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Acting out trauma: the psychological impact of being a professional actor

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the psychological impact of being a professional actor. Drawing on interviews with five professional actors it examines whether secondary trauma can result as an outcome and investigates and addresses the psychological contributions the profession makes towards actors' psychological wellbeing. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed to analyse the results. From this study three main findings were identified: (1) Acting provides a therapeutic outlet; (2) The profession has power to cause psychological damage; (3) The role of the actors' self is key, with acting being both of the self and for the self. These findings are further examined in relation to trauma research and additional areas of focus within this under researched area are suggested.

Contents

Abstract	2
Tables	4
1. Introduction	5
<i>Trauma</i>	7
<i>The Self in Acting</i>	9
<i>Do Actors Experience Secondary Trauma as a Result of their Profession?</i>	13
2. Method	15
<i>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</i>	15
<i>Participants</i>	15
<i>Procedure</i>	15
<i>Sequence of analysis</i>	17
3. Results	20
<i>3.1. Acting Provides a Therapeutic Outlet</i>	21
<i>3.2. The Power the Profession has to Cause Damage</i>	24
<i>3.3. Being Oneself – Of the Self and For the Self</i>	28
4. Discussion	32
References	46
Appendices	51

Tables

Table 1. An example of one clustered emergent theme	19
Table 2. The superordinate and subthemes identified from the analysis	20

1. Introduction

“The truth of ourselves is the root of our acting.” (Meisner & Longwell, 1987, p. 45)

Actors are considered essential to society's mental and spiritual health (Apodaca, 2013). Often viewed as storytellers, vehicles for change, emotional warriors (Barton, 1994) and artistic athletes (A. Robb & Davies, 2015), they provide entertainment, education, healing, escapism, hope and serve a timeless function as truth tellers (Alfreds, 2007; Auslander, 2002).

Actors' careers are economically insecure, require alternative means to subsidise their profession, involve working in an industry where jobs are tricky to attain and seemingly involve activities that the average person would meet with either opposition or insecurity (Nettle, 2006). The UK performing arts industry in 2018 had 21,000 Equity registered actors, yet The Guardian (2009) listed only 6% of Equity actors as earning over £30,000 a year, 52% earning less than £6,000 and the average number of weeks worked as only 11.3.

Despite this being a low-paid profession with infrequent employment, actors receive a vast amount of interest from the general public deemed out of proportion in comparison to other social groups (Nettle, 2006), and yet actors psychological wellbeing is an under researched area (Maxwell, Seton, & Szabo, 2015; A. E. Robb, Due, & Venning, 2016). Actors within performing arts are viewed as ‘the forgotten patients’ (Brandfonbrener, 1992; Seton, 2008) with performing arts medicine continuing to focus predominately on dancers and musicians. In the early millennium, only 0.2% of all published articles in Medical Problems of Performing Artists (MPPA) were on actors exclusively, and only a handful of further published and unpublished works were written

addressing the psychological impact of the acting profession specifically (Maxwell, Seton, & Szabo, 2015).

The research on actors is of both a qualitative and quantitative nature, with a strong focus on actors residing in Australia and America. It focuses on aspects of actors' lives such as acting practices and experiences (Dieckman, 1991; McFarren, 2003), vulnerability (Seton, 2008; Thomson & Jaque, 2012), post-performance experiences (Bloch, 1993; Geer, 1993), psychological wellbeing (Maxwell et al., 2015; A. E. Robb et al., 2016; Seton, 2008), the development of personality traits (Goldstein, Wu, & Winner, 2009; Nettle, 2006) and boundary blurring and personality affects (Burgoyne, Poulin, & Rearden, 1999; Hannah, Domino, Hanson, & Hannah, 1994).

Research conducted has clearly highlighted risk factors linked to the associated unstable lifestyle and the psychological and physical demands of acting (Thomson & Jaque, 2012). The psychological hazards of the profession include areas such as the power of the industry, feeling separate from society, burnout, an inability to maintain boundaries between self and character, the experiencing of trauma whilst on-stage (A. E. Robb et al., 2016), the instability of the industry, and the opportunity to summon unconscious conflicts and past traumas into awareness through the adoption of personality traits and emotions of a character (Brandfonbrener, 1992). These are considered as hazards from a psychological perspective, however, theatre practitioners and philosophers alike share a different view, for example Derrida states that experiences such as bringing unconscious matters into an actors conscious awareness are in themselves acts of creation (Auslander, 2002; Osborne, 1993).

In my experience of pursuing acting professionally for 10 years, I reached a point where I found the lack of work, the lifestyle and the emotional impact of the profession

to be problematic. I came to question how psychologically healthy the acting profession really was, fearing that the level of emotional depth expected and the exploration of traumatised, complex characters could be impacting us as actors more than we realised.

Trauma

The in-depth nature and concept of trauma falls beyond the scope of this dissertation and therefore a workable definition of trauma is being presented for the purpose of this paper.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines trauma as ‘a deeply distressing or disturbing experience’. More specific definitions of trauma can be found in relation to vicarious and secondary trauma and its role within the health care profession. Although these terms are often used interchangeably they actually mean different things (Sartor, 2016). Vicarious trauma is specific to mental health professionals and is classified as a more serious, long-term change to an individual’s cognitive schemas and core belief systems after accumulated exposure to secondary trauma. Secondary trauma however, is a trauma that results from contact with an individual who has experienced a primary trauma. It is not exclusive to mental health professionals and can occur after a singular incident. Secondary trauma symptoms include those associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as elements such as compassion fatigue and burnout (Sartor, 2016).

PTSD can be a sign that the emotional processing of an experience is incomplete (Yule, 1998), and is driven by a completion tendency (Horowitz, 1986). It is this completion tendency, the need to integrate new information into the existing belief system, that keeps the trauma active until it has been processed and resolved (Resick,

2001). Social cognitive theory states that it is the disruption of three centrally held assumptions of personal invulnerability, that the world is a meaningful place and that the self is worthy and positive, that results in trauma responses (Resick, 2001).

PTSD is regarded as the simplest and most complex of the anxiety disorders (Yule, 1998). The simplest of anxiety disorders due to the ease of identifying the initial causal experience, as traumatic events are often unanticipated and interpreted as a threat (Resick, 2001), and the most complex due to the range of unpredictable symptoms that can accompany it and their unique expression within an individual (Yule, 1998). Traumatic events provoke the bodies survival mode of fight, flight or freeze, which in turn triggers numerous biological, cognitive and emotional responses. These responses can be exhibited in several ways including depression, anxiety disorders, coping behaviours such as substance abuse or withdrawal, and in the experiencing of a range of emotions of not only fear, but also shame, anger and sadness (Resick, 2001).

Maxwell et al. (2015) acknowledge that actors may be at a higher risk of experiencing stress, depression and anxiety than the general population. Whilst Berger's (2018) online article, although not specific to actors, highlights how in the UK the risk of suicide within the performing arts industry is 69% higher for women and 20% higher for men than the national average.

In relation to trauma, Seton (2008) coined the term 'Post Dramatic Stress' (PDS) from examining the role and use of vulnerability within performance. PDS is a descriptive term to highlight the psychological impact on actors who embody and witness trauma within rehearsals and performances. It has arisen from research into student actors and focuses on explaining the residual effects that can occur from taking on character traits and utilising specific acting techniques. Additionally, these effects can be

further impacted when these specific techniques are employed by ill-equipped teachers who do not have an understanding of the psychological impact of using trauma, and of the trauma that can also result from using these exercises (McFarren, 2003), conclusions that have been further acknowledged by Barton (1994) and Seton (2008). However, although useful in helping student actors and those in training, these studies fail to examine if these effects continue post-training into an actors' professional work.

The Self in Acting

Although the execution and use of the self varies greatly between methods, renowned and respected theatre practitioners such as Stanislavski, Strasberg, Meisner, Adler, Grotowski and Brecht (Auslander, 2002) share the view that the actors' chief instrument is himself (Meisner & Longwell, 1987).

Meisner's teachings, for example, state that it is through the merging of actor and character that a new representation of the self arises. Meisner further promotes the use of the actors' imagination to develop roles instead of using memories relating to past trauma(s), such as employed by Strasberg (McFarren, 2003; Meisner & Longwell, 1987). However, even through the use of the imagination Meisner acknowledges that items can still be too personal, as well as not personal enough, but posits the responsibility with the actors' to know the difference whilst on their quest to find their emotional triggers (Meisner & Longwell, 1987). Schechner (2006) notes the self as operating on a continuum, with actors merely continuing the performance that individuals engage in as part of life, except that for actors this performance takes place within defined frames of behaviour designed specifically for viewing. On the other hand, Osborne (1993) suggests that the concept of the self actually emerges from the roles played, as opposed to the role

emerging from the self, implying a sense of discovery and development. Despite these different theatrical and psychological viewpoints the use of the self is deemed integral within acting.

Investigation into the utilisation of the self within acting has found an increase in actors vulnerability in relation to emotional dysregulation and self-destabilisation (Thomson & Jaque, 2012), along with experiences of boundary blurring between the self and character (Burgoyne et al., 1999; Hannah et al., 1994; Thomson & Jaque, 2012). Boundary blurring, Burgoyne et al. (1999) note from their study into acting students, can result when students become too emotionally connected to a character. This connection transcends what could be considered an empathetic connection and requires instead a level of emotional investment from the actor. Burgoyne et al. (1999) further emphasise the impact of specific methods, stating that inside-out methods, the working on the internal (inside) emotional landscape of a character and allowing this to inform the physicality and vocal expression (outside), are the most problematic. Although boundary blurring has been acknowledged as a problematic issue, further investigation is required to examine whether it results in growth or emotional distress for the actor (Maxwell et al., 2015), as optimal levels of boundary blurring have been deemed to serve positively towards creative expression and personal growth (Burgoyne et al., 1999). Whilst contradictory to Burgoyne et al. (1999) findings, Thomson and Jaque (2012) have noted boundaries are created through a distancing of a 'me' and a 'not me' self (Kaplan, 2005) and that this distancing has the potential to minimise would-be PDS, although again this distancing may be dependent upon the technique(s) employed.

The process of boundary blurring has been noted to be encouraged by some acting practitioners and teachers (Burgoyne et al., 1999; McFarren, 2003). Teachers are often

guided by the premise that successful transformation into a character requires the actor to lose consciousness of their own self (Meisner & Longwell, 1987) or to employ elements of the self, such as experiences, emotions or the physical body, to create a truthful performance (Auslander, 2002). However, teachers may not feel or be adequately trained to guide actors through these experiences, especially if the actors are utilising personal trauma in their methods or experience trauma as a result (Burgoyne et al., 1999; McFarren, 2003).

As Barton (1994) notes, students may view this loss of consciousness not as a danger, but as a breaking free of their emotional limitations. From my personal experience, this breaking free can be both an exhilarating and scary experience, as actors are both pushed to intentionally explore their vulnerability in uncharted territory. However, the loss of consciousness and the techniques used to facilitate this raises ethical considerations (McFarren, 2003; Seton, 2008) and questions of the appropriateness of such techniques due to the potential traumatic impact that the blurring of boundaries could impart. However, Tust-Gunn (1995) suggests from her research, also with students, that acting ultimately works towards nurturing student actors psychological wellbeing, as opposed to being detrimental to it, comparing Stanislavski's techniques to that of psychodynamic psychotherapy (Burgoyne et al., 1999).

Post-performance issues such as emotional hangover, the lingering of emotions from the performance within the individual (Bloch, 1993), have also been highlighted as a problematic outcome of the acting profession. Emotional hangover is acknowledged to arise if the emotion within the performance has not been fully executed, resulting in the emotion remaining within the individual until another situation allows for the complete processing of it (Geer, 1993). Emotional hangover has similarities to the incomplete

processing that Yule (1998) notes as existing within PTSD sufferers. Geer (1993) summarises a need for a 'cool down' to be introduced into actors working practices to help reduce the potential for emotional hangover, noting it is often not the role that the actor struggles to detach from, but the emotions. Schechner (1985) confirms through his cross cultural research that theatre scholars traditionally do not focus on the after performance effects, which can ultimately create long-term consequences.

Research into actors personality traits and predispositions have revealed that actors have higher levels of unresolved mourning and detachment in comparison to control groups (Thomson & Jaque, 2012), along with being at an increased risk of experiencing more psychological instability. This instability could be further impacted by the level and frequency of the self that is employed within practices or imply that actors are simply more able and willing to lose their selves within their profession. Either way actors have also been found to actively employ skillsets to manage the psychological demands through exhibiting higher levels of self-regulation and a greater distribution of psychological security (Thomson & Jaque, 2012). Leading theatrical practitioners further express that actors generally enjoy the process and the challenge involved in creating a truthful representation of a person, who provides truths and conflict (Brook, 1987; Chekhov, 1953 cf. Thomson & Jaque, 2012).

Positive qualities of the acting profession exist in relation to feeling like they belong to a tribe, being in pursuit of their calling and fostering a sense of being able to look within (A. E. Robb et al., 2016); the development of specific personality traits such as openness to experience, agreeableness and extraversion (Nettle, 2006); and skillsets such as enhanced Theory of Mind development (Goldstein et al., 2009), increased attention, memory and concentration (Thomson & Jaque, 2012), which can be likened to

Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being's six characteristics of positive functioning, with the associated traits noted as useful not only within the acting profession but within life generally.

Do Actors Experience Secondary Trauma as a Result of their Profession?

There is limited research that directly focuses on the psychological impact of being a professional actor, and the research that has been conducted is heavily influenced by the role of student actors, as opposed to professional actors and more specifically professional actors' relationship to trauma. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to examine whether professional actors experience secondary trauma as a result of their profession.

This question is based on the premise that actors 'take on' characters and invest elements of their self within a role and that the relationship to trauma has not currently been examined in depth. The character is viewed to operate as the primary unit experiencing the trauma (as defined by the writer), with the actor being the secondary receiver through interpreting the character and working to bring the character to life. The focus of this study is to explore three sub-areas: (i) the impact working with trauma has on future acting roles, (ii) understanding how the boundaries between the actor and the character are maintained and (iii) the impact of a profession that requires regular engagement with intense emotions and/or traumatised characters on the actors' personal life. The definition of profession is used to encompass training, paid or unpaid professional work, the environments and processes associated with these, and includes work in theatre, TV and film. A qualitative methodology has been chosen to allow for a

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detailed, truthful description of the individuals' experience, in an attempt to shine a light on this under-researched group, who are deserving of more detailed attention.

2. Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

A qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was taken to examine the actors' perspective of how the profession has impacted them. IPA focuses on examining in depth an individual's lived experience of a specific phenomenon and the subjective meaning this has for them, with the overall aim to reveal something that is specific to a small number of participants in relation to the 'embodied, cognitive - affective and existential domains of psychology' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA also takes into account the role the researcher plays in the hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009) and recommends steps such as keeping a reflexivity journal, and bracketing throughout the process, to ensure any self-imposed ideas do not influence the analysis unwittingly.

Participants

Five participants were interviewed. The participants were aged between 28-34 years and consisted of three males and two females. Four of the participants classified their ethnicity as white or white variations (white Northern, white European), with one declining to answer. All participants lived or worked in London as professional actors and had professional acting experience ranging from between 6-14 years, with an average of 10.8 years.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via social media and/or emails from the researcher's pre-existing professional networks. Participants were provided with detailed information

via a Participant Information Sheet (see appendix 2), which detailed the purpose of the study as examining three sub-areas within the general topic of ‘Acting out trauma: Do actors experience secondary trauma as a result of their profession?’: (i) The impact of working with trauma (as defined by intense emotions and/or traumatised characters) has on future acting roles; (ii) Understanding how the boundaries between the personal feelings of the person (actor) and the feelings attributed to the character are maintained; (iii) The impact a profession that requires regular engagement with intense emotions and/or traumatised characters has on the actor’s personal life. Participants were also provided with further details of what would be involved if they chose to participate in the study.

On the day prior to their interview’s participants were sent a list of seven guideline questions to allow them time to reflect upon the topic before the interview. These seven guideline questions were used to inform the semi-structured interview (see appendix 2).

The five participants were interviewed over a period of one week. The interviews lasted between 51 minutes to 1 hour and 18 minutes and were of a semi-structured nature. A semi-structured interview was used as it allowed for a flexible, open dialogue, which the participants could lead, initiating new topics or expanding on topics as they felt, which in turn provided personal descriptive data of the lived experience of working as a professional actor (Memon & Bull, 1999). The answers provided by participants were generally very detailed, with response times to questions lasting several minutes, with minimal prompting required.

Interviews were conducted at Brunel University London in a privately reserved room or at a jointly agreed location in London that facilitated the opportunity for the

participants to talk freely and privately. On the days of the interviews, the participants were given the Participant Information Sheet again to read, followed by a consent form and demographics form. The participants were then asked if they had any questions prior to the interview starting. The interview then began and the actors were asked to reflect on their personal experiences of working as a professional actor who regularly engages with intense emotions and/or traumatised characters as part of their profession. The semi-structured interviews were all opened in the same way by the interviewer asking the participants to describe the methods/practitioners they used to inform their work. Following on from this, the interviews were guided by the participant's comments, with the guideline questions used as a reference tool only, given that the participants often naturally covered the topics of their own accord. The interviews were voice recorded and transcribed, with each line of the transcription numbered for ease of referencing (see appendix 3).

Sequence of analysis

Once completed, the interviews were transcribed and analysed using the steps recommended by Smith et al. (2009). The interviews were read through, and any initial words or comments were highlighted and noted in the left-hand column. After this initial reading and notation, the interviews were read through a second time and any comments deemed useful of a descriptive, linguistic or conceptually significant nature were further highlighted and noted in the left-hand column. After this, the left-hand notations were examined and emergent themes from each page were detailed in the right-hand column (see appendix 4 for example page). The previous literature and notes that had been read

to inform the semi-structured interviews were read through again before the next part of the analysis.

Next, each participant's initial emergent themes were clustered into related groups. These clustered groups of themes were given a descriptive title such as 'Sought after feeling of being alive'. Underneath these titles, brief captions were added to summarise the content within each cluster, along with noting the initial emergent theme and lines that related to this clustered theme (see Table 1). Each participant's emergent themes were examined in turn, before moving on to the next participant to keep the clustered themes specific to the individual.

During the entire process, reflexivity and bracketing played a key role, ensuring I remained aware of both my own experiences, feelings and preconceived ideas. Bracketing allowed for the focus to remain on the participants, whilst helping to direct questions and assessments based on my initial preconceptions, ensuring I was making sense of the participants' world but also not neglecting or being unaware of any of my own pre-conceived ideas that may have been playing a part.

Once all the participants' transcripts had been analysed independently, the clustered emergent themes for all participants were brought together and combined as one. These were then re-clustered into new groups, producing version one of the superordinate themes and subthemes. Version one of the superordinate themes and subthemes were then re-examined, combined and re-grouped accordingly, in order to produce the final three superordinate themes and their associated subthemes.

In the final report pseudonyms have been given with no identifiable references or quotes attributed to the participants.

Table 1

An example of one clustered emergent theme

Clustered emergent			
theme	Initial emergent theme	Participant	Line
1	Need to feel	1	432 – just want to
Emotional needs as			feel
underpinning role as	A requirement to feel	1	227
actor	Emotional spectrum	1	412 – 414
- Underpins personal	Varying levels of	1	92 – go deeper
motivation for doing	emotion		
this work	Understanding of	1	228 - 259
- Underpins a job role	emotions		
requirement	Sadness and love	1	416
- A need to understand	Touched a nerve	1	98 – not doing it
and access a spectrum			right
of emotions	Emotional response	1	38 / 55 – crying
	Release of emotional	1	218 – crying eyes
	tension		out

3. Results

The term ‘actors’ in this section is used specifically in relation to the five participants interviewed as part of this study. Some quotes within this section have been edited to ensure anonymity, along with amends to slang words and the removal of filler words such as ‘like’, ‘um’ etc. To facilitate being quoted, longer answers have occasionally been reduced and are connected with an ellipsis.

The following superordinate themes and subthemes were identified from the IPA analysis (Table 2):

Table 2

The superordinate and subthemes identified from the analysis

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme
Acting provides a therapeutic outlet	By giving me permission to confront my true self Through providing the opportunity to release and heal emotionally
The power the profession has to cause damage	Its negative impact on mental health The need for the teacher/director to provide a safe environment to be vulnerable in
Being oneself - of the self and for the self	I am the character Embracing the opportunity to create rare and truthful connections

3.1. Acting Provides a Therapeutic Outlet

“It’s like a therapy session . . . You go there and you express it and get it out . . . If you’re doing it right it’s completely mindful because you’re just in the moment, which is great and that’s like a therapy in itself.” (Harry, 447)

All participants expressed experiencing fulfilment of a therapeutic need through their profession, by either giving them permission to confront their true self or through providing them with the opportunity to release and heal emotionally from past traumas and conditioning.

Starting in the training phases of the profession and continuing into the research and development (R&D) of projects, they acknowledged the process of bringing into their conscious awareness items that had been *“long since buried”* (Rupert, 117). This created experiences of both hope and confusion, whilst offering a chance to develop, heal and eventually learn to accept themselves.

3.1.1. By giving me permission to confront my true self

“I had a lot of stuff that I didn’t know how to cope with or deal with before I started acting . . . I feel like it’s helped me learn how to sort of live with myself or face how I feel, to actually work with that, and see it and really look at it.” (Jessica, 124)

The acting profession provided the actors with a tool to challenge and learn about themselves through confronting issues, ideas and beliefs that they held. This confrontation brought into their awareness a sense of experiencing who they felt they truly were. This resulted in higher levels of self-acceptance, along with developing more truthful connections to their characters. As Jack noted:

“I know it’s all my flaws and things that I’m worried about, things that I feel confident about, that [they] are the things that make me interesting as a performer, and I know that as soon as I access all of those and don’t deny myself access to any of it then it’ll be better.” (402)

The actors’ journey of self-discovery was mirrored in most interviews with language used to describe this such as *“facing yourself”* (Jessica, 123) and *“being faced with the stuff you might not necessarily be able to”* (Zara, 172). Harry, however, highlighted that it is not always felt positively whilst you are ‘in it’. He commented that the training and R&D process can make *“you question who you are as a person, the relationships that you have with the closest people in your life . . . huge fundamental questions that can rock you as a person, absolutely rock you.”* (362). This appeared to result in a sense of unease as the actor then felt left to work through these questions and new insights on their own. As Harry further explained:

“I went through a stage being like why don’t I love my Mum? That’s a big thing to comprehend and that came out of nothing, sharing an honest connection with someone else and letting your persona go away, your little mask that you hold to the rest of life.” (363)

3.1.2. Through providing the opportunity to release and heal emotionally

“You get a release, you get to have an emotional workout, it feels good.” (Harry, 448)

The element of releasing and healing was communicated strongly from the actors who had trained predominantly in the Meisner technique. These actors experienced the opportunity to release deep seated emotions and heal internal conflicts that had resulted from both past experiences and conditioning from relationships, society and institutions,

with Rupert noting *“to be inauthentic, to not express how we really feel is in fact a very traumatic experience in itself”* (112).

These actors further questioned whether they would have had the opportunity to have healed emotionally without acting, and in taking advantage of this opportunity felt that it provided them with the potential to access and create characters of more emotional depth and therefore honour their craft better. Initially though, the actors appeared to experience personal resistance from confronting their past traumas. As Rupert explained: *“I didn't want to go there because I'd spent my life not going there and it felt very unnatural to face those demons”* (116).

However, concerns were raised by a number of the actors regarding the element of healing. Zara seemed very intent on trying not to speak of acting in a therapeutic way, even stating *“I don't want to say a therapy but . . .”* (179). However, although she was less inclined to reference acting in relation to healing emotionally she spoke of other ways related to the acting profession in which she did fulfil this need, such as through her playwriting.

Both Jessica and Harry acknowledged the association between (good) acting and feeling emotionally pained. Jessica described her concerns:

“When we started training and I started to feel like a part of me was healing, I then had the anxiety that ‘Oh god what if then I can't act? Because I'll be fixed and I won't need to express any of this pain . . . I won't have any pain’ . . . No-one wants to watch that.”
(73)

Harry echoed this sentiment by highlighting a personal perspective in relation to why he feels actors pursue acting in the first place, noting the quest to fulfil an emotional

lack he has both recognised in himself and in fellow actors. Jack raised further concerns in relation to the problems that being in tune with your emotions can bring:

“I think it's healthy to a certain extent. But then, this is the problem, I keep thinking none of my mates are very in tune with their emotions but they're incredibly open and happy people . . . but no I enjoy it, I find it useful and therapeutic.” (349)

A number of the participants also highlighted the psychological vulnerability of actors generally which Harry succinctly summarised as: *“actors are nuts anyway, they need as much help as they can get”* (319).

Jessica noted from her experience that individuals can sometimes get stuck in the therapy aspect of the training and not transcend past this into exploring the craft and the profession of acting. However, for these actors this did not appear to be the case, all speaking from a place where they were able to enjoy the artistic freedom that had resulted in coming out of the other side.

3.2. The Power the Profession has to Cause Damage

“There are so many reasons why you should stop acting, the lifestyle's difficult, it's hard to maintain, but that rush you get from being able to go through a whole scope of emotions in a two hour play is incredible.” (Jack, 186)

The actors communicated a distinct separate viewpoint of the profession as an industry (the business-related aspects) and a craft (the creative, performing aspects). The industry was spoken about in an undesirable way, with all actors vocalising the potential power the industry has to cause damage. The damage imparted on the individuals was often acknowledged as an industry hazard, one that was quickly deflected from focus as it became apparent that if one wanted to work as a professional actor these were hazards

that needed to be accepted. Jack recalled a particular injustice and the impact it had on him:

“That’s the first time ever that I’ve cried through not getting an audition and I know full well you shouldn’t start counting your money before you get given a job, but to basically be offered that kind of thing and then for it to be taken away last minute felt incredibly unfair, and that was the closest I’ve been to giving up, because I didn’t think that I could go through that again, the ups and downs like that.” (250)

Despite examples like this, all of the actors expressed a sense of resilience, integrity and humour which they employed to help them manage the rollercoaster of the industry and its hazards.

3.2.1. Its negative impact on mental health

“It takes it out of you, you’re emotionally drained but you also just question everything.”
(Harry, 375)

All five actors referenced, exhibited and provided examples of the negative impact the acting profession (craft and industry) has had on their mental health. These affects were detailed as short-term, transient and fleeting. They were exhibited in a variety of ways from mild PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks or uncontrolled emotional outbursts such as bursting into tears, to experiences of depression, anxiety, negative automatic thoughts and self-doubt, to exhaustion and potential burnout. As Harry described in a training exercise:

“I just got more and more frantic and worried and it sort of went into this level of ‘I’m not good enough, I’m disappointing, I can’t do this’ . . . it turned into a mild state of panic really.” (93)

The actors also acknowledged the impact it had on their personal life and relationships, commenting on feelings of dissociation and disconnection, of questioning their relationships and of feeling emotionally and mentally absent. There was a sense of the work continually filtering into the actors' personal life, sometimes by choice as Zara acknowledged, sometimes not. Harry described how it could stay with you and the impact it could have:

“You just carry it! And it can be really fucking damaging, especially in relationships. My ex-girlfriend would come home and I'd just be pissed off, I just wanted to sleep and didn't want to have that contact with her or anything.” (285).

A weakened sense of, or a negative view of the self was something that all the actors expressed having experienced in relation to the profession. This weakening of the self was frequently made worse by the damaging pairing of a state of vulnerability that the actors were frequently required to be in, both to honour their craft and to get the jobs, coupled with the continual rejection that they experienced from the industry and the auditioning process. This pairing of vulnerability and rejection set up a huge contradiction for the actors who were expected to be *“both a vulnerable artist and a business person . . . within an industry that is not really supportive of the idea of vulnerable artists”* (Rupert, 338).

As Jack reflected:

“The only thing I can really bring to the table is what I've got and it's probably got me more work but it makes me more vulnerable . . . which is a lot scarier because you've got nowhere to hide and it also means that when you get rejected it hurts more because I feel that it's not just the part that you've gone up for that's been rejected, it's you as a person.” (233)

3.2.2. The need for the teacher/director to provide a safe environment to be vulnerable in.

“It depends on whether something is written well and you feel safe in a rehearsal room because that’s where a lot of damage can be done, if something isn’t dealt with properly, if the people involved aren’t sensitive then that is where potential trauma could happen.”
(Zara, 105)

All the actors, although acknowledging their own responsibility to look after and take care of themselves, commented on the teacher’s and/or director’s need to provide a safe environment for them to work in. They highlighted the problems that can and have arisen if the actors do not feel safe, especially as the actors give *“someone so much power in those situations”* (Jessica, 298). This power, coupled with the actors’ vulnerability, and the potential for situations to arise that can be unexpected and difficult to handle, highlighted the requirement of the teachers/directors to have both the awareness of and be responsible for providing a safe environment. Rupert further emphasised the need for a level of emotional intelligence that should be a requirement of teachers/directors who are *“delving around in these deep murky areas of the unconscious.”* (408). As Zara commented:

“You won’t last very long if you don’t create safe spaces. It is the people that you want to work with, the people that have longevity are the ones that create a safe space, because by turning up to rehearsals, by standing on stage trying something out for the first time is really a vulnerable experience, because you’re going this is what I think and I’m getting up and I’m showing you and I’m telling you this is what I think and sometimes that’s really scary.” (230)

3.3. Being Oneself - Of the Self and For the Self

“I think that the majority of actors whether they care to admit it or not have probably experienced trauma in their past because looking at it objectively, the desire to spend your life pretending to be other people is quite a strange desire . . . I think the great tragedy and irony of this is that in order to get good at acting you do need to go into yourself and you do need to fully be who you are because that’s the only bedrock from which true art can come [when] you’re fully expressing who you are and what it is you want to say to the world.” (Rupert, 283)

The more conceptual of the three superordinate themes, being oneself – of the self and for the self, details how much the actors are immersed in their profession, fulfilling the profession’s requirements through the use of themselves as the instrument, whilst also pursuing the profession for themselves and their personal gain. They all demonstrated they believed that in order to be an actor who honoured their craft, they must invest themselves fully. The investment of the self resulted in contradictory experiences, with the potential to cause confusion and damage as well as create truthful connections and foster a sense of belonging.

3.3.1. I am the character

“It’s not character it’s just you, you’re just opening up a different aspect of yourself.” (Harry, 369)

It emerged that although maintaining boundaries through keeping a separation between their personal identity and the character’s identity was theoretically understood as the safest and preferred way to create a character, the reality, and again not always by conscious choice, was that these boundaries are in fact often not maintained. When they

are not maintained the two identities merged due to it being *“such a fine line”* (Zara, 378) and as Harry demonstrated *“if the character is supposed to fall in love with someone, I always end up falling in love with them”* (223).

Attributed reasons to this element of blurring boundaries could be seen to result from the use of their self – their interpretations, their emotions and their experiences – to inform and bring the character to life, in order to create a deeply connected and stimulating performance. Therefore, being self-aware of triggers and cues that naturally affected them, such as specific images, music, relationships, even bodily postures were all ways used to access a character. As Zara stated, a character starts as nothing but a *“little shell that you're going to put your soul into and bring to life”* (296).

All actors had found that using their own past experiences directly, as in Strasberg’s Method, was not a method they now employed due to the damage or emotional hangover they had previously felt from it. As Jack summarised from his experience of using personal experiences as a way in:

“There’s a residue that sort of stays within you afterwards. It's like trying to squeeze all the water out of a bottle so you can take an empty bottle home but it's always got stuff in” (323).

Rupert further adds:

“I have used past events in my life to allow me to unlock emotion in relation to a specific scene and I've also found that this is a technique that is both dangerous on a psychological level and actually not nearly as effective as using my imagination to get myself to similar emotional states.” (136)

Aside from past events, the use of imagination to bring the character ‘to life’ was a technique referenced and frequently employed by all actors. Often the use of

imagination was combined with an existing memory and/or with key relationships. As Jessica detailed: *“if I'm doing an emotional role I'll use my attachments that I feel to people to help me with that.”* (84). However, even in using the imagination the potential for confusion was still there due to the investment of the self in it, with Jessica further noting the importance of keeping a harness on her imagination.

At times the participants noted that they had been lost within their characters. During the interview, Zara even referenced herself as the character:

“I was, she was, see look, I can't distinguish which, whether it's she or whether it's me that they weren't talking to.” (390)

Whilst Harry and Jessica noted having had experiences resulting in a sense of entanglement:

“I actually felt quite a strong resentment, I didn't want to be around those girls in life, even though they hadn't done anything wrong. I started to feel like they were against me. I genuinely believed they were against me outside of the performance and so when the play finished I didn't know what to do, because even if I wanted to listen to music I didn't know what songs to listen to because all the songs I'd been listening to were related, tied into that world and they no longer were mine separate of that world, they were all related to that place.” (Jessica, 196)

3.3.2. Embracing the opportunity to create rare and truthful connections

“We reach a sort of bedrock of universal humanity because I think on an emotional level we are all the same. So we can go to these imaginary places, feel feelings that we know to be honest from our own past experiences and not use those past experiences because we have a fully functioning instrument that allows us to delve into these different areas

of humanity at the drop of a hat. Which is something that you know civilians can't do and wouldn't want to do because it's a bit mental.” (Rupert, 253)

Being an actor for these participants was more than a title or a job; it provided a sense of belonging, a purpose, a fulfilment of a calling in which they also gained a connection to a wider collective of like-minded individuals, their tribe. It also provided them with the opportunity to behave in sought after truthful ways, even if those moments were fleeting.

There was an emphasis on societal restrictions as a negative controlling force which appeared to be a key underlying driver in their pursuit of acting.

“You can accelerate an entire life's relationship in three minutes. Because society doesn't let you act in a certain [way], doesn't allow you to act like you're allowed to act there. That's why. It's a space where you don't have to abide by the laws of society and when I say laws of society, it's what people would regard as the unwritten etiquette of life.” (Harry, 436)

The actors expressed a sense of feeling separate from society, which appeared to be both celebrated as well as internalised negatively, as a ‘them’ and ‘us’ mindset. The ability to express their individual truth provided a sense of freedom to the actors, who embraced breaking free from conforming to the conventions of what they deemed as socially acceptable behaviours. It also provided a rush, in the sense of ‘feeling alive’, and provided them with a feeling of fulfilling their purpose, with three of the actors noting the addictive nature of this feeling of aliveness:

“The most enjoyable bit I always think is research, being in a rehearsal room, looking at a person, finding out about them, working with other people, being in the moment with that person, you know all that kind of stuff that you don't really get a chance to do . . . you're just liberated for a moment and I've been chasing that ever since.” (Jessica, 445).

4. Discussion

This research was designed to investigate whether actors experience secondary trauma as a result of their profession. In regards to the view expressed by the participants that the character operates as an extended representation of the self (albeit placed in given circumstances with predefined words), it could be argued that secondary trauma cannot exist, as there is no 'secondary' element since the character is not identified as separate from the actor. However, drawing a definite conclusion from the actors' interviews about whether they experience secondary trauma as a result of their profession is clearly very complex and more research needs to be conducted to categorise the aspects of (secondary) trauma that may be arising and the associated triggers. Scholars such as Seton (2008) have begun to pave the way for investigation of trauma within actors, utilising PDS as a descriptive starting point, but as demonstrated by this study more focused research specifically on understanding how trauma can manifest in actors is needed.

Impacts and symptoms of trauma (a deeply distressing or disturbing experience), were very clearly expressed by the actors within this study. However, from their interviews it would seem to imply that they would be more likely to experience (primary) trauma and/or PTSD, as opposed to secondary trauma, due to the lack of boundary maintenance between themselves and the character they are playing, based on the actors having described the adoption of the character as if it were themselves.

In what could appear to be contradictory, the actors also employed an awareness that they were not the character, even though the character was viewed as an extension of themselves. The employment of awareness seems to be key to maintaining safety boundaries that can help mitigate potential trauma. Potential trauma was expressed as

most likely to occur when the two identities merged and the actors believed that they were the character – as opposed to the character being viewed as an extension of the self. The awareness of a need for boundaries, even if not actively employed, and the symptoms expressed by the participants as arising post-exercise and post-performance further indicate an element of incomplete emotional processing, which is highlighted as a condition of PTSD (Yule, 1998). During this element of analysis I could relate to viewing the character as an extension of the self, having also utilised my experiences, my emotions and my imagination to forge connections to both the character I was playing and the other characters within the piece. Although I believed I maintained an awareness that I never was the character, this highlighted the question whether the investment of myself was more extreme than I was aware of at times, and in fact resulted in a blurring of boundaries and the problematic associated symptoms.

This study provided further insight into the importance the actors placed on establishing an emotional connection to a character and the use of the self in establishing this. Thomson and Jaque (2012) have considered whether it is the emotional connections to the character that may cause a trauma response in actors. This has been explored based on an intensified focus on past trauma and loss, which may heighten posttraumatic stress symptoms (Berntsen & Rubin, 2007) despite histories of trauma and conflict not being greater in performing artists than in control groups (Thomson & Jaque, 2012). However, the actors interviewed in this study expressed a preference for using their imagination over a past trauma. This raises the question whether the use of the imagination can in fact create a new trauma and therefore create a similar impact on the actors as if they were using a pre-existing trauma, which could also be further accentuated if the boundaries between the self and the character have been blurred. Further considerations

from this study highlight that it is not merely the establishment of an emotional connection on its own that is problematic, but that the emotional connection and the associated vulnerability when paired with the industry hazards (of ill-equipped teachers/directors and industry practices) could be the issue. In relation to the emotional investment, the actors within this study noted at times that an emotional investment offered them a therapeutic outlet, whilst at other times it presented itself as problematic. This finding implies that there are either optimal parameters of investment or that the employment (or exclusion) of certain factors can result in whether the emotional connection becomes problematic or therapeutic.

PTSD occurs due to incomplete emotional processing and more specifically when new trauma-related information cannot be brought into alignment with an individual's held beliefs about the self and the world (Yule, 1998). However, it could be argued that actors have more opportunities to experience an event, such as a rehearsal or performance, that can facilitate the completion of emotional processing. The actors in this study, although expressing symptoms when engaged in emotionally intense work that could be seen to align with PTSD, also demonstrated that they are continually searching, exploring and seeking out personal growth and truthful connections. This growth mindset in itself, depending on the degree of trauma experienced, could imply that if new trauma related-information was created it could be processed quicker than in non-actor groups.

Furthermore, trauma does not need to be seen solely as a negative, nor should an attempt be made to eradicate it permanently from an actor's toolbox, as there is a need for stress and trauma to be employed as instruments within the actor's professional life (Seton, 2008). Instead, recommendations are made that more preparation and support is

offered to actors both before and after their professional work has finished, to mitigate any potential negative impact of stress and trauma (Seton, 2008), a finding further supported by this study. The challenge however, lies in relation to creating spaces where actors can utilise this stress, trauma and vulnerability towards positive transformation, as opposed to it being viewed as a problem to be dealt with (Seton, 2008). Geer (1993) also advocates that more support and preparation is required through implementing 'cool-down' protocols, noting that the energy spent on the warm up and getting actors into character is not equally spent on bringing the actors back to themselves. If time was spent on this, it could help to reduce the problems associated with emotional hangover, a recommendation also made by a couple of the participants in this study. In my experience, the cool-down and emotional hangover is key in terms of learning how to manage, as we can at times open up something inside ourselves that we have no idea of how to close. Hence, when engaging in this profession a few times a week, returning to normal unaided can take a while. This also offers further consideration into the psychological impact in relation to actors who are working on jobs over a longer period of time where even more frequent engagement is required and based on this study I would postulate that emotional hangover becomes even more detrimental to an actor's psychological wellbeing in these cases.

The revelation from the actors that they used their profession as a form of therapy aligns with Barton's (1994) research that art cannot be separated from healing. Even in Burgoyne et al's (1999) work examining boundary blurring, the researchers involved with this study combined backgrounds from counselling and acting research. Dramatic principles are also used continually in counselling and therapy practices to aid the healing process of clients (Auslander, 2002; Osborne, 1993). It would therefore make sense if

this experience could work in 'reverse' for the actors. The actors also questioned whether they would have had the opportunity to have healed emotionally without acting, confirming past research that acting can facilitate the acknowledgement of true feelings for the first time (Brandfonbrener, 1992).

A further positive described by these participants however was that in taking advantage of this opportunity to heal and acknowledge their feelings, it provided them with the potential to honour their craft better. The honouring of their craft was a recurrent theme in all the interviews, revealing that to these actors acting is a calling, a calling that despite the numerous issues was highly valued and provided a sense of belonging. This calling raised comments from two of the actors in relation to ensuring that their self-identity was not so intrinsically entwined with being 'an actor'. On occasions where the individual's identity had been dependent on their 'actor-identity', further psychological problems occurred. However, keeping their 'actor-identity' in-check could be problematic when the investment of the self, as exhibited by these actors, is so high.

Further insight into the use of acting in therapeutic ways could be offered from an Annafreudian perspective (Freud, 1992) in that the actors' pursuit of vulnerability and emotional freedom is ultimately an attempt to free themselves from their ego's defence mechanisms, thus offering them permission to behave in ways that fulfil their instinctual desires which would ultimately be, or believed to be, frowned upon by society, which could further result in the separation these actors already felt between them (society) and us (actors).

The times when I have myself used or have watched others utilising acting as a therapy session has resulted in not only poor work but also a sense of self-indulgence,

which is neither useful creatively or enjoyed by the participants of fellow actors and audience. Instead it builds a barrier that goes against the underlying desire expressed to form connections. Having said that, I have experienced therapeutic elements from my acting work, which I believe are a positive by-product and which resulted from the forming of truthful connections to the script, character, fellow actors, and universal truths.

The forming of truthful connections was a key driver for these participants. However, in life these truthful connections may not be so easily formed or invested in (possibly due to the 'masks' people wear), this could result in further feelings of separation. If this is the case this could provide additional negative implications on the actors' mental health, further contributing to the separation of a 'them' and 'us' mentality, whilst also creating a sense of instability as the actors oscillate between 'truthful' connections in their craft and 'less-truthful' connections in their personal lives.

The industry standards (hazards) formed a large undercurrent in all of the actors' interviews. These hazards can be summarised as continual rejection, unethical and unfair behaviours, unrealistic or pressured expectations and poor treatment, all elements that would be deemed as unacceptable within a 'normal' workplace. I posit the question then, if when the service being sold is the self if this is viewed as a lesser offering, noting Zamir's (2013) unanswered question as to whether there 'exist moral limits to professionalising aspects of one's identity'. McFarren (2003) further questions the ethical nature of specific acting exercises within her study. Zamir (2013) likens elements of acting to the 'inner structure of prostitution', having noted the flexibility that actors embrace (which non-actors reject) as ultimately what allows the potential unethical experiences to occur. The flexibility Zamir (2013) comments on is noted as the levels of

vulnerability and access into unexplored areas of the psyche. This is regarded as being further impacted by the disengagement from the material that arises and the willingness given by the actors to partake in these experiences, which places a different, potentially unethical, value onto them. Zamir (2013) comments further that actors attempt to embody and explore unrealised possibilities of the self, which is then validated by fellow actors and the audience. He argues that it is this imagining of other possibilities which ultimately impacts the stability of the actors' actual identity. To corroborate Zamir's (2013) reflections, Burgoyne et al.'s study (1999) noted one of their participants as likening acting to 'emotional prostitution'. The vulnerability employed by actors can be argued as a starting point that allows unethical or damaging practices to occur, owing to a 'weakened' position that the actors are placed in due to the investment of the self. Through this weakening they are momentarily depleted of their defence mechanisms, and it is this depletion that provides the foundation for the development of psychological instability, especially if such occasions occur repeatedly and/or at a high intensity.

In this study the element of psychological instability was most prevalent in relation to the level of vulnerability that was involved in the actors' character creation, as well as in relation to the power the industry has over the actors, which underpinned the heavily referenced need by the actors for a safe environment. One of the participants highlighted that often teachers are not equipped to work with students who use or experience trauma as a result of their training, a finding verified by Burgoyne et al. (1999) and McFarren (2003) who have further noted a need for the safeguarding of this. However, there are equally a number of teachers and directors who do have the skills and are supportive of their actors, and it is worth remembering this before the responsible

ones are tarnished by those who are ill-equipped or irresponsible, a viewpoint acknowledged by those interviewed.

The element of emotional vulnerability coupled with rejection from the industry resulted in the actors wearing “each rejection like a little scar” (Jack, 259). This perspective highlighted the damage that has been inflicted upon and can be felt by these actors from the industry standards. However, despite this, these actors also appeared to strongly demonstrate a growth mindset (as opposed to a fixed mindset), turning this rejection around and adopting a positive perspective. However, I question whether the negatively reinforced messages that appear to be coming from the industry could be noted as having a potential negative impact on these actors, both in the short term and the long term. Dweck (2000) acknowledged in her studies on learned-optimism (and its counter-part learned helplessness) that an individual’s response to the outcome of a situation is informed prior to the situation by a multitude of factors including self-identity, self-esteem and self-concept, but highlights that although studies have shown belief systems remain consistent over time, beliefs can be influenced and changed. These changes can either be short-term in their effect, lasting only as long as the situation is present, or long-term, if the message is consistently and continually reinforced (Dweck, 2000). This I feel has potential implications for actors. I had previously been unaware of how damaging the industry could be until I engaged in this study, and like these actors I had merely accepted it as industry hazards, unaware of the negative impact it was ultimately having on my self-esteem. Comments provided by those interviewed further corroborates that potential short-term changes can be made to self-esteem, self-identity and self-concept and resulted in a questioning of the self and self-doubts.

The positive process of growth noted in this study however, continues to highlight the wonderful opportunity that exists for these actors working within this profession. This journey of discovery and process of growth in turn seemed to allow these actors to gain a sense of personal freedom, as well as artistic freedom and could be seen to imply higher levels of psychological wellbeing based on Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being classifications, specifically in relation to the individuals' personal development and self-realisation.

The fulfilment of deeper needs, such as a sense of purpose that the actors referenced, can also be noted as a positive effect. However, as this is only fulfilled fleetingly through inconsistent and infrequent work, this could in fact have the opposite effect, serving simply as a reminder of a scarce, yet sought after need. The exploration of other outlets that can allow for a semblance of this feeling whilst working within this profession was highlighted as a requirement by a couple of the actors interviewed. This fulfilment of purpose was in essence summarised by the participants as Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) theory of flow, which is utilised predominantly in relation to performance psychology and has only recently been extended to include 'elite performing artists' (A. Robb & Davies, 2015). Flow details a feeling of being completely immersed and engaged in an activity to the extent that an individual's psychic energy is focused on a point and the conscious mind is in harmonious order (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) describes the links between creativity and flow, detailing creativity as an activity that when involved in the participants feel like they are living more fully, often satisfying fulfilment needs that are expected to be found in other aspects of life but frequently aren't, a summary made by all of the participants in this study. In their study examining flow within actors, A. Robb and Davies (2015) noted positive

after-effects of joy, satisfaction, and a reduction in self-criticism. However, after non-flow performances actors reported negative emotions and self-criticism with a ruminative thinking style associated with depression. Findings that were again exhibited within this study. Csikszentmihalyi (1992) emphasises the active process of flow, and its likening to an individual's ultimate quest for happiness. Csikszentmihalyi (1992) details that ultimately it is the interpretation of the events that defines the happiness and not the events themselves. Optimal experiences, the times when we feel most alive, can also be painful or unpleasant in their nature yet they provide a sense of personal mastery and a sense of participating in life. In my experience when all the stars align within a performance you do indeed feel connected to something much greater than yourself and are ultimately happy, even if the character you are playing is an extremely traumatised one. Optimal experiences are most likely to occur when the individual's attention is put to use towards realistic goals, pursued with the appropriate skillset and with opportunities that are readily available (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). However, as revealed in this study, for these actors' opportunities can seem to be limited and that in itself could create further negative impacts on their psychological wellbeing.

Limitations of this Study

The small group of five participants interviewed within this study offered only a limited insight into potential impacts of the profession. A wider and more diverse sample, of mixed ages and professional experiences, may offer further insight for comparative purposes.

It could be argued that the process of self-acceptance and awareness that was highlighted in this study is simply a process of maturity, with all of the participants being

in their late 20s to early 30s. Further research across a mixed age range is therefore suggested. Personality traits could also be a contributing factor, but were not examined in this study, whilst research into the long-term effects of being an actor is further recommended as this was not covered.

A final limitation to highlight is that a number of topics were covered by the participants within the interviews and that a more focused examination on specific elements within the profession i.e. on an exercise, a period in rehearsal or the auditioning process, could provide further insight into trauma affects.

Further Directions

In summary, the following areas have been recommended as a focus for further investigation.

Boundary blurring and boundary maintenance between the actors' own identity and a character needs to be further investigated, to allow actors to transcend both in and out of characters safely. As Burgoyne et al. (1999) notes, in order to help actors there needs to first be an understanding into how boundary control can be achieved. This would involve acknowledging that there is a peak threshold of blurring that can positively assist personal growth and creativity, and minimise distress, reiterating the importance of the factors of awareness and control of the self (Burgoyne et al., 1999). Further investigation is also required into the parameters and factors that may influence the reaching of this peak threshold, along with developing a clearer understanding of the symptoms that can occur, as highlighted by the participants within this study. Boundary blurring also seemed to be a chosen engagement, therefore providing actors with mechanisms to transition out of a character and/or emotional state could further help reduce the after

effects that were noted as seeping into their personal lives, affecting their psychological wellbeing and relationships in the short-term.

The teacher/director also served as a key influencer on whether the acting experience was perceived as positive or negative. As Barton (1994) notes teachers can feel unequipped to handle crises and situations that may occur, highlighting the delicate balance between providing challenging yet supportive environments, a finding further supported by this study and Seton (2008). Barton (1994) further recommends that acting teachers might look towards the knowledge and experience of therapy, and based on the results of this study I would recommend the same.

The industry practices also need to be further reviewed, to ensure actors are not at risk of unethical or unsafe practices, dismissed by these actors as industry hazards. Developing actors' business knowledge, especially during training, may offer a new skillset to actors, and this in turn could help them feel less vulnerable and with some semblance of control over their careers. The development of resilience protocols to help with the element of rejection and vulnerability could also help reduce the negative impact on the individual's identity. This could involve implementation of Acceptance and Commitment therapy, Rational-emotive behaviour therapy and/or Beck's Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques (Ellis, 2005), to help actors gain perspective and control over overactive minds and the associated problematic thought processes.

Finally, the experience of secondary trauma from watching fellow cast members in rehearsals/training is another area that could be further examined in relation to specifically exploring secondary trauma within the acting profession.

This study, along with verifying previously detailed findings, has also revealed that within the acting profession there is a clear divide that exists between the craft and

the industry. The craft ultimately serves these actors' psychological wellbeing positively, whilst the industry impacts these actors' psychological wellbeing negatively. Although secondary trauma was not a noted outcome in this study, this study has emphasised that trauma, in a more general sense, can be seen as a by-product of this profession, especially when the power of the industry and the investment of the self within character creation are brought together. This finding provides the opportunity for further investigation into the exact nature and expression of trauma within the acting profession, to ensure that actors are not 'forgotten patients' (Brandfonbrener, 1992) left to cope alone with a profession that can have a negative psychological impact on them. Further, this study provided evidence that trauma did not result solely through forming an emotional connection to a character, but that it was through the incomplete discharging of this emotional connection and/or the vulnerability involved, paired with the industry hazards (of ill-equipped teachers and rejection), that caused the most traumatic responses to occur in the participants. Overall, it is important that the actors, and other individuals associated with this profession, have an awareness of these potential psychological impacts.

Final Self-Reflections

The process of this study provided me with the opportunity to reconnect with a profession that had previously left me feeling damaged and vulnerable. Through listening to and analysing the participants' interviews I was reminded of the great many opportunities and connections that acting has afforded me, whilst further allowing me to see that some of the struggles I had experienced were partly a by-product of the industry and its associated hazards.

In summary, I believe this study has highlighted the importance of ensuring that actors are not forgotten in relation to further research. It has presented an opportunity to contribute knowledge to an under-researched area and has highlighted the issues that can exist in relation to the industry practices, along with both the positive and negative psychological impacts that the acting profession, as a whole, can create.

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