Networking is an important factor for professional success, at least in the business of pornographic films. That is the conclusion of research by Jochen Lüdering, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Geneva in August 2016.

His study analyses data on around 10,000 performers who appeared in adult films between 1970 and 2013 to examine the relationship between centrality within a social network and career success. The results indicate that the risk of a given performer leaving the industry in a given year is reduced if he or she was central to the industry in the previous year – especially if they appeared in a film with a very well-connected actor.

The research also shows that performers who are older when joining the industry tend to leave faster than actors joining at the age of 20. An actor joining the industry at 18 has a 25% lower risk of leaving the industry in the following year than a person joining the industry at 33.

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The researcher describes his work: my study is a contribution to the research literature on the relationship between social networks – that is, how well connected a person is to friends, family and colleagues – and professional success. A lot of research in this field suffers from the problem that working relationships are hard to measure and success is also not observed in a straightforward manner. As a consequence the literature remains ambiguous on the issue, whether being well-connected is important for professional success.

The data used in this study originate from the Internet Adult Film Database (iafd.com), where enthusiastic volunteers collect information about pornographic films and the performers they feature. The data can be used to construct a network from collaborations on the film set, which are usually recorded in great detail.

An advantageous position for a performer in the network may exist in two ways. First, someone who has made films with a large number of performers who are only connected through the person in question. Second, it may also be beneficial to work with well-connected performers, who provide access to a large social network. This might be of particular importance to newcomers to the industry who do not possess a large network of their own.

Due to the absence of direct measures of success (such as payment information) the concept of success used relies on the economic argument that a person will stay in the industry until it is no longer profitable. Hence, a performer must have a good idea of the profitability of being in the adult film industry, which depends not only on the generated income, but also includes non-monetary costs from social stigma, adverse health effects and the like.
Using data on about 10,000 performers who appeared in pornographic films between 1970 and 2013, econometric models for duration analysis are applied to examine the relationship between centrality and success.

The results indicate that the risk of leaving the industry in a given year is reduced if the performer was central to the industry in the previous year. The effects are substantial: having a centrality score twice the average value decreases the risk of leaving the industry in the following year by 10%. In addition, appearing in a pornographic film with a very central actor also decreases the probability of leaving the industry in the following year.

As one may expect, performers who are older when joining tend to leave the industry faster, than actors joining at the age of 20. An actor joining the industry at 18 has a 25% lower risk of leaving the industry in the following year, than a person joining the industry at 33. But initial research had shown that appearance had no effect on the success in the industry.

From the results one can conclude that networking is indeed an important factor for professional success. Whether these results apply to all kinds of professional collaboration or constitute a specificity of the adult film industry remains a point for discussion.

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Standing and survival in the adult film industry’
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