

GROWING UP IN FASHION.

Can we give her some pants because I don't want to see these legs!

Hi, my name is Hannelore and I have great legs!

...

As a model it's in my job description to be judged, compared and chosen over somebody else.

Often this happens right there in front of us.

And even though I knew from quite early on not to take it personally, I still felt all the feelings.

It's a mind-f*ck to say the least.

...

I'm standing here out of LOVE.

To share my lived experience.

Not to cancel or to judge but to raise awareness around working conditions for professional models and support wellbeing in the industry.

I'm also well aware that there's so much more to be said than the things I will say here today.

So let me begin with the beginning and take it from there.

...

My first big show was the Alexander McQueen show in London.

The year was 1997 and I was 19 years old.

First time ever walking on high heels!

My outfit was a pink leather motorcycle-chick look but ballgown style.

Walk with confidence.

Stop at end of the catwalk.

Strike a pose and walk back.

Easy, simple rules.

Music is popping, you're standing in line up and then just before it's your turn, the make up artist says "*at the end of the catwalk do this:*" and she licks her upper lip very sensually.

I blush and GO! I start walking in trance.
Which luckily translated as "with confidence".
I walked the walk and stopped and ... my dry tongue got stuck between my even drier lips.

...

All of a sudden I was riding this rollercoaster.
From day one I got to walk all the big shows and inevitably got all the big campaigns.

Yohji Yamamoto, Chanel, Gucci, Prada, Gaultier you name it I did it.

I left for Milan as a joke and didn't come home for the next 6 months.
Only to refresh my suitcase and get up and go again.

"You must be stupid not to stay on the ride," they said!

All these opportunities, the money, the glamour... how could I ignore all that?

So my life took a turn without me even knowing it.
My life chose me, and I chose to stick with it.

The fear of saying no, was bigger than the fear of stepping on that catwalk that night in '97.
And so I played a role from the very first minute I committed to this job.

...

This is not fashion's fault.
It is how we as humans, women are conditioned:
Be a good girl! Do as they ask & enjoy the opportunity that is given to you.

Growing up in fashion sure added that extra spice in my coming of age.

Because if you are afraid of admitting what you want and don't want, you may repress your emotions, but over time you may even become a stranger to yourself and disconnect from your truth.

...

Our industry seems to run on gaslighting, ~~amongst other things~~.
Even writing this piece, I had a hard time finding my exact approach
because I doubted my own feelings and experiences.

Did I really feel bullied at times and caught up in a spiderweb of ego
games and power trips? Or is it just me, the pretty white girl who's sad
because her career might be over? This is gaslighting.

But then it hit me.
All the job options I still get, the moodboards I'm on.

Or the confessions of peers and other creatives.

I'm not alone in standing here.

...

But how to address this without being misunderstood?
Without the prejudices I have to battle before even talking?

...

As a model I saw it as my duty to keep the spirit high on set.

I noticed that when I walked in, people often held their breath for a
second "*is she going to be a bitch or not*" and as soon as I said hello to
both the head of production and the second assistant of the assistant,
people would start breathing again "*oh, she is normal*"

Most models I know are "normal".

Most of us have the skills of basic curtesy down.

Being a bitch is not our default setting.
Maybe you just pushed the bitch button. (Wink!)

But you know what is the most frustrating part?
As a model we are hardly taken seriously.
We are expected to be grateful.
We are "pretty" and therefore not allowed to complain.
When we do, we are considered too much drama. Too sensitive.
Too loud in disrupting the status quo.

All this while bending backwards.
Staying loyal, with no guarantees.

“A muse! An inspiration. So refreshing. Androgynous yet super feminine.”

I sparked his engine. And as a team we were on a roll... Until the day something personal hit my agenda and I had to say no to a non-paid job ... He never booked again. Nobody says no in fashion, not even for a funeral.

But I chose to do this job and so I stay professional aka silent.

I don't even know what's more challenging.
Bikinis in winter or layers of cashmere in summer?

Working for free more often than not.
Pole dancing on Times Square next to the traffic lights during peak hours.
Made fun of on set while doing the craziest things they ask you to do.
...

Recently I read an essay about humiliation.
Anton Chekhov once observed that the worst thing life can do to human beings is to inflict humiliation. How it has an impact on the mind, the heart, the veins and the arteries. It allows people to brood for decades, and often deforming their inner life.

I felt that.
...

Sometimes I feel like a body without a human inside.
People stare at you, touch you and forget you are real.

When agents sell and clients book us, they sometimes seem to forget we are human beings.
They forget it's a human being traveling the world.
Doing business.
...

If you want your product to arrive fresh as a daisy, straight to set and work for 12 hours that day? Yeah, I will ask for a business seat when you book me.

I'm not a diva, I'm a professional delivering the goods.

Perhaps it is time to walk a mile in my high heeled shoes.

And it would be this mentality change that we can all benefit from.

It shouldn't only be up to the model to learn how to deal with their part of the job.

...

Models are taking care of their mental health & strength.

We are addressing an industry that is forcing us to see each other as competition.

Passive aggressive micro aggressions, power trips and ego games are a common problem in our business.

It fuels feelings of jealousy and insecurities and in my personal journey I added shame to that pile. Because as a good girl, I shouldn't be feeling jealous.

I should work harder because competition makes you stronger. Right?

I never acknowledged my authentic Self and I had to figure it all out on my own or in hours of therapy.

...

A while ago I was invited in a clubhouse meeting amongst younger models to talk about this "comparing with others".

It was so refreshing to hear.

A new generation of models that spoke to each other instead of hiding in shame.

...

Instead of ignoring the flaws of the business, let us look at them so we can grow from them.

You need to see the dirt in order to clean your house.

These girls are taking care.

Maybe we/you/us could and/or should do the same.

Competition does not make you stronger.
That's the patriarchy keeping us in control.

...

So let me show you a glimpse of what my journey as a model is,
before you see me shine in glitter and glamour on fabulous covers that
make us dream.

FIRST STEP: POLAROIDS

There used to be a time before the internet.
A time when my agent or a casting director would shoot some polaroids
to "register" how I look.
No make up, no lighting, nothing. Just natural.
People were happy working for months with this one miserable looking
polaroid.

Nowadays, you know, since internet and high tech cameras on your
phone, it seems that clients demand a polaroid as soon as your name
pops up in their mind's eyes.

Hurry, my agents write, they need it asap.
Because with a phone and internet, how easy is it to shoot a picture on
the spot and send it across the world.
Right?

Wrong!
Let me get you in on a secret: I'm not always looking this good.
Most of the time I wash my hair with dry shampoo and most part of the
week my outfit isn't fashion forward or even flattering and showing you
my body the way it should.

But it's just a polaroid!, they say.
Right?

Wrong again!
It's the picture that will decide if I'll be booked or not.
Please let me take my time and be professional in selling my product.

Or use the polaroid I send out not even a month ago!

...

Dear clients and agents,
can you trust me that I did not grow a third limb.
That my size is still the same. (Because Yes inclusivity isn't towards all models out there)
OK. My hair might be blond or black. I'll give you that.

But really, I can not on the spot just like that drop my son or my daily life just so you can have that polaroid asap because *the house is on fire and we need a fashion shoot to save it!*

...

But let me back up a minute.
Those paying attention heard me say: rush rush and rush some more

...

to then ... sit and wait for weeks.

...

Let me introduce you to STEP TWO: THE OPTIONS

To be able to work with the client's dream team, we have this system of "options".

Clients put an option on a few girls, just like they do with potential hair and make up teams, and then depending on timing, budget and taste you will get confirmed or not.

So far. So fair.

My professional and personal life jumped from one option to the next, waiting and wanting for jobs to get confirmed.

Model life is being in a constant mode of pending. All while rush rush rushing to then sit and wait.

Clients asking for exclusivity and dropping you whenever they feel ready to make up their mind.

My dopamine was all over the place.

Often an option would not get confirmed until the day before take off. Which means that you've had your agenda blocked for weeks and now all of a sudden you need a babysitter and someone to feed the fish. Because I can not have a whole village on stand-by, you see.

If you were lucky, you got confirmed and it was well worth the anticipation.

But if you didn't your brain got triggered in the same spot as when you get shot in the foot.

Ting Ting Ting High Alert!

My cortisol and adrenaline go up and without proper knowledge of how to activate my para sympathetic nervous system, I live my life as a model with chronic stress.

And so, I hit a burnout.

...

I'm not saying I'm worse off than others.
This is not the most shitty job contest.

I'm just sharing what I've learned along the way.

And I would like to acknowledge the wisdom all of us models hold.

Our coping skills got us through the job.

I'm realising that the coping skills I used during these early years weren't too bad, but they definitely weren't perfect either.
And at some point they caused more harm than good.

Low self-esteem

Doubt

Shame

Social anxiety to the point that I would faint when introducing myself.

...

I've learned now how the chemicals work in my brain.

Dopamine is activated for the anticipation of the reward. Not the reward.

So every option was an opportunity for my dopamine to flare up.
And the last-minute-life-style was interrupting a healthy flow.

Not only was my thinking mind caught up in a poisonous loop of not being good enough, on top of that I had a physical and chemical explanation of why I was who I was.

...

I've learned to counter act the inner critic that has grown so big inside of me.

I am using my brain in a different way and it has positively impacted my life.

So now I wonder... if I can do it. So can you. So can they.

They, who keep this unprofessional way off doing business in this industry alive.

And there I said it: BUSINESS

...

A perfect bridge to our THIRD STEP: THE PAY-CHECK.

Here's how it goes.

To start or maintain a relationship with a client for potentially payed jobs – I have to keep my face “relevant” and current to the new trends.

If my face keeps showing up in high end magazines - the shoots that don't pay - I might get more of a chance to be picked up for a paid job, like campaigns and commercials.

So for the most part of the year I'm investing time, energy and money to keep business up and relevant.

All this while clothes are still being sold, whether I'm being paid or not.

This is a business model that might have made sense at some point but listen to this:

Budgets are cut down so much. The same amount that used to go to 1 campaign in print, now has to go to multiple campaigns in even more formats including social media, print, moving image and still photography, and all that with a shorter life span & less royalties.

All because of our deliberately cultivated - fast paced - easily bored - consumer mindset.

...

My job as a model is to keep investing the same amount for a smaller return while the clients, or actually the suits that handle the numbers, get more revenue with the same and even less expenses.

Yes, I could do e-commerce and online look-books.

But my status, value and respect I gained after 20 years of work in high fashion would melt away under the all seeing eye of the fashion snob.

If you would add up the \$\$ I made since my last paid job and divide it with the time and effort that has gone in it, I barely brake even and often lose money.

And that's pre-pandemic so you can imagine how it's going now.

Plus, there is no guarantee whatsoever that I do get the paid job because... trends change fast and personal taste changes even faster.

It's like asking your baker to prove his bread is good by giving it to you for free for 3 months to then after three months come to the realisation that your taste has changed and you will go to the bakery around the corner.

Because why not.

It started out as a reasonable business-model and it's only fair competition.

...

Why does this sound crazy in real life and not in model-life?

With this realisation I have been waking up and learning that fashion seems to be running on an outdated system.

...

Most models, myself included aren't ego-driven.

It's not only about the billboards and attention.

We work hard to embody someone else's dream.

But we also bring our own spirit, creativity and experience to set.

We would like to be taken seriously and get the respect, laws and normal pay-checks any artist or employee deserves.

...

Throughout my career I've met some amazing people and some ... not so much.

I could set my clock on the fact that if I was in option or booked for a job together with one of my "toxic" co-workers, I could rest assured that my connection with that particular client would, as if by magic, stop.

He called me personally, to spend a day with him while making looks for his upcoming show. He loved my spark. People called me his muse. His stylist welcomed me and told me to wait outside ... I sat in the hallway most part of that day.

They say don't take it personally, but if the decision on you getting the job, is based on personal mood swings, things are personal before you're even involved.

...

For example castings are a normal proces, and vital part of our industry. You know you will be judged and looked at as if you were cattle. You know not to take it personally but that's only in theory. How do you actually take a step back?

How do you disassociate from your body, knowing that that is the most toxic and taxing thing you can do to your own true self.

It is in that gap between you and your body that any form of abuse can happen.

...

How can I not take it personally when my product is my face and one of the reasons why my face will be booked again depends on how nice and "ass-kissing" I am towards the client, stylist or whom-ever is in charge?

I'm not good at playing that game.
It's draining.

But it's the price you pay.
And yes I know, I could have chosen another job.
Or I must be spoiled not to cherish the opportunity and luck I seem to get with this job.

And so I played the high-fashion game.
Always grateful, never complaining.

Hannelore, play the game so the game doesn't play you.
I told myself.

And after all these years I still wonder: why did I have to make peace with it?

Why couldn't we, in the business all grow up and do this job more professionally and not based on the tantrums of egos?

...

It's these insecurity that drive us.
It's the glorification of vulnerability that every creative person holds.

Everybody in Fashion is god and we are supposed to protect them, to protect them so they can be creative at all costs every minute of every day because there's lots of money involved and so we cannot have a hiccup in the creative flow of the genius at hand.

May it be a photographer, a designer or a casting director who feels the need to be important so they can claim self-worth.

And as a model/young woman I saw it as my job to be the best I could for every designer or shoot.

...

Can you see how the search for self-worth is outside of ourselves in the world we are living in?

We are giving our powers away.

We forget that our self-worth is a birthright and that it is living within us from day one.

It is our culture which makes us believe that we need to find it elsewhere.

...

I never knew I needed to come back to my body, to myself.
Until I hit that wall of burn out and depression.

My job might be seen as shallow but it's because I do this job that I know and understand the dynamics of shallow thinking.

Don't get me wrong, Fashion is great and I'm grateful for all the good it gave me, but at times it is also very toxic.

We have to find humanity in the digits that are controlling this industry.
The digits I love.
The digits that are paying my bills

I do not want to choose between a job in Fashion or a life for myself.

Because the way it is now, when you choose for a job in fashion, you are almost forced to put your own self on standby. You live as a servant to whoever has the most power and sticky juices.

...

So, I recently told my agents I would not work for free anymore. If a client today needs proof of my qualifications as a model, they can Google me.
You can find me under the #icon section (and that's not even a joke!).
I'm done investing. I know my job. And I'll deliver if you book me... and pay me for my talent and skills I gained over my career of 20+ years.

Or book me for a great shoot without paying me but write down in paper you will book me for a money job within the next 3 months.
Thank you.

Because I do love this job. To be part of storytelling and image making.
The passion. The creativity.

...

We'll see what happens.

I do know my energy will not get waisted on feeling guilty saying no to yet another unpaid job because I needed to stay home with my son or study to develop another source of income.
I prefer to have no income and have control instead of having some income and be controlled by an outdated system.

From now on, if the systems says JUMP, I'll jump.
But I will be the one who decides how high.

...

I do know my long career gives me privileges and opportunities like here to speak up or even walk away.

And with that I'd like to highlight my gratitude towards everybody working hard and believing in Hannelore during all these years.

But so if not for me let me then at least stand here for all these young models, freshly embarking on this journey.

As models, we want to be taken seriously and we want to take part in making up the rules of the game, while we are all re-shaping the industry. #notbacktonormal

...

How do we talk about problems without knowing any answers or solutions?
Are there any even?

I know I can't do this alone, but together we can make fashion a better fit. For our mental health and self-esteem.

Something as simple as meditation can be a good start.
It sure has been my life changer.

Or check out the work of my beautiful colleagues at The Model Alliance. Our very own model UNION.
I warmly invite you to read and sign the RESPECT program they encourage us all to live by.

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If we are the cutting edge industry that we want people to believe we are.

Let's show the world how truly innovative we can be.

Let's show them how honest, respectful and equal teamwork, will absolutely make that fashion dream work.

Thank you