was having sex with someone, it was about having sex in the best and most feminist way, and holding space, say if it was in a mainstream setting, being the one to come into that setting and hold the space, and aggressively negotiate, because that space wouldn't necessarily be held.

Amanda 21:31

Can you give me an example of that?

Madison 21:33

There's differences between feminist porn and mainstream porn. In mainstream porn, a lot of the times you're not going to know the person that you're performing with until the day of. So you meet the person, so they set the person aside, and I'd say hi, I'm Madison, here's a little bit to know about my body, this is how I like to be touched, I'd like to know a little bit about you, these are things that I don't like, what do you like, what don't you like. Just having those conversations, that was considered unusual.

Amanda 22:07

What was otherwise expected, that you would just show up, high five the person and start banging?

Madison 22:12

Pretty much. I mean, it's just a lack of communication, and a lack of emphasis on, say, pleasure. So very much like Annie Sprinkle, I'm a pleasure activist. I think that in documenting pleasure, and in documenting authentic pleasure, that that is feminist.

I mean, I've been in so many scenes, and I think there were only a couple that were highly problematic. I was pretty vocal about really advocating for myself in mainstream settings. In any setting. You had to really come in prepared in a mainstream setting.

One time that I was in the middle of a scene, and had an anal tear, which is not very fun, the guy pulled out, and was like, ugh! I was like, oh no, there must be some poop or something. And I looked down, and there's all this blood, and I was totally freaking out, I ran to the bathroom, and I continued to bleed more and more, and I called my agent, and I was like, I'm out of here. I'm bleeding, I need to go to the hospital. He was not very helpful, he was like, oh you can finish the scene, it's no problem.

Amanda 23:35

Bad agent.

Madison 23:36

Yeah, bad agent. And I was like, okay, well, I'm just gonna get an Uber and go right to the airport, because even though I should have probably gone to some place in LA, just wanted to be back in the Bay Area where I was living. So I went to the hospital as soon as I landed in Oakland. Of course received very biased opinions as well from the medical provider, from the doctor who saw me and said, you know, you have an anal tear, and I said, well when can I have anal sex again, because I have to pay for my feminist art gallery! This is expensive rent in San Francisco!

Amanda 24:22

So you were really young when this happened.

Madison 24:25

Well in the porn industry, not super young. I was, I think 27? 28? And he said that I should never have anal sex again.

Amanda 24:33

Oh, wow.

Madison 24:34

Because, of course, what doctor is going to say that?

Amanda 24:39

Was this a male doctor?

Madison 24:40

Yes.

Amanda 24:42

How did this male doctor explain that? He was just like, anal sex is too dangerous, just don't have it?

Madison 24:49

He didn't even give a lot of explanation. I just asked him very upfront, this is part of my job, when can I go back to work, which involves anal sex? And he was like, you shouldn't have anal sex.

Amanda 25:06

No pun intended, but what an asshole.

Madison 25:08

Yeah. Total asshole. So I'm always telling people, it's so important to find sex positive doctors.

Amanda 25:16

So how does one go about finding a sex positive doctor?

Madison 25:19

Interviewing them. You have to...

Amanda 25:23

If you're in an emergency, you don't really have that luxury.

Madison 25:26

Exactly. The hard part is when there's an emergency. For general practitioners or midwives or things like that, you can do more research, and there's a great site called [kinkawareprofessionals](http://kinkawareprofessionals.com) which is really great. It's hard. There's a lot of judgement out there.

MUSIC BREAK - Congratulations

Amanda 25:51

In your life right now, things have changed as well, because you're how old?

Madison 25:56

39 in a couple of months.

Amanda 25:59

39. And you have an 8 year old and a 2 year old. And having children changes your body, being pregnant changes your body, and then being pregnant again changes your body, and did you breastfeed?

Madison 26:09

Yeah.

Amanda 26:10

So breastfeeding changes your boobs, and even if you don't breastfeed, pregnancy changes your boobs. I knew that pregnancy would change my body, I didn't know that pregnancy, and then the aftermath, was going to change my ass so profoundly. And my ass more or less snapped back, but I did a photoshoot, I had just given birth, it was weeks, not months, and I decided to do this amazing, badass mom photoshoot on the beach at dawn in LA, I was wearing this weird dress that had no ass because it was actually a theatrical dress, I was holding a big machete, I was holding my child. And the vision that I had in my brain for the photograph was me from behind holding the child, and holding the machete. But I hadn't looked at my ass since I had had a child. And I don't think anyone else had either, I had mostly been rolling around in a bed, just dealing, and then occasionally shuffling off to the shower, shuffling to the store, cos I had an infant attached to my boob at all times. And I didn't even know until I looked at the contact sheets, and I was like (*gasps*) what happened to my ass?!

Something happened. Well, I know what physiologically happened to my ass. It was filled with pounds and pounds of water, and then the baby happened and my ass just deflated like two balloons, and that's what my ass looked like, it just looked like two fleshy, shrivelled balloons that had just been let out. It was just a horrifying sight. And there I was, I was just so used to my ass that I was posing for the camera like I had the ass that I had, not the horror ass.

And then I was like wow, I am confronted with my own vanity. That's the shot. But wow, look at that amazing, hanging, sagging, postpartum... wow. That's not the shot I had in my brain. But then, Amanda, hyper-uber-feminist, why are you afraid of that ass? What about that ass is scary to you? But also, this shot from the front of you holding the baby with the amazing dress is also amazing, maybe we use that.

But I really was amazed at my love of, and appreciation of, the camera, with which I have also had a lifelong relationship. And I was like, wow, that camera is showing me something that I wouldn't have otherwise seen. I just never would have seen my postpartum ass. It's hard to look at in a mirror, I wasn't anywhere where there were two way mirrors, I wasn't in any shops where I was trying on clothes, I was just recovering from childbirth.

And there is something very beautiful about the camera as friend, as truth-teller, non-judgemental, shower of you to you, that for someone who doesn't spend a lot of time professionally in front of a camera, and that does not mean you're taking selfies with your phone, being professionally, especially naked, in front of a camera, really gives you a relationship, a comfortable, if you're doing it right, hopefully, a comfortable relationship with your body that's not automatically available to other people, and I wonder if you've felt that same thing.

Madison 29:46

I shot porn through the pregnancy of my first kiddo, and my second kiddo, much more with my first child than my second.

Amanda 29:57

Why was that?

Madison 30:00

I just had other things going on, including being a parent. And I very rarely perform in erotic films any more. I direct erotic films for [Erika Lust](#), and I write non-erotic films, and I write books, and I have a [podcast](#), I'm doing a [television show](#), I have other projects that I'm working on. So during the pregnancy of my second kiddo, I didn't do as much. I did one or two solo shoots, cos I love the pregnant body, and I wanted to be out in nature, and get some gorgeous erotic photos, and things like that.

It's a very different relationship that I had with my body when I'm pregnant. I'm a big pregnant lady. I'm a pretty small person, I gained 60lb with both of the kids, each time. I lose it. My mom also gained a lot with both of her kids. My body just packs it on during a pregnancy, and I become very round. I love that though, I love the roundness of a pregnant body, I think it's gorgeous, and I think it's really important to show that when we're pregnant, we still have a relationship with our body, and with our sexuality.

And then I also did some work postpartum with my first kid, and that was tough. I mean, I think that people don't spend enough time writing about the postpartum experience, because the relationship you have with your body... You're right, it's like, celebrated when you're pregnant, and you're round, and you're full, and then...

Amanda 31:48

You're a moon goddess!

Madison 31:50

Yeah! And then you're just exhausted.

Amanda 31:53

And flapping.

Madison 31:54

And flapping, yes! Everything.

Amanda 31:56

The flapping ass, the flapping vag. The thing I was most fascinated by postpartum was just how gigantic everything was. My vag and my labia were so magnificently swollen, that I was like, wow, I feel like I'm packing. There's just so much happening down there, and no one told me about this. But also, I gave birth in the most wonderful place, I gave birth at the Farm.

Madison 32:27

Yeah! Oh, I knew it on hearing that, that's so great.

Amanda 32:31

With all these wonderful, wisened midwives, who had done literally thousands of births, and they were prepped, and they do something called a twatsicle. And a twatsicle, they made them, and then they gave me the recipe for them, and it's basically a pad, sanitary pad, soaked in witch hazel, that you stick in the freezer, and then you take the twatsicle, and you put it in your underwear. And they'd say, get a twatsicle for Amanda!

Madison 32:58

My second birth was at a beautiful birthing centre in Berkeley, surrounded by midwives, in a gorgeous, huge tub, and it was the most supportive, ecstatic experience of my life, it was so transcendental, I was like, making out with my husband, and going into these other realms.

Amanda 33:20

It's a trippy experience.

Madison 33:23

It was so amazing.

Amanda 33:24

And I was so glad that I didn't have to have it in a hospital, or on drugs. It was intense, but also as someone who's comfortable with your body, and especially comfortable with your own bits and not holding a lot of shame around that, it's probably... You already have a language for it.

Madison 34:41

Yeah. And it was nice to be in that supportive environment. My first kiddo, we had Kaiser insurance, and we were like, you know how to do your thing, let's just do it at Kaiser, have them stay out of the way, we'll bring our doula, it'll be fine. But I think just being in that environment, it wasn't fine. I'm a long labourer, both kids were 47 hours, which is fine, but it wasn't fine in the hospital.

Amanda 34:10

Cos you're stuck there.

Madison 34:12

They don't like those numbers. They're all about the numbers, and checking constantly, and with the midwives they checked once.

Amanda 34:20

So I have just a curiosity question. So the porn that you did when you were pregnant the first time, was any of it pregnant-centric? Was it just, this happens to be a pregnant person having sex, and this is totally normal and normalised?

Madison 34:33

There were a couple that were pregnant-centric.

Amanda 34:37

My favourite new word. Pregnant-centric.

Madison 34:42

But I also did some porn that was, I was doing a tour in Australia, and was shooting with some folks there, and it was just different queer and feminist porn that I was booked to do.

Amanda 34:59

And you just went and did it.

Madison 35:00

And I happened to be pregnant.

Amanda 35:01

Did anyone have a problem with it, within the community and without the community?

Madison 35:05

Not within the community. I mean, I think that folks, especially within the queer community, were kind of excited about it, and in the feminist community I think as well. But with mainstream porn, it mostly was kind of a niche thing, once I started to show in my second trimester.

Amanda 35:26

You've gotta be ready to drop nine.

Madison 35:30

Yes, you kind of go from being marketable, the first trimester I was able to stretch that first three months, and only pull off a burrito belly kind of thing, and then not marketable really until the third trimester, where you're very pregnant.

Amanda 35:50

Right, and you look like a pregnant lady.

Madison 35:52

Yes. And I couldn't do most of the bondage work that I was really well known for doing, due to liabilities. Not due to it actually...

Amanda 36:05

People aren't into that.

Madison 36:07

Yeah, I mean I did a spread for Hustler's Taboo magazine where I was very pregnant, and in rope and things. It's completely fine and healthy to explore BDSM and kink while you're pregnant. Just doing it in a way that modifies for your pregnant body.

MUSIC BREAK - You'd Think I'd Shot Their Children

Amanda 36:32

And so, when I said from without, I don't even mean, so you've got the queer porn community, and then the mainstream porn community, but then you have the world.

Madison 36:40

Oh, the fans, and the world. Yes.

Amanda 36:41

Well yeah, and the fans are even whatever, but then there's the world. Has the world had anything to say about that? Especially the tour that I'm doing right now, and the conversation around how we are with pregnant women, and that we are female, we're put on this planet to give babies, and make babies, and do babies, that's our job. And people have really, really strong political opinions about what pregnancy is, and how it is done, and I would imagine that there would be some people out there who would be incredibly pissed off to know that a pregnant woman was doing porn.

Madison 37:25

I had a lot of support during pregnancy. What I had a lot of backlash from was once I became a mother, because that's very different.

Amanda 37:36

Then you're a mom doing porn. Moms don't do porn.

Madison 37:39

No. You can be a MILF in porn, but you can't be an out mom, and talk about it all.

Amanda 37:49

Where did that backlash come from?

Madison 37:51

I saw it from both within the community, and from people who had been fans in the past, and everyone. I mean, I feel like it was a really hard transition into becoming a parent.

Amanda 38:10

Which is hard enough as it is.

Madison 38:12

Yeah, I mean it was a hard transition as it was. It kind of exploded with... I had planned this prior to becoming a parent, because I was a workaholic, and travelled around the world, getting tied up and doing porn, and then also writing grants for non-profit feminist art gallery, and providing all of this programming in San Francisco at my art gallery. I was just working 70 hours a week prior to becoming a parent.

So I had decided that I was going to do a plan in our programming, an exhibition called Becoming MILF, and it would be surrounding the transitional experience of what is it like to balance our relationship with our body and sexuality, and motherhood? And I would document it, and do this photo series, and have an exhibition of it, and it would be up eight weeks after giving birth.

Amanda 39:17

And it would fix everything.

Madison 39:19

Why not? Of course I can create 13 new pieces of art and...

Amanda 39:21

And a child.

Madison 39:23

And a child, and exhibit it. Why don't I just have the child in the gallery too?!

Amanda 39:26

Yeah! So how did that go?

Madison 39:27

I learned. It was a wonderful learning experience of what not to do. Some beautiful pieces of art came out of it, and we survived, and my kiddo spent lots of time at the art gallery, as I was mounting the show. The public that showed up for the show, which was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, and we had a grant for, it was at a very nice gallery, everyone was very supportive. Then the press kind of glommed in. There were images from the show that were taken out of context. There were interviews and things about the show that were not necessarily bad, they were completely fine, but the images went out into the interwebs world, they went from the gallery onto online.

Amanda 40:20

Are these images of you and new child?

Madison 40:22

The specific image that came under attack was an image that I tried to recreate of a famous Avedon image of Marilyn Monroe, where she's kind of looking to the side, and she's very pensive, and she has this halter dress on, it's black and white, and I'm doing a similar image, dressed as Marilyn, in a halter, and breastfeeding, and looking to the side, just like this transitional period of time. You don't see my nipple, you don't see a breast, you don't see the face of my child.

If I was anyone else, no one would think this image was sexual at all, or erotic at all. But the attacks coming in were saying that as someone, even though I had a long history as an artist, because I'd done porn, that my image and my self were always under an erotic eye, and would always be sexualised. And so if I was bringing my child into an image, and I was...

Amanda 41:30

Then you were putting your child in porn.

Madison 41:32

Yes. And then from there, it spun onto, oh, I'm taking my child onto...

Amanda 41:39

A porn set.

Madison 41:40

Porn sets, yes, all of these things that were completely not true, I hadn't even been near a porn set since the birth, and I was like, in that weeping stage, and leaking stage, and doubting who I was, and in this glom of emotional mess, with just what seemed like everyone in the world...

Amanda 42:02

Yelling.

Madison 42:04

Yelling at me, and phone calls started coming in from talk shows, and Anderson Cooper, and all these people, and like, I don't wanna talk to anyone! Pretty terrifying. Also just as being someone who did work in erotic film, having people in the community say things like, 'You need to be careful, someone might hurt you, or you could have your child taken away from you, I'm like, all I'm doing is rocking here with a colicky baby, like I'm so normal right now! This is the most normal I've been in a decade! Just leave me alone!

Amanda 42:51

I'm so sorry.

Madison 42:53

Yeah, it was very traumatising. But it was after that whole experience, and having space from it, it just became so clear how the public perceives mothers, just how taboo that is. And I include that in my one-woman show, after all the shit I've done, the most taboo thing that I have ever done is become a mom. That's it.

Amanda 43:19

Well, because you're not allowed to break that mold. We are not allowed to break that mold within this patriarchy. It's sacrosanct. We're like service providers, who are supposed to just provide babies in a certain way, with a certain tone, and you start fucking with that, and you make people very, very, very, very angry. I mean, I certainly haven't had anything that bad. People get a different kind of upset within the conceptions of this culture when moms are involved, and kids are involved. There's a different kind of outrage.

Madison 44:00

But I think that after that, I mean I'm glad, in a way, that it all happened, I've seen so many more... That was eight years ago, with my first kiddo, and many more women in the adult film industry since then have become out about being parents, and are documenting their pregnancy, and are able to...

Amanda 44:22

I love that you have to be an out parent.

Madison 44:27

Yeah, exactly! I know, it's like that's the thing that you're being out about, but it's like, I am that complicated, look, I'm not hiding! Because before then, so many people, if they were in front of the camera, they'd just hide during that time, and then come back when your body is back.

Amanda 44:44

Well, there's some other interesting areas, in entertainment and beyond, where that's also true. In the music industry, and I've seen a lot of women talk about this, especially women rockers of the 80s, some of them weren't out.

Madison 45:01

Right, right, I can completely see that.

Amanda 45:04

It's just not rock and roll. It's just not rock and roll, and it fucks with the image, so just hide that child.

I'm really proud of you for weathering that storm. I mean, you definitely, I'm sure, have kicked the gate down and the door down for a lot of people.

Madison 45:21

I'm working on an anthology of women and non-binary folks who work in porn that are also parents, of many different ages, it's really interesting, right now we have about 25 submissions. I'm really excited to get their stories out there.

Amanda 45:40

Did you ever think this would be your life?

Madison 45:42

This?

Amanda 45:43

Yeah.

Madison 45:44

Yeah. I totally did. I grew up super shy, and quiet, and nervous, and bullied, and I would stare out the school bus, and I saw this woman. I completely knew this was out there. I'll talk to my spirit guides and stuff, and they're like, we gave you those visions. We gave you those visions because we knew it would get you through, and we knew you would step into that woman one day.

MUSIC BREAK - I Don't Have This Shit Figured Out

Amanda 46:25

Given where you are now, given everything you've been through, is there anything about your body that you still struggle with?

Madison 46:33

Hmm... You know, our relationship with our body changes on a daily basis. I think that for me, it's really about gifting affirmations to parts of my body that really need it. So if I'm feeling like my boobs are saggy, and I have a negative thought start to come in, I touch them, and I tell them, I'm like, I love you. You need love.

Amanda 46:59

Thanks, boobs!

Madison 47:00

Thank you so much. Or my belly. Whatever it is. And I think that, in the last year, I've really gotten into high intensity interval training, and strength and conditioning and stuff, and becoming really strong in that kind of brings me back to that place of what I also enjoy about bondage, and being strong in my body, and pushing those boundaries. So I think for me, the next step is a lot of the internal stuff, the spiritual stuff, and working on all the inner gooey stuff inside.

Amanda 47:40

Chiropractic adjustments of the soul.

Madison 47:42

Yes!

Amanda 47:43

I was really shocked after I had Ash, I notoriously, among all of my friends and Neil and everyone around me, everyone knows I really hate the cold. I hate the cold, I hate being cold, I hate having to deal with the cold. If given a choice of temperature, I will stick it on 80, that's just where I want it, I want every room 80, if I'm going somewhere and I get to pick, I wanna go to the place where it's 80, or 90, I just like being hot. And then after Ash was born, I started going into cold water. Ice cold water. And in that same way where I was really interested in how strong I could be, and testing myself, and going into ice baths, and going into glacially cold lakes, and just... I know! She just shivered. But I think I was really emboldened by childbirth. I was like, I just did that. I just did that. I just endured a 24 hour labour and gave birth with no drugs, and that was... quite intense, and quite long. Am I supposed to believe that I can't endure being in glacially cold water for three minutes?

Madison 48:58

Right, bring it on.

Amanda 48:59

Three minutes is just not that long! And now I'm like an addict.

Madison 49:05

Wow.

Amanda 49:06

I just desperately want to get into a cold plunge at all times, it's amazing.

Madison 49:09

I'll have to try that out.

Amanda 49:10

You should try it. And also, you get out of the cold and you feel like you have taken some amazing drugs, it's an incredible feeling, not unlike the feelings that I know come up for people who do suspension, and do crazy, unexpected body challenges.

But yeah, that makes me very happy to hear. You just seem so comfortable within yourself, and I'm so glad that you're out there being an advocate, and an activist, and you're following the Annie way.

Madison 49:39

I am!

Amanda 49:40

You're using your powers for good.

Madison 49:42

Absolutely. She's been a shining light.

Amanda 49:45

Madison, thank you so much for being on my podcast. Madison has her own podcast, [I'm actually on it](#). I'll post up the link, but do you wanna give your podcast a plug, and just tell people where they can find it and what it is?

Madison 49:56

Sure, it is Wash Your Mouth Out podcast, you can find us at washyourmouthoutpodcast.com. We are a stigma-smashing feminist podcast that is addressing power, pleasure, and parenting.

Amanda 50:11

And you're on Patreon.

Madison 50:13

Yes, I am on Patreon. Both for [Wash Your Mouth Out](#), and [Madison Young](#).

Amanda 50:18

Make sure you check out both of those Patreon pages, and good luck with everything that you're gonna do. I hope we get to check back in.

Madison 50:27

Yeah, definitely! Me too.

Amanda 50:29

Find out what's happening five years from now.

Madison 50:31

Oh my gosh. We'll be in... Who knows where we'll be?

Amanda 50:35

Thank you again for doing this.

Madison 50:36

Thank you.

Amanda 50:40

This has been the Art of Asking Everything podcast, I'm Amanda Palmer. Thank you so much to my guest, Madison Young, for her incredible bravery, truth-telling, shameless awesomeness. I want more guests like Madison!

You can check out her podcast, cos she's got one too, it's called Wash Your Mouth Out, her memoir again is called [Daddy](#), you can find that online, and in your local bookstore, indie please. Check out her web-series [Submission Possible](#) on RevryTV, and [Fragments](#) is on Lust Cinema.

Our interview was recorded by Sonia Parrish at KBOO in Portland.

For all the music you heard in this episode, you can go to my website, and the section for the podcast is amandapalmer.net/podcast

This podcast was produced by FannieCo. Lots of thanks as always to my incredible team: Hayley Rosenblum, Michael McComiskey, Alex Knight, Kelly Welles, my manager Jordan Verzar, all of them have been wearing lots and lots of various hats and doing tons of stuff to make this podcast, and all of the stuff around it, possible.

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If you're not part of [the Patreon](#), please, become a supporting member. It also gives you access to the patron-only parts of the [forum](#), the live chats that I do with the guests sometimes, you'll get the podcast right in your email inbox, and it would mean a lot to me and my whole community if you would join us. It is a great place to be, especially as the rest of the internet turns into more and more of a cesspool every day.

Thank you so much everyone. Signing off, this is Amanda Fucking Palmer. Keep on asking everything.