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# **Front Row: A Grounded Theory Exploration of the Psychological Wellbeing of Professional Actors**

by

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**Portfolio for the Professional  
Doctorate in Counselling  
Psychology**

**City University of London  
Department of Psychology  
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## **Acknowledgements**



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## **Introduction to Portfolio**

### **Exploring the Self**

## **Portfolio Introduction**

This portfolio consists of three pieces of work that represent three aspects of my training as a counselling psychologist. Firstly, I present an original grounded theory research study which explores the processes involved in being a working actor, and how that impacts on an actor's psychological wellbeing. The second piece is a publishable paper reporting the findings of the research study. The third piece I present is a case study of my clinical work with a woman in her early thirties who was struggling with symptoms of depression and anxiety.

### **Theme**

Together, these three pieces fit as a collective body of work linked through a theme of 'sense of self'. This theme encompasses the concept of losing and discovering one's identity. Throughout these three pieces of work, participants and clients are exploring their sense of self. The first two pieces of work in the portfolio address the wellbeing of actors. There is a consistent theme of an actor's sense of self being dysregulated as they play different characters and try to navigate the acting industry. The third piece is a clinical case study of a pluralistic piece of work with a woman who had no sense of self and how, she was able to develop that through the therapeutic work. In all three pieces, there are the experiences of individuals losing themselves in their characters or in other people and yet all the time trying to hold onto that sense of stability within themselves. One of my goals as a counselling psychologist is to aid people to have more of a grounded sense of self in order for them to lead healthier lives. This is seen through my work as a practitioner in the client study, and through the framework built and suggested for psychologists working with actors.

### **Section 1**

The first piece in this portfolio is a grounded theory research study which aims to understand the lives of working actors and the impact of their work

on their individual wellbeing. My aim with this study was to understand the factors that contribute to working as an actor. These included factors within the culture of the acting industry and the process of playing a character. By understanding the interwoven nature of these two concepts, the aim was to offer a theoretical model of a working actor for psychologists to draw on in their clinical work with actors, and to guide researchers in the development of future research. A constructivist approach was adopted to acknowledge that the data corpus and the analysis are the results of a collaborative process between the participant and researcher. The study generated many original findings and raised a framework that demonstrated the complex interwoven nature of the acting industry, the process of playing a character and the impact that has on the individual. The findings are discussed in detail.

## **Section 2**

The second piece of work is a journal article written for submission to the 'Creative Research Journal'. It offers a summary of the research findings of the first piece of work. The journal article focuses on one category (the use of self), and the implication for clinical care. This article determines the potential for the findings of the research to be ready for publication and disseminated to the wider academic community. Throughout the research study and the journal article, there is an obvious theme of how actors use parts of themselves (memories, emotions, body) to play a character and how they often lose themselves within the character. Findings revealed a blurring in sense of self which is attributed to distress.

## **Section 3**

The final piece of work is a client study chosen as an illustration of how working towards the actualisation of one's self is a powerful mechanism in client recovery. The work describes the process of treatment for a client named Grace (pseudonym used). Grace self-referred for psychological treatment as she was struggling with psychological symptoms of distress that



were attributed to a lack of sense of self. The treatment adopted a pluralistic approach to working and consisted of exploring how Grace had never developed an identity as a result of systemic complications. The main goal of therapy was to develop a 'sense of self'. This relates to the key finding in the research of 'use of self', which reveals the detrimental impact that dysregulating oneself through playing multiple characters can have on the individual. The client study shows how developing a sense of self can reduce distress, and it is suggested throughout the portfolio that this is a key area for psychologists to assist clients in doing.

### **Implicit Themes**

Throughout these three pieces, there is an implicit theme of collaboration that relates to the position of the researcher/practitioner. Both the research which takes a constructivist epistemological stance, and the client work which adopts a pluralistic approach, acknowledge and rely on the collaborative role between researcher and participants, and practitioner and clients. Another implicit theme that can be identified is the subject of addiction. The research revealed there is an addictive-like pull to acting and actors experience extreme high and lows. There can be a high psychological cost to this and often they find acting to be an escape. This was similar to Grace, who experienced euphoric feelings when in a secure relationship which gave her a sense of identity. This sense of escape reminds me of a quote from Mark Ruffalo *"I became an actor, so I didn't have to be myself"* (Ruffalo, n.d). For both the actors in this study and with Grace, there was a deep inner conflict described as to whether they should stay in their career/relationship or leave. Often the pull of what was identified as the harmful career/relationship would win this struggle. Throughout the three pieces there is also this shared concept of giving space to the participant/client to inform the work. For example, in grounded theory there is the idea that the theory is driven from the data, the questions can be changed as the research evolves. In pluralism, there is also the idea that no one thing is right for a client and that what might be right for them at one time might not be suitable at a different time and the client should be given voice

to make therapeutic decisions collaboratively. These ideas of the practitioner/researcher leaving space for the others to influence the work sits strongly within my identity as a psychologist and can be seen throughout this portfolio.

### **Motivations for the Pieces**

It is only appropriate to address my motivations for the research subject from the outset. My interest in actors came from a professional role I had in a London drama school whereby I would regularly see actors come out of their classes upset. Often, they would naturally offer me their stories of how playing a role had triggered something emotional in them. I even saw a couple of students leave training because they felt uncomfortable with the demands of the classes. This caused me to wonder what was really going on for actors? What are the psychological processes involved in this work? What is the psychological impact of this work? How could psychologists help? When I turned to the psychological literature to answer these questions there was very little to be found. Thus, I was propelled forward to develop the research question in order to meet the needs of actors. Hopefully, this research will contribute to a greater understanding of actors and the industry. I hope it will provide practitioners with understanding of the mechanisms involved in following this career and how to reduce and prevent distress.

I chose to present the case study of Grace as it is a piece of work that demonstrates my practice as a pluralistic psychologist. Working pluralistically for me has been a creative and freeing process in navigating the many approaches available to psychologists. I have been able to develop an approach that represents my strengths and skills, and tailor that to meet the needs and preferences of my clients. Working pluralistically has enhanced my practice through the use of regular feedback from clients and adapting the work to meet their goals. Through this client study, not only did Grace make progress in finding her sense of self, but I was also able to develop my identity as a psychologist.

## **Reflecting on the Portfolio**

Training as a psychologist has pushed and challenged me in many ways. Through the process, I have a greater understanding and a sense of myself. I have learnt much about myself as a psychologist (both practitioner and researcher), but also as a colleague, a daughter, a sister, a partner and a friend. For example, I have developed my confidence as a practitioner, I now know which philosophies and models are most a kin to my way of working and what client groups I favour to work with. As a researcher, I felt amateur at the outset of this work, but I have learnt not only to produce rigorous research but also to find enjoyment in the process. This naturally overflows into my personal life where I have learnt more about myself and how I relate to other people. I have taken the time to develop who I am in each of these roles and together it creates my sense of self. I have done this through my own individual counselling, learning many new ideas and theories as part of the training, keeping a reflective journey and speaking to trusted people around me. I felt myself stretch and develop over the years.

However, it is important to acknowledge that tensions in my identity are heightened in a professional capacity, particularly around the concept of gender. As a female psychologist, I experience gender power dynamics within line management and supervision where I internalise others seeing me as a 'young girl'. For example, I have struggles to speak up at times, feeling that a male supervisor is superior to that of a female trainee. As a female in the workplaces, even as a trainee I do not feel comfortable to say I am struggling for a fear of looking 'weak female'. Another example is, I have to navigate choosing a career path that has led me to qualify in my 30's and how that sits alongside any desire to have children. These tensions are something that I will continue to have to navigate throughout my career.

Despite this, overall, I have reached a position from which I feel happy, secure, proud and confident. I have experienced how self-development can be healing and rewarding for oneself, and how that can be positive for those whose lives you touch. This experience has undoubtedly played a role in my

clinical work. As the actress, Meryl Streep says *“The formula of happiness and success is just being actually yourself, in the most vivid possible way you can”*. This portfolio proudly reflects my work as a researcher and a clinician. It is the greatest achievement I have to date. The research has been very topical, interesting and original that I have found it an enjoyable process. It is my hope that this portfolio has a wide impact.

## **Section 1: Research**

### **Front Row: A Grounded Theory Exploration of the Psychological Wellbeing of Professional Actors**

## **Abstract**

Within the media increasing numbers of testimonies are being exposed in relation to the consequences actors suffer as a result of their art. Despite actors being of topical interest to society, to date, research has focused on other groups of performing artists, with the actors being somewhat forgotten. This qualitative study aims to understand the nature of the processes involved in being a professional actor, and how that affects individual psychological wellbeing. It hopes to address the scarcity of research and understand more about this unique population, and how care can be adapted to meet their needs.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight professional actors. The resulting data was systematically analysed and categorised in accordance with principles of constructivist grounded theory.

The findings exposed that the acting industry has an extremely high-pressured culture, throughout all stages of an actor's career, from training, to seeking work, to being on a job. Secondly, the findings revealed that the methods actors use to get themselves into a character involved manipulating their imagination and their body to enter an out-of-body like state in an unregulated way. The third finding showed the impact of these first two findings on the actor's wellbeing and how their social, mental and physical wellbeing is impacted in a negative way. The last finding addresses the addictive nature of acting and gives insight into what keeps an actor in their profession despite the recognised harm to self and pull to leave.

A framework for psychologists to draw on in their work with actors is proposed, and suggestions are made regarding the position of counselling psychology in supporting the unique needs of actors. Collectively, the findings support previous research, and future research directions are explored.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Setting the Scene

Heath Ledger and Robin Williams are two notable actors whose lives ended tragically. Whilst in each case the cause of death is still generally regarded as ambiguous, the most prevalent media speculation suggests that both actors were severely depressed and that both took their own lives.

Accounts given by those involved in the making of *Batman: The Dark Night* describe how Ledger 'remained' in character even when the cameras were not rolling. They suggest that he locked himself into isolation in a hotel room for a month to develop the character of the Joker. Ledger (2007), told *The New York Times* whilst playing the role he found it nearly impossible to sleep. Even though his *"body was exhausted (his) mind was still going"*.

Ledger's family insist that he was not depressed. Personal accounts from 'I am Heath Ledger' (Buitenhuis & Murray, 2017), a recent documentary based on his life, describe Heath as being a lovable, generous person who would seek adventure and push himself to his artistic limits. His friends described Ledger as being 'on the edge'. The phrase 'on the edge' is a common term used within the acting community to describe someone displaying behaviours on the edge of societal norms. Speculations are that playing the Joker pushed Heath over 'the edge' and negatively impacted his mental health, which was a contributing factor to his untimely death.

Most actors willingly attest in media interviews that playing a character is an immersive experience that can require an emotional commitment unlike no other. This can be immensely taxing for the actor, whether due to the intense preparation required, the circumstances of the person they portray or the aftermath of a projects debut.

In an interview with Vogue in 2012, Anne Hathaway spoke about playing the famous Fantine in 'Les Misérables', who needed to appear near death. She lost twenty-five pounds by following a near-starvation diet eating only two squares of dried oatmeal paste a day. She talks about how it took her weeks to let go of the sense of 'deprivation':

*"When I got home, I couldn't react to the chaos of the world without being overwhelmed. It took me weeks until I felt myself again".*

In the celebrated film 'The Pianist', Adrien Brody plays a Polish pianist living through World War II. He told The Guardian:

*"For a good year after, I was probably seriously depressed. Easily. There were severe transitions that I put myself through physically and emotionally".*

In the early stages of this research project, I was particularly moved by an interview with Marion Cotillard on The Graham Norton Show in 2016. Describing her role as the iconic singer, Edith Piaf in 'La Vie en rose', for which she won Best Actress Oscar for her emotional performance, she said:

*"I had trouble getting rid of her (the character), which I was very ashamed of... I thought it's a job, I'm an actress, I shouldn't be affected by any of my roles but I had spent six months... with her (the character) and I really entered another dimension... I didn't see my friends and family for this amount of time, because when I would see them, they would find me weird and I didn't like it... First of all, I was weird because I was shaved, my eyebrows were shaved and my hair was shaved...the thing is... when you do a movie you spend a lot of time with this person, you fell in love with in a way and then the last*



*cut is...I mean you will never share your life with this person anymore, so sometimes it can be kind of brutal...but I'm fine now".*

Whilst society has a pervasive interest in actors and their lives, most of our knowledge is gained from potentially unreliable sources (tabloids, magazines, tv). This causes me to question what the evidence base tells us about actors' experiences of working.

However, acting is not all about playing a character, as many actors experience long periods of unemployment. The statistics are shocking, with 92% of actors in the profession out of work at any given time. The same 8% are the actors who tend to work continuously whereas the 92% never get a chance.

A quip demonstrating the unemployment of an actor is:

*Question: Why don't actors look out of the window in the morning? Answer: Because they'd have nothing to do in the afternoon.*

When actors do find work, they are surrounded by the culture of the acting industry. Recently media attention has focused on the negative side of the acting industry. Many actors have come forward about their experiences of sexual harassment and of debilitating depression and anxiety. There has also been great attention highlighting the pay gap between male and female actors.

Whilst these celebrities all have a platform from which to speak out because they are part of the 8%, there are many actors who are working but might not yet be of celebrity status and their experiences are unknown to the general public.

In The Evening Standard (2018), The Mental Health Foundation spoke out about how:

*“conditions in the arts and entertainment industry can often undermine workers’ mental health and wellbeing, with insecure contracts, low rate of pay and anti- social working hours. Further compounding harsh working conditions, performing artists are often asked to work for free or ‘for exposure’. Maintaining a healthy sense of self can be difficult if your work, passion and skills are consistently devalued in this way”.*

After the suicide of three actors within a short space of time, ArtsMinds (n.d) was created. ArtsMinds is a collaborative initiative which includes the British Association of Performing Arts Medicine, Equity, Spotlight and The Stage and which offers basic resources and information for performers facing mental health issues. Whilst it is encouraging that problems actors face are starting to be noticed and recognised, the information provided by ArtsMinds may not represent or adequately support the complex needs of this population group.

From media accounts it is evident that an actor experiences the complexities of negotiating the acting industry and the effects of playing a character. However, what do psychologists know about these experiences? What is being done to investigate ways to prevent mental health development and support actors? Where is the field of psychology and other health professionals within this media movement? It is these questions that conceived the start of this research.

## **1.2 Overview**

The following chapter aims to set the scene for the current research objectives by contextualising and presenting the rationale for this study

which looks at the mental wellbeing of actors. More specifically, this chapter's intentions are to introduce the importance of understanding how actor's experiences and processes contribute to an individual's mental wellbeing and to build a framework of understanding that psychologists can draw from when working with this population. I start by outlining my personal background, the background of the study, critical literature review, rationale, aims of the study, its relation to counselling psychology and my personal reflexivity.

### **1.3 Personal Background**

The starting point of this research comes from my own personal experience of performing. I grew up as an amateur ballerina and was involved in competitive sports. I was always performing, even if it was just at home with my family. In my mid-twenties, when living in London, I set up an acting school in London together with two friends who were professional actors. Although there were classes for beginners, there was a focus on developing the professional actor and keeping their skills fresh. The actors taught the classes and my role was to set up and manage the business. Even from my position of managing the school, I was aware of constantly heightened emotions, distress in the students after some classes and boundary blurring. I would see professional actors consistently out of work, financially struggling and taking on other jobs unrelated to acting. The psychologist within me wanted to find out what research- practitioner models were available to support these actors, and I was surprised to find very little.

## 1.4 Background of the Study

There is an abundance of literature documenting an association between mental health problems and creativity (Clark & de la Motto, 1992), evidencing an over- representation in creatives of depression, bipolar (Johnson, et al., 2016), drug use, unemployment, risk-taking, suicide occurring at younger ages (Clark & de la Motto, 1992), over self-regulation and emotional expressiveness (Goldstein, Tamir & Winner, 2013). It is important to acknowledge that whilst all artists are creative, due to different skills and rewards there can be distinctions made between those who create and those who perform (Brandfonbrener, 1999; Kogan, 2002). The main distinction is drawn between those who create (composers, choreographers, playwrights) and those who perform them (musicians, dancers, actors). Taking the example of a playwright and an actor, the playwright generates the dramatic work, often in private, and the actor interprets a particular role in public as part of a cast (Kogan, 2002). Whilst the literature on mental health and creativity is widely documented, there are few studies looking at Actors Mental Health. Hence, from the first part of this research 'Setting the Scene' grey literature was drawn on to present this. Recently, Actor Milly Thomas spoke to The Guardian (2018), about the portrayal of mental health that is represented in grey literature sources stating she is sick of the notion the 'tortured artist' and that "there is nothing romantic or glamorous about depression". Celebrity actors are using their international status to combat this idea by speaking out about their personal experiences of mental health (Psycom, 2018).

There are 47,000 actors living in the UK (The Statistic Portal, 2018) and yet, as a population, actors have been underrepresented in psychological literature. This is surprising as the media is littered with stories of actors demonstrating the psychological cost of their profession (Simkins, 2016). To study performing artists is somewhat of a paradox as the public have such an invested interest in actors, and yet psychologists have steered clear (Kogan, 2002). Actors have been described as the "*forgotten patients*" (Brandfonbrener, 1992 p.101). There is plenty of research on creatives but

less on performing artists and, within this, academic research has primarily focused on dancers and musicians, with only 0.2% of all scholarly articles published in the field of 'performing arts medicine' between 2002-2006 addressing actors (Dawson, 2007). Within these studies, the focus has mainly been concerned with injury prevention and management (Guptill, 2011). Actors have been titled as 'athletes of the heart', living under feelings and actions that do not correspond with the actors' self (Artuard, 1938). This creates cognitive challenges on extreme levels (Goodman & Kaufman, 2014), thereby raising the question as to why psychologists have taken a backseat within this sector. Perhaps this is because actors may not openly express concerns about their health and wellbeing and because it has not previously been a priority of actors' unions (Prior, Maxwell, Szabo & Seton, 2015). In 1992, there was a call for medical professions to pay more attention to actors (Brandfonbrener, 1992). This was followed by a small number of studies looking at physical injuries but there was little exploring psychological factors. In 2015 the British Psychological Society (BPS), released an article following the annual conference of the actors' trade union, Equity, in which an Equity speaker championed for more resources to be attributed to assisting mental health problems. In response to this article, Clinical Psychologist Soren Stauffer-Kruse commented that the need for provision of psychological therapies for actors within the National Health Services is required due to actors facing constant rejection, employment difficulties and enormous amounts of pressures on the job, whilst they live embodied as characters (BPS, 2015). In 2016, Naomi Hynd, an actor and a clinical psychologist, wrote to the BPS as she thought readers might be interested in work she does with drama schools in London. When explaining how psychology and acting relate to each other, she spoke from her personal experience:

*"Three people dropped out of my year at drama school with mental health problems, and certain personality types can be drawn to the profession. It's a tough life, so in training, they knock you down to build you up, but this can be brutal. My tutor at drama school advised*

*me to have a nose job (which I resisted). There's definitely a pressure to get thin and look good. Once you're earning a living it doesn't get any better". (BPS, 2016, p 638-641).*

To my knowledge, no further research or practice has been developed to support this need in the UK and only a few studies in Australia have been carried out.

With this call for psychologists to respond to the combination of the difficulties for an actor and the strong association of mental health problems and creatives, the question arises of how counselling psychologists can contribute to the research within this field and ultimately apply this knowledge to supporting actors in performing their art. To determine where the gaps for further exploration are, a literature review is needed.

### **1.5 Literature Review**

The literature review is seen as the foundation of social research (Dunne, 2011). A review of the existing body of literature is expected to be completed prior to social research (Cresswell, 2007). However, in Grounded Theory it is debated whether or not the literature review should be conducted at an early stage or further on in the research process to limit preconceived ideas imposing onto the analysis and to allow new ideas to be articulated without parameters of existing theories (Dunne, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). Despite this debate, many grounded theory researchers agree that it is beneficial to review at least some of the literature (Charmaz, 2005; McGhee & Marland & Atkinson, 2007). I would argue it is important to have some understanding of prior research. At the same time, it is important to be open to new literature and existing theory as they become relevant to the study (Dick, 2007; Giles & King & de Lacey, 2013). However, whilst, according to the parameters of my doctoral research, a critical literature review was required early in the research process, its focus shifted as my study progressed and new findings were exposed.

Multiple databases were used in conducting a systematic literature search to identify all relevant articles available. Primary keywords or phrases (and their synonyms) were identified and yielded the following search terms: “actor and mental health”, “actors and psychology”, “actors and wellbeing”. ‘Actor’ was then swapped for ‘working actor’ and ‘professional actor’ and all these searches were repeated with the term ‘actress’. Due to the word ‘actor’ having multiple meanings and the lack of research, it was difficult to find studies and the reference lists were analysed to broaden the search. Literature was filtered, based on the relevance to the research topic. Perceived relevance to the research topic adapted in accordance with the research process with the result that the literature which was previously included or dismissed was updated in line with the development of the research question. This search generated works published between 1958 and 2018. Articles that were not published in the English Language were excluded. A critical analysis of the literature was carried out which considered the titles and abstracts for relevance.

It is important to look at all aspects of an actor’s work-related life in order to give an informative picture of how that impacts his or her wellbeing. The following literature starts by looking at personality commonalities within actors and then moves on to look

at the process that occurs for an actor when he or she is playing a role. The literature surrounding performance is outlined and includes stage fright, performance-emotional problems and emotional regulation. Lastly, the research on wellbeing is discussed.

### **Personality Factors**

Like in any work a psychologist does, it is important to be aware of patterns within particular client groups. Within the small body of research on actors, there is a slight lean in the prevalence of studies that have explored personality traits within actors and identified specific clusters within the

population. In self-report tools, it was shown that actors tend to have higher levels of dissociation, traumatic events, greater self-awareness (Thomson, 2012) and increased levels of fantasy (Goldstein, 2009). However, contradictory findings from other studies were that performing artists do not have dissimilar histories of trauma and conflict than control groups (Ayers, Beaton & Hunt 1999, Thomson & Jaque, 2012). Whilst methodological reasons could account for this discrepancy, the prevalence of actors with unresolved trauma (Thomson, 2012) is what stands out from these findings.

Other repeated findings in the literature show that traits including extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness and empathy were more prevalent in actors than in the general population, (Nettle, 2006, Nowakowska et al 2005, Schuldborg, 1990). However, it is not conclusive whether actor training develops empathy and openness or whether there is an innate disposition trending within this creative population. Whilst these findings render the actors vulnerable to psychological distress, patients in one study did not report these symptoms as being a problem to an extent that would satisfy diagnosis. These findings then raise the question as to how these personality traits in actors can manifest themselves within rehearsal, performance and in the after effects.

### **The Actor's Process**

Blunt (1966) describes the actor's process in three stages. The first stage is comprehension, which is the time in which the actor gathers as much information about the character as well as theories of acting. The second stage is translation, which turns the knowledge into meaningful dramatic action. The third stage is creation, which projects this meaningful dramatic action to the audience. Nemiro (1997) looked at the social influences on an actor completing this process through semi-structured interviews. Nemiro found creativity to be heightened when an actor experiences freedom, challenge, trust, recognition, collaboration, lack of concern or evaluation recognition and respect. Actors' creativity is dampened when they felt they



were being evaluated under pressure, poor direction, distrust and lack of individuality being acknowledged. Yet, this was a small study with only three participants and therefore the findings are not generalisable. It might also be beneficial to study the process of acting whilst it is occurring as this was based on what the actors recalled in interviews. However, it is helpful to conceptualise the creative process of actors whilst acknowledging that it is unlikely to be a one-size fits all model. Due to the nature of this studying addressing psychological wellbeing, is important to distinguish the difference between the process of acting for a job and that of psychodrama as a therapeutic tool. Psychodrama utilises guided dramatic action to examine problems or issues that a patient brings. Through experiential methods, role theory and group dynamics psychodrama facilitates personal development, insight and integration of behaviour, thoughts and emotions (British Psychodrama Association, 2019). Unlike the unstructured, 'anything goes' nature of professional acting, psychodrama is facilitated with the individual having options of what to bring to a therapeutic setting. This difference excludes psychodrama as being complementary to the present studies enquiry.

### **Performance Anxiety**

Despite the stage being the actor's home and acting being a highly cognitive process (Goodman & Kaufman, 2014), there was still only a small number of studies looking into performance anxiety in actors. Research has shown the effects on the body when conducting a performance can include a large increase in heart rate and blood pressure (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter & Salomon, 1999), tremors, dry mouth, temporary cognitive impairment and rapid breathing (Simmonds & Southcott, 2012). The immune system can also be inhibited by the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines and cortisol during evaluation threat (Dickerson, Gable, Irwin Aziz & Kemeny, 2009; Dickerson Mycek & Zaldivar, 2008). As the body is reacting to the pressures of attempting to perform to perfection, the brain can add high levels of anxiety to the situation (Kemeny, 2003). Goodman & Kaufman (2014) conducted a study adapting the performance anxiety index to concentrate on acting. This

was used with 151 professional actors to determine if there was a correlation between personality and stage fright, using self-report measures of the Big Five personality factors and locus of control and self-efficacy measures. It was found that stage fright tends to be more dominant in the female population, with actresses having an external locus of evaluations and low emotional stability experiencing symptoms. However, this could be because females tend to be more socialised to anxiety symptoms, thereby creating a reporting bias. Further, several factors were being investigated in this study and perhaps more detailed measures throughout rehearsal and before, during and after a performance would have yielded more robust conclusions. It has been suggested that self-reporting may not be the most reliable source for examining stage fright as memories change over time (Sharps, Herrera, Dunn & Alcala, 2012). However, the authors of this study argued that self-reporting within actors is valuable as stage fright can be intense, prolonged and detrimental to an actor's career with the result that his or her memories are likely to be accurately retained.

In the first systematic assessment of stage fright in training actors, it was found that 36.7% experienced stage fright to moderate levels and 9.6% to severe levels. Whilst age, experience and extraversion were not contributing factors, it was found that neurotic traits were positively linked to stage fright and that women experience more detrimental effects than their male colleagues. It also evidenced stage fright as having a negative impact on the actor by increasing health-related symptoms prior to a public performance (Stephoe et al, 1995). However, this study was restricted to students and its results might therefore not be applicable to working actors. Additionally, due to self-reporting it is uncertain whether these health-related symptoms represent observable deterioration or just subjective perceptions.

There has been one qualitative investigation within this area exploring the processes behind performance anxiety. Interviews were conducted with actors, musicians and public speakers. The interviews identified a clear

theme that performance anxiety was largely influenced by how the performer perceives an audience (Simmonds & Southcott, 2012).

These few studies give a microscopic view of stage fright with actors highlighting personality to be highly influential in the experience of performance anxiety as well as how one perceives the audience. Whilst we know the physiological responses, contributing factors and prevalence of stage fright within actors, there is no research to my knowledge addressing how an actor's anxiety is perceived and managed. What is lacking from the research body is an understanding of the experiences of what goes on for the actor whilst performing. Further exploration could be around what is contributing to performance anxiety, what can help manage it and any other factors that come into play whilst the actor is doing their job.

### **Performance-Emotional Problems**

One of the main themes in the small body of existing literature on actors explores the harmful effects of the process involved in the work of realistic acting. What is being documented is actors bringing aspects of their emotions and history into recall and allowing themselves to re-experience these intense feelings within the present moment to infiltrate their characters' processes (Hannah, 1994). As actors bring their experiences under examination, this can cause them to question their relationships, beliefs and behaviours (Rule, 1973). Bloch questioned how actors disengage from this process and conducted studies where actors learnt to induce emotions. When interviewed a week later, it was found that they had remained in the induced emotional state for the full week. Bloch termed this the 'emotional hangover' (Bloch, 1992) and he is one of the only pioneers developing work for actors to cool down after a performance. However, no complete solution has been found thus far (Geer, 1993).

Rule (1973), speculates that there are two dangerous reasons for the 'emotional hangover'. Firstly, to perform with success, the actor has to find

empathy for the character. For example, if playing a man who walks out on his wife, the actor, in order to empathise with his character, may look for all the reasons that would justify walking out on his own wife. This could bring any dislikes the actor may have repressed towards his family to the surface and exaggerate them to larger-than-life size. Secondly, the actor receives repeated applause for the traits and values the character holds and this positive reinforcement, day in and day out, could spill over into his or her private life.

Brandfonbrener (1992) identified 'psychological hazards' of acting and drawing on her personal experiences of providing medical care to actors and said:

*(playing an actor) "can put them in touch with some of their own feelings for the first time...for some, this is a positive experience but for others, the process can range from difficult to unbearable. Even the most mature, stable and experienced actor suggests the effects of playing (characters) night after night" (Brandfonbrener, 1992, p.101).*

She even reminds us to be mindful of these consequences whilst engaging with the performing arts for our own pleasure.

A common finding is that actors create emotional ties with characters they play (Rule, 1973). This may be a problem as it can cause a traumatic response from the actor (Ayers, et al., 1999; Thomson & Jaque, 2011; Thomson, 2012). For example, actors have found their character becomes a part of their own personality throughout contact time with the character (Hannah, Domino, Hanson & Hannah, 1994). This idea ties in with the findings that actors tend to have less ability to define boundaries and a catharsis of personal and character identities (Nemiro, 1997; Burgoyne, Poulin & Rearden, 1999).

Directing 'The Crucible' by Arthur Miller, Suzanne Burgoyne found her students to experience a "psychological fallout" from the show. She joined with counselling psychologist Karen Poulin to conduct a grounded theory study looking at the impact of the student actor's experiences of performance (Burgoyne, et al., 1999). They interpreted the findings to show that actors purposefully engage in various strategies for connecting with their character. This can blur between the self and the character in what they term the life/theatre feedback loop. When this process is activated negatively, the actor's personal life may bleed into the character and lead to the actor losing control in performances. Conversely, the actor's character may leak into the actor's everyday life. Both of these processes may lead to emotional distress. When the processes are activated in a positive way, growth on or offstage may occur.

Another qualitative study, looking at professional actor's portrayal of character, suggested, in contrast to previous research, that acting may create psychological health rather than dysfunction and allows personal exploration within a time allotted to the performance and found that her participants' experience did not cross boundaries in a threatening way (Tust-Gunn, 1996). However, this research is unpublished and has been criticised as her interviews did report emotionally distressing experiences from boundary blurring, although more experienced actors are perhaps less likely to encounter this problem (Burgoyne, et al., 1999). These studies did not determine an actor's ability to control this process or any related consequences. Whilst one study showed that an actors experience of playing a character has an increase in positive characteristics (Hannah, 1994), the general findings have been consistent in the negative characteristics taken on by actors. Seton (2008) found that actors often embody co-dependent, addictive and harmful traits from the character they have been role-playing. In response to his concerns surrounding the witnessing and enactment of trauma in the context of rehearsal and performances leaving an imprint on the actor's personal lives, even if they

had not previously experienced the trauma prior to the performing role, Seton coined the term 'post dramatic stress disorder'.

Another study found that actors displayed higher levels of insecure attachments and state of mind compared with control groups and were more likely to experience dissociative disorders and unresolved traumas. Whilst AAI is a useful tool to explore attachment and trauma (Appleman, 2000), it cannot be ruled out that within the acting test group, participants may be more practised in recalling and discussing their trauma compared to control groups. It also cannot be ruled out that an actor is acting whilst involved in research.

Thomson & Jaque (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study looking at a psychological vulnerability in actors asking if actors showed increased self-other awareness, including more resolution for past trauma. 41 actors were recruited from across three major cities in Canada, USA and South Africa. Despite the equal gender divide, 36 of the participants were Caucasian, thus limiting the diversity of the sample. They took part in self-report measures and semi-structured interviews using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) to look at attachment, loss and trauma. These were compared to a control group of other performers (artists, dancers, musicians). The data was analysed by experienced coders and kappa scores were derived. These scores were considered excellent with an agreement between coders demonstrating a reliable analysis. This was the first study to administer the AAI to a professional actor sample and there was a significant difference between the actor group and the control group. The actors were found to be more prone to destabilise their sense of self and to be more dysregulated (Thomson & Jaque, 2011). Whilst the actors were able to remain coherent, engaged and regulated during the interviews, they had a higher proportion of unresolved-disorganised classification compared to the control group.

Despite similar traumas/losses in both groups, the actors showed more lapses of reason and discourse during interview, including psychological disorientation, beliefs of deceased figures remaining alive and feelings of being possessed by abusers meeting markers of narrative disorganisation (Currier, Holland & Neimeyer, 2006). The design of this study was not predictive but perhaps the work of an actor to portray a character may elevate unresolved mourning in the actor group. However, they may be able to manage self-regulation to maintain the psychological demands of acting. Further, the findings show a higher disposition to fantasy, absorption and imagination compared with the control group, supporting their earlier research findings (Thompson & Jaque, 2011). These findings add to the theory that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms can be heightened when traumatic memories are transferred into a personal narrative (Berntsen & Rubin 2006). Further, one of the measures which was suggestive of pathological distortion, showed 40% of actors indicated the need for further screening for dissociative disorder compared to 2.7% of the control group. Whilst these subjective self-report measures are a limitation of the study, the fine-grained analysis provided by the AAI offsets this. The study suggests that there is a psychological cost for actors and that although they may be more psychological self-aware, they may be more vulnerable as they reuse their own trauma and loss in their work (Thomson & Jaque, 2012). Whilst AAI is a useful tool to explore attachment and trauma (Appleman, 2000), it cannot be ruled out that within the acting test group participants may be more practised in recalling and discussing their trauma compared to control groups.

This highlights the need for further exploration of the mental health of actors, who may be particularly vulnerable to psychological distress. Notably, it has been suggested that through paying attention to previous loss and traumas, there can be a reinforcement of posttraumatic stress symptoms (Berntsen & Rubin, 2007). It is important for this emotional hangover to be further explored so that psychologists can create ways to best support the actor after the performance.

## **Emotion Regulation**

Stemming from questions raised around emotional problems, a small body of research has investigated emotion regulation within actors. Within acting the individual is constantly required to call upon his or her own emotions for a character to create a realistic performance. In essence, actors must be able to manipulate and regulate their emotions. Emotion regulation can happen in adaptive or dysfunctional ways and can have effects on the health and wellbeing of an actor (Goldstein, 2009).

Goldstein (2009) discussed the research in terms of psychological perspectives on acting, highlighting that actors engaged more in daydreaming and fantasy worlds as children compared to controls (Goldstein & Winner, 2009). Actors reported feeling different from their peers, and to be lonely, shy and introverted as children (Winner, 1996). She also determined actors to have strong theory-of-mind skills (the ability to read a person's inner state), however it is unclear whether this is innate or developed in actor training. Additionally, actors had higher levels of empathy (Nettle, 2006). Lastly, she discussed how actors have power over their emotions to be able to call them up on cue (Goldstein, 2009). However, to my knowledge, there is no research into the combined effect of these psychological processes and their impact, if any, on the individual. One method of emotion regulation is emotional suppression (Gross & Levenson, 1993). The negative effects of this method are well documented to be harmful, impacting on health, cognitive functioning, social engagement and increasing the experience of suffering (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007; John, & Gross 2004). Tests of emotion regulation were conducted to see whether there was a tendency towards fantasising that facilitated artists to dissociate. This was done by comparing theatre actors to a control group. Findings showed that 32% of actors dissociated at pathological levels compared to the control group (23%). This harmful emotion regulation included dissociation strategies such as fantasy and depersonalisation. This suggests that there is a higher vulnerability for



pathology within actors (Thomson, 2011). Whilst fantasy is related to positive psychological wellbeing, when uncontrolled it has been connected to psychopathology (Lynn, Rhue, & Green, 1988; Rauschenberger & Lynn, 1995; Waldo & Merritt, 2000). It has been found that many actors have visited alternative worlds from a young age and that part of the pull towards acting was to frequently visit these worlds (Goldstein & Winner, 2009).

A recent study examined whether children who received acting training are less likely to suppress their emotions than a control group. The findings supported this hypothesis and the children had a decrease in expressive suppression (Goldstein, 2015). This study was strong in its methodology and results, yet the student's personality differences or the personality types of parents that enrol their children in acting cannot be ruled out. Also, it does not shed light on how the young actor creates emotions. Overall, these studies of emotion regulation cannot easily be compared as they are exploring different emotion regulation techniques within both child and adult populations. Yet again the urgency for further work to be done in this area is clear.

## **Wellbeing**

This section reviews the literature on wellbeing within actors. There has been little exploration in this area. The main pioneer of this area of research is Mark Seton who took up the question of the wellbeing of an actor for his doctoral thesis (Seton, 2004). He took part in a participant-observational study of actor training by joining acting classes himself. His main note highlighted the mindset of the teachers and students was an obligation for actors to be 'vulnerable' to be successful, as well as the attitude of 'doing whatever it takes' in response to bullying and inappropriate sexual behaviours (Seton, 2004). He suggested that this vulnerability might come at a cost to an actor's overall wellbeing. Unlike other performers, actors are trained not to question the quality of their embodied experience and the impact it may be having and to allow themselves to be moulded and remain

vulnerable to a director's wishes (Seton, 2010). Without awareness of these issues, actors are opening themselves up to further risk. Trauma experts have found that, cognitively, the body does not distinguish between fiction and perceived trauma (Levine & Levine, 2010; Rothschild & Rand, 2006). However, the first provisions to my knowledge of awareness or support for traumatisation of actors through their performances are only starting to be developed in Australia.

In the only study of its kind, Equity commissioned a research study in which 782 of their members in Australia completed surveys measuring their wellbeing (Maxwell, Seton & Szabo, 2015). Results found that 41% of those surveyed earned less than \$10,000 from acting between 2001 and 2002. 20% lived under the poverty line, even when their income was supplemented by other forms of employment. 62% claimed that their wellbeing had been impacted negatively by stress at work. A quarter of those surveyed experienced bullying and harassment at work, whilst a quarter also experienced debilitating performance anxiety. 287 participants said that alcohol was used as a coping mechanism for acting, with 43% of males and 36% of females consuming alcohol to harmful levels. Furthermore, compared to the general population, symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress were significantly higher in actors (Maxwell, et al., 2015). However, despite these findings, actors over 65 looked back on their careers positively, albeit that they only constituted a small number of the participants. The study did not capture those unsatisfied actors who would have collected in this study and did not offer an extensive analysis of the psychometric test results or the correlations between data sets. Promisingly, the authors do propose to address these in future work.

A more recent study by Robb, Due & Venning, (2018) explored the psychological wellbeing of Australian actors through a thematic analysis. 22 actors took part in semi-structured interviews. The themes from the analysis showed actors to have little power within the industry and their careers to

have left them feeling helpless and humiliated. This was particularly pertinent to female participants. Secondly, the actors' lifestyles were talked about as unhealthy, with little finances and high levels of drugs and alcohol. Participants felt outside of society due to living untypical lives and therefore felt undervalued and ashamed. Thirdly, participants reported what whilst relationships with other actors were like all being in a 'tribe' and experiencing intense connections, the intimacy behind these was false. Fourthly, participants described a reluctance to seek help and disclose their troubles, partly due to the restrictions of the industry but also partly to do with feeling like they don't deserve help compared to others that were suffering. Fifthly, and more promisingly, it was found that when actors are working, they find their work to be highly engaging and described a sense of being stretched and stimulated. Additionally, high levels of perfection, burnout, overthinking and character attachment were reported. On the other hand, personal growth, high levels of curiosity and empathy and a feeling of a 'calling' were also found. When put together, these factors may leave actors at risk of mental health disorders and, in particular, depression, anxiety and trauma. However, this study was limited in diversity, with only two participants being from minority groups and the experiences of Australian actors may differ from actors in the UK or the rest of the world. Further, this research was conducted through an interpretative lens. Whilst the study does not give further details surrounding epistemology, it is known that the first author has a background as a director and more mention of her contribution to the interpretation of the data would be interesting to the reader. What this study does show is that actors are vulnerable to mental health problems and that actors may require specialist services due to the co-occurrence of multiple factors and the individuality of the work. These studies provide the first real insight into the cost of an actor's wellbeing and the detrimental effects of this profession on their mental health.

## **1.6 Summary**

The body of the evidence demonstrates just how far actors will go for the sake of their art and the price of the acting world on an individual's wellbeing

(Seton, 2008). It also shows some of the common personality traits within actors and the pervasiveness of performance anxiety. Further, it provides a glimpse into the highly emotional processes around character development, attachment and how a character invades the person, thus enhancing trauma (Thomson, 2012). As well as how actors use regulation techniques to control these emotions. Whilst these findings show a direct effect on an individual's mental health, what we do not know is how they all combine, how actors manage these difficulties, what their experience is like or how we can work creatively with actors and those training/directing them to support their mental health and the ongoing impact it has on their lives.

## **1.7 Rationale**

In 1954, Carl Rogers talked about the importance of creating an environment of psychological safety and freedom, high internal motivation and the absence of external evaluation to allow creativity to flourish. The relationship between actors and psychology has mostly been one-sided, with actors drawing on psychological findings to inform their characters. Psychology plays a large role in acting primarily because it is comprised of a host of cognitive capacities. These have only started to be explored but as realistic acting becomes more and more of one of the main pleasures of contemporary life, it is time for '*science to take the stage*' (Goldstein & Bloom, 2011). However, as well as expanding on these cognitive processes, psychology needs to take up the mantle of responding to the mental health needs of actors.

As outlined, the research into actors is sparse and it is essential for psychologists to be constantly growing in their knowledge of this area so that we can have a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of creative clients (Kyaga, et al., 2011). This will enable us to better organise our services and to offer innovative ideas to alleviate the affliction these clients experience. It is unclear why counselling psychologists have not focused on this population previously. Perhaps it is due to the 'whatever it

takes' mentality embedded in this population (Seton, 2008), resulting in actors not reaching out for the support they need. Alternatively, it could reflect societies' interests with other creative groups being of interest in the 1950's when actors weren't invading people's homes to the same extent as they are now with the technology boom. Nevertheless, the gap lies in how a combination of the factors outlined in this literature review come together to create a picture of mental health within actors. A further gap is that between the quantitative and qualitative research in relation to actors (Prior, et al., 2015). There is a clear absence of a qualitative presence within the research as well as an absence of a contribution from counselling psychology despite the "lasting emotional damage" of the acting profession (Geer, 1993). A need for a variety of methodologies to add empirical perspective to the understanding of actor's lives is much needed (Maxwell, Seton, Szabo, 2015). These authors of the largest actor's wellbeing study pioneer for further research said:

*"more comprehensive and deeper awareness of potential physical, vocal and psychological hazards and industry challenges...must continue to be a topic of discussion, debate and affirmative action. We can no longer ignore preliminary research data and congruent anecdotal evidence emerging from a range of individuals and organizations shedding light upon this important subject" (Prior, Maxwell, Szabo & Seton, 2015, p.23).*

Further, there has recently been an intense focus in the media regarding sexual harassment within the acting industry. Many female actors have come forward talking about their negative experiences of what they have had to endure to obtain a role with many speaking about the male-dominated environment and the sexual encounters forced upon them (BBC, 2018; #metoo). There has never been a more topical time for psychologists to start playing more of a role within the acting industry not only in providing services for the suffering actor but also to bring about change within the workplace environment.

## **1.8 Aims**

It is for these reasons that this study aims to provide insight into the mental wellbeing of professional actors. This study aims to meet the knowledge and methodological gap within the literature in order to respond to the challenges psychologists face in offering ideas and services that may alleviate actor's struggles (Kogan, 2002). Further, as actors have a considerable impact on the public, the benefits of devoting research and practice to ensuring actors are healthy spans from the individual to having a wider benefit to the general public (Kogan, 2002).

A career as an actor appears to be dependent on performance in two different spheres. First, there is managing the challenges of the industry: the stress surrounding high rates of rejection, unemployment, and the difficulties that arise from the emotional nature of the work. Second, is the task of the process of acting itself: the abilities and characteristics required to create and portray characters that an audience will believe and enjoy.

## **1.9 Counselling Psychology and the Research Study**

It is essential for counselling psychology to make progression in this area for several reasons. Firstly, as one of the main mental health providers, counselling psychology should be stepping up to meet the needs of these under-represented population group. Secondly, counselling psychology is well placed to produce qualitative research to meet the methodological gap that this topic exposes. Thirdly, research thus far has taken sections of the actor (i.e. stage fright, personality) rather than gaining insight into individual as a whole, with no studies looking at how meaning is created from their environment and mental processes, nor the impact this joint effect has on them. Therefore, counselling psychology is best-placed to represent the individual and how they make sense of the experiences. Fourthly, to my knowledge, there have been no studies in the UK looking at the professional

actor's wellbeing. This study gives counselling psychology the opportunity to investigate this topic area in one of the acting industries most central places in the world. Fifthly, according to the British Film Institute (BFI, 2016), there is a lack of diversity in race, gender and disability in the UK acting industry. As counselling psychology aims to promote diversity there is space to promote this value through this research. Lastly, drawing on the similarities between counselling psychology and acting, particularly in relation to high levels of empathy and theory of mind, counselling psychology is best placed to understand, treat, create best practice and advocate for this underrepresented population.

### **1.10 Reflexivity**

Having a personal interest in the wellbeing of actors, the topic is particularly meaningful to me. When I first approached the literature, I was surprised there was very little to be found on actors due to the amount of interest we have in them as a society. I reflected on why this might be as the actors I had met often talk about how they relate with psychology, particularly in terms of the empathy and understanding one must develop to play a character / sit with a patient. On the other hand, I have noticed that within short periods of time actors become immersed into the industry and see their negative experiences as 'normal'. In my personal experience, when I have questioned certain behaviours within the industry as being unhealthy, actors would explain these experiences as part of everyday interactions. Therefore, perhaps actors present less to services than other performing artists, thus the need for research into this area remains unseen and actors remain 'forgotten' (Brandfonbrener, 1992).

Exploring the existing literature evidenced some of the processes and experiences I have seen first-hand. For example, I have witnessed actors become emotional after a performance and the literature on boundary blurring confirmed hypothesis' I had in relation to this. More than anything my initial literature review pushed and inspired me to move forward with this

research and to champion psychologists to become more involved in the care of these people that provide us with so much entertainment. I saw the gap in the literature, and I was seeing the need in day-to-day life.

Whilst carrying out the study over the course of three years, I have held the previous research lightly, and due to the time duration, it has not been at the forefront of my mind during data collection and analysis stages. Coming back to the literature in the write-up stage, I feel excited to be part of the small body of psychologists and other professionals concerned about the wellbeing of actors. I feel privileged to be part of such an under-researched topic. To engage with how my personal experiences and relationships with the topic may impact on the research process, I have engaged in personal reflexivity throughout. This has been done by using a reflective diary and memos to help me identify assumptions and recognise my subjectivity as they arise.



## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter gives a detailed account of the research process. I begin by outlining the development of the research question and describing the assumptions that underlie it. I then outline the constructivist paradigm that formed the knowledge sought and how it was understood. Lastly, I describe the ethical considerations, research procedures and analytic process.

### **2.2 Development of the Research Question and Grounded Theory**

In this research, I sought to ensure congruence between constructivist grounded theory (GT) and my research question. I was curious about how actors understand themselves in the context of their work, and the impact this has on their psychological wellbeing. Working within the acting industry, I witnessed actors struggle with the demands of acting industry for example, being out of work or the pressure to look a certain way. Additionally, I often witnessed actors come out of a performance emotional or with the feeling as though they had worked through something. These personal experiences, along with the existing literature helped me develop the research question. I was particularly concerned with the experiences and processes regarding a), the individual operating within the acting industry and b), the job of playing a character. I was looking to identify actors' experiences in order to reveal the impact on their lives. I wanted to find out if a theoretical framework or social process could be formulated as ways of understanding this topic area. This was done with the aim of providing psychologists with clearer ideas in relation to how they can best support actors.

My first interest was with participants stories, experiences and understandings. I employed constructivist grounded theory to enable participants to share their perspectives (Charmaz, 2006). Firstly, I sought to enable an inductive inquiry that would make room for the voices of

participants and be a starting point of analysis, interpretation and the construction of new theories and understandings. Secondly, I was concerned with seeing people as individuals and as part of society. I wanted to explore their experiences of participants in relation to their wider context.

Constructivist GT seeks to explore and analyse at societal levels whilst seeking to maintain the value of personal experiences (Charmaz, 2014). This method seeks to move past both positivist and interpretative assumptions about knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). From this method, I hoped to construct a new theory that is grounded in the experiences of participants. Thirdly, Charmaz (2014) argued that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction between people. As the researcher, I do not believe I am just a data collector but actively involved in this process of research. My own values, interactions and interpretations could also shape the theory. Therefore, I wanted my questions to be broad and open. I sought to create a semi-structured interview schedule that would allow participants to share their stories, reflections and understandings. Further, the 'how' elements of my questions could enable participants to reflect on a deeper level of their own experiences, societal influences and the consequences for themselves.

These objectives were addressed through the following questions:

1. What is it the culture of the acting industry is like for a working actor?
2. What are the processes involved in playing a character?
3. How does the acting industry contribute to their wellbeing?

The assumptions behind these questions were:

- The acting industry is a unique place to work
- The industry impacts the actor's psychological wellbeing negatively
- Actors know the processes involved in playing a character
- Actors are aware of the impact on themselves (therefore assuming a certain level of self-awareness)

- It is possible for me as the researcher to construct an interpretation or understanding of participants accounts
- There may be a difference between how actors and psychologists perceive the impact of the industry
- Participants are interested and willing to share their experiences as part of this research study

## **2.3 Personal Position in Relation to the Participants**

It is long debated whether qualitative researchers should be a member of the population they are studying (an insider) or not (an outsider). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) steer researchers away from having concrete labels and challenge this 'insider' versus 'outsider' status. They propose that there are both strengths and challenges in relation to being part of the studied population or not and that labelling a researcher in a dichotomous way restricts them. They suggest that there is a 'space between' where a researcher can hold both positions. I consider myself to be in the 'space between', holding aspects of both an insider and an outsider to the actors within this study. However, this position is not without its tensions. I identify with the 'insider' position due to my own experiences of working administratively in the acting industry and having professional contact with actors. However, I also identify as being an 'outsider' as I do not have acting experiences and I am a researcher relying on the actors to share their experiences with me. Without their cooperation, I could not have carried out my research. To facilitate the actors engaging in this research process, I needed some solidarity with them (Karp, 1994). On the one hand, I was mindful of the potential of over-identifying with participants as we shared 'inside' experiences. On the other hand, I did not want to be the detached 'outsider' simply seeking to sieve data out of participants. Lee (1993) states that every interview depends on a:

*“complex interrelation between the relative structural positions of the interviewer and interviewee and the interviewer’s skill and personal style”* (p.109).

Further, I am aware my understanding of another person will never be exact and therefore I am an ‘outsider’ to their experiences. To manage the difficulties of finding myself in the ‘space between’, I considered the methodological and ethical challenges reflexively throughout the research and carefully planned to address these. I kept a reflexive diary and utilised the process of memoing throughout the study to help me identify responses, feelings and ideas I had. This allowed me to stand back from the research and reflect on my own assumptions and processes.

It is an interesting balance for me holding my own views and insights into the acting world. I feel like I want the participants to know that I ‘get it’ to an extent. That I have seen inside this secret world. On the other hand, I really don’t know much of what they go through at all. I do think actors are so open and generous, so ready to tell their stories that they won’t mind speaking to me and that perhaps the insider/outside position is not as significant as it might be with other groups of people.

Box 1. Reflexivity

## **2.4 Finding a Research Paradigm**

The research paradigm makes the philosophical stance of the research clear. This sets the scene for the study and acts as a map for the researcher to follow (Ponterotto, 2005). Research paradigms can be defined by philosophical beliefs of ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Only once a study’s research paradigm is clarified and the belief system underpinning the research defined, can then questions of methods be addressed.

- Ontology is the position from which one studies 'being' (Crotty, 1998), and raises questions about reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Ontological questions tend to focus on "*how things really work*" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 p.108).
- Epistemology is a way of understanding knowledge and explaining the relationships between what can be known, the researcher, and the research participant. Epistemological questioning asks, "*how I know what I know*" (Crotty, 1998, p.3).
- The methodology is made up of the procedures or techniques a researcher uses to gather and analyse the knowledge that can be known (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

It is essential for researchers to reflect on their ontological position that backs their research aims and whether they wish to offer reflections that try to make sense of participants experiences (a relativist position) or to expose reality (a realist position) (Willig, 2012). These two positions describe the views a researcher holds about how they are representing the knowledge the research produces. A relativist researcher carries the view their research produces a 'reading' of the data, which says as much about the researcher themselves as it does about the area being explored. Alternatively, a realist researcher carries the view they are accurately representing the internal experience of the participant through their data (Willig, 2012). The ontological positioning within research is intertwined with the epistemological positioning and one cannot exist without the other (Crotty, 1998).

To clarify my positioning, I will now outline the research paradigm that informs this study, and how that impacted the choice of methodology.

## **2.5 Paradigms for This Study**

### **Qualitative v Quantitative**

Quantitative research methodologies have dominated psychological research, adopting an objectivist philosophical stance when discovering a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This allows for a realist position where reality is to be objectively examined and understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), whereas the process of understanding subjective experiences goes unaccounted for (Bruner, 1991). In contrast, Denzin & Lincoln (2003, p.13), describe how qualitative methodologies aim to understand the social construction of reality and the relationship between what is being studied, and the circumstances that may shape the investigation. Therefore, qualitative research is more likely to adopt a relativist position. There were several reasons for selecting qualitative research.

Firstly, training as a counselling psychologist, my work as a clinician and a researcher is underpinned by understanding individuals' unique experiences and the social factors that impact on them (Health Professional Council, 2009). I have therefore struggled with the idea of taking an objectivist stance towards exploring the impact of the social factors that undoubtedly will impact upon the experiences of participating actors in this research.

Secondly, as there is little previous psychological research investigating the world of acting, utilising a quantitative method would mean there would only be my assumptions as a hypothesis. However, using a qualitative research method, the research would be open-ended, exploratory and generate a hypothesis from the data rather than testing it (Burck, 2005).

Thirdly, I felt obtaining personal accounts of experiences would provide important first insight into an under-researched area and would further empower a participant group whose story is often told for them (Waksler,

1991; Morrow & Richards, 1996). As this research is concerned with discovering new insights, by using an inductive stance that is taken in qualitative research it provides spaces for new theories to be generated (Willig, 2013).

Therefore, taking into consideration my personal ontological and epistemological beliefs (which will be delineated in the next section), the novelty of the research area, and limited pre-existing knowledge a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was considered most fitting.

### **Ontological and Epistemological Paradigms for This Study**

I have reflected on my ontological and epistemological positioning to conduct this research project. I have thought about the kind of knowledge I aim to produce, the assumptions I make about the world, and the way I conceptualise the role of the researcher in the generation of knowledge (Willig, 2013). I assume that there is a real world that exists, and any meaning-making occurs within a real reality. I believe that experiences and social processes exist through the beliefs individuals hold about them and that there are real and physical consequences of their reactions to these beliefs. I also hold the view, that my role as a researcher will impact the research, that the data and analysis are created through an interactive process between myself and the participant to co-construct a shared reality that will form a *“picture that draws from, reassembles and renders subjects’ lives”* (Charmaz, 2003 p.270). According to these underlying assumptions, I have defined my ontological position to be critical realist, located between a realist and a relativist position and my epistemology to be constructivist.

It has been a difficult philosophical process for me to work out their position myself epistemologically. I find it hard to know what I believe is the truth and how we know it. I have really thought and discussed this at length. I keep coming back to it, reading about it, discussing it. I feel slightly more settled now I have figured it

#### Box 2. Reflexivity

## 2.5 Considering Methodologies

This section will look at other methodologies that were considered and give justification for the chosen methodology.

### Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

As this study was looking at the *experiences* that actors have in the industry and of playing a character, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was initially considered. IPA aims to explore the subjective experiences and social cognitions of an individual and how they make sense of their world. The researcher brackets their own perceptions to keep them separate from the participants, so an objective account of a subjective experience is created (Flick, 2011). IPA was considered due to its emphasis on subjective experience, it partially fitted the objectives of the present study and could provide insight into significant experiences within an actor's work. For the current research, IPA would explore how actors experience their work to have an impact on their psychological wellbeing. Whilst this would be interesting, the attention of this research is focused on not just the experiences, but the wider social processes involved in being a working actor and how the interaction of these may impact on an individual's psychological wellbeing.

Additionally, IPA proved problematic for the objectives of the current research from an ontological and epistemological perspective. Within IPA



the researcher can suspend their subjectivity, this does not fit with my understanding of how knowledge is constructed. Further, my perspective on the influence of the researcher in constructing the data and analysis was not congruent with the IPA concept of the researcher bracketing during the data collection stage. Lastly, as there is little literature on the actor's psychological wellbeing, I have determined that a tentative explanatory framework would better service counselling psychologists when working with this population. Therefore, I determined that IPA would not achieve the aims of the present research.

### **Thematic Analysis**

As there is little known about actors within the research literature, thematic analysis was considered. Thematic analysis is a useful method to explore under-researched areas or if the research includes the views of the participant that are not known (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is a method that underpins most other qualitative methods of data analysis. It is like grounded theory and phenomenological analysis in action in the way that they all rely on line-by-line coding to identify 'themes/categories' within the data corpus. (Braun & Clark, 2006; Willig, 2013). Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting themes (patterns) within data. It organises the data set in descriptive detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Whilst thematic analysis is used widely, there is no clear agreement about what the methodology is and how you utilise it (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Tuckett, 2005).

Thematic analysis is not tied to one theoretical approach to qualitative research, therefore the researcher takes the onus on deciding what the themes identified represent. It can be used to address social constructionist, phenomenological or realist research questions. Thematic analysis was considered as a method for the current study due to its theoretical flexibility. This has been seen to be one of the strengths of thematic analysis but also

where it lends itself to criticism for being an ‘anything goes’ method (Braun & Clark, 2006; Willig, 2013). However, a good thematic analysis makes transparent the assumptions the theoretical framework carried with it makes in relation to the nature of the data that if demonstrated would bypass this critique (Braun & Clark, 2006).

There are two major theoretical frameworks that have been known to theorise the thematic analysis findings (Joffe, 2012). These are the social representations theory and social phenomenology. Social representations theory looks at the way in which individuals and institutions conceptualise and represent social phenomena and how this conceptualisation evolves over time. Social phenomenology looks to understand how groups of people subjectively understand their social reality as they go about their daily life. When paired with thematic analysis the themes identified from represent the meanings attributed to participants experiences and helps the researcher make sense of the actions of participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

From a critical realist position thematic analysis;

*“acknowledges the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, whilst retaining focus on the material and other limits of reality”* (Priya & Dalal, 2016, p. 211).

Therefore, thematic analysis would be suitable for the present study as it allows for psychological and social interpretation across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Whilst thematic analysis would have provided an insightful method to address the present research question and to look at an under-researched area, it was discounted as firstly, the lack of a framework within thematic analysis did not sit with me as the researcher as secure enough to hold the research. Secondly, the motivation behind this research was to generate a theory about actors that is useful to psychologists. Thematic

analysis may identify similar patterns across the dataset as a grounded theory, but it does not offer a framework to raise the patterns to a theoretical level. Therefore, thematic analysis was discounted.

### **Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis was also considered for this study as it is concerned with psychological and social consequences for individuals. Narrative analysis looks at the stories that people tell and how they make connections and interpretations of different events and how that, in turn, influences how people's lives are shaped. It therefore produces social constructionist knowledge (Willig, 2013). Narrative analysis looks at the participant's story to inspect how 'to impose' structure on the flow of experience to understand events and actions in their lives (Reissman, 1993). However, it is important to note that narrative researchers vary in their theoretical assumptions and methods of analysis, although they all ask questions of the narrative within the data (Willig, 2013). Often the researcher carries out multiple interviews with the participant as it can take a significant amount of time for a person to tell their story. This was an obstacle for the present study as time and resources are somewhat restricted. Narrative analysis seems somewhat fitting in the present study as acting is all about telling a story and in my personal experience, actors enjoy telling theirs. Further, it is important within this method to consider how individual narratives are shaped by wider social and cultural narratives. This also seems suitable to explore the acting culture and how that shapes the actor's experiences.

However, I do not find narrative analysis to be fitting with my epistemological stance. Narrative analysis suggests that reality is determined by stories told about social and material structures but not directly influenced by these structures themselves. I believe that social structures do impact an individual directly, and that is what informs an individual's reality. Whilst, I do agree that the way we tell the accounts of the stories has an impact, I see it as secondary. Further, whilst this method would provide insight into the way

actors stories are told and how that impacts on their wellbeing, it again does not leave room for raising the theoretical framework that grounded theory offers. Therefore, it does not meet the aim of this study to generate a theory that is useful to a psychologist in their work with actors and was discounted.

### **Considering Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory was debated on the basis that it works towards developing theory and in this way corresponded with the current study's aim of exploring the experiences and the processes involved in actors work to generate a tentative theory for how psychologists are best placed to help actors.

In contrast to IPA, grounded theory as a methodology holds many different permutations which conform to a spectrum of different epistemological and ontological stances ranging from positivist to constructionist (Levers, 2013; Rennie, 2006).

Grounded theory stemmed from sociological research as an alternative to the deductive methodologies that were dominant at that time. It was concerned with theory emerging from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Since its conceptualisation, the number of versions of grounded theory has been developed and the methodological directions of grounded theory debate. Some think these debates detract from the purpose of which grounded theory was created (Breckenridge, Hones, Elliot & Nicol, 2012). For this reason, I point to Charmaz (2014), for a succinct outline of the grounded theory versions that dominate the research and a summary of the disagreements between them.

Grounded theory holds common features throughout its many versions. These include; initial coding, categorisation of data, concurrent data generation, memo writing, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sensitivity, intermediate coding, core category identification, advanced coding, and theoretical integration with the view to

generating integrated and comprehensive grounded theory (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Grounded theory aims to generate theories that account for patterns of behaviours that are relevant and problematic for those involved (Glaser & Holton, 2005). This is well fitting for the purpose of this study looking at the patterns of behaviours in the culture of the acting industry, the acting process and the problems that causes for the individual actor. Grounded theory seeks to gain an understanding of the ways people manage their social situation and how their own actions play a part in the unfolding social process (Willig, 2013). Further, grounded theory allows the researcher to explore:

*“individual processes, interpersonal relations, and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes.”* (Charmaz, 1995, p. 29).

In this case, I am interested in how actors negotiate and manage their social and individual processes and I hoped grounded theory would enable me to do that. It was therefore determined that grounded theory was the most appropriate methodology due to its suitability to understand social and individual processes over other qualitative methods (Willig, 2008).

## **2.7 Symbolic Interactionism (SI)**

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a key component of grounded theory, regardless of permutation and is central to many of the stages of grounded theory research process (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills & Usher, 2013). It places emphasis on the process of subjective meaning-making through which an individual understands, make sense of, and moves through their world (Blumer, 1986). SI proposes that it is an individual's reflection on themselves within society which creates a co-construction of new interpretations and changes self-meaning which in turn co-constructs society. Despite the commonalities of SI cross the different grounded theory approaches SI is also significant at the ontological divide between the different approaches, as it causes us to question whether we are discovering

or constructing meaning. As SI advocates the emphasis on meaning as socially generated, it supports a research approach which attends to process as opposed to assuming structure (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). From a theoretical perspective, the SI stance is strongly aligned with constructivist as both grounded theory highlights the continual process of 'creating discoveries' through co-constructing meaning (Charmaz, 1990).

SI provides scope within the current research for not just exploring the processes relating to the experiences of actors but also in the explicit and implicit meanings underlying these processes.

## **2.8 Constructivist Grounded Theory**

This study is aligned with constructivist grounded theory. This approach was developed by Charmaz (2014) in response to the limitations of the existing grounded theory. Charmaz moved away from the positivistic leanings in earlier grounded theory, most essentially, the idea of a researcher's ability to separate their subjectivity from the research process so as not to contaminate it. She challenged this idea, putting forward the argument that it is unavoidable that the researcher will make assumptions about the area under investigation, and inevitably be drawn towards those assumptions. She criticised the earlier approaches for failing to acknowledge not just the construction of the research, but also the social context in which it is constructed. It is through researchers and participants social interactions that we can construct new meanings through the generation of 'interpretative understandings'. Charmaz used the term 'constructivist' to: *"acknowledge subjectivity and the researches involvement in the construction and interpretation of data"* (p.13).

It is essential to constructivist grounded theory to engage with individual's experiences within their social world. Researchers want to learn about meanings, understandings and stories (Charmaz, 1996; 2006). It is the collective experiences that give understanding to deeper social problems. By

combining interpretative and positivist assumptions about the production of knowledge the constructivist seeks to combine insights from 'inside' lived experiences and 'outside' processes of power, values and structure. Therefore, any theories that emerge are 'grounded' in not only in experiences but in deeper structural problems and their consequences. Charmaz (2014) says we must learn:

*"how, when and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and often hidden structures, networks, situations, and relationships" (p.240).*

Further, this knowledge is co-constructed between the participant and the researcher (Charmaz, 2014). The social world exists, and knowledge is created within it. Charmaz drew on symbolic interactionism agreeing with the view that individuals create their own meanings and as they interpret their private and public world they act on that meaning. Through individual lived experiences of 'temporal, cultural and structural contexts' individuals develop their own subjective understanding (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). Constructivist research is born from the assumption that social reality is multiple, processual and constructed (Charmaz, 2000). From this perspective, it is not possible for the subjective researcher to be abstracted from the social world that shapes them. It is through the interactions of the researcher and the participants that new knowledge is created (Charmaz, 2014). Within the interview context, the communication becomes the creation of something new. In taking this view, the 'objectivist' stance of the researcher within classical grounded theory is rejected (Charmaz, 2003).

Charmaz (2014), criticised classical research tradition to have treated their analysis' as accurate interpretations of the worlds they have studied rather than as constructions of them. Nor did they account for their processes or the situational and structural infringements that contribute to the research. She argued that there is mutual relationship between the participants and the researcher resulting in the creation of a shared reality and that it is not

possible to delete research subjectivity rather than engaging in reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014). She championed the view that researchers influence their constructed theory with their views and values. She believed it necessary to consider a researcher's perspective, privilege, and position. This is particularly evident in the analytical stage where she challenges one of the fundamental principles of classical grounded theory which is that researchers can 'discover theory' from data. Charmaz (2005) asserted that:

*"no qualitative method rests purely on induction and the questions we ask of the empirical world frame what we know of it"* (p.509).

Additionally, in terms of theory generation, Charmaz stresses the flexibility in her method of analysis contrary to the previous formulaic prescription. She describes prior GT for being too prescriptive and didactic as opposed to interactive and emergent (Charmaz, 2000). She views this interactive process one in which the researcher constructs their theory by interacting with the data.

Due to the links made between the co-construction of knowledge and the importance of reflexivity as well as the emphasis of the subjective and the social contexts, constructivist grounded theory was utilised.

## **2.9 The Use of Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is an essential part of constructivist grounded theory. Charmaz (2014) described it as:

*"the researcher's scrutiny of the research experience, decisions and interpretations in ways that bring him or her into the process. Reflexivity includes examining how the researcher's interests, positions and assumptions influenced his or her inquiry. A reflexive stance informs how the*



*researcher conducts his or her research, relates to the research participants and represents them in the written reports” (p.344).*

Not to engage in this process of reflexivity risks reproducing “*current ideologies, conventions, discourses and power relationships*” (Charmaz, 2011, p.241). Reflexivity only became a practice in research from the 1980’s (Burgess, 1984). Since then, it has been a topic of much importance in relation to the research process. However, much of the research around reflexivity has been pioneered by feminist scholars and therefore is often used as a pinch of salt on studies (Roberts, 2007; Solbue, 2011; Letherby, 2015). Marcus (1994) determined reflexivity as being an indulgent and narcissistic process. In contradiction, Ruby (1980), thought of it as being ethically mature and honest. Holiday (2002) stated that “*researchers and their methods are entangled with the politics of the social world they study*” (p.146). As a counselling psychologist, an emphasis is placed on reflexivity within psychology practice, I naturally align with Ruby, Holiday and Charmaz that we are not neutral but entangled with the world and our research. As a result, it is essential that I need to be aware of my own life, values and how they impact on this research. Further, I need to be aware of how they influence my own preconceptions on data and concepts (Charmaz, 2014).

Within grounded theory space is created for reflexivity throughout, particularly through the exercise of writing. Grounded theory applies the use of memoing to help the researcher capture thoughts, ideas, insights and connections across the research process (Charmaz, 2006). As the research develops, the memos become more analytical, and the emphasis on deep reflection is required throughout the write up stages (Charmaz, 2014). The writing demands more than just reporting, but for the researcher to be reflexive and analytical of the contexts that shape the lives of both participants and researcher (Mills, Boner & Francis, 2006).

## **2.10 Limitations and Possibilities of Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory has been named the 'major force in igniting the qualitative revolution' (Denzin & Lincoln in Charmaz, 2014 p.10). It has contributed greatly to the credibility and rigour of qualitative research. It is a way to learn more about the worlds we study and provides a method for researchers to develop theories to understand these worlds (Charmaz, 2014). There are numerous versions of grounded theory and is now popular across many fields of research and is one of the most common approaches utilised by undergraduate and postgraduate students across many fields of research (Payne, 2012 in Dune). However, Glaser remained critical of many developments that strayed from the original ideas citing grounded theory as the essence of poor taste and an example of how a whole industry has been created on the subject (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Despite the obvious potential that grounded theory offers to qualitative researchers, I am also aware of some of its limitations:

Firstly, a rarely noted but obvious limitation is the time it takes to conduct grounded theory research (Elliot & Higgins, 2012).

Secondly, despite the assertions of grounded theory that the theory is grounded within the data, the use of analytical terms including properties, codes and categories seem to reflect more quantitative and deductive language and approaches to research (Burgess, 1984). Bryant & Charmaz (2007), similarly criticised Strauss and Corbin's 'axial coding' of the same fault.

Thirdly, some grounded theory theorists assert the idea that researchers should refrain from examining the previous literature until the fieldwork is complete (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They propose conducting a literature review prior to the field work would contaminate the coding and development of theory. This has been largely criticised and is a topic of ongoing debate (Charmaz, 2007; Cresswell, 2007; Dunne, 2012). However, due to the

requirement of most universities and ethics committees to conduct and include a review within research proposals, this controversy leaves those undertaking their PhD studies in somewhat of a dilemma (Charmaz, 2014). Fourth, earlier grounded theory studies were predominantly taught and conducted by middle class, white men, and has therefore been criticised for their use of gender- specific language within their writings. Whilst they contributed widely to the academic world, it can be argued that the enormous contribution to qualitative methods that was made by earlier female sociologists was not acknowledged. Examples of this work include Dorothy Smith (1926-n.d), Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), and Margaret Mead (1901-1978) who conducted significant ethnographic work.

Lastly, Layder (1994; 2006) criticised grounded theory for its primary concern is with interaction, subjectivity and meaning. He thought these interactionist perspectives as being focused inward and neglecting the impact of structural issues of inequalities (class, gender and racial divisions). Layder and others also thought ideological factors such as the media, that shape subjectivities and human meanings were downplayed. He argued for more attention to exploring the micro levels between human interactions and how that is linked with wider structural contexts (Layder, 2006; Hooks, 1981, Dillon, 2014). Collins (2000), reminded us of 'intersectionality' and the importance of this in people's lives. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, our locations and our individual biographies situate our individual experiences and life chances.

## **2.11 Ensuring Research Quality**

With the object of being mindful to produce high-quality qualitative research, I explored what makes a rigorous study. There are multiple ideas regarding the criteria that can be utilised to evaluate qualitative methodologies.

Charmaz (2014) suggests that the credibility of qualitative research depends on scope and depth as well as adequacy and suitability for representing empirical events. Criteria that specifically evaluate the quality and reliability

in counselling psychology research includes; subjectivity, reflexivity, social validity, suitability of data and of interpretation (Morrow, 2005).

Other suggestions for evaluating quality in more detail include; keeping close to the data, developing rich integrated theory, utilising and recording reflexivity, findings that can be significantly generalised and transferred (Henwood & Pigeon, 1992). Denscombe (2002), suggested several features that evidence good social research, despite the specific methodology used. These features include; data that was collected and used in a justifiable way, the precision and validity of that data, findings from which generalisations can be made, and the contribution of new knowledge.

To ensure the quality was met throughout each research stage, I kept a reflexive diary in which I wrote regularly. Sometimes this would be several entries a day, sometimes this would be once every couple of weeks depending on how immersed I was in the research at any given time. I have been clear in addressing my position to the study and my interest in actors. I ensured to be clear with the participants about my 'insider' role before they interview so there was full transparency and they could choose not to take part if they so wished. To stay close to the data I checked my coding with colleagues to ensure similar results are being produced. I made a conscious effort to stop and acknowledge at regular points my part in constructing the research. Further, I follow ethical guidelines and the steps of grounded theory closely. I engaged in regular meetings with my supervisor and discuss my research process with my colleagues to ensure accountability and to obtain perspective throughout the process.

## **2.12 Evaluating the Study**

Throughout the stages of the research in order to evaluate the study, I engaged in a variety of tasks to ensure that the research findings are credible

and of a high standard demonstrating rigour and trustworthiness. Perspectives vary on the criteria that should be used to evaluate qualitative methodologies. My research was informed by a counselling psychologist (Morrow, 2005), and a grounded theorist (Charmaz, 2014). I mindfully engaged with the recommendations of these researchers to ensure all stages of the study were of high quality. (This is outlined below).

Morrow (2005) places emphasis on counselling psychologist researchers to acknowledge their own subjectivity and reflexivity. I engaged with reflexivity throughout the research process, across methodological, epistemological and personal aspects. I kept a memo diary to keep track of connections made. I documented this through excerpts that are included throughout the chapters.

In relation to grounded theory studies, Charmaz (2014) acknowledged that there is no 'one size fits all' evaluation for studies with that in mind, she proposed recommendations for evaluation: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness.

#### Credibility:

For a study to be credible, Charmaz is concerned with whether the results of the study are plausible in terms of the familiarity and presentation of data, the analysis process and that the claims made are evidenced. Throughout the research process, I worked to be transparent and rigorous. I ensured to make clear to everyone involved that I had both personal and academic interests. In chapter 1, I locate myself in the study and in chapter 2, I demonstrate utilising constructed grounded theory to further establish transparency. I outline my own ontological and epistemological position and how I view my relationship to the study. The presentation of the findings and the process of how these were generated are clearly outlined. I have evidenced codes and categories by using participants quotes. During the process, a sample of my coding was shared and checked with colleagues

and research methods tutors. I presented and discussed the relationships between categories using visual representations to demonstrate these connections. My findings reveal an in-depth knowledge of that date (see Chapter 3, Findings).

#### Originality:

Charmaz suggested the research to demonstrate originality, the categories must offer new insight into the topic area. As discussed earlier, this research offers fresh insight into a professional actor's world and is highly original. For instance, the category 'Addictive Nature of Acting' (see Chapter 4), adds understanding to the literature base around why actors might stay in their profession when they know it is detrimental. This concept of being addicted to the work is a pioneering idea within this field of research and practice. Many of the categories presented are innovative and present fresh suggestions. Further, they offer new insights into the relationships between the industry and the process of acting and how that impacts the individual.

#### Resonance:

Charmaz advocates that for a study to demonstrate resonance, the researcher must have drawn connections between individual lives and larger collectives. She asks researchers to question whether analysis deepens understanding of their lives and worlds to both the participants and others. The data analysis demonstrates the collective experiences of the industry and social processes that occur within the acting industry. Participants themselves are offered understanding in terms of self-reflection and development by being offered a psychological perspective on their profession and experiences. Many others that work with actors (directors, agents, psychologists etc.) can also gain a deeper understanding of what goes on for an actor and develop their practice with actors around that.

### Usefulness:

Charmaz notes that 'usefulness' of a study is concerned with whether or not the theoretical findings are useful for people to utilise in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, how the theoretical findings contribute to knowledge and make the world a more informed and better place. I believe the theoretical findings of this study are useful for several reasons. Firstly, they offer fresh ways of thinking about an actor which generates a deeper understanding of these individuals. Secondly, the findings challenge the industry to make changes to some of the damaging aspects of its culture. Thirdly, as famous actors are speaking out within the media about their experiences, this research gives voice to other professionals who may not have the same platform from which to break their silence of their own experiences. Fourthly, actors are individuals who seek to know themselves, this theoretical model could offer actors a deeper understanding of who they are. Lastly, it gives professionals a greater insight into how best to work with this client group.

## **2.13 Ethical Considerations**

It is an important part of any research project to continuously consider any ethical implications within the research (Rosenthal, 1994). None of the participants reported experiencing distress at any stage of the research process.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical approval was gained from City University Psychology Department, and IRB procedures were followed. Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical codes guided the research. No particular vulnerabilities needed to be accounted for when researching this population. Ethical considerations needed to be well-thought-out if participants had found recounting their experiences distressing the researcher would have used her therapeutic skills to contain the participant during the interview. Avenues for support were clearly explained to all participants verbally and through the information documents related to the study.

A second ethical consideration relates to the confidentiality of participants. To protect their privacy and anonymity, all identifying information about participants is concealed and the participant's names and identifying features have all been changed. All participants were informed in writing and verbally that they have the right to withdraw at any point without giving a reason. Participants were informed that there is a possibility that the research could be published, and that data will be kept for 10 years on a password-protected hard drive, accessible only by the researcher as according to university regulations. There are two consent forms that the participants signed. The participant kept one copy and I the other. These forms include the participant's name and signature and will be stored separately from any other data (see appendix). Each participant was given a number that corresponds with all the data relevant to them which is kept in a separate password protected file.

A third ethical consideration is a role that I had within the acting community. I managed an acting school for adults in London. To protect the anonymity of the participants and to allow them to feel comfortable within the interview, I determined that as the researcher, I must not have any personal or professional connections to the participant. It was considered what the 'plan of action' should be if I the researcher encountered a participant in an industry context in the future and this was to treat the situation as if encountering a client in a different context: do not approach the participant, follow their lead (be warm if they approach you), make all reasonable efforts to remove self from situation. Participants were made aware before attending the interview of my position within the acting community and given the opportunity to withdraw their interest if they so wished. Shortly after the recruitment phase of this research I stepped out of my role within the acting school and this reduced any contact to be exceptionally minimal.



## **2.14 Ethical Considerations for the Researcher**

As the interviews were conducted away from the university campus the University's Lone Worker Policy was adhered to and a colleague was made aware of the time and date of each interview and was contacted before and after each interview.

## **2.15 Method**

### **Grounded Theory**

In contrast to other qualitative methods, GT provides a framework for collecting and analysing data that allows a theory to be generated from within the data (Charmaz, 2006). As I used a constructivist approach, I followed Charmaz' (2006), method for data collection and analysis.

### **Participants**

Eight participants were recruited for this study. Participants were made up of four females and four males. Participants ages ranged between 18-45. Ethnicity was diverse, and all participants were currently based in London. The time in the profession ranged from 2 to 20 years of experience.

The inclusion criteria required participants to meet all the following:

- Is currently a professional actor (their main source of income comes from acting roles).
- Can identify with their chosen career to have impacted their psychological wellbeing.
- English speaking.
- 18+
- Participants must not be known to the researcher in a personal or professional capacity.

## **Recruitment**

As I worked for an acting school, I had direct access to the acting community. The Advertising Poster (see Appendix B) for participants was e-mailed to the student and staff databases asking them to pass the advert on. Relationships throughout my professional world were utilised to forward this advertisement to other acting schools, casting agents and directors. Word of mouth worked sufficiently, and I was steadily approached by participants. One participant kindly re-posted the advertisement in her online acting community after her interview, this generated more interest. When participants contacted me by e-mail. I phoned them to ensure they met the inclusion criteria and to explain the purpose of my study. If they were happy to proceed, I sent them the participant information sheet and the consent form. Following Charmaz (2006), I recruited, interviewed, and analysed in three stages. Recruitment stopped once I reached eight participants and I found nothing new was emerging from the data.

I thought the recruitment phase would be challenging but I have an influx of interest from actors who wish to interview. The problem I am now experiencing is that in line with Charmaz, I am trying to recruit and analyse in stages and so I have had to tell a participant I will come back to them in a month or so! I hope they are still interested then.

### Box 3. Reflexivity

#### **Relationships with Participants**

Whilst my role within the acting school facilitated the recruitment, I recruited from multiple sources to ensure a case rich sample of participants. Whilst I did not know any of the participants, I was aware that holding an 'insider' role within the community could make participants feel a) more comfortable and understood or b) uncomfortable because of any concerns regarding an impact on their career or confidentiality. Both perspectives were accounted for. A key principle, important for me, was to ensure that all my contacts with participants were honest and transparent (Charmaz, 2014).

Participants have referenced things they assume I am aware of during their interviews demonstrating when they are seeing me as an insider. They have included me in their bracketing of the industry for example, 'you know what it's like'. I feel I have created genuine rapport with them very quickly. They have also asked me questions about being a psychologist or commented on the amount of years I have studied, thus showing when they are seeing me as an 'outsider'. Holding this dual role was not something I found hard to navigate but came quite naturally to me. Perhaps because whilst being an 'insider', I have always been aware in my career in the acting industry that I am 'outside' of this, I might work there but I am not an actor nor do I have first-hand experience of acting. Therefore, I am more kin to the role of the 'inside observer'.

### Box 4. Reflexivity

## Interviews

Birks & Mills (2011), stress that a grounded theorist should not assume that their researcher skills are adequate for yielding rich data. Therefore, a pilot interview was carried out with a willing actor I did know. This pilot study carried out the steps that would be taken during the research interview. I received constructive feedback and improved and adapted the interview schedule accordingly. For example, the participant in the pilot study told me that my second question: *'How do you think the culture surrounding acting has had on you as an individual?'* was slightly confusing.

After the pilot, I decide to split this question into two to draw out a more detailed account from participants, so I then asked the following: *'Can you tell me about the culture within the acting industry'* and then *'How does that impact to your wellbeing?'* (see Appendix F). I also was able to gain an understanding of how long the participant might speak for on each question and to become more familiar with the interview process myself. The participant also told me he found the experience enjoyable which gave me more confidence in the next interview.

Interviews took place at the time and location of the participants choosing, for example, their home address or a private room they had access to. A confidential space at City University was offered however no participants took this option. Once participants had agreed to be interviewed, I emailed each one to confirm the date and time. I included a copy of the participant information sheet and the consent form (see appendix C & D). At the start of each interview, I restated the purpose of the research and discussed consent. I checked to see if they had any questions. Concluding questions facilitated the ending of the interview, participants were asked how they found the interview and if they had any concerns. Participants reported the experience to be cathartic, and most said they saw their experiences in a new light. Participants were asked if there was anything they wanted to add

or subtract from their interview. They were thanked and debriefed before I took my leave. I audio recorded all interviews.

I have just done the first interview.

My thoughts:

So interesting

So much to know

So many different bits

Was he acting through it?

Refine how you ask the questions Sheena – speak clearer

I'm excited and nervous for next interview

I wonder if there will be difference in an interview with a female?

Box 5. Reflexivity

## **Transcription**

All interviews were transcribed by myself. Participants were offered a copy of their interview transcripts. One participant requested a copy and was sent a transcript.

Whilst I had been warned about the tedious task of transcribing, I felt that my participants accounts were so interesting, and I was keen to listen to them again. I surprisingly enjoyed the transcription and really felt the analysis starting to form in my mind as I typed each one.

Box 6. Reflexivity

## **Data Analysis Procedure**

Three research interviews were initially collected and transcribed. With the intention of immersing myself within the analytical process, each transcript was re-read several times and the audio recording listened to. Every time I read the transcript, I considered all levels of coding in order to ground the

codes in the participant's language (Charmaz, 2006). The raw data was broken down and categorised using several methods (Table 1).

Primarily, initial line by line coding occurred. I studied each line for their analytic importance, particularly paying attention to what the participant was "doing" with their wording. The use of questions, Charmaz (2006) suggests, was helpful at this point to actively engage with the data. Line-by-line coding enables the researcher to detangle from the data with their own motives and focus on the participant's intentions (Charmaz, 2003).

Coinciding with the coding process memo writing took place to incorporate the thoughts and ideas that came to mind (Glaser, 1998). These then helped build towards theoretical codes and help to understand the patterns that are being generated from the data (Strauss & Glaser, 1970; Charmaz, 2006) (see Box 7).

Attention was paid to *in vivo* codes, which is a process that extracts significant quotes and words used by participants to keep the theory that is developing, grounded in the data. This took place until no new codes were being generated (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused coding then expanded upon initial coding by dissecting and interweaving the most useful initial codes and comparing them throughout the rest of the body of data. I then started to conceptualise how the codes relate to each other (Rico, 1983). This process started to explain the phenomenon being explored by raising the codes to a conceptual level (Glaser, 1978).

Table 1. The coding processes

| Participants Quote  | Initial Open Coding      | Focused Coding to Conceptual Categories |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| I think all of it in some ways are about pressure right. So, it's about                                 | Pressure                 | Pressure                                |
| Different degrees of pressure. There's a lot of pressure as an actor, pressure to get jobs then once    | Pressure getting a job   | Pressure / Work                         |
| You've got jobs pressure to really do a good job and do it will. Primarily because someone's paying     | Pressure on the job      | Pressure/ Work                          |
| You but also because they are much more likely to give you another job, which is often how the industry | Pressure for future jobs | Pressure/work                           |

Memos were made of focused codes by seeing which codes best represent the data and drawing relationship between them to conceptualising tentatively (Charmaz, 2006).

*Memo: The process of 'working' creates this explicit concept of pressure is at every level for actors – getting a job, doing a good job, getting the next job.*

*Due to the nature of the industry, their work is never secure, and they are always having to 'try' perform to 100% because of how hard it is to get a new job and to do a good job.*

*Money is also maybe more of an implicit pressure – they are getting paid and the production costs a huge amount of money.*

*The two concepts of 'working' and 'pressure' seem interlinked you can't be a working actor without the constant pressure, at no level can you separate them.*

*Questions: What are the other areas this pressure is implicit/explicit?  
What is the impact of being under this amount of pressure?*

*Reflexion: It feels like the actor is always on edge, constantly thinking about what they are doing and if they are doing it right. This amount of pressure cannot be good for them. I'm aware I'm thinking of this negatively which is making me think about when pressure is good. Pressure often makes me perform to a higher standard, you can enjoy pressure it can be a good feeling. I need to be careful not to just see a negative side.*



In the next stage, three more interviews were gathered. Once the new data went through the first stages of analysis, I conducted the final two interviews. Then the entire research body underwent theoretical coding. Charmaz (2006), describes this as the process of establishing secure relationships between the most significant categories and sub-categories. In this stage, I compared and integrated memos to keep the emergent findings grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

To put together a working picture, theoretical sorting, diagramming and integrating memos took part in a combined process (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sorting was done as close as possible to the understanding of the empirical experience following the logical route that will have emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006). An essential part of grounded theory is diagramming the categories to see the direction and relationships of categories and sub-categories (Clarke, 2005). By integrating memos into this stage, I gained insight into the implicit and sharpened the relationships between categories. This began to shape the initial analytic framework (Charmaz, 2006).

The above steps were repeated until the categories were saturated (Stern, 2001). Charmaz (2006) states that saturation occurs when the data is not producing any new theoretical insights. However, Glaser (2001) and Charmaz (2006), have acknowledged some flexibility around this agreeing that when continual comparisons are no longer generating new codes then the main categories are determined to be rigorous enough to support the grounded theory framework and saturation will be determined. Due to the limits of a relatively small sample size within doctoral research, it was determined that theoretical saturation may occur less organically and has worked to the latter idea of saturation.

To develop the theory, I relied on 'theoretical sensitivity' (Glaser, 1978). This is a concept that encompasses the researcher's insight into the area, how attuned they are to the participant's words, and how they reconstruct

meaning separating what is important or not (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p44). In other words, this means I actively stopped to rethink during the process of theorising to take apart the phenomena and look at it from an aerial view considering other leads, ideas and comparisons. This meant creating theoretical openings, to explore possibilities, connections and remaining curious towards the building framework (Charmaz, 2006).

Drawing on theoretical sensitivity, I felt the framework start to develop early in the process and take quite an organic shape. The transcription spoke into the analysis and the analysis built the framework. Of course, this process was mostly occurring within me and I have been aware of the 'construction'. It felt like a very creative process, allowing the framework to develop as a tapestry, becoming clearer as it developed. At the same time, the perimeters of the method gave scaffolding that provided boundaries and a path to follow and to ultimately guide the creativity. This allowed me to enjoy the process and gave safety to the organic development of the framework.

#### Box 8. Reflexivity

## Chapter 3: Findings

### 3.1 Introduction and Overview of the Findings

The aim of this chapter is to present how I arrived at my theoretical findings that relate to my research question: *A Grounded Theory Exploration of the Psychological Wellbeing of Professional Actors*.

Four main categories emerged from the analysis of participants' accounts and were identified as key dimensions representing the life of a working actor.

The categories are:

Category 1: 'Culture and Pressure' of the industry  
Category 2: 'Use of Self' in playing a character  
Category 3: 'Impact' of being an actor on wellbeing

Core Category: 'Addictive Nature of Acting' - what keeps them in their career

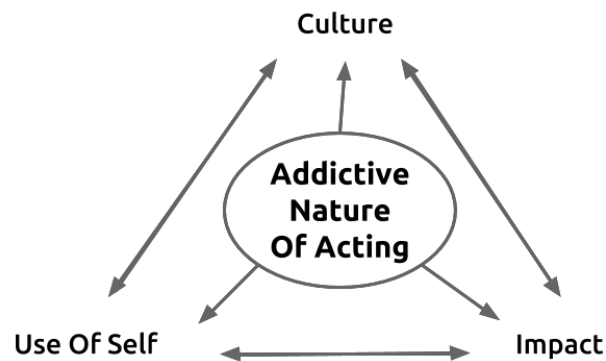


Figure 1. Categories

### **3.2 Presentation of Findings**

To present the data, I will use the term 'participants'. I have numbered participants one to eight and will refer to them using their number. I will draw heavily on the participant's voices. Quotations are referenced with an abbreviated participant reference and page number in transcription, for example (P1.p1). The main reason for not using pseudonyms is to do with an unease I felt at giving another name to an actor, who regularly takes on other names within their work. I wanted to represent the participants as active players contributing to the research. This challenges the traditional way of referring to people merely as objects to be studied. In addition, I believe names have meanings and are markers for identifying how each of us is known. Therefore, I would have found it difficult to find appropriate and respectful pseudonyms for them. Allen and Wiles (2016), argue, the practice of allocating pseudonyms is not merely a technical procedure, but holds psychological meaning both for the participants, the content and the process of the research. I find myself to be strongly aligned with this idea.

As the data was extensive, it was not possible to present an exhaustive account of all the categories and themes present in the analysis. Therefore, categories that were most saturated in the accounts of the participants and that most closely corresponded with the aims of the research were prioritised and presented here. It is important to highlight that the categories are not individually distinct from each other. The categories are representing processes that can be occurring simultaneously, therefore, many aspects of the data intertwine across all categories. It has created some challenges in how to present the findings and it has been very much a labour of love, allowing the categories to shape as naturally as possible whilst trying to create distinction.

For structural purposes the theoretical model is first outlined, to give the reader an insight into the processes at play and how they relate to each other. Then the three categories are presented. The first category is the most

complex in relation to describing multiple layers of the acting industry. The core category is presented lastly as it ties up some of the questions that were raised during the research process. Text boxes including my reflections and memos are incorporated throughout the data body.

### **3.3 Category 1: Culture and Pressure of the Industry**

#### **Presentation of Category 1**

This category aims to present the findings of what it is like to be within the acting industry.

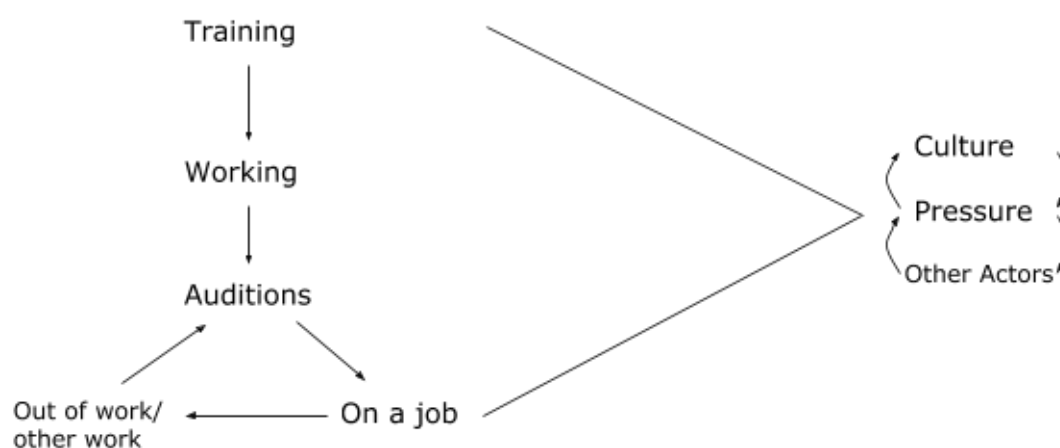
Four sub-categories were generated from this category:

1. Training
2. The working actor
3. Culture
4. Other actors

This category is named 'Culture and Pressure of the Industry'. From participants accounts, it appears that there is a very distinct culture within the acting industry, and in nearly every experience the actor faces, both in training and at work, they experience unique pressures. The acting industry is, of course, made up of other actors which adds a variety of pros and cons.

This category centralises on the idea that the culture and pressure of the acting industry are consistently present for the actor. The concept of being under pressure was so strongly interwoven throughout the data, that it was not possible to keep this distinct from the other categories. Therefore, it has been included in the category title to stress pervasiveness of it and given a sub-category to explain it. The reader should note, no part of the findings exist without the feeling of intense pressure. For presentation purposes, culture is given its own sub-category (c) and pressure is considered within sub-category b. Other actors are also consistently present but across all

experiences have their own sub-category. This is perhaps best explained by a diagram (See figure 2).



*Figure 2. Category 1*

It should be noted that culture is mentioned more frequently in the other sub-categories, as it was impossible to separate these.

### **Introduction to Category 1**

The acting industry was represented in the data in a particularly negative way. Participants rarely described good aspects of the industry and tended to draw on the pressures and the adverse experiences they have had. Through the data, the industry transpired to be a uniquely hard place to work in. There were reports of constant pressures and instability. From the participant's accounts, the industry does not appear to be set up to support, develop or nurture the actor's wellbeing.

## Sub-category 1: Training

This section presents the first sub-category: 'Training'.

When participants were asked about the culture of the industry, each participant talked about their training despite many having completed training years or even decades earlier. Thus, training seems a particularly significant time. Whilst participants said they treasured their learning they all discussed this time of training drawing attention to largely negative aspects.

For example, participant 2 describes being:

*"thirsty for learning", "unstoppable" and at the same time "homesick & lonely"* (P2.p8).

Participant 1 described the environment at his drama school:

*"it's' a very ambitious, ruthless place...it's quite bitchy...sort of a weird arrogance"* (P1.p1).

Participants also talked about some of the processes they experienced. For example, participant 4 describes his training as being the trigger for the onset of his eating disorder: *"everything was on us the whole time, scrutinising ourselves...I became very vain...aware of myself physically, it became a problem"* (P4.p4).

Several participants described a process of 'breaking', which was part of the training. This happened in the classes where the teachers would push the student to their breaking point to get the 'raw' acting out of them.

Participant 7 describes her experience:

*"they break you down to build you up. Break your defences and emotional blocks...they would have you doing sit-ups to exhaustion and then would question you, he (teacher) was into this rebirthing stuffer like really aggressive, he would press your solar plex and some people would end up*

*with bruising and I eventually did break and I ended up on the floor sobbing”* (P7.p2).

Participant 8 talks about how his training triggered him into breakdown mode in his life outside the classroom. During his training, he had onsets of migraines and depression and describes being in “*breakdown mode every day*” (P8.p4). He reports feeling like there was no support from the school.

From these accounts, the participants are describing extremely negative experiences of the training. All participants reflected on their training days despite not being asked about this directly. The data seems to suggest that training is a time where they are exposed to the pressure and the culture of the industry, perhaps for some this is their first insight into this culture. They describe the culture as highly competitive, scrutinising and pushing you to ‘break’.

## **Sub-category 2: The Working Actor**

This sub-category outlines the processes of being a working actor.

The data showed once an actor is out of training and is a professional working actor there are several barriers they must face. This can be split into two stages, that cycle each other repeatedly. Firstly, the stage of unemployment. This means entering the process of auditioning within which the actor’s hopes rise and fall with the repeated onset of anticipation and rejection. This is normally paired with a disheartening attempt to maintain some form of other work to provide some income. However, obtaining flexible work that can be dropped at a moment’s notice if an audition/acting job comes up can be challenging. There is no logical progression within acting. This means well-known and experienced actors are going back to menial jobs until their next break comes through.



Secondly, once an actor has a job they must navigate the pressures that come with that in terms of performing to the best of their ability, working on high budget productions with their idols. In addition, actors are managing the loneliness they can experience as they may be away on set for long periods of time and often not near their fellow cast members.

This cycle is infused with pressure at every stage. For presentation purposes, the pressure is outlined as part of the second stage.

Here we take a closer look at each of these stages:

i) Auditions

Auditions are described as a process of riding a 'roller-coaster' through the ups and downs of the experiences of being an actor. Participants talk about how they eagerly await an audition and once they have it they put their heart and soul into preparing. They anticipate the moment with extreme nerves and excitement, feeling as though they are the best in the world. They then arrive at the audition to see a queue of similar looking people lining up outside. In the audition, they are often given only one take to do their best. They are often treated poorly within this process and then left without any feedback. The actors said if they have not heard within four days, they have not got the job, yet the actors describe hanging on for weeks hoping there might be a chance to hear. When they realise they do not have the role the sense of rejection can be overwhelming. This type of rejection was mentioned regularly throughout the data. Participants talked about how disheartening and confusing it is to not get jobs. The rejection causes them to overthink, become very emotional and feel depressed. Participants talked about having to learn to manage rejection early on as it is constant.

Participant 5:

*"It's the rejection and it's the constant self-doubt, it's the ego that just screams all the time....and you're just trying to numb those thoughts...there's competition...it's a really hard industry...your emotions are constantly up and down"* (P5.p7).

They discussed how there is no logic to the process. You might do the best audition you've ever had or have been working on high-profile jobs and still not get the part and not have a reason why.

Participant 8:

*"you've been in the number one west end show in town it will be easy for you to get a job and I went to my first audition after and I got cut straight away"* (P8.p7).

Participant 7 talks about the audition process as '*mean, brutal*' and that the industry is constantly trying to push your boundaries and values. She describes:

*"the amount of times I've been told if I take my top off I can be in the film"* (P7.p6).

Going hand in hand with the constant rejection is the competitive nature of the industry. It could be that you don't look quite right with the other people who are cast or someone else has more social media followers. The competition is so evidently high when they turn up to an audition and there is a queue of people with similar aspirations then waiting outside all for the same job.

Participant 7:

*“you’re brutally reminded there’s 25 other people in line and they all look like you... I’ve just convinced myself I’m entirely average and that’s definitely compounded by the amount of competition” (P7.p5-6).*

It seems participants were drawing a distinction between the audition process in different countries. They said that in Hollywood the focus is more on a perfect image whereas the UK still looks for storytelling and skills. Participants talked about not keeping friends who are in the same casting bracket as them, as they are always comparing yourself to others and the jealousy is difficult to manage.

Participant 6:

*“it is hard to look around you and be like oh she’s getting jobs because she’s really beautiful...because she’s thinner” (P6.p4).*

Participant 7:

*“one of my friends says ‘every time a friend does well a bit of you dies” (P7.p6).*

This mountain that actors are trying to climb is only made by a very small percentage and along with that journey, the industry is one of constant competition, rejection and set back.

ii) Out of work/other work

Following the rejection, or a job coming to an end, the cycle of unemployment continues.

Participant 1 says:

*“the job of the actor is when you’re not working” (P1.p2).*

Participants describe a constant lack of money, little routine and the relentless reminder of how replaceable you are. Participants talk about having to get low-level work. One participant who is a household name and, has been on many British TV programmes in recent years said they are now a nanny and cleaning toilets. Another participant said they had 6 jobs at one time to live.

Participant 6:

*“I’m counting my pennies just to buy bloody lunch...that can be tough and finding jobs that fit around it...something that doesn’t suck your soul and is flexible and pays enough” (P6.p5).*

All participants talked about how *hard* life is when they are out of work. They describe having no money, doing ‘shit’ jobs and struggling with large amounts of uncertainty. Participant four talks about feeling frustrated, depressed, negative, constantly questioning self and career. He finds it very hard to tell friends and family that he is not currently working and that people have the attitude of *“get a real job”* (P4.p9).

Through participants accounts, there was a shared sense of the industry being a very difficult place, full of rejection, lack of chances, a place where they constantly question themselves and has no money.

### iii) On the job

When actors are successful in obtaining jobs, this means they could be sent anywhere for an indefinite amount of time to work on a production. Often on set people describe being very lonely, especially if they are filming away from their hometown or you don’t get on particularly well with the other cast members. Loneliness was something participants frequently described.

Participant 3 talks about being in a different country and being lonely. This was because there was so much money in the production she would be set up with her own house and car which could be miles away from her cast members:

*"I was lonely, I didn't want to be on my own but yeah I really struggled with that"* (P3.p6).

Participant 1 talks about being in a different country and not getting on with the cast: *"You're just kinda surrounded by 4 walls all the time and it just drives you a bit crazy. You have more time sort of in and not socialising so I found I got a bit isolated"* (P1.p4).

Participant 8 describes it as the:

*"loneliest industry you'll ever go into"* (P8.p4).

The participants seem to be describing the struggle they face in the industry of being isolated. Their work often takes them away from home and the industry comes with so much money it acts as a barrier in getting to know people or you struggle to form relationships with other actors (see sub-category 4).

#### iv) Pressure

When actors are at work they are desperate to do the job well. They experience an intense amount of pressure to perform. They are anxious to be great, they describe; constantly questioning themselves, being under pressure working with people they have idolised and now have become their peers. There is pressure to stay open in oneself, respond to truth and to let go of the control you have on the process. On film, every retake costs money and in the theatre, you are on the spot and there is no room for error. In theatre, you are under pressure to perform to perfection in the moment.

Participants describe this constant pressure to stay focused and perform their best particularly as their performance can often have an influence on them gaining work in the future.

Participant 1:

*"I think all of it some ways are about pressure right. So, it's about different degrees of pressure. There's a lot of pressure as an actor, pressure to get jobs than once you've got jobs pressure to really do a good job and do it well. Primarily because someone's paying you but also because they're much more likely to give you another job which is often how the industry works"* (P1.p7).

Pressure is explained as coming from both their own and from other's expectations.

Participant 3 describes:

*"my biggest pressure comes from trying to stay open and making sure I'm giving the characters and the director and everyone the emotional integrity. Because it's like what if I can't...sometimes you wake up and you're not in the mood to act or be that emotional or you can feel your body it wants to keep you safe today but you're like no I need to slit my wrists, come on I need to stay open"* (P3.p7).

Participants also refer to the pressures of the: reviews of their work, to present a certain image on social media, at industry events and the constant scrutiny.

Participant 5 talks about experiencing pressure to be a type of person she is not. This includes dressing a certain way, having to display behaviours of confidence and extroversion as well as the constant pressure to be more open.

Participant 5:

*“the pressure, especially in Hollywood to be fucking perfect” (P5.p9).*

On the other hand, there was a shared sense of participants enjoying the ego boost they get on the job and the power they have when their work influences others.

Participant 1 talks about how being on set can temporarily lift your self-esteem:

*“you feel good about yourself and it’s a boost to your ego and you are like, the tricky thing though is it can be difficult because it doesn’t really last” (P1.p8).*

Actors are under constant pressure at each stage of this cycle. There is the pressure they experience in auditioning or being unemployed. The pressure they have in their jobs, combined with the loneliness they experience. Actors are striving for perfection, for good reviews, they are under constant scrutiny be it in audition, on a job, on social media, at industry parties and yet when faced with all this pressure the one thing an actor is always meant to do is ‘stay open’ and be emotionally open to your experiences.

Participant 1:

*“there is a lot of pressure as an actor, pressure to get the jobs then...pressure to really do a good job...” (P1.p7).*

Whilst participants briefly mention the positives of their work, they seem to be saying this is a job with challenges in every aspect. There are extremely difficult barriers at every stage and the pressure is infiltrated throughout the whole of their lives. It seems difficult to separate the ‘work’ from the ‘actor’ as even when the actor is not on a job they are experiencing the effects of being out of work.

### **Sub-category 3: Culture**

The findings above already give insight into the culture of the acting industry as being one of extreme pressures and loneliness. This sub-category presents other aspects of the culture in more detail.

Findings suggest that actors constantly think about the image they present within the industry. This image was described as 'fake'. They describe having to put on a persona of everything being fine and pretending they are really enjoying life and doing well when they might be struggling, and findings things difficult.

Participant 7 describes the pressure of playing the game in social media:

*"having to seem busy as you're obviously more in demand if you seem really in demand"* (P7.p6).

Participant 6 talks about how it is hard not to take the industry personally. For example, she experienced a severe injury and couldn't work so her agent dropped her.

Participant 6:

*"it's not SHOW business, it's show BUSINESS.... if people are not making money out of you they'll move on"* (P6.p5).

Additionally, she talked about finding the industry to be a very unsupportive place especially as it is a place of such constant rejection.

She also reported the industry makes her feel:

*"quite lonely and isolated from society and aware that you're quite different"* (P6.p10).



Participant 8 began his interview by saying:

*“the industry can fuck you up”* (P8.p1).

He talks about the level of criticism that an actor faces:

*“you are told about your weight...appearance...how you talk...walk, even down to what you wear...yep, this industry fucks you up big time”* (P8.p1).

Participant 8 further described how difficult it is to be constantly put down, told that you are not right and then how it makes you not want to be yourself. Consequently, he felt he needed to be someone else as he was criticised so much. This led him to seeking solace within his character:

*“becoming somebody else is an escape”* (P8.p1).

Further, Participant 8 describes the pressure to come into work even when he was unwell, so the production does not lose any money. He was also aware that if he had time off he might not get re-hired. On the other hand, participant two talks about how the industry gave him the room to overcome his anxiety. However, he acknowledges that is not the case for everyone: *“So in that respect, the industry allowed me to do it. They allowed me that space. For certain actors, it's not the case”* (P2.p8).

Participant 7 talked about how as woman in the industry she had to be ruthless, often giving up on other dreams such as having children. Interestingly, she was the only participant who seemed hopeful for the industry:

*“I do think people are getting kinder...I think our generation is more appreciative of were all in the industry...together”* (P6.p5).

Further, the enticement of the glamour and parties were mentioned throughout the data, showing that not all experiences are negative. However, not many details were given in relation to them (see core category).

Participants describe the culture of the industry to be one that seems to focus on sexuality, money and perfection. Actors reported feeling under-supported, broken down and insecure.

#### **Sub-category 4: Other Actors**

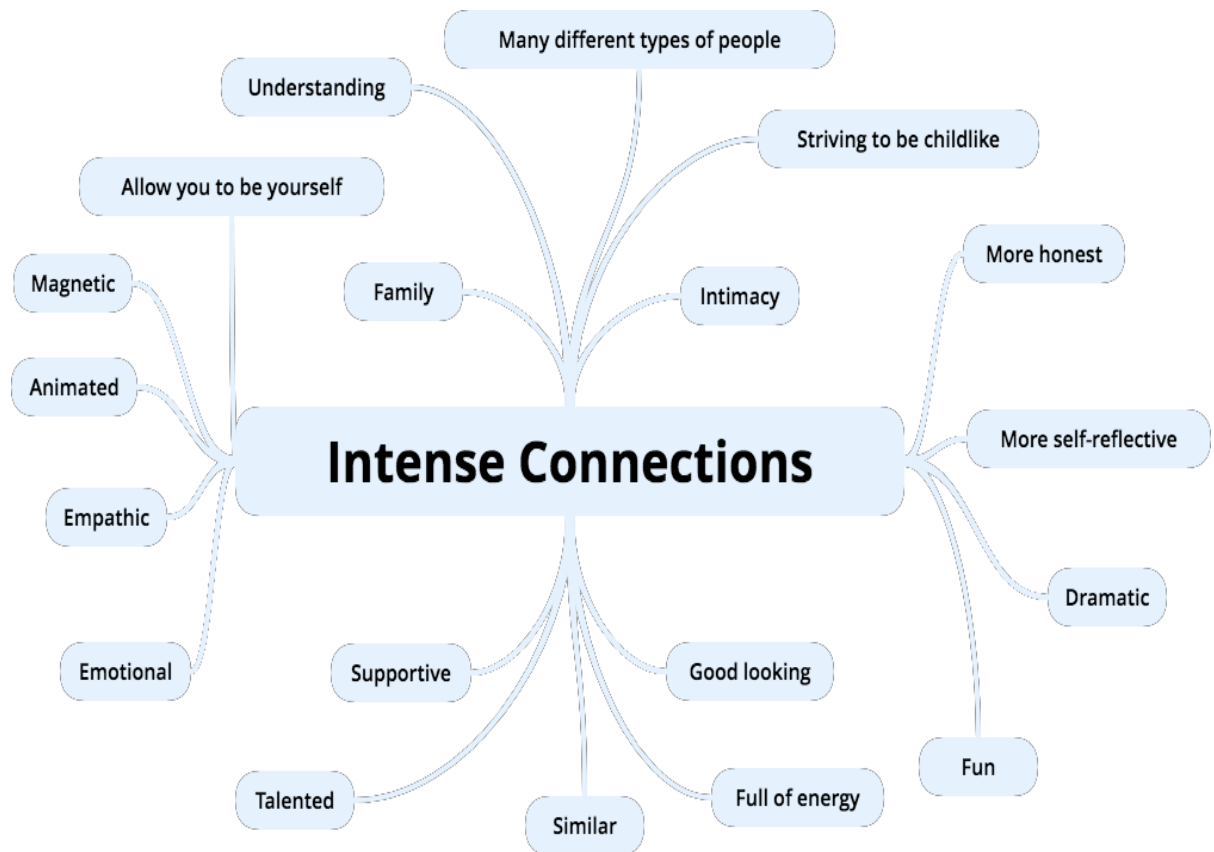
No specific questions were asked about other actors or personality types. However, through the data body, participants described other actors in two distinct ways. They were seen as either being intensely connected or a source of stress. This is presented below.

Participant 2:

*“you learn to work with all shapes, sizes, creeds, cultures”* (P2.p10).

### *Intense Connections*

The positive narrative surrounding other actors described being in an environment of creative people. The following mind map shows some of the descriptions given by participants:



*Figure 3. Other Actors: Intense Connections*

### *A Source of Stress*

At the same time participants uses the following negative descriptions of their fellow actors:



*Figure 4. Other Actors Source of Stress*

There seems to be a shared sense of camaraderie between actors where they see themselves as a group that is different to others, more honest, and more self-reflective. They become these temporary fantasy families, developing intense intimacy based on their 'extreme honesty' and 'damaged pasts' with a 'Greek Adonis-like sexuality'. At the same time, they are highly competitive with each other, extremely bitchy, arrogant and underneath these intense bonds they created, are shallow roots that do not sustain these relationships for long. Further, the constant see-sawing nature of the relationships perhaps adds to the wavering stability of the acting culture. It seems that participants are constantly questioning themselves and others and they find familiarity and comfort with other actors but also retreat and fear them at the same time. Participants themselves must hold both sets of these characteristics. The data appears to be saying that actors also have this love/hate relationship with themselves.

### **3.4 Summary of Category 1:**

Participant 6 sums up Category 1 well:

*"Like most actors I know we are all just a bit abstract, were all like super sensitive because that's what we do....to like to take on the way people deal with emotions...so I think that to wanna like express yourself and dig deep within yourself and use that to feed yourself there probably is something wrong with your brain! ...you know you won't make money, and know it's really hard but it's like an addiction.... there's no stability, you're always broke, you have to handle rejection all the time, you're always comparing yourself...you have to put yourself out there and read reviews that tell you, you were shit...you didn't get the part because you're too fat..." (P6.p2).*

Putting it all together, the industry appears to be a rather negative culture to work within. From training through to the audition process to working on a job, there is constant scrutiny, competition, loneliness, pressure and difficult relationships.

I particularly resonate with the sub-category 'other actors'. I feel, I myself see have seen and experience that type of intense connection that you think is so real because you share something intimate, but it turns out that you're not as close as you think. I didn't ask a question about other actors, but I did feel it was significant throughout the data body and that 'other actors' kept coming up within the data body. Perhaps this stood out to me within the data body because of my own experiences and another researcher may not have constructed this sub-category.

Box 9. Reflexivity

### 3.5 Category 2: Use of Self

#### Presentation of Category 2

This category presents the findings of the processes the actor is involved in when playing a character.

Four sub-categories emerged from the data:

1. Use of emotional recall
2. Use of body
3. Use of imagination
4. Dark places

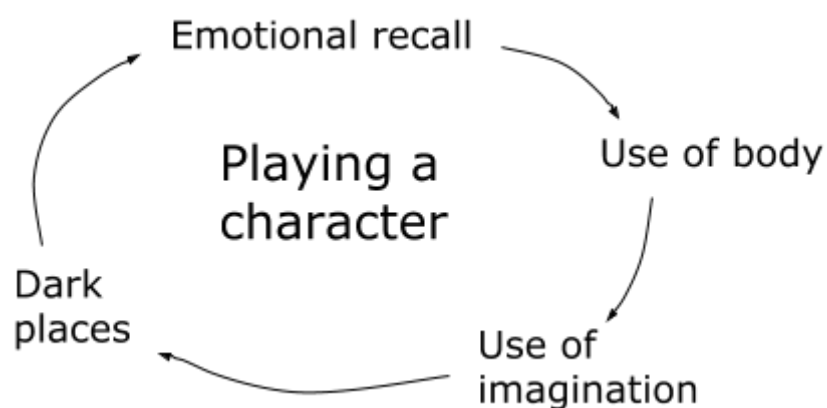


Figure 5. Category 2

## **Introduction to Category 2**

Throughout the data, the participants talk about the various ways they play their characters. There were various methods described, however, despite the individual's preferred method there were commonalities across all ways of working that emerged. These commonalities were regarding how participants brought their characters to life. The data highlighted three main ways they do this: through emotional recall, their bodies and the vivid imaginations. Interestingly, participants did not mention positive experiences of doing this. They often described the place in themselves they had to draw from as 'dark'.

### **Sub-category 1) Use of Emotional Recall**

All the participants described a technique they use called 'emotional recall'. This is the process of drawing on their own emotions and experiences to help bring life to a character.

Participant 7 explains it as the following:

*"bringing your individuality and your story and you stitch it together with a story, you interweave it somehow...I definitely feel like I have to use myself, I now have to use my own self" (P7.p4).*

She describes having to constantly:

*"summon that emotion...even if it takes a toll on my emotions as a person... it's a fine line of being yourself and an honest, natural sort of hyper natural version of the character" (P7.p9).*

To use their emotions in this way participants, describe having to be 'open' and to have removed their 'mental blocks' (as described in Category 1).

Participant 1:

*“you have to be physically, spiritually, mentally open otherwise...things are just not going to affect you” (P1.p11).*

Participant 5:

*“if you have your own mental blocks you won’t be able to fully inhabit these other people and tell the story to the best of your ability” (P5.p7).*

All the participants described the use of themselves in a negative way. It appears there is an exposing of one's most inner self and a fight to overcome their natural defences. The way participants describe this is to feel exposed and potentially damaging for the actor.

Participant 1 describes this as:

*“you are always having to dig really deep, search, and use as much of you in the role and that can be quite tough sometimes...the more interesting characters are where people really bring a lot of themselves, a lot of experiences from their lives, a lot of emotional stuff...so if I have to do a relationship breakup well what was that like for me...sometimes if you use things to raw it can have a really negative effect because if you can imagine you’re just having to re-feel those things again and again. Erm, it's very deep some of it” (P1.p10).*

This rawness and the negative effects are further explained by Participant 7 who talks about a period of severe depression she went through, and how she can use that for her art and how that benefited her character.

Participant 7:

*“I wouldn’t have been able to play it with that raw anger and depth of pain that I now have...anger, sadness and pain are negative things that people have to hide from or run from but for me, I kind of think...it will help me play things with more character” (P7.p3).*



Participant 6 describes the same attitude of using her dark experiences in her art. She then goes on to describe a time where using this emotional recall had a negative effect on her.

Participant 6:

*"I had a breakdown and another actor was like strangling me on stage and I had been in a relationship where a guy was quite abusive. So, for a second I saw my ex- boyfriend's face and not the actor and that like sent me over the edge"* (P6.p8).

This process of drawing on a place of pain seems like something the actors tended to relish despite the consequences. Participants suggest when they are going through a difficult time it gives them hope to think they will be able to find a benefit for their pain. All participants talked about this process of emotional recall and all participants told me that you are not meant to recall any emotional event that has occurred within the past three years as the event might be too fresh. However, they all went on to say how they often abandon these guidelines.

Participant 2:

*"ah forget it I'm just going to use that thing from a few weeks ago"* (P2.p22).

Participant 2 was the only one who caveated that statement with only using emotional recall:

*"If I feel it will be worth it...I feel like I have been provided with ammunition for all scenarios within acting just from paying attention to the news"* (P2.p23).

Participants accounts showed they shared the feeling that the processes they were experiencing were unhealthy for them:

Participant 5:

*“I think the most dangerous thing about acting is getting close to your life and the experiences you’ve had because...that can just be very dangerous for your psyche” (P5.p3).*

Participants referred to the different methods suggesting that there are different techniques that demand less of the self.

Participant 7 reports one method to be less harmful:

*“Meissner is much more about looking at who else is in the scene and how you relate to them and it takes you...away from the indulgent how am I feeling...and you are completely focused on the other person and I think that has really helped me...because it becomes less self-aware” (P7.p9).*

Participant 3 talked about what could be a healthier way of getting to the right place with her character. She described how she has been through all different types of experiences and when processing them she tries to use a kinship with those feelings rather than the experience itself:

Participant 3:

*“I can just be fucked off by the fact that someone shrunk my favourite jacket and that for me is enough to do a scene where I have to be fucked off about the crash of the economy because in the moment it will translate the same thing for the people watching it” (P3.p18).*

By remaining, ‘open’ and ‘unblocked’ participants use emotional recall to weave their painful experiences into a character to bring them to life. This process seems, to an actor, to be exposing themselves,, and going deep into the depth of their innermost parts, and, re-opening wounds to use the rawness of that emotion to sculpt their art. Participants talked about this as being an unhealthy process and whilst they are aware of the other techniques they often revert to the ‘f\*\*\* it’ attitude to get the results they want.

The next category will present how the actor uses not just their emotions but also their body.

### **Sub-category 2: Use of Body**

In addition to using emotional recall, the actors talk about how essential their body is to their work. Participants described their bodies as an instrument that allows them to inhabit their character. From the data, it seems that when they use emotional recall their bodies have a physical reaction that makes the character 3D.

Participant 1 describes it as:

*“When you are going into a role, you are trying to hit a very specific note it’s almost like a musical note and you’re trying to hit that note... there’s like a sensation you get that comes through your body and when you hit that right note you have that sensation and everything is in kind of free flow and it all feels amazing and you’re connected to someone else”* (P1.p6).

Participant 6 describes holding the backstory of the character in her mind and:

*“having that simmer in your body”* (P6.p6)

To reach this specific note participants described manipulating their bodies into producing a certain physiological reaction. This process is termed ‘body hack’.

Participant 4:

*“body hacks...like to trick your body into being so upset that you cry or are breathless”*

(P4.p2).

This manipulation is so real to the characters that their bodies do not differentiate between reality and pretend.

Participant 6:

*“there is always a part of you in any character you play...I don’t think there is as much separation as people imagine...so if you are panicking (as the character) you are panicking...if you’re being raped in a scene you can’t act like you’re not being raped in it. like its impossible, you can’t separate those two mindsets” (P3.p8-9).*

The way the participants have described these processes, it seems that they are using their experiences and body tricks to convince their body to produce a reaction they want i.e. panic. This works but cannot be separated from reality. The participants seem to be able to tap into their physicality and allow their character to ‘simmer’ and possess their bodies.

They rely on their emotional recall and their imagination to create these bodily sensations.

The next section presents the findings on how actors use their imagination as part of this process.

### **Sub-category 3: Use of Imagination**

In addition to emotional recall and body hacks, participants describe entering a world of research and imagination. They talked about ‘fantasy worlds’ and expressed high levels of imagination throughout the data. The benefit of entering these other worlds was in relation to using their imagination to create a body hack or used in terms of creating a whole world for the character.

Participant 4 talks about going into:

*“this complete realm of our mind that we have no firm grasp on” (P4.p2).*

He further talks about playing a character that was grieving and going into a dark place of his mind where he imagines his brother who is currently deployed in the army, is dead and all the details surrounding his death.

Participant 4:

*"I've thought about at points in passing and you know he's going off to war, what if he dies - stop that chill-out. But it was letting that in and saying yeah okay...let those thoughts in, let those emotions sit with you, give it colours...something meaty and I'm lying on his bed and sure enough, I felt deathly afraid...log this, remember the process, the images...I made it into a film in my own head. He then explained how he would stay in that place for hours allowing the grief to take over him. He describes the process as 'a bit weird, a bit dark...but then that is the nature of it, isn't it...and it's quite interesting to see it isn't it the fact that you can trick your body into thinking it'" (P4.p2)*

Participant 7 reports something similar:

*"I have to use my own self, feeling to a certain extent almost as a shortcut to access the role, particularly for auditions when you're not into the full psyche of the character and you just have to produce the goods. It's easier to go to how I feel about my father might die soon and then you can immediately be accessing something" (P7.p4).*

Participants emphasised extending their imagination to enter the worlds of their character.

Participant 5 talks about the experience of her characters being like real life:

*"getting so into it that you don't see the reality...if you're in a 40's play you don't see the world you're in...you're seeing all the different aspects of the 1940's...it's like time travelling...I get on stage, do the scene, finish and I have no idea what happened" (P5.p4).*

It seems she is describing an out of body experience where she enters a level of imagination where she loses sense of reality, time and what is going on in the present world. This was a similar account to other participants.

Participant 6 talks about through researching the character you:

*“build this whole world...I would know everything about them {character}, I was playing a part where this woman was on the edge and she was on the verge of suicide, I wrote a journal as her and she was also obsessed with being old and not being beautiful anymore so I started to put on my make up every morning imagining myself as her. I actually went a bit mental” (P6.p6).*

Participant 7 talks about not only doing this in her acting but also in her day to day life almost as if she prefers to operate in this other world:

*“perhaps a huge part of me lives in a fantasy land...very much on the imaginative/make belief scale...it’s almost like I’m so in the little fantasy world sometimes of what that story is” (P7.p1).*

This account was not uncommon within the data. Participant 5 talked about how she evolved into the character to the extent where it was hard to stop playing them even when they were not working.

Participant 5 describes why it is difficult:

*“I think it’s because you’re so invested in living this other life...and it’s so real...it’s so much fun...maybe that your imagination likes playing and you know, I don’t know”.*

She describes how the character will start to influence her in her personal life like *“I’ll play her and I’ll realise something through her...I’ll make a decision in my own life through the story. It teaches me” (P5.p.5).*

For participant 2 it seems his imagination is so vivid, the world he enters when he is a character creates real memories for him. He describes being

on a job where he had to cry and he could use memories he experiences whilst in character to produce this emotion.

Participant 2:

*“character flashbacks...we had shot some pretty dark scenes in the first episode and I was using the memory of what we shot...kept going over it and eventually it had an effect” (P2.p22).*

Perhaps this shows a different combination of imagination and emotional recall. As actors described using their imagination, many of them talked about this being a ‘dark’ process of entering ‘dark’ places of their minds. These findings are presented in the next sub-category.

#### **Sub-category 4: Dark Places**

Throughout this category participants constantly used the word ‘dark’. This is often in relation to exploring the dark places within the self or researching/playing difficult characters or times in history. Here is an example of each:

Participant 6 talked about exploring the dark stuff within herself:

*“breaking down how like messed up and broke and dirty most people are...when you explore like that dark stuff people don’t talk about...I played a woman that was in love with her step-son and ended up having sexual encounters with him...Like dark stuff that no one talks about but actors do. Which is probably why we are all fucked up as well” (P6.p3).*

There is something enticing for Participant 6 about exploring dark areas of herself:

*“I love playing like dark characters or like fucked up people like, yeah, I really love looking at the side of life that people don’t talk about” (P6.p7).*

She further talked about how in the process of doing this she would draw on her own *“dark shit”* (P6.p8).

Participant 2 finds acting a positive outlet for his inner darkness:

*“it’s very healthy to just be able to voice what’s going on in the darkest corners of your brain”* (P2.p13).

However, Participant 5 described the content of the play being too dark, it was uncomfortable for her:

*“it was a just a sensitive subject for me and looking back into that and going into these dark spaces and having to really analyse the abuser and the abused...”* (P5.p2).

Participant 7 explains that sometimes the acting work triggers dark thoughts in her personal life:

*“when you have looked in depth at so many characters...a lot are very dark, things pop into your head more readily because you are constantly surrounded by...make believe”* (P7.p5).

There appear to be mixed experiences of exploring the dark places of a character or self for the actors. Whilst some participants find it enticing and healthy, for others, it triggers sensitive areas for them or triggers negative thoughts.

### **3.5.1 Summary of Category 2**

From these accounts, we are seeing how powerful the imagination is. The participants are describing using their imagination to create other worlds, recall emotions, to make their bodies distressed, to explore the dark places of ourselves and others. Further, what seems to be being described is an experience akin to a alternative state. Participants lose themselves in the characters’ worlds having out of body like experiences. The characters are



so alive in the actor, they have their own memories or reach out of the pages of the script, bleeding into their personal lives and causing the actor to go a *“bit mental”* (P6.p6).

It's this combination that actors are seeking because it is what makes their characters convincing.

Participant 1:

*“what makes something interesting is when people have the ability to use themselves in it and that's what unique, everyone is unique the way the move, breath, laugh...you do have to use a lot of yourself, the more interesting characters are where people really bring a lot of themselves, a lot of experiences from their lives, a lot of emotional stuff”* (P1.p10).

The findings suggest actors recognise they are engaging in unhealthy strategies. They go towards their pain to channel it rather than avoid it. Participants, repeatedly engage in the process of 'using themselves'. They manipulate their emotional processes, bodies and imagination whilst trying to survive within an industry of instability and pressure, actors can undoubtedly create and sustain further suffering to themselves.

The following category will explore this impact.

Whilst, listening to these stories about how actors lend themselves to the art, I was very conscious to keep my researcher hat on, although I could not help but start to formulate some of these experiences. I would say that I am quite imaginative, and I felt I could understand to some extent what the participants were describing when they created films in their minds of entered other worlds. However, I don't think I can compare to someone who is forcing themselves into another world. I also felt quite excited listening to these accounts and coding this segment of that data because it was 'what I was looking for' from the research. I think I had seen this with actors I know and read about it in the media but nothing about it the research literature. Perhaps my excitement would have encouraged me to have emphasised parts more prominently than others. I also think I was aware of this during construction and tried to look at it from different

### 3.6 Category 3: Impact

#### Presentation of Category

This category presents the findings of how being in the acting industry and processes involved in playing a character, contribute to an actor's wellbeing. This category is named 'Impact' as the findings suggest that there is a significant impact on wellbeing through being an actor. This impact is in relation to the consequences that a career as an actor may have on their social, physical and psychological wellbeing.

Three sub-categories emerged from the data:

1. Social wellbeing
2. Physical wellbeing
3. Psychological wellbeing.



*Figure 6. Category 3*

Within this category, the nature of the industry and the use of self are woven together intimately, as together they create a full picture of the impact on an actor.

## **Introduction to Category 3**

The findings show the majority of the impact to be negative, with few positive accounts. This impact is in relation to the consequences that a career as an actor may have on their social, physical and psychological wellbeing. Within this category, the nature of the industry and the use of self are woven together intimately, as together they create a full picture of the impact on an actor. Actors recognise themselves as sufferers. They go towards their pain to channel it rather than avoid it. By attempting to manipulate their emotional processes within an industry of instability and pressure, actors can undoubtedly create and sustain further suffering to themselves.

### **Sub-category 1: Social Wellbeing**

Actors frequently referred to the cost that being an actor put on them. One of the costs outlined in the data was that of their social wellbeing.

Participants discussed the impact on their:

- i) personal relationships
- ii) family dynamics
- iii) place in society

Each one is discussed below.

#### **i) Personal relationships**

In terms of romantic relationships there seem to be two consequences: one tied to the practicalities of a relationship in terms of the actor being able to commit, be in one place, turn up for dates etc. and one in terms of the impact that a role an actor is playing and how that might be transferred to their personal relationships.

Participant 6 talks about the cost of her work as an actor on her relationships and how it has caused several relationships to come to an end:

*“he said to me if I asked you not to do it you wouldn’t like you would put it (the audition) first or like the I got a job when I had to go down to Wales for*

*three months...I think they find it hard to see you wanting something so bad that it will go on top of anything that's around you. I guess it's kinda of like going out with an addict, you know they will eventually go back to their addiction or it will always be an issue in relationships" (P6.p3).*

She further describes how boyfriends get jealous of the intimate roles she plays: *"my current boyfriend gets really insecure about the relationship actors form (with each other) because at the moment... I've got to like kiss someone...and that is slightly strange" (P6.p4).*

Participant 6 also described how being an actor makes her difficult to be in a relationship with:

*"and I guess dealing with the highs and lows like you get a recall and you think it's going to be the making of a career...and then it doesn't get picked up" (P6.p4).*

Participant 6 described the different elements at interplay within her relationships, it seems that acting is always the priority and that it is hard to be in a relationship with someone who will drop you for the thing they want more than you (to act). That being on a job can cause difficulties due to the intensity of roles and how the other person deals with that and finally the yo-yo nature of the acting career and the impact that has on emotions.

On a different note, Participant 5 discussed how a role she was playing affected her relationships by putting her off them:

*"in the story, my dad rapes me, like it, you know its affected me with relationships and stuff because like I've done all this research and I've just like not had a desire to like you know, I just wanted to be alone" (P5.p3).*

*"relationships have been particularly hard for me, you find yourself dating within the industries and it's hard to make it work because you never know*

*when someone is going to go. You really have to practice detachment”* (P5.p6).

From these accounts, it seems that the researching of the role and the physical acting involved in the role may cause actors to retreat from romantic relationships, avoiding sexual intimacy and seeking to isolate themselves.

ii) Family dynamics

The nature of the job doesn't just have an impact on romantic relationships but takes you away from your family, home and the actors described feeling guilty.

Participant 5:

*“there's the whole guilt of not being there to help them and the whole not being a good daughter or a good sister and you miss the normal things of to being able to meet up for coffee or whatever”* (P5.p6).

Participant 7 had similar experiences saying: *“you also have to put a price on your friendships...what would mean you would miss that particular birthday or holiday or wedding, what would a job need to be”* (P7.p9-10).

Participant 4 described how being out of work has a negative impact on his relationships with his family:

*“I was living at home as well. I think that has pressured me a lot...it's put a strain on my relationship with my mum and my stepdad...I can't get a secure job to sustain myself”* (P4.p4).

iii) Place in society

In addition, it was noted throughout the data that when participants gave their accounts there was a notable element of shame in owning their careers as actors and that people struggled in their social lives for fear that actors have carried since Shakespeare time's being told to "*get a real job*" (P4.p9).

Participant 7 talks about the reaction of other people:

*"It's funny the assumptions people make about you. That's bizarrely one of the hardest things, being able to own what you do and be proud of it. very I often I say I'm a teacher because you don't want to get into the conversation of 'so have you been in anything I know?', 'Oh what are you doing at the minute' – nothing, sitting on my arse erm you're like last year I was in a major feature film, this year sod all"* (P7.p10).

The findings suggest a significant impact on an actor's social wellbeing. There are the relational consequences, the social impact of being out of work, not having any money and the sacrifices they must make in terms of where they live, or where they work. Within this data, accounts are being given of hard decisions that are made, disruption and cost to relationships across family, friends and romantic partners. There seems to be an undertone of the inability to commit to jobs, people, living circumstances and life events due to this hope of being able to touch their dreams of acting. Further, when this dream is lived due to the undetachable nature of the actor/character symptoms of trauma may cause the actor to separate, isolate and change their experiences of other people through playing a character.

### **Sub-category 2: Physical Wellbeing**

Throughout the data, the findings suggest there is a significant impact on the actor's physical wellbeing. Actors often work long hours in a range of challenging circumstances. They may be on set from four am in the freezing cold, their role may call for physical exertion or stunt work. They may have

to do the same thing repeatedly causing strain to their physical health. Actors throughout the data talked about feeling exhausted after performing demanding roles and the impact that the roles had on their bodies.

Participant 2 talked about the effect a role had on him where he was playing a slave and in his personal life was struggling with anxiety:

*“I felt knackered for a while because it was so heavy. It was like marking through a swamp every night, physically, emotionally, psychologically...just exhausting because of the subject matter” (P2.p11).*

Participant 5 talks about the intensity of a war play that she did:

*“it was for hours every day of just like creating this imagery and research and reliving these hard experiences and you know you’ve obviously got to like see the blood, like relive it, you know I can’t even imagine what people who have gone to war go through but just reliving those experiences just through the experiences they’ve had, gosh it’s scary...I was straining my voice but the night before my actual performance I started like puking up blood” (P5.p3).*

From what the participants have said in terms of using their imaginations (see category 2), it seems that she was describing a connection of the physical to the mental, what goes on in her body as a result of what she sees in her mind. It seems that she is having physical reactions to a) what her body is being put through on a daily basis and b) how her body is reacting to what she is visualising.

Participant 5 also describes that she struggles with anxiety attacks and talks about the pressure there is on a job and how that affects her body:

*“you know how much work and effort has gone to that point and if you’re tense (anxious) you fuck things up and yeah so that a lot of pressure...straining your voice and all that, your body so much, it’s your instrument really” (P5.p7).*

This suggests that the amount of pressure an actor experiences on the job increases their anxiety. Further, that part of the job is fighting to disregard the anxiety so that they can do their job.

Participants seem to be described using their bodies as their tool, pushing and moulding it to fit different characters and it is having physical reactions to that.

Actors describe not being able to separate the self from the character. Participant 3 talks about how she cannot separate what is happening to her character and herself:

*“you can’t separate it being fake or not it doesn’t work like that. So, if you are panicking, you are panicking. Whether it’s because there’s a lion there or because you’ve imagined one, your body still has the same response...I had an anxiety attack and it was after one of those types of scenes”* (P3.p8).

Participant 7 describes being exhausted from constantly dredging up her emotions for use of a character. She refers to a study she relates to:

*“I think they did some tests in term of...what your body is going through every time you go for an audition and I believe it equates to a minor car crash, the levels of chemicals that are going off...and you are doing that 1x a week sometimes more putting your body through that”* (P7.p5).

Participant 8 simply talks about the amount of energy that has to go into a west end show leaving him:

*“mentally or physically exhausted”* (P8.p4).

Whilst actors are not alone in coming home from a day’s work exhausted, what is unique to this group is that they seem to be exhausted from their



character's experiences. Their bodies are their tool and their tool is being borrowed by the character. They use their bodies in ways that they may not normally naturally do. Then when their bodies react with natural reactions (anxiety) they manipulate or suppress them due to the pressure they are under.

### **Sub-category 3: Psychological Impact**

This section presents the third sub-category: Psychological Impact.

The most lengthily discussed part of an actor's wellbeing was their mental health. We know that social and physical wellbeing has a large role to play in psychological wellbeing. In addition to these factors, there are also purely psychological factors at play too (see Figure 7).

Within the data, participants would regularly refer to:

- iv) how, due to a mix of the actor's lifestyle/culture and the roles they have played, they have experienced symptoms of mental health difficulties
- v) the extreme highs and lows they experience
- vi) the emotional toil that playing a character would take on them
- vii) the impact being in the industry had on their self-worth



Figure 7. Psychological Impact

i) Symptoms

Whilst the presentation of these difficulties varies across participants, it seems that being a working actor is a significant factor in the onset of these difficulties. The following are some accounts demonstrating the spectrum of psychological consequences:

Participant 1 talks about his experience in a job that was touring, where he didn't get on with his cast and discusses the impact of being lonely due to his job:

*"I just genuinely felt like I was going a bit mad, a bit crazy... I got a bit isolated and then when I went out I just got a bit paranoid, like genuinely paranoid"* (P1.p4).

Participant 4 has developed an eating disorder as a result of the pressure he puts on himself to look as good as he can due to the competitiveness of the industry. Here, he talks about his experience of the pressure he put on himself before an audition:

*"I lost so much weight in those two weeks. Even my parents were like your eyes are sunken what's going on and I was exercising 2/3x a day and I was really going for it and I didn't get it (the part). I left the audition and I was in tears. I knew I had messed up and that sent me in a bit of a downwards spiral that"* (P4.p4).

Participant 6 talks about how, in trying to inhabit her character more, she takes on character traits which in turn impacts her bipolar:

*"I'd do really weird things because she was really weird and on the edge and stuff, I'd be in the shower and I'd be like I'm not going to get out the shower until I can memorise half of it and I'd be in the shower for like an hour and a half and my skin would be all wrinkly.... I probably do go a bit crazy, which probably feeds into my mania"* (P6.p11).

On the opposite side, she sometimes feels she resonates too closely with a character: *“I was feeling really really down one day and I’ve had like suicidal thoughts...and I was like I want to die, I want to die and then we did a scene where the character was on the edge like an was feeling suicidal and on that day, I was like oh shit...”* (P6.p8).

Participants accounts talked about the pressure to come into work when they are not well. Participant 8 talks about having migraines and depression whilst being on a job in the West End:

*“They are like we need you to come in and you’re like I can’t I’m really ill, so it’s that sort of situation in that, where is the fine line between getting yourself sorted and ploughing through. Yep, this industry fucks you up big time”* (P8.p1).

From these accounts, it suggests there are multiple ways in which an individual’s psychological wellbeing can be affected (paranoia, eating disorders, bipolar, depression, etc.), and that there is a clear cost of the work. Whilst each person has their individual experience, there are some possible commonalities including the demands and competitiveness of the industry, and the impact of the process of playing the character on the individual.

## ii) Highs and Lows

Actors report experiencing frequent and extreme emotional highs and lows. Many of the participants talked about how working itself could be an extreme high, but how when they are out of work these highs plummet and they experience significant lows.

Participant 1:

*“It’s not easy to deal with. It’s very highs and lows acting, do you know what I mean. Like you know, when you have a job you’re very high and your happy and when you haven’t you’re down and low”* (P1.p5).

Participant 4:

*“You feel so happy and secure and then all in a flash you feel a complete way of I’ve never felt this way before (this bad), I never want to feel that again” (P4.p2).*

Participant 6:

*“You get massive highs of someone saying in a review you’re great or you get the lows of being rejected time and time again... and that takes a lot of strength” (P6.p10).*

Participant 7:

*“When you get to do it, it’s the best job in the world...The best feeling in the world. I’m a big lover of life but it’s weird to be dancing around very dark, very happy, very extreme thoughts all the time.’ It is a roller-coaster, right up and right down again. There’s something so great about “yeah I’ve got an audition today” and you feel so awesome...then as soon as you get in there you’re brutally reminded there’s 25 other people in line and they all look like you” (P7.p5).*

There is a wealth of experiences describing highs and lows across participants. The highs seem to be in terms of achieving or having the opportunity to achieve their goal (getting an audition or a job). When this occurs, there is a large spike in their mood, creating an elevated state. However, this is quickly sent into plummeting lows through the reality of the struggles that present working in this industry. From these accounts, there does not seem to be a middle ground or any attempt to regulate these massive fluctuations in highs and lows, therefore adding to the psychological cost of the individual.

iii) Emotional demand

As well as these continuous fluctuations in emotional highs and lows, actors talk about the emotional demand that is used within their work whilst playing a character.

Participant 1 describes this:

*"I have done other shows where I have had to have a really heightened emotional state...you're so hell-bent on becoming the best actor ever you know and people loving you and giving you this applause that you'll do anything even potentially damaging things you know" (P1.p11).*

Participant 3 describes the processes as *"lay{ing} myself bare emotionally"* (P3.p8). She then describes the after effect:

*"Scenes and emotions from things stick with me but that is what I find harder to shift than the emotional weight of what I am doing" (P3.p14).*

Here we see someone who is exposing herself emotionally, yet the struggle being what she takes from the character rather than her own vulnerability. This can be understood slightly more when she discusses how, in character, she has experiences that can be just as real as experiences out of character, and how she might have to experience things as a character that she might not have been exposed to or chosen to experience in real life.

Participant 3:

*"If that's the first time you are experiencing it and you're making it real in the moment, you're doing it. even if you're not physically giving someone a blow job you may have to go through all the things that surround that, all the mental things that women go through if they want to give someone a blow job or if they don't want to...you are putting yourself through that" (P3.p17).*

Participant 4 talks about playing a character with raw emotion and how that affected him:

*“Going into something so raw and touching and upsetting and it became real...it affected me from that point of view, unbelievably horribly and hurtful way but then the results pride and really sincere pride from my acting ability” (P4.p18).*

This report gives insight into the complex emotional demand of the acting work. It seems actors may experience extreme pain from the process of acting and pride in the results.

These findings tie into Category 2 when the participants are talking about using themselves for their art. Whilst the participants talked a great deal about that process, it seems due to the lack of data they have only slightly engaged with the impact that it is having on them. However, these findings of emotional demand weigh heavily on the individuals' psychological wellbeing.

#### iv) Self-worth

Throughout the data, participants regularly spoke about how their self-worth had been adversely impacted, due to the negative pressures within the industry. They talked about constantly questioning themselves and questioning whether they should continue acting or change career.

Participant 1 talks about when he didn't get jobs:

*“You are just constantly questioning yourself – am I good enough for this? Am I really a good actor? oh god, maybe I'm shit?” (P1.p3).*

He further discusses questioning himself on jobs:

*“Getting so confused as to am I making the right choices (for the character) and as to whether my portrayal of the character is any good or not” (P1.p11).*

Participant 1 appears to be in ongoing conflict, constantly questioning

himself and his ability. He reports that his self-worth also gets a boost in the times when he has a job secured, but the job has not started yet so the pressure of the work has not kicked in: *“You feel good about yourself and it’s a boost to your ego...it can be difficult because it doesn’t really last...it’s almost like the best part of being an actor is the period in- between finding out when you have the job and actually having to start to do any work”* (P1.p8).

Participant 4 struggles with his self-worth both in terms of not getting jobs, but also the pressure that he has taken on in terms of his body image:

*“I’ve started thinking whether it would be worth packing up for a bit for my mental self’...I am never constantly happy with it (his body). Erm which is draining me and making me feel very lethargic and because I don’t have a reason to actually do it and that the thing, why am I working so hard for something that I don’t have and I’m not getting jobs”* (P4. p5). He repeats this later, saying *“when it affects mental health it’s like do I give up, am I good enough. It’s a constant question of ‘is this the right thing to do?’ I look back and think about the way its affected like my physical health even socially as well”* (P4.p19).

This repetition could be showing just how difficult the struggle is between giving up his dreams and the consequences it’s having on him.

Participant 5 describes it as:

*“Constant self-doubt it’s the ego that just screams all the time”* (P5.p10).

Participant 7 says:

*“I’ve convinced myself I am entirely average and that’s entirely compounded by the amount of competition”* (P7.p5).

Participant 8 talks about questioning themselves and constantly overthinking: *“It all stems back to – you don’t look good enough, you’re not right (for the part), you’re fat...like you question everything, is it worth doing this, should I just go work 9-5...even on a job all those thoughts are there. Like you think you’re doing a good job and you get a note and you’re like clearly I’m not doing it right and it shoots you back to square one again”* (P8.p3).

It seems that the pressure actors are under to get a job, to look a certain way, and to do the job well creates a constant screaming dialogue of questioning themselves, scrutinising themselves, and really struggling to find their self-worth.

There was one participant who talked about having been in the industry for so long he’s developed the know-how of being confident:

Participant 2:

*“I’ve done some amazing work and I feel like I’m not working for acceptance. I walk in there now knowing that I’ve got a handsome body of work on my cv...my experiences and who I am is more than enough”* (P2.p7). This participant seems to be encouraged by his experiences as an actor, which have developed his self-confidence. However, this account seems to be a rare case, with only a few people developing this confident attitude.

This sub-category shows the psychological processes that are under strain for working actors. The data speaks clearly about these in a largely negative way, emphasising the cost and distress that is carried by each individual.

### **3.6.2 Summary of Category 3**

The findings suggest that being within the industry and the processes involved in playing a character, have a large impact on an actor’s wellbeing.



Participants describe a high-pressurised culture and that their experiences of the acting processes are largely unhealthy. Participants describe lives of instability, constant rejection, unemployment, menial jobs, pressure, loneliness, challenging relationships, long hours, harsh environment and dark thoughts. The impact is seen across social, physical and psychological levels.

It was hard for me as a researcher to listen to participants talking about their experiences of nightmares or the eating disorders. The participants in some cases didn't connect the symptom to their acting work and it was hard for me to maintain being a researcher and not point this out. I did gently express concern and suggest the participant with the ED speaks to his GP as I felt it would be unethical not to. Participants would also ask my opinion as a psychologist and I really had to balance my answers, ensuring to stay in the research role. Participants would speak about being extremely self-aware and how in acting you should know yourself inside out and I felt I was listening to their stories and experiencing the opposite from them. It really makes me think this is a area that psychologists can help with by having participants discover more about their processes and how they inter-relate. Perhaps this would have influenced how I interpreted or wrote about these categories so that they would point in the direction of psychologists being able to help them (however that was the aim of the study!).

#### Box 11. Reflexivity

### 3.7 Core Category: Addictive Nature of Acting

The last three categories have emphasised the negative experiences, processes and how these impact on an actor. So why and how do they keep doing it?

Whilst less prevalent throughout the data than the negative experiences, there was an underpinning category that represented just how much actors love acting. In this core category, we see that it is the love of acting that is so highly addictive to the actor, that they do it despite their constant questioning, despite the negative impact it has on them and despite their own conviction. Participants describe a pull that is so strong it effects them physically, emotionally and psychologically. They report being pulled by their

experiences of acting in a way that is addictive and that they receive both the highs and lows that come with the experience of addiction. The data revealed varied reasons that give insight into this addictive nature of acting.

Participant 4 describes the allure of the industry.

*“the glamour isn’t it...that’s what’s so enticing about it. alongside the fact that you can perform, be the centre of attention on stage or camera”* (P4.p8).

Contrary to this, he also describes how although the industry has been a negative experience for him. He still gets a sense of pride from his work that gives him enough reason to continue working as an actor.

Participant 4:

*“it affected me from the point of view, unbelievably horrible and hurtful way but then the results, pride and real sincere pride from my acting ability and I thought I really do this. I can do it”* (p4.16).

There’s almost a sense of that’s what an actor can offer the world back.

Participant 6:

*“I think actors are really special, for wanting to have fucked up lives to tell {stories}”* (P6.p9).

Participant 7:

*“I don’t fight wars physically, I don’t save lives but you know if I can truly identify with someone whose experienced something very different to mine with a humility and understanding and compassion even if it takes its toll on*

*my emotions as a person, I sort of feel like I deserve that, that that's the cross that I bear and the service that I can provide is truthful storytelling so yeah I'm sort of, you can't not do that" (P7.p9).*

Participant 8 also talks about how he has achieved his dreams despite all the adversity he has faced in terms of criticism and people telling him can't do it. For him when he plays a character he gets to forget his real life.

Participant 8:

*"becoming someone else is an escape" (P8p1).*

He feels safe in the theatre. The majority of participants refer at some point to some significant trauma or abuse in their lives throughout the data and how they use that for their art, but perhaps they are also escaping.

Another explanation for this 'addictive like love' can be seen from how participants talked about the high they get from acting.

Participant 4 explains further why he loves it:

*"when you are on stage in a performance, better than drugs, better than any feeling. That you get to dissect human emotion...the people, the actors...the freedom, the fact that you're not doing a sit-down cubicle job, you can travel...be completely different, you get to make believe...it's a real sense of you can discover people but delving into yourself and applying it to something...I think there's nothing more beautiful than bearing your heart and soul in front of a group of people and for them to be affected. And the round of applause is pretty fucking epic" (P4.p2).*

Participant 5 describes the electricity she feels when she acts and the out of body experience as being:

*"better than anything in the world" (p5.p4).*

She describes that part of her struggle to let go of a character is because she enjoys living another life so much.

Participant 6 compares herself to an addict explaining that despite the negative effect acting has on her relationships, she will always go back to her drug.

Participant 6:

*“if someone’s an artist, it’s almost like a drug. You need to perform...because I feel electric because I feel alive...the adrenaline...you still get really nervous and that rush and then just when you become immersed in the world”* (P6 p3).

Participant 7 also describes this addictive nature:

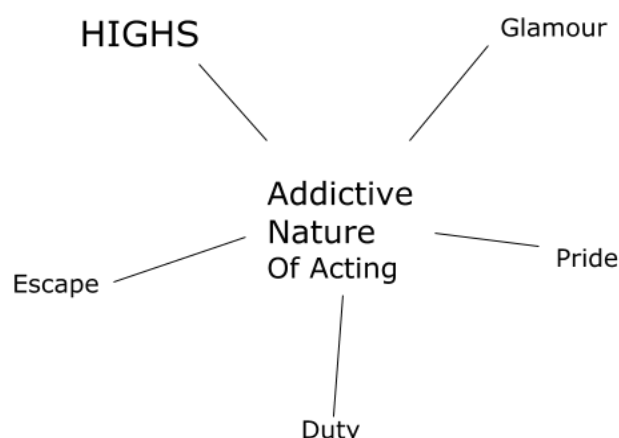
*“I have to act. I must do it...I think there’s definitely something in me that is quite self- punishing and that is very satisfying...when you get to do it is the BEST job in the world and I love that it’s project driven...I love the really intense push and the massive post-show blues and really intense again”* (P7.p1-2).

Throughout the interview, she lists more things about what she loves, the feeling and the processes. How it engages her mind, creativity, body, fellow actors, pretending to be other people, the impact on the audience and even manipulating the audience.

When she describes the negative impact it has on her, she explains that she: *“almost revels in the fragility and off the rails-ness of it all”* (P7.p4).

Participant 1: *“you’re so hell-bent on becoming the best actor ever you know and people loving you and giving you this applause that you’ll do anything even potentially damaging things you know”* (P1,p11).

Not only are the participants using the word ‘addiction’ themselves to liken their experience of acting but throughout the data all of the participants report repeatedly engaging in behaviours, cognition and affects are likened to that of an addiction. These categories are so closely integrated and when put together seem to show actors continuing to work within a culture of instability, criticism and competitiveness, so desperate to reach their goals that they manipulate their bodies and minds in order to achieve instant rewards, despite both the short and long terms impact to their social, physical and psychological health. They continue to engage in this cycle although they report deeply questioning and considering withdrawal and recovery in order to benefit their health and yet the high being so highly addictive they continue on the same path. This will be explored further in the section 4.8 of the Discussion Chapter.



*Figure 8. Core Category – Addictive Nature of Acting*

Undoubtedly, this category emerged from my thoughts. As the participants would speak in an interview, I would think *why* do they keep putting themselves through that? If I push myself further, I can admit that with some actors I have met who struggle with regular employment, I think *why* do you keep doing it? That said, I really feel this category was grounded in the data. That the term addiction came from the participants themselves.

Box 12. Reflexivity

### 3.8 Conclusion of Findings

These findings lay the foundations for the theoretical model of a working actor. When all put together they show what is going on for the actor, the processes involved and the impact of them. In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings in relation to the existing literature and the implications of the findings regarding professional practice.

### 3.9 Theoretical Model

This section proposes a theoretical model of the processes of a working actor. The analysis suggested a complex interplay of the categories, each one feeding into the other, representing a layered model of the working actor. A core connecting category of 'Addictive Nature of Acting' was identified, which applied to the three main categories as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

Model of a working actor:

- By choosing to enter this industry the actor is inescapably caught up in the culture and pressure of being an actor.
- When actors are at work, they regularly engage in unhealthy processes to facilitate themselves to embody their character.
- When either of the above are activated there is an impact on the individual's wellbeing.
- The addictive nature of acting maintains this cycle for the actor.

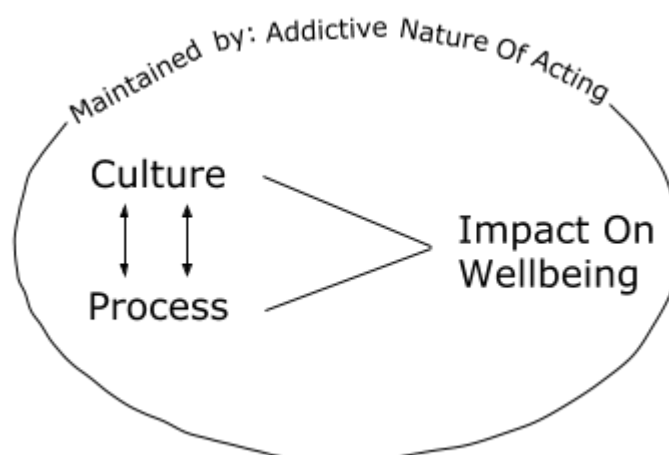


Figure 9. A: Theoretical Framework 'Model of a Working Actor'.

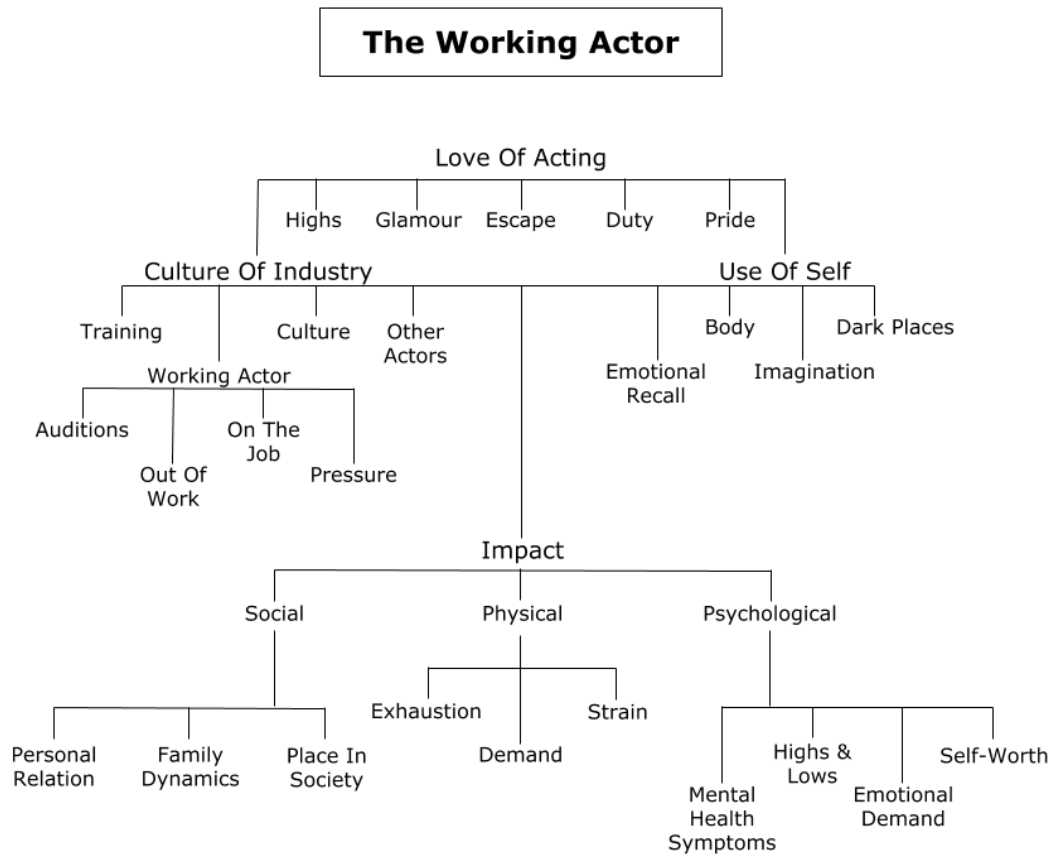


Figure 10. B: Detailed Theoretical Framework 'Model of a Working Actor'.

This model shows how the categories relate to each other. The *culture and pressures* of the industry permeate throughout all stages of an actor's life, be that when they are trying to get a job or are working on set. Additional to these cultural pressures is, the *acting process* itself. The techniques involved in playing a character are uniquely demanding to the actor, both mentally and physically as the actors use all parts of themselves to embody a character. This means the actor is working in a highly pressurised culture, with uniquely demanding processes that have a large *impact* on the individual's wellbeing. Actors are aware of these impacts, yet it is the addictive-like-love they feel for acting that maintains them staying within this cycle (see figure 13. p151 for the developed working model).

### 3.10 Reflexivity & Ethics

#### Reflexivity

In line with a constructivist methodology, it is important to consider how as the researcher my life experiences and personal interests position me in relation to the data (Ahern, 1999). I have reflected on my reasons for choosing this research topic and how this might influence the analytical process. Having worked with actors for the past few years, I am aware that I am not only interested in their experiences of being actors, but that I am also aiming to contribute towards a push for improving psychology services for actors at a wider level. I considered to what extent the latter would compromise my ability to interpret the data considering my preconceptions. Through reflective exercises such as journaling, brainstorming and discussions with my supervisor and peers, I have searched my preconceived ideas, making them explicit to examine the effect they may have on the data. I acknowledge that I have had a significant impact on the analysis, constructing and arranging the findings presented (Charmaz, 2006), and the analysis is a constructed shared reality between the participant and myself. Furthermore, the process of the research has also had an undeniable impact on me as the researcher (Hanley, Lennie, & West, 2013).

During the initial stages of analysis, I was excited; I was absorbing the content and memo writing throughout listening to the recordings and transcribing the data. I felt the data came alive and started speaking to me even in those early stages. As Charmaz (2014) advised, I tried to start the initial coding as soon as possible; however, I was not confident in the coding process and felt restricted by my constant questioning of '*am I doing it right?*'. My qualms were somewhat eased when I presented a section to my colleagues and found that they selected codes similar to mine. This gave me the confidence to carry out the coding more freely. As the analysis progressed, I became conscious that I was constructing the knowledge



rather than just writing about it; I felt like I was having a conversation with the data and making decisions from it.

I feel like the data speaks to me, it resonates with me. I cannot help but code with the previous transcripts in mind, even when I try to put them out of mind. I feel like the participants wove their story into my understanding and that is impacting how I code the data. I'm coding it with their voices in mind.

#### Box 13. Reflexivity

I reflected that the data was so rich, that focused codes were forming in my mind before the initial coding was complete. I felt humbled by the data and found I was drawing constant parallels between being a psychologist and an actor in terms of the levels of empathy needed within each profession and that 'use of self' that we are both encouraged to do. Acknowledging that I was forming a bond with the data that was undeniably constructing its voice, I pushed myself to look for other options within the data, to recognise that there could be other understandings and interpretations. I actively took a step back from myself and tried to take a 'helicopter view' of my coding to create a *"picture that draws from, reassembles, and renders subjects' lives"* (Charmaz 2003, p. 249).

I became afraid that I was too close to the data and sought reassurance from my supervisors and peers. I reached a point of frustration with the data when I had to start sorting the codes into categories; it was a process that felt quite messy as there is such an overlap between codes and sub-themes, it was difficult to sort them into categories. Several times I thought this was completed and then I revised it. At this point, I felt like I was weaving a tapestry and it felt exciting again to look at the web of my analysis. Due to the extensive nature of the data, it was not possible to present an exhaustive account of all the categories within the analysis. Deciding what to discard at this point was a difficult decision as it felt like every bit had something to contribute. However, I selected the categories that were closest to the aims of the research and most saturated in the participants' accounts. Due to the

overlapping nature of the data, it was a hard process to start organising and writing it up clearly.

I was constantly aware of the negative undertone of the accounts and kept going back to the data to ensure this was grounded in the data and not just my interpretation. I kept in mind that some of what the participants were describing could be emotionally evocative and that I might be provoked to relay this in a certain way. I was also conscious that it felt like each participant wanted to get a message across and I wanted to do justice to this.

## **Ethics**

I am aware that I am constructing others' distress through a western, female, psychological lens. This has undoubtedly influenced the way I interpret and present my findings. For example, Category 3 is made up of my psychological knowledge of mental health symptoms. My dual role as a practitioner/researcher influences how I construct the framework. Regarding ethics, I am aware of ensuring I do not pathologize their experiences, for example, by explaining nightmares as a potential PTSD symptom, where this could mean something different to them.

Whilst participants were voluntary, wanting to tell their story, and the data is rich in demonstrating actors' suffering and pain, they did not come for diagnosis or for their experiences to be interpreted medically. Perhaps they were trying to give voice to their suffering. In any case, it needs to be made clear this construction is not to disadvantage any actor, but to advocate for greater awareness of their suffering. I am mindful of the power I hold as the researcher in interpreting their accounts. I am mindful, too, of the potential consequences that could be caused to a participant, and the distance between the account and any claims of its meanings must be acknowledged. To try to balance this, I actively try to search for and relay the positive accounts given throughout the data and I am conscious of the need to give

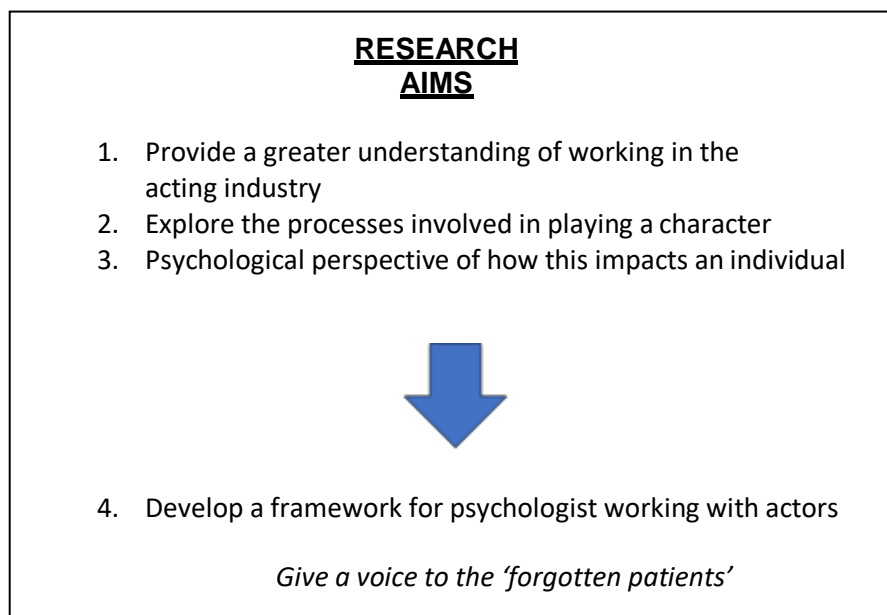
voice to such active data, to let it do the talking. In addition, I must consider the context of the acting industry at present. The media is filled with stories and encounters of the negative side of the industry (abuse, pay gaps, racial disparity, etc.). In the current context, actors are starting to speak out more about their experiences and mental health, and I am aware this will filter through participant accounts and my interpretations.

However, it must be acknowledged that this is a synthesis of what the participants are saying; the segments were selected by me for my agenda and therefore this research only sheds light; it cannot capture the whole picture. Hopefully, as a psychologist, I have been somewhat able to read between the lines and accept multiple truths to give deeper comprehension to the understanding of the research question.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

### 4.1 Overview

Despite the number of studies completed on other performing artists (musicians/dancers), and despite the huge media interest, little is known regarding actors, and more specifically, an actor's wellbeing. This study proposed to meet the knowledge gap and methodological gap within the literature in order to offer ideas on how psychologists might tailor their services to meet actors' needs and alleviate their struggles. The study had multiple agendas. The first aim was to provide a greater understanding of the challenges of working in the acting industry. The second aim was to explore the process of playing a character. The third aim was to look at how the combination of the first two objectives impact an individual. The overall goal was to provide a psychological perspective of these three aims to develop a useful framework for a psychologist to draw on in their work with actors. An implicit agenda was to give voice to this demographic who have been labelled the 'forgotten patients' (Brandfonbrener, 1992).



Box 14. Research Aims

In order to meet the aims of this study, I used semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into the worlds of eight professional actors. I applied constructivist grounded theory methodology to the data and raised a theoretical framework. The findings suggested a multitude of interwoven complexities between the acting industry and the process of acting. Insight into both these areas was gained; the findings support the small body of previous literature, adding a depth of participant experience and process to the existing research body and contributed several original findings. The study found the individual impact on the actor to be detrimental to the actor's wellbeing in psychological, social, and physical aspects. The study contributed several new findings to the research literature, the most significant being the reasons why actors stay in their career despite the adversity which they experience. This study has shown that there is an addictive quality about the world of acting that the actor is compelled to feed. Taken together, these findings have generated a psychological framework that will hopefully enable psychologists to better understand this client group and to provide tailored care. The implications of this are discussed in greater depth below.

## **4.2 Summary of the Findings**

The findings suggest that being in the acting industry involves being in a highly-pressurised culture, lacking job security, and often being isolated from their family and friends. Actors give up other things in their life to pursue the vocation because it can feel like a compulsion and in the process, actors draw on the deepest, darkest, and most painful memories of their lives to be able to portray a character. During this process, the actor enters an alternative state; this out of body experience can be so vivid they have no memory of what has happened in the real world. Actors become so interwoven with the character that they have memories of the character and push their bodies to have reactions to situations which are fictitious. They may perform a scene repeatedly, causing their psychological and physical states to become accustomed to the character they are playing. Nearly all aspects of the

industry were represented in a negative way throughout the data and across participant accounts. Insight was given into the compelling nature that keeps actors engaging in their career despite the hardships they face.

The findings are interwoven to such a degree that it is a significant challenge to break them into sections to present. The first two categories of the findings 1) 'Culture and Pressure' and 2) 'Use of Self' presented with aspects of psychological wellbeing being drawn on in each. The third category of 'Impact' is then presented in further depth. Lastly, the core category of 'Addictive Nature of Acting' is presented. This connects all the categories together giving insight into the love actors have for their work.

#### **4.3 Category 1. Industry and Culture**

The first category is that of the culture of the acting industry and what it is like to work within it. The findings are broken down into their subcategories of: training, the working actor, culture, and other actors. The findings are discussed in light of the previous research relating to actors and explained by drawing on other theories. Original findings are emphasised.

##### **Training**

The findings suggest that when actors look back on their training there are many negative memories generated. The culture is described as ambitious and lonely with several participants describing the health impact it had on them. One participant discussed feeling that there are such high levels of judgement, scrutiny, and an expectation to be perfect that he developed an eating disorder. Another discussed how his training caused him to have a breakdown that made him unwell for a significant period. This could be associated with the concept within the culture of 'breaking' the individual. This is a process of forcing the actor into a physical and emotional place of exhaustion and manipulation until they 'break' and access an emotional reaction that is triggered by going through this 'torture-like' experience.

Surrounding these everyday occurrences participants report a lack of support within their training institutions.

Previous research has acknowledged that the training process is not an easy one. Seton (2004), conducted an ethnographic study where he attended acting classes at three actor training sites as a participant observer. He describes themes of vulnerability, seduction, rape, and nakedness occurring repeatedly and pervading his whole experience of the training. Like the accounts of participants in the present study, Seton found students were willing to submit to discipline however painful if it helped them to progress in their career. Seton (2010), later went on to explore the ethical practice within actor training, particularly in relation to the culture of vulnerability and embodiment. Whilst his recommendations are simple implementations to develop ethical practice, from my personal experience in the acting industry and most certainly from my participant's accounts, acting training institutions are still yet to integrate ethical practice. As training often sets the tone of the culture in a profession, it is vital that ethical and best practice is being implemented early on, in order for the actor to carry forward healthy ways of working and to hopefully implement a cultural shift with a view to greater psychological welfare for actors. The British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM), has developed these practices for dancers and musicians and I raise the question as to why, again, actors are being forgotten?

Whilst the present study supports these specific earlier findings, there is nothing documented in the previous literature about the aspect of competition, judgement and the impact on health in this early training stage. Perhaps this is due to participants in the current study having completed their training, and therefore able to reflect on their experiences in contrast to the studies which have looked at training with those currently participating in training.

## **The Working Actor**

The data revealed that there are two stages to a working actor's day to day life. Firstly, being out of work. This means going through the auditioning process which encompasses highs of anticipation and lows of rejection. When actors are in periods of unemployment, they often have no other option but to seek alternative and often menial work. Due to the illogical nature of the industry, actors can go from being extremely well known, working on TV sets to finding themselves doing jobs such as cleaning toilets because they are out of work again. These findings support the existing literature that demonstrates actors struggle with repetitive periods of unemployment (Maxwell, Seton & Szabo, 2015; Robb, Due & Venning 2018; Roberts, 2013). However, this is the first study to ask actors about how this impacts their psychological wellbeing. Within the current study, participants talk about feeling utterly demoralised due to unstable working patterns. This is much in line with unemployment research which suggests that insecure employment relates more to psychological complaints, subjective complaints, and poorer health as compared to short-term, long-term unemployment and secure permanent employment (Griep et al., 2016). As actors are constantly experiencing insecure employment, these findings suggest that they are constantly vulnerable to detrimental effects the impact psychological health. For example, unemployment is related to indicators of depression, anxiety, decreased life satisfaction, psychological distress and minor psychiatric morbidity (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005; Virtanen, Vahtera, Kivimäki, Petti & Ferrie, 2002; Rugulies, Bultmann, Aust & Burr 2006). Scholars state the unemployment is problematic because it frustrates both obvious (i.e. income) and covert (i.e. time, social identity, social network etc.) functions of work (Paul and Batinic, 2010). Job insecurity suggests prolonged uncertainty and uncontrollability which results in detrimental wellbeing consequences (Vander Elst et al., 2014).

However, Griep et al., (2016), did find there was higher life satisfaction among individuals who experience insecure employment compared with those who faced short or long-term unemployment. In relation to actors,



perhaps this can be explained by the extreme highs actors experience when they are on a job and the romantic tint they add to their outlook when describing life. This was the first qualitative study to capture the tension between the elevated status of being on a high paying, glamorous film set with runners able to respond to your needs and the fall to unemployment and how utterly disheartening this can be.

Of course, the reverse of this process applies the other way around too, with actors being out of work and then suddenly being propelled into a Hollywood lifestyle. Jensen & Kim (2015), examined the negative consequences of sudden positive status shifts within actors. They found that when someone is elevated in status quickly, the negative effects impact the actor at the personal level. Moving between status positions is often a disruptive experience involving social and cultural dislocation which can shift social support, cultural belonging and a sense of self (Durkheim, 2005). Further, whilst status shift can be financially beneficial and generate market entry (Jensen, 2003), anxiety, relational discrimination, complacency and distraction are typically experienced (Jensen, 2008; Bothner, Kim, Smith., 2012). For example, there is an increase in divorce rates for male actors, however, this decreases for females. This can be explained by the idea that as your status rises, both female and male actors are likely to get more attractive spousal alternatives and male actors tend to respond in a way that disrupts their personal lives (Roese et al., 2006). Whilst not explicitly reported in this study, actors did talk about the amazing feeling when they got a job. Additionally, male actors are more likely to feel relatively deprived than females and may also respond differently to this feeling (Matud, 2004). It is perhaps important for a psychologist to be aware of the other side of the coin.

The second stage in the cycle is when an actor is at work and they must give their all to the role. The pressure to perform is extremely high with every mistake having huge financial costs as each retake costs a significant sum

on a film set. We know from occupational and medical research that work can have a significant impact on psychological wellbeing and can develop into mental health illnesses. This is particularly prominent in work with occupational uncertainty, little value and respect, high job demands paired with low job control, low relational justices, role stress, bullying, and low social support in the workplace. These experiences can increase work-place stress, anxiety, depression and cognitive functioning (Harvey et al., 2017). These are all things which actors within the present study report to have experienced.

Often, having a job takes an actor away from their home and they are often managing the loneliness and the extensive downtime whilst they are offset. Loneliness has been defined as a psychological condition since the 1970's (Lynch & Convey, 1979). It increases the clinical risk for depression (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006), alcoholism (Akerlind & Hornquist, 1992), suicidal thoughts (Rudatsikira, Muula, Siziya, & Twa- Twa, 2007), aggressive behaviours, social anxiety, and impulsivity (Cacioppo, Capitanio & Cacioppo, 2014).

To the best of my knowledge, loneliness is not reported in the previous literature in relation to actors. However, findings within other groups of performing artists have shown that they experience loneliness and homesickness for similar reasons, such as leaving their families for long periods of time for work (Kenny & Ackermann, 2009). It was the actor Robin Williams (2009) who said:

*"I used to think the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not. The worst thing in life is to end up with people who make you feel all alone".*

This cycle of being unemployed and employed happens repeatedly. At each stage, the actor faces enormous pressure, either to get out of unemployment

or to be perfect within a role. At the same time, the actor may be suffering from the consequences of loneliness.

## **Culture**

In relation to the culture of the acting world, actors talked about how they always had to think about how they presented themselves and how they were being portrayed in the acting industry. They described this as a fake process (pretending to be in top form when you are really struggling with depression).

The idea of multiple sense of selves or personas is a not a new one. Jung (1953) and Goffman (1959) distinguished between the individual's inner self and the public self. Carl Rogers (1957), the founding father of humanistic psychology, developed this idea of the unconscious self and the public mask. He refers to this as a process of incongruence. This is when the individual's awareness and experiences are not aligned. Meaning perceptions, conceptions, and constructions of the self, environment, and others are present in the individual's awareness which means the individual is more vulnerable to anxiety. Rogers believed for a person to find their true sense of self and reduce this anxiety they must align their inner self and experiences. Actors in this study, through both their work as an actor and the process of presenting a fake version of themselves, may be increasing this sense of incongruence within themselves.

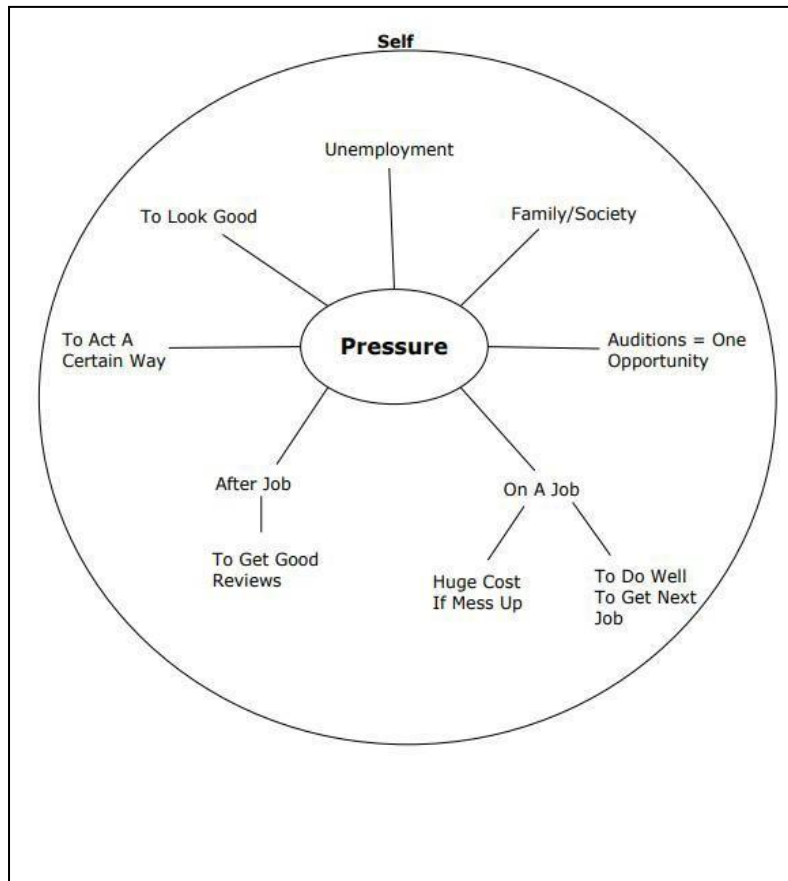
Additionally, participants described experiencing intense pressure at every stage of the cycle of acting. Many participants felt "fucked up" by the industry. As they are scrutinised in such detail, they start seeing every "flaw" within themselves and stop wanting to be who they are. They were constantly criticised for their weight and looks, being told they were too fat or not attractive enough for a role; these constant comments may trigger eating disorders which is explored later in this chapter (see p134 & p142).

Female actors talked about their negative experiences in the industry. Firstly, they spoke about the difficulty of continuing to act if they have the desire to raise a family. Secondly, they described being sexualised at every stage of their career, with opportunities only being made available to them if they took off their clothes or performed sexual acts. The reported accounts of pretending to be single to get a job or having to give a lap dance as part of an audition or feeling pressured to do nude shots. These experiences meet the threshold of sexual harassment which includes gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980). There is a strong correlation between sexual harassment and increased rates of work withdrawal, decreased productivity, increased depression, post-trauma symptoms and general clinical symptomatology (Avina & O'Donohue, 2002; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Overall, the culture was described as one that focuses on money, perfection, and sexuality. Actors reported feeling broken, insecure, and under-supported. Not all accounts were negative. Participants would mention the glamour and enticement of part of the industry, describing red-carpet events or the perks they would receive on a job as thrilling and positive experiences. However, comments were seldom compared to the negative accounts. The finding complements the recent findings in a sample of Australian actors. Robb et al., (2018), conducted semi-structured interviews with actors focusing on their wellbeing. One of the themes represented power dynamics within the industry. Participants described being in the hands of a few powerful individuals which created feelings of humiliation and helplessness, particularly for women. These accounts are similar to the experiences described in the present study, as participants reported being manipulated into uncomfortable situations, constantly rejected, and a sense of having no control over whether they were in work or not. Whilst the choice of words used within both studies analysis' may differ slightly, they are both encompassing the negative experiences of the culture of the acting industry.

At present, there have been ongoing conversations in the media regarding experiences of sexual harassment within the film industry. As many actors step forward to speak about their experiences of sexual harassment it is surprising that participants in this study did not focus on these experiences. Perhaps participants in the current study have had different experiences, or participants may feel threatened into silence, or perhaps participants do not feel they have the security of celebratory status to protect their career.

Previous literature has documented that actors experience performance anxiety or unemployment worries (Steptoe et al, 1995; Simmonds & Southcott, 2012; Goodman & Kaufman, 2014), all which accumulate in an actor feeling pressured to get a job or to do a good job. There has been little to explore the concept of the sheer amount of performing arts literature, the term “spotlight effect” was generated. This is the idea that when people speak and perform in front of others, they do not appear as nervous as they imagine they do. Hence the term the “spotlight effect” (Savitsky & Gilovich, 2003). In relation to actors, perhaps participants are describing elements of *pressure* the actor faces at every stage in their career, (see *figure 1*). Within the over evaluating the extent to which others notice and evaluate their appearance. On the other-hand as acting is not just about your talent, but your personality and your physical appearance this may differ from other performing actors and really are always under the spotlight as participants suggest.



*Figure 11. Actors Experience of Pressure*

## Other Actors

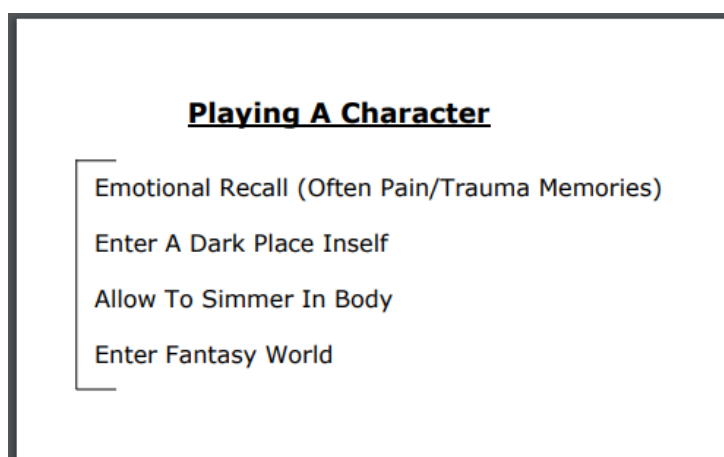
From the data, there were two findings that contradicted participants experiences of other actors. On one hand, a sense of comradery between actors was found. They experience themselves to be more self-reflective and honest compared to other professions. They develop very intimate bonds very quickly and are often a source of support for each other. On the other hand, they describe themselves as highly competitive, arrogant, bitchy and underneath the intense bonds are fake relationships. In Robb et al.'s, (2018) study, participants described similar findings to the present study in relation to other actors. Both studies share reports of the immediate intimacy found between actors and then the realisation that the intimacy was false and not continued after the work was completed. There was also a deep sense of mistrust. Robb et al., (2018), described bullying behaviour between actors and the participants and the present study demonstrates the competitiveness between themselves and other actors. These findings again represent the instability that actors face, even once they have secured a job, they are still standing on turbulent ground as the relationships they are surrounding themselves with may not be as safe as they appear. At the same time, one participant spoke about having a group of actor friends who have *chosen* to be different. This was described as a sense of tackling the 'fakeness' of the industry and providing real relationships to each other. Another participant spoke about the extent to which he cared for his fellow actors and that seeing them get constantly 'ripped apart' made him become unwell.

Research tells us that friendships are a vital part of our mental health and wellbeing. They help meet our socio-emotional needs by providing self-validation and positive support (Cleary, Less & Sayers, 2018). Friendship reduces stress, helps with adjustment and gives people a sense of belonging, mattering and feeling cared about overall increasing an individual's happiness (Demir, Ozen, Dogan, Bilyk & Tyrell, 2011). In the workplace friendship plays an important role in reducing stress, improving

teamwork and communication and enhancing the quality of work produces, whilst enhancing health and wellbeing (Berman, West & Richter, 2002). For actors who experience large amounts of stress, loneliness and pressure, having supportive relationships with their cast members could be of great benefit to their wellbeing. However, if those relationships transpire to be fake, unstable and competitive the risk of pathology and poorer wellbeing could be increased.

#### 4.4 Category 2. Use of Self

This category represents the first offerings to be documented in the psychological literature that suggests explanations for *how* the participants play a character. It emerged that actors *use themselves* as templates to create a character. In the analysis, this category produced sub-categories of: of emotional recall, use of body, use of imagination and use of dark places. These sub-categories are discussed together as it is the combination of these processes that produce the creation of a character and they cannot be easily separated. It is not clear what order these processes occur, or if they are simultaneous (see *figure 12*). See Brestoff (1995), for an overview of acting methods and techniques.



*Figure 12. Playing a Character*



Participants described a process of emotional recall where they ruminate on personal memories and use the emotions generated to immerse themselves into a character. This is where the training of 'breaking' an individual comes into play as the actor is able to force themselves to remain 'open' and 'unblocked' against their better judgement.

The second process revealed in the data is termed 'body hacking'. The participants described using the emotional recall to the extent where they would trick their body into producing a reaction that it would not otherwise have had. For example, they might recall a time they were very scared to act like they were panicking but their bodies would enter into a state of panic. The actor then allows these bodily reactions to simmer within their bodies and it is this combination of psychological and physical reactions that make a character come to life.

In addition, participants described a process of using their vivid imaginations to create and enter a 'fantasy world' for their character. By being in this fantasy world it enabled emotional recall or body hacks to occur easily. They often described this as a 'dark' process, that they were engaging with 'dark' places in their minds, some found this an interesting process where they experiences self-development. One participant gave the example of exploring sexual fantasies of family members. Others found it would cause them to have negative reactions or negative intrusive thoughts. Participants talked about these processes as being an 'out of body experience' where they lose the sense of the real world and time. This experience is so real to them they take on their characters memories or traits when out of character and back in the real world.

The participants account of how they play a character were in line with the three stages Blunt (1966) describes of a) gathering as much information about the character, b) tuning the information into dramatic action and c)

projecting this dramatic action to the audience. The findings cover these three stages with an emphasis placed on the latter two.

These findings add support to previous studies that have documented actors to have more expressive use of emotion (Goldstein et al., 2013), higher levels of daydreaming and engaging in fantasy worlds (Goldstein, 2009) and embodiment (Seton, 2004; 2010). They add clarity to the findings on emotional recall offering suggestions of *how* this is done and provide further evidence of the difficulty in letting go of a character and the blurring process that can occur between actors real self and character self (Rule, 1973; Hannah, 1994;; Bloch, 1992; Brandfonbrener, 1992; Geer, 1993; Burgoyne et al., 1999; Thomson, 2012).

#### **4.5 Original Findings**

The three processes have been documented separately in the literature before with researchers looking at either emotional recall or embodiment, both showing to have a negative impact on the individual. This is the first piece of research to capture the combination of these processes and this is the first data set to reveal how these intertwine and create the outcome. Additionally, the previous research has looked at the impact of these, whereas this data also tells us *how* participants engage in these processes and how they are used. It is also the first research to discover the concept described as the 'dark place' and to shed light on what the actors think about engaging in them.

#### **4.6 Exploring the Findings**

Talent in acting is comprised of the ability to analyse, master and channel vulnerability (Seton, 2010). There is this idea that the more vulnerable and 'open' you are, the rawer emotion you can give to a character, thus resulting in a better performance. There was also the idea that actors perceive

themselves as more self-reflexive and in tune with themselves compared to the general population.

From my personal experience of working in the acting industry, I would see people often highly emotional because of the part they were playing or the aspect of being 'pushed' by the teacher. Also, within relationships, there was almost a spoken demand that you would be vulnerable with others. This was propositioned to me regularly. 'Sheena, you need to be more open, you're so closed, open up, relax, share' was what I would constantly hear.

I'm a counselling psychologist, I have done years of therapy and self-work, I grew up dancing, I regard myself as a creative and spiritual thinker/being which I have been taught and self-learned to develop (holding the term very lightly considering the nature of the present study!), I believe I am reflexive, not just as a practitioner but in all aspects of my life (often too much). Further, I am honest, a straight talker, I don't tend suppress my feelings (I hopefully express them appropriately) and this comment used to really irritate me.

How I interpreted the difference was actors carry this sense of being ready to be vulnerable at every moment when needed, they are very much trained to access their innermost parts but in an almost rudimentary way, with no protection around it, no autonomy in the moment, no barriers. Whereas I have boundaries in my workplace, I carefully think and decide who to be vulnerable with, being vulnerable for me is not a given, it's a thing I protect and privilege people with when I share it. This is the same when working as a psychologist. It is not always appropriate to be personally vulnerable with a patient, often you have to be a very safe, secure, consistent and to a sense in-personal. You actively choose the level of intimacy you give your patient, and although often you might give a lot you are very aware of giving that.

#### Box 15. Reflexivity

Previous research has shown us that actors have more expression of emotion which is seen as healthy compared to the opposite being suppression of emotion (Goldstein et al., 2013). However, some of the strategies participants in the study described were questionable. For example, the use of memory recall; this is the idea of remembering and visualising a painful time in your life to the extent where you tap into the emotions connected with that memory and bring them into the present. Mastering their emotions is seen as a skill that actors must have, so they are able to recall emotions on cue and re-experience what that emotion feels like to be able to reproduce it in performance. There is little research into the cognitive process that occurs here. To my knowledge, there is nothing documented previously that gives further insight into exactly *how* this is done. One of the participants in the study describes lying on his brother's bed (who is away at war) and imagining him dying. He does this repeatedly, over and over until he is sobbing and in a place of devastation. This is the first time this has been captured in the research.

Psychologists have found that the more significant a past event, the stronger the emotion that was attached and therefore the more vividly those events and emotions can be remembered (Mackay et al., 2004). Freud & Bonaparte (1954) suggested that memories linked to trauma may be repressed to avoid distress, and through free association, these could be brought back to memory. Performance could be seen as an aspect of association, this could be problematic for the actor if during a performance a repressed memory came to light. On the other hand, Öhman and Mineka (2001), claimed that as emotions regularly operate beyond our consciousness, their intuitive nature can warn the individual of potential environmental threat or suggest a risk- adverse environment and behaviour can be adapted appropriately to the situation. This raises the question of what happens when the individual is not in actual danger or is not actually in a secure emotional environment, but they repeatedly must pretend that they are? This is currently unknown.

It is known previously that actors are highly visual people. That they have higher levels of daydreaming and engaging in fantasy worlds (Goldstein, 2009). We also know they have advanced skills of theory of mind and empathy to be able to read another person's inner state and feel similar feelings to another (Goldstein, 2009). However, what is the cost to this for an actor? Some theorists claim that a healing process occurs when the individual is in conversation with artwork (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2009). However, others claim that recounting traumatic events can disembody individuals from their sense of self (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016) by increasing ongoing dissociation and negative appraisal of memories which can maintain symptoms of PTSD or anxiety (Halligan, Michael, Clark & Ehlers, 2003).

Whilst engaging with the process of using emotional recall within their work, participants often described using their imagination to enter another world where they would forget all sense of time, lose consciousness of the real world and only be able to see and experience the world of their characters. This was described as an out of body experience and when participants would awaken, they would have no memory of what had just occurred. This state of transcendence is familiar to other performing artists (Simmons & Southcott, 2012). An out of body experience and the connection to playing a role convincingly has been likened to entering a hypnotic state whereby actors demonstrate effects such as absorption, suggestibility that are associated with hypnotisability (Panero, Goldstein, Rosenberg, Hughes & Winner, 2016). However, actors are describing deliberately creating another world that they push themselves into. This seems different from the heightened spiritual awareness or deep state of relaxation that these studies are describing. The impact of which is discussed below.

We know that actors are under a huge amount of pressure at work and a state of anxiety might cause an individual to depersonalise (Kaplan, 2005). We know that a proneness to fantasise has been significantly associated with dissociative disorders (Pekala, Angelini & Kumar, 2001). Fantasy

literature informs us that whilst controlled fantasy can be related to psychological wellbeing, the participants seem to be describing something out of control, that they push themselves into and lose all sense of their surroundings and what is real, this uncontrolled fantasy proneness is linked to an increase in being vulnerable to dissociation and experience auditory hallucinations (Lynne & Rhue, 1998; Waldo & Merritt, 2000; Rauschenberger & Lynn, 2003; Goldstein & Winner 2009; Thomson & Jaque, 2012; Perez-Fabello & Campos, 2017).

This process is evident in the data in this study whereby participants described how their character started to blur with their own self. The relationship between increased fantasy proneness and dissociation may intensify absorption, blurring self-states and evoke a feeling that the character operates as an independent agent (Taylor, Hodges & Kohanyi, 2003).

All actors in the present study talk about drawing on historical trauma, going to a painful place within themselves to create a reaction. Some describe having a visual image in their head they play repeatedly, this could be likened to flashbacks that trauma patients experience. Traumatic experience, high levels of anxiety, more emotional excitability and less adaptive emotion-oriented coping strategies, have been linked to dissociation (Thomson & Jaque, 2018). Within the acting population, these traits appear to be common, therefore suggesting even more disposition for an actor to dissociate during their work.

One participant talked about having traumatic character memories and being able to use emotional recall of the character experiences. Thus, showing that it is not always possible to separate the character from one's self. This is supported by theorists who claim that when the self is in conversation with artwork it is an identity-shaping experience (Sullivan & McCathy, 2009). However, some scholars suggest that through the ability to identify with

oneself and another perhaps traumatic memories are being integrated and therefore it's a healing process (Parson, 1999). However, in this study the participants seemed to have acknowledged the 'darkness' associated with engaging in this process and they themselves felt it was unhealthy. Perhaps if actors are using acting as a form of therapy, in a trained and secure environment it can certainly provide healing but that seems to be the opposite context of what these participants were describing. The trauma literature suggests that those who experience PTSD, have a less ability to tolerate stress, and experience frequent dysregulation, hyper-arousal and can lose connection to somatic experiences (Van der Kolk et al., 1996). This process heightens trauma symptoms making individuals more vulnerable to minor triggers (Ogden, Pain & Fisher, 2006). This could explain the out of body experiences and blurring that the participants describe. In other words, as actors re-trigger their trauma, they could experience symptoms of hyper-arousal that have a lasting effect. This fits with the finding that participants experience the negative impact on wellbeing through portraying a character. This was described by having nightmares, by participants starting to think more like the character, taking on their characters physical habits, and going 'a bit mad'. Other suggestions are that trauma occurs in the body, and when someone is acting a traumatic experience their nervous systems are stimulated. Unless trained to tolerate the state of arousal, an actor's body is re-triggered, ultimately dysregulating the stress response by causing the body to go into hyper-arousal when it is 'acting' rather than being in real danger (Porges, 2011). Further, one of the consistent findings is that actors experience constant pressure from all dimensions and often have past traumas. Thus, when recreating trauma through memory recall or experiencing trauma through the characters' lives, actors are largely susceptible to being less resilient in managing stress (Van der Kolk, 1994).

Geer (1993) gives the example of the 'psychic garden' stating:

*"When actors water and fertilize in the patterns of Macbeth, or Hedda, or Blanche, their gardens grow differently; dark blooms flourish, weed crop up.*



*The actor isn't the only one tending the garden. Other actors, directors, creators and audience all have a hand in the process. Over the length of a rehearsal and a run...the actors garden changes considerably. The result, to a greater or lesser degree, is that the characterization process reprograms actors onstage and off".*

The image of other people who are untrustworthy tending their psychic garden shows just how vulnerable actors must make themselves. This idea of laying everything bare and allowing people to tamper with parts of their selves seems to strip actors of all power, autonomy and control. However, Bloch (1993) believes actors take on characters out of habit and to have a souvenir of their validity as artists, and therefore don't want to give it up.

Not only can the actor blur with the character but the emotional intensity can stay with the individual after. This is documented in the previous research and named the 'emotional hangover' (Bloch, 1993), 'post-dramatic stress disorder' (Seton, 2008) or 'psychological fallout' (Burgoyne et al., 1999). This refers to actors being unable to withdraw from the emotional content within their roles particularly if using negative emotions such as fury, terror or hate. Bloch (1993), found that actors often remained in the emotional state of the character a week after the performance. This could explain some of the lows or intense emotions that participants described in this study after they have finished a show or a job. Further, there is the idea that if an emotion is fully discharged, it tends to chronically develop until another episode of the same emotion is strong enough to precipitate a catharsis of the original (Clynes, 1977). For example, if someone does not fully grieve a loss or acknowledge how hurt they have been in a situation when they are playing a role and the emotions for the character may be the same the emotion from the personal incident can overflow. Here it is important to remember this may not be happening in a safe environment with trusted people. Additionally, with the participant talked about having memories that were from the character, it is important to be aware that trauma, cannot always be distinguished between

real or not and can reorganise our memories (Koss, Figueredo, Bell, Tharan & Tromp, 1996). This idea is quite alarming that actors could embed their characters experience into themselves and the effect follow them throughout their lives.

Ludwig, (1995), well known for his work and writings with artists struggling with their mental wellbeing writes in his book:

*“Those who delve inward and use emotional experiences as the raw material for their creative output are more likely to experience the double-edged sword of creative activity. While the creative process lets them fester and channel their painful experiences through the power of their expression, they sometimes can not contain the emotional forces unleashed through their probing.” (p175).*

I feel it is important to note that I relate to this process in a way. I want to let the reader know I am not overly shocked or disgusted by these findings. If I conceive the idea that my brother was to die, (and this is something I could do quite easily). I could produce an emotional reaction. However, I think a lot of people do not have this embodiment process so instantaneously. Also, what is different is perhaps the way the participant is using this as a tool to get to somewhere and might be purposely replaying this to manipulate their emotions which I do not do.

Box 16. Reflexivity

The findings suggest actors recognise they are engaging in unhealthy strategies. They go towards their pain to channel it rather than avoid it. Participants repeatedly engage in the process of ‘using themselves’. They manipulate their emotional processes, bodies and imagination whilst trying to survive within an industry of instability and pressure, actors can undoubtedly create and sustain further suffering to themselves. Whilst

previous literature has acknowledged the embodiment of the acting profession (Seton, 2004, 2010). This is the first study that has explored the participant's processes in depth.

#### **4.7 Category 3. Impact**

This third category draws together the first two categories to look at the impact on the individual actor. Whilst this study was primarily looking at psychological impact, there were significant social and physical impacts. As a counselling psychologist, I believe it is important to acknowledge the three and how they interact. I do not feel it is possible to separate them.

#### **Psychological Consequences**

Much of the psychological impact has been noted already. We have seen how through using themselves an actor's psychological wellbeing can be destabilised. As they draw on traumatic memories an actor is opening themselves to disembodiment from their sense of self, and the character and the cast members may shape their identity as they work in an almost tantric state. Due to the huge amount of pressures they are under in a role and through constantly engaging in a fantasy world, actors are prone to dissociate, absorb intensity and evoke a feeling that the character operates independently from them. This can cause the actor's memories to be reorganised and for them to stay in the character's emotional state for up to a week after performance. Actors experience low mood, anxiety, nightmares, a change in themselves, 'going a bit mad' and a change in personality.

In addition, findings from this study suggest that the actor's psychological wellbeing is exposed to the harshness of the culture in the acting industry. According to this study, actors are judged, 'broken', manipulated physically and emotionally, criticised, pressured, sexualised, under-supported, humiliated, helpless, lonely and in insecure working environments with unstable relationships. Actors describe having breakdowns, constantly

overthinking and developing mental health illnesses from this pressure. These shocking findings have been somewhat explored earlier in this chapter. The following sections will examine some of the areas not yet emphasised.

One of the key things regularly reported in the data was the concept of self-worth. To my knowledge, no studies have looked or found anything regarding an actor's self-worth. However, there is one study that interviewed performing artists across several domains which included one actor who reported feeling constantly exposed to criticism and judgement (Hays and Brown, 2004). In this study, actors talk about the scrutiny they are under, the rejection they face, the high levels of competition, constantly questioning themselves and overthinking. How we self-evaluate and form our self-worth is crucial to psychological and social well-being. Having a positive sense of self-worth acts as a protective factor and a non-specific risk factor in physical and psychological health (Mann, Hosman, Schaalma & De Vries, 2004). The beliefs and evaluations people hold about themselves can determine who they are, what they can do and what they can become (Burns, 1982). It is widely documented in the literature that self-worth acts as a powerful, inner influence providing an internal guiding mechanism, steering and nurturing an individual through life, governing their behaviour, concepts and feelings about themselves. It is this self-worth that gives them the ability to deal with challenges in life, (Mann et al.; Seligman, 1975; Bandura, Adams & Beyer 1977; Bowlby 1980).

The findings in the present study seem to show a split in positive and negative aspects of self-worth. On one hand, actors experience so much hardship and rejection that it would seem their self-worth is quite strong in motivating them to keep pursuing this career, that they have what it takes and a sense of being special. On the other hand, it was very clear through the data that participants constantly question themselves, they overthink their every move, and that there is a deep sense of doubting whether they can

continue in this career. However, perhaps this is more to do with the constant attack on self-worth that causes them to constantly question their path rather than initial low self-worth.

It is documented that an unstable and poor self-worth can play a crucial role in the development of a range of mental health problems such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, anxiety, violence, substance abuse, depression and high-risk behaviours (Mann et al., 2004). There is some support for this from the current study. To take just one example, one participant talked about how his eating disorder, which he feels has been triggered by through the constant scrutiny, the pressure to look and act a certain way, and insecure relationships which impacted his self-worth. We know that interpersonal dysfunction and self-worth based on weight and shape are key constructs for eating disorders. Although the relationship between these two concepts is under-researched (Rieger, Dolan, Thomas & Bell, 2017).

Within the data, participants talk about mental health symptoms they experience because of their career. This adds to the research that already suggests actors are vulnerable to depression, eating disorders and substance abuse (Waterman, 2013). Maxwell et al., (2015) suggests that anxiety, stress and depression are experienced in actors above levels in the general population. Another finding in the current study is the idea of actors being incredibly lonely within the industry. Participants reported it to be the loneliest industry you could work in. we know that loneliness can have a detrimental impact on psychological wellbeing. Lamster et al., (2017), found that a lack of social support is a significant predictor of loneliness and that when people have low self-esteem they tend to generate negative schemata of other people which mediates the association between loneliness and paranoia. This demonstrates the links between low self-esteem, a lack of social support and how it impacts on an actor's mental health. It gives insight into actor's accounts of their experience of being in a different country on

tour, being lonely and under-supported by their cast, stuck within the four walls of their hotel and their experiences of paranoia.

Psychological wellbeing with actors has only been explored explicitly by one other study (Robb et al., 2018), and general wellbeing with actors has been looked at through Maxwell et al., (2015). The findings from the current study very much support these two studies as previously discussed.

### **Psychological Consequences and the Previous Literature**

There is a small body of other research which includes psychological processes such as performance anxiety, performance-emotional problems and emotional regulation (See chapter 1). However, these studies have described some of the effects actors experienced but not explained them in terms of psychological wellbeing. These powerful experiences can be psychologically destabilizing (Nuetzel, 2000). This seems in line with the experience participants were describing in this study, the overall impact the work has on them and how they feel destabilized. However, other research suggests that as a group, actors tend to be stable that they are more extroverted, agreeable and empathetic (Nettle, 2006), expressive yet self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) and embrace imaginative assertiveness and intrinsic motivation (Gluck, Ernst & Floortje, 2002). All of which could act as protective factors against psychological vulnerability. This is fine, but subsequent studies suggest that these findings are not generalizable and that we must proceed with caution and be aware that whilst some actors may experience stability and positive personality traits, for others the risks posed for mental wellbeing for reasons discussed. These findings raise concerns in relation to the actor's psychological wellbeing and adds support to the theories that enhanced engagement of traumatic memories into a personal narrative may be indicative of posttraumatic stress symptoms.

## **Social Consequences**

Actors frequently referred to the impact of being an actor on one's social wellbeing. Participants discussed the impact on their personal relationships, family dynamics and their place in society. In terms of romantic relationships, there were various negative consequences that emerged from the data. The first was due to the practicalities of being an actor, the inability to commit, be in one place and to follow through with agreements in the relationships if an audition or job came up. The second was due to the impact that a role had on the individual and how that can be transferred into their personal relationships. For example, a participant described playing a character where she was raped, after playing this role she found herself isolating and avoiding intimacy in her personal life. In other words, the participant is experiencing symptoms of trauma that she experienced when in character which are now bleeding into her personal life. Another spoke about her boyfriend would be jealous if she had to take part in an intimate scene as part of her role which would put a strain on their relationship.

In terms of the impact on family dynamics, participants described how acting often takes you away from your home. Actors expressed feeling guilty about being far from their families. It can also put a strain on family relationships during the periods of unemployment, particularly if the actor is staying or depending on the family. Another aspect is for women, it was talked about that actors do not get maternity leave, or if they are parents do not have the flexibility to do what it takes to succeed in a career.

## **Social Consequences and the Previous Literature**

As discussed earlier in the chapter there is a longstanding body of evidence in the literature to support the concept that positive social relations have a strong correlation with psychological wellbeing (Bowlby, 1969). Studies suggest that having supportive social relationships can reduce the adverse effects of a wide range of stressful life events (Caplan & Cobb 1979; House; 1981; Mitchell, Cronkite & Moos, 1983). Additionally, studies suggest that

having positive social support benefits psychological wellbeing irrespective of the level of life stress (Lin, SimeOne, Ensel & Kuo, 1979). Therefore, not only having others to turn to may enhance wellbeing directly and help facilitate coping with stress. For an actor, if their relationships are unsustainable, strained or separated by distance there may be a negative impact on their wellbeing. No research has documented this social impact previously.

Throughout the data in the current study actors talked about being unemployed, financially strained, having to work demeaning jobs, and how this impacts their wellbeing. This qualitative account adds depth to previous documents around the financial instability of actors found in Seton et al., (2015). Relative deprivation has been highlighted as a source of strain found in a study looking at 72 celebrities who had committed suicide, five of these were actors. Actors mentioned that they could not keep up financially with their friends of similar ages and backgrounds in terms of finances. The second source of strain found was aspiration versus reality, this was where there was a discrepancy between a person's aspiration and the reality that the person has to live in their daily lives. The larger the discrepancy, the greater the strain (Zhang, Tan & Lester, 2013). These findings support the strain theory of suicide which assumes that two sources of psychological strain typically precedes suicidal behaviour (Zhang, Wieczorek, Conwell & Tu, 2011). According to these findings, actors may be at a heightened risk of suicide.

Additionally, there was an element of shame felt throughout the data, where actors felt ashamed of their periods of unemployment and would avoid engaging in conversations about their career. This supports the findings of Robb et al., (2018), who found actors to feel outside of society due to their untypical lifestyle which resulted in them feeling ashamed and undervalued. Shame has been shown to have a high correlation with fantasy, with the idea that an individual might try to escape their feelings of shame through fantasy.



However, it was found that whilst escape might be temporarily found the feeling of shame did not reduce (Thomson & Jaque, 2015).

Shame is also linked with a heightened sense of social awareness, feeling small, worthless, incompetent and frustrated with oneself (Izard, 1977; Welten, Zeelenberg & Breugelmans 2012). Shame has been evidenced to disrupt functioning in talking, acting and thinking clearly (Gilbert, 1997). Shame has been argued to disrupt ongoing activities, to motivate an inability to talk, act, or think clearly (Gilbert, 1997). It also has a negative effect at the interpersonal level with strong associations with withdrawal, isolation and inhibited social interactions (Haidt, 2003). Shame also acts as a source of conflict in personal relationships (Kelly & Lamia, 2018). Overall, shame seems to be contributing negatively to an actor's wellbeing. This may not be the case though as recent research has shown that shame can be used to motivate growth, learning and desire to change (Kelly & Lamia, 2018). However, does this apply if the shame is not justified? I argue that shame acts a signal to us when we have done something wrong, the participants in this study are speaking more of a general sense of shame attributed to a different lifestyle rather than a response to a wrongdoing.

### **Physical Consequences**

Throughout the data, actors speak about the impact acting has on their body. They describe their bodies to be their tool. They use memory recall to create strong emotional reactions to which their physiology responds (i.e. crying or feeling anxious). The actor lets the emotional and physical sensations simmer throughout their bodies and it brings the character to life. Other than documenting mental health problems that produce physiological symptoms there has been no mention of the impact of the actor's body in the previous literature. Perhaps because compared to other performing artists such as dancers and musicians the impact is not as significant on the body. However, despite the separation between actors and other performing artists,

participants in this study regularly mentioned things that we know impact the body.

Actors discussed being in training and physically being pushed to exhaustion in order to create an emotional response from them. Participants described having to do boot- camp-like exercises to get to this point. Additionally, when actors often have to work long hours, the conditions can be unpredictable, and they may repeat the same physical movements many times (especially if they are doing stunts or theatre performances) which can result in repetitive strain. We know that when we are exhausted, there is an impact on our wellbeing which can impact on losing work, functioning, health care use and may trigger mood or anxiety disorders (Tuithof, et al., 2017).

From actor's accounts, they are not solely using their bodies, it is not a matter of muscle memory but a specific process of engaging cognitive and physical skills at the same time. Research on the bodily aspect of exhaustion has mostly been examined from a physical perspective. However, more recently studies looking at workers who have to think and use their bodies at the same time, (such as firemen, doctors) have started to show that when we attempt cognitive and physical tasks at the same time the prefrontal cortex is activated causing our bodies to become fatigued much sooner than if we were solely participating in a physical task (Mehta & Parasuraman, 2014). Further, it shows this process can cause working memory performance to degrade (McKendrick, Mehta, Ayaz, Scheldrup & Parasuraman, 2017).

In Seton's (2010), 'Ethics of Embodiment' paper he referenced a quote from Casey (1998, p207):

*"There is not a word, not a form of behaviour which does not owe something to purely biological being – and which at the same time does not elude to the simplicity of animal life, and cause forms of vital behaviour to deviate from their pre-ordained direction, through a sort of leakage and through a genius for ambiguity which might serve to define human beings".*

What Casey is suggesting is that humans are a complexity of natural and cultural learnings, but these fill a biological being. In other words, for an actor, they have their way of being, they can be taught different bodily behaviours but that is not separate from the biological reactions that occur. What happens when the body is manipulated repeatedly is a question that can be somewhat answered by looking at the trauma literature. It is clear that the body cannot distinguish between what is real and not real (Levine & Levine, 2010), and therefore the body produces the same biological reactions at the moment whether an actor is playing a character being raped or is actually being raped.

Secondly, there is the impact of pressure on the body. A few studies have previously looked at performance anxiety within actors. Whilst this was not necessarily something particularly prominent within the present study's research findings, the aspect of pressure on the job to the best standard possible is repeatedly discussed. Contrary to previous findings (Steptoe et al, 1995; Goodman & Kaufman, 2014), it tended to be the men in the current study that talked about the pressure facing them in a job. This could be due to the qualitative nature of the study giving more space for participants to think about and discuss their experiences compared with quantitative questionnaires. I also acknowledge this could be to do with the constructivist perspective of this study with my perception influencing the findings. What we do know from performing arts research is, that there is a large impact on one's body during performance including an increase in heart rate and blood pressure (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter & Salomon, 1999), rapid breathing, dry mouth, tremors and temporary cognitive impairment (Simmonds & Southcott, 2012). The immune system also releases cortisol and pro-inflammatory cytokines which can inhibit the immune system (Dickerson, et al., 2009); Dickerson, et al., 2008). Kemeny (2003), also found that as the body reacts to the pressure of performing to perfection anxiety levels are significantly heightened.

The impact of anxiety that actors may consistently face must without a doubt take a toll on their physical wellbeing. We know from a neurobiological perspective that when stress is negative and exceeds an individual's ability to cope, it tires the body system and causes physical or behavioural problems. This leads to overreaction, confusion, poor concentration, anxiety and lower performance (Salleh, 2008). This is the same process that is occurring when participants use the process of 'body hacking'. Actors describe bringing themselves into an emotional and mental space that is so tangible that they can manipulate their psychological state and produce physiological reactions. As mentioned previously, cognitively the body cannot distinguish between what is a real threat and what is fiction (Levine & Levine, 2010; Rothschild & Rand, 2006). Therefore, the body produces the same biological reactions in the moment despite whether an actor is playing a character or experiencing something real. It is unlikely actors can escape this process without consequences.

Animal studies have shown that exposure to chronic stress strengthen the nerve impulses along the pathways of noradrenergic responsiveness to previous stressors and increases the release of norepinephrine in the hippocampus and other brain regions (Abercrombie & Jacobs 1987). This could mean when actors manipulate their bodies repeatedly, they are strengthening the neuro-biological processes that respond to stress, this could mean that they are constantly nearer a heightened state of stress in both their work and daily lives. Repeated arousal of the stress response strengthens the chemical and psychological pathways meaning an individual can experience long- term consequences of stress (McEwen, 2008). For example, their wellbeing can be threatened (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012), their resilience's is significantly lowered (Luthans & Youssef, 2007) and when many stressors are present recovery is often unachievable (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). In terms of health, we know sudden emotional stresses, especially anger can trigger arrhythmias, heart attacks and sudden death (Krantz, Whittaker, Sheps, 2011). If stress is ongoing it can make you feel fatigued, have poor concentration, create headaches and stomach pain,

muscle tensions or pains, dizziness and irritability (NHS, 2017). It also makes any existing problems you have worse (Glaser & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2005), and can cause disease due to the changes in your body or poor coping mechanisms people use to combat stress (i.e. overeating, alcohol use, social isolation), (Krantz & McCeney, 2002).

This causes me to think of my personal experiences of actors. With friends I have that are actors, I sometimes perceive them as having a lower resilience to life events. They also always seem to be tired and slightly panicky. This could be just my experience of a particular group or it could be for these physiological reasons.

#### Box 17. Reflexivity

Participants also talked about developing muscle memory from a character they have played, whilst this may not always be harmful if it is a hand gesture or a twitch, it could have wider effects if the muscle memory is to flinch when a man comes near you or to tense up when becoming intimate with your partner.

The other impact on an actor's body could be the swing of chemicals released in the regular highs and lows that actors describe. Actors talk about being on top of the world, enjoying glamorous experiences and being the centre of attention. These experiences suggest that chemicals such as dopamine, endorphin, oxytocin and serotonin are firing at such high levels actors are experiencing ecstatic states and then their situation crashes and the chemicals are rapidly depleted. We know when people experience low moods for sustained periods of time, there is a significant impact on their physical health with increased risk of cardiovascular disease (Pan et al., 2011), metabolic syndrome (Vancampfort et al., 2015) and diabetes (Vancampfort et al., 2016) to name a few. Further, the co-occurrence of depression and a physical disease was associated with worse health outcomes (Moussavi et al., 2007).

Further, image related pressures from being in the industry may render an individual susceptible to eating disorders, body image disorders and other mental health problems. These all have components that impact the individual's body. Take the example of the participant who was suffering from symptoms of an eating disorder, this could impact his cardiovascular system, gastrointestinal system, neurological functioning, endocrine functioning, mortality and have a range of other health complications (National Eating Disorders, 2018).

#### **4.8 Category 4. Addictive Nature of Acting**

This category outlines and discusses the findings on *why* actors stay within this line of work despite the negative impact it has on their wellbeing on a multi-faceted scale.

Although the data was full of the negative consequences of acting, there was an underpinning of reasons as to why actors continue to pursue their career despite the hardships they face. In this core category, we see that it is the sheer love of acting that is so highly addictive to the actor that they do it despite the negative impact, their constant questioning of self and career despite their own conviction. Implicit within our understanding of addiction is a measure of the negative consequences that must be experienced by a behaviour to justify the use of this word in clinical or academic context. This is combined with the rewards (physiological, psychological, social and cultural) associated with this behaviour which determine the likelihood of involvement in the particular activity (Griffiths, 2005).

Participants recalled the good things about acting describing it as the best feeling in the world and that they simply could not do it. Participants described the highs and the rush they get from obtaining and carrying out an

acting job and the intense lows they experience when not working. These highs are described unlike any other feeling, the rush and intensity being so addictive that actors are constantly seeking to re-experience it. From these accounts, there does not seem to be a middle ground or attempts to regulate the highs and lows. This seemed to be justified by the idea of sacrificing themselves for the art and the idea that actors live special lives to tell people's stories and that is their contribution to society. There is a strong sense of pride actors carry when they play a role and that when they hear applause or get the recognition it feeds their self-worth and nurtures this craving they have to be loved.

All the participants disclosed some form of trauma through their interviews and there was this sense of escaping and entering another world which was so vivid, tangible and, freeing for them. One participant talks about the hardship of acting saying she almost thrives on the self-punishing aspect and the intensity of the emotions, even the dark ones. In their recent paper Robb et al., (2018), describe a similar finding in their thematic analysis that they have termed 'The Calling'. This theme describes the feeling of 'a calling' that actors felt to become and continue being an actor. They describe how this calling gives participants purpose and a sense of identity, particularly during the times of purposelessness, fear and loss of identity that would overcome them between jobs. The category of 'Addictive Nature of Acting' supports these previous findings. These are the first findings to document the gravities of the pull actors feel between looking after themselves, and following this 'calling'.

However, I feel like it is more than a 'calling'. Participants in the present study, seem to describe existing in a state of inner turmoil where all the evidence is pointing towards them discontinuing acting being the healthiest thing for them and yet, they cannot do it. The pull to act is so strong. They will sacrifice their relationships, their status in society, their physical and psychological health just to touch that feeling of working again. Whilst the

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM-5) does not provide a clear definition of addiction that is not substance-related (a behavioural addiction), Kardefelt-Winther et al., (2017), a group of experts in behavioural addiction proposed a definition based on their collective understanding of harmful and persistent problem behaviours:

*“A repeated behaviour leading to significant harm or distress. The behaviour is not reduced by the person and persists over a significant period of time. The harm or distress is of a functionally impairing nature”.*

Using this definition and applying it to our findings, actors do seem to suggest they experience repeated significant distress to their social, psychological and physical wellbeing. Whilst the distress does not stop them from acting (although it might be a factor in the audition process, whether they obtain jobs and how they perform whilst on a job), it seems to impair their relationships, physical and psychological health. In addition, there are high levels of trauma amongst actors (Thomson & Jaque, 2012) and there is a high correlation between trauma and addiction, with the addiction being used as an attempt to self-regulate (Padykula & Conklin, 2010). Further, studies have shown that individuals with behavioural addiction and with substance use disorder report high levels of sensation-seeking and impulsivity (Lejoyeux, Tassin, Solomon & Ades, 1997). This is in line with the personality reports of actors (see section 1.5.1). Maxwell, Seton & Szabo (2015), reported the co-morbidity of psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder. This co-morbidity is similarly found in individuals with addictive disorders (Grant, Potenza, Weinstein & Gorelick, 2010). However, interpretation of comorbidity must be interpreted with caution as causal effects may occur on a behavioural level. These findings support the concept of acting being addictive and as the framework suggests a shift in our thinking of the experience of professional actor and in turn influences direction for treatment pathways.



Whilst this might seem like a dramatic suggestion, and I do not wish to pathologise those who bring so much richness to our every-day lives through their storytelling but to understand and support this population.

#### **4.9 Theoretical Framework**

This section proposes a theoretical model of the processes of a working actor. The analysis revealed a layered model of the working actor, the categories of which interplay in a complex way, each feeding into the other respectively. A core-connecting category of 'Addictive Nature of Acting' was identified, which applied to the three main categories (see Figure 13).

#### **4.10 Model of a Working Actor:**

- In choosing to enter this industry, the actor becomes caught up in the culture and pressures of being an actor.
- When at work, the actor engages in unhealthy processes in order to embody his or her character.
- There is a particularly negative impact on the actor's individual wellbeing.
- Despite the negative consequences it has on their personal wellbeing, the actor seeking the highs achieved through their work maintains this cycle.

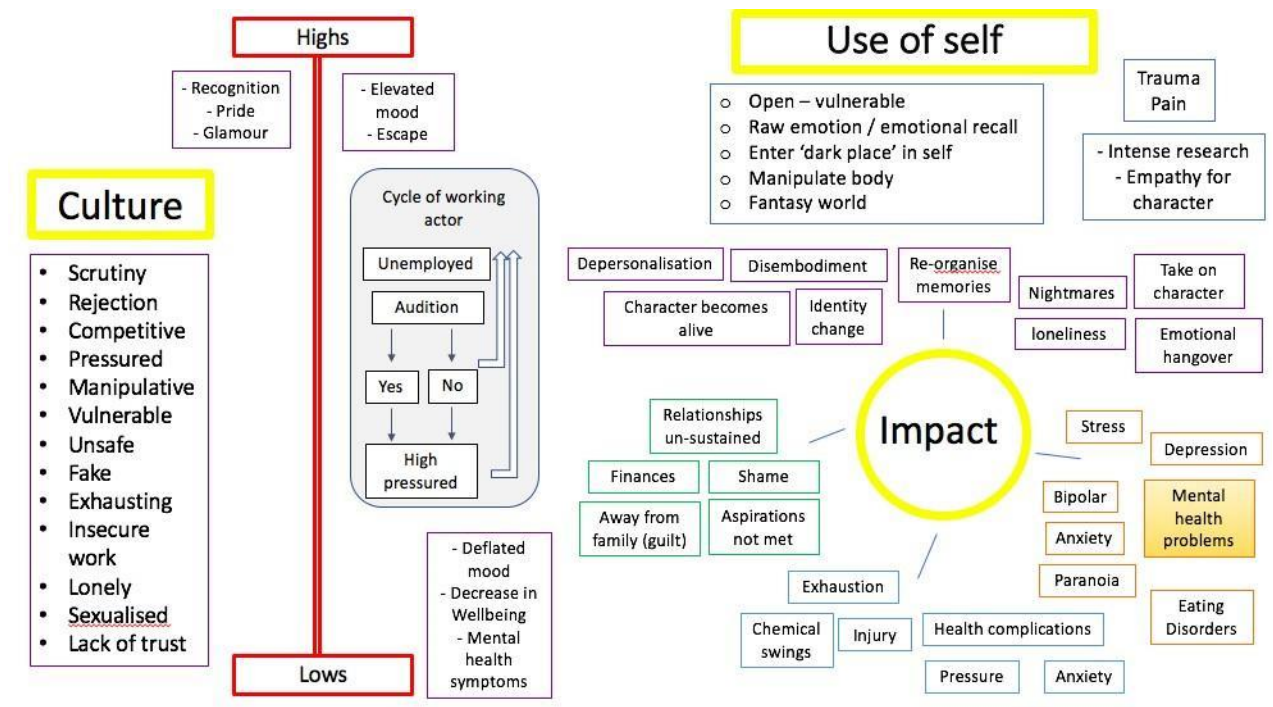


Figure 13. Developed Theoretical Framework 'Model of a Working Actor'

This model shows how the categories relate to each other. The *culture and pressures* of the industry are permeated throughout each stage of an actor's life, from when they are trying to get a job, to when they are working on set. In addition to these cultural pressures is the *acting process* itself. Since the actor uses all parts of themselves when trying to embody their character, the techniques involved in playing their role are uniquely demanding, both mentally and physically. This means the actor is working in a highly pressurised culture with exclusively demanding processes, which have a large *impact* on their individual wellbeing. Actors are aware of these impacts, yet their addiction to the acting experience keeps them within this cycle.

Within this model, an actor could be experiencing any of the processes outlined. Often multiple processes occur at one time which has a huge impact on the individual's wellbeing. An actor is training, seeking employment and working within this harmful culture. When an actor is unemployed they experience extreme lows, perhaps due to an 'emotional

hangover' (Bloch, 1992) from their previous character or from not having any work. When at work, actors use themselves in particularly exposing ways, whilst managing their insecure environment. This, in turn, has extremely negative impacts on their wellbeing. However, the high experienced from entering a fantasy world on stage, receiving applause from an audience and from being treated like a star feels compelling to the actor, so much so, that they keep going back to it, despite the largely negative impact it has on their wellbeing.

If a psychologist can understand these interactive processes they will be better able to tailor their services to meet the needs of actors. They will not only be able to help actors develop strategies to regulate their highs and lows and manage the pressures of the acting culture (e.g. working out where their emotional and physical boundaries lie) but will also play an important role in empowering actors to make cultural changes within their own industry. Psychologists might also champion the implementation of ethical practice in training and practice. This may involve teaching actors to engage with embodied practice, listening and responding to it, rather than dis-embodimenting it. It may also involve helping actors think about their past experiences and explore their dark places.

Many participants talked about coping strategies such as exercise, yoga and self-help work. Psychologists working with actors may be able to help actors identify the cognitive processes being activated at each stage of their work and therefore develop coping strategies to help them cope better. Through supporting actors in these ways, psychologists can treat existing mental health conditions amongst actors more appropriately and help prevent further illnesses from developing amongst this client group.

Additionally, psychologists might also use this framework to champion the acting industry to make recommendations for best practice in training schools, auditions and in work. They might be able to start a cultural change,

which could involve creating greater awareness of the negative impact of acting on an actor's personal wellbeing. From this awareness, a cultural shift might arise, resulting in the industry looking at systemic issues that can be addressed to enhance the care of actors. Additionally, appropriate support for actors to be put in place so they can best manage their career.

#### **4.11 Original Findings**

Due to being one of the first studies of its nature and the first study to look across an actors' working life rather than a specific area, this research has added depth to the recent research that exists with the data body and it has generated many original findings.

##### **Original Findings**

- Qualitative data regarding the impact of competition and judgement in training
- The impact of unemployment on an actor
- The highs and lows an actor experiences
- Qualitative capture of the loneliness actors experience
- Understanding of multiple coinciding pressures actors face
- In-depth detail about the relationships with other actors
- Multiple processes involved in playing a character and mechanisms behind *how* that is done
- How these processes intertwine and relate to the acting culture
- Insight into actors' experience of self-worth
- The impact on romantic relationships
- The impact of family relationships
- The impact on the body of actors
- The addictive nature of acting

Box 18. Original Findings

#### **4.12 Implications for the Acting Industry**

The findings from the present study may prove useful to support the development of best practice and care within the acting industry. This study gives insight into the processes and experiences of actors at a time in which society is witnessing the hardship that actors face.

I hope this study motivates training bodies, companies and unions to develop their efforts in supporting and developing actors safely. This study highlights the need for cultural change in the industry and for support to be offered to actors throughout their journey.

Further, these findings may have implications for the actors. All the participants spoke about self-awareness and self-development; the framework proposed can offer the individual actor insight into the psychological processes occurring through their career. Perhaps this awareness will develop self-reflection and growth for the actors and in turn ease their struggle. This is particularly relevant to that internal conflict of staying or leaving the industry and perhaps understanding those two pulls as an addiction can bring understanding, recovery and choice to their journeys.

#### **4.13 Implications for Counselling Psychology**

This research puts counselling psychology at the forefront of the limited knowledge into this area. It responds to the gap in the literature of psychological theory exploring the performing arts and more specifically actors and their wellbeing. Further, this research responds to the need and call for psychologists to intervene in unjust situations, at a time where the world has cast a scrutinising lens over the acting industry. This research is a first step into looking at difficulties facing the acting profession and a first response to the needs of the 'forgotten patients' (Brandfonbrener, 1992).

Counselling and applied psychologists have the potential to develop and implement useful interventions to support the needs of actors throughout their training and career. The unique role of counselling psychologists as practitioners and researchers place them as healthcare professionals who can provide vital services including; implementing ethical training, expanding knowledge, developing best practice recommendations, individually tailored techniques, support and a powerful voice in terms of promoting a shift in the culture of the acting industry.

The framework developed suggests a theory for counselling psychologists to draw on when working with actors and provides an understanding of the processes and experiences an individual may go through. The framework contributes to our current understanding of the acting culture and industry, shedding light on what it can be like for individuals training and working in such a high pressured, unstable and competitive environment. Secondly, the framework adds to our understanding of the psychological processes that occur whilst an individual journeys through this culture and in their work playing a character. Thirdly, this framework provides a more in-depth view of the impact on the individuals from their social, physical and psychological wellbeing. Lastly, this gives insight into the addictive nature of acting and the compulsion to do it, despite knowing it is potentially harmful. Taken together this is the first effort within the literature body to provide a combined picture of the actor's life.

Further, the study was purposeful in engaging constructivist grounded theory as a tool for researchers to embrace social change. Psychologists are in key leadership roles throughout services, policy and teaching. These findings provide psychologists with a framework to speak from in order to cultivate the social change that actors, the media and other professionals are calling for. The implications of this research puts psychologists in the position to lobby for change on a macro level, lead and consult on a micro level in order for the acting industry to strengthen its ability to support actors. As well as

making systemic change, the research points to specific recommendations that can support psychologists working with actors on an individual level. For example, a psychologist working with an individual whose a career was affecting their mental health might look to help the individual think about whether this is the right career for them. However, this framework tells us that understanding and approaching the individual's situation as an addiction could create more positive treatment outcomes for that individual. It might be helpful to explore the root of the acting addiction and to develop ways for the actor to limit damage to self in the process, by encouraging them not to use memory recall or to develop cool down strategies. Of course, this varies person to person and inter-sectional factors need to be taken into account, for example, the data explores how a female experiences discrimination in relation to maternity processes and access to roles, thus cannot be treated as a white male actor. Hence, collaborating and working out together what stage of the actor's cycle the individual is at and co-producing intervention ideas, is crucial.

#### **4.14 Strengths and Limitations**

Whilst the current study has yielded interesting results, which build upon and contribute to the existing literature body, there are limitations which must be considered.

#### **Recruitment**

Mason (2010), conducted an analysis of over five hundred PhD qualitative studies and found the mean sample size used was thirty-one participants. The current study is decidedly smaller with eight participants. Although this number is reasonable for a grounded theory study and saturation was determined, a greater number may have led to more diversity within the sample. Nonetheless, in a recent qualitative study that interviewed 20 actors, the authors also reported that eight interviews appeared to be sufficient to reach saturation (Robb et al., 2018).

Secondly, participants who took part in this study self-selected as they identified with the subject topic. The reasons motivating them to participate could be varied. However, the experiences of this sample cannot be extended to *all* actors, particularly those perhaps that do not resonate with this subject topic either for different or positive experiences of their acting work. Further, all participants were currently between jobs, hence their availability to participate, according to the framework generated, when participants are out of work or are on a 'low'. Potentially, actors interviewed whilst working and on a 'high' might generate different findings.

Thirdly, the participants' length of time as a professional actor varied from 1-20 years and perhaps a more homogenous sample would demonstrate particular experiences and needs. However, this did not affect the data from having countless reoccurring categories throughout the data body and it could be argued that the data provides insight across the lifespan of an actor's career.

Fourthly, whilst most participants had worked internationally with different industries (i.e. Hollywood), only one participant was not from the UK industry. The experiences of participants could vary depending on their initial experiences of training, professional development and where they are located in terms of work opportunities available to them.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory studies have been criticised as being tied to subjectivist and interactionist accounts and therefore being 'inward-looking' (Layder, 1994, 2006). Due to this, the structural and ideological factors are often played down. From the outset, I wanted to approach the study as openly as possible. I kept my question broad and it had a number of aspects, at times throughout the study a part of me wondered whether the scope was too



broad. Some aspects of my topic feel worthy of more in-depth study independently. Due to taking a wide berth, the study generated a vast amount of data, which required considerable time to analyse and I was forced to make choices on which aspects to focus on. Other researchers have already identified this feature of grounded theory as a limitation (See Chapter 2). A difficult aspect of this research was how to structure the findings and what parts of the data to include and leave out. It helped to constantly draw myself back to the research question in order to focus the direction. Having said that, this was the first piece of research not to focus on just one specific area with actors and being open to almost anything and everything may have allowed the participants to drive the focus of the research allowing for organic development. I found that the methodology enabled this process to happen as it allowed me to explore the topic in totality and give attention to both wider social processes and lived experiences. I wanted to value the experience, thoughts and feelings of the participants, whilst interpreting what I was hearing and relating this to wider social processes. I found I could explore knowledge from both the 'insider' and 'outsider' positions (Charmaz, 1995). Additionally, I found that the philosophy and method of grounded theory offered me the chance to explore deeper factors, beyond personal stories. It led more to explore the complexities of the acting industry and the relationships between categories that were crucial to understanding this research topic.

Nonetheless, I do agree that the demands of a grounded theory researcher are high. It involved significant time and personal commitment. It is an approach that generates its own levels of complexities and large quantities of data and both experience and expertise are needed. This is something novice researchers should keep in mind when adopting this methodology for exploring more complex and sensitive topics.

Another criticism is that the methods and language of grounded theory could be too deductive and prescriptive (See Chapter 2). However, I did not find

this to be the case with this study. On the contrary, I found the initial stages of line-by-line coding, developing codes and raising categories a very interactive and inductive process (Charmaz, 2012). The clear framework and method of analysis were helpful in dealing with the quantity of the data.

Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006), have criticised grounded theory stating that the method does not aim to provide full individual accounts of evidence as it seeks to move a theoretically sensitive analysis of participants stories onto a higher level, whilst still retaining a clear connection to the data from which it was derived. It is worth considering this issue as grounded theory requires the researcher to raise the level of analysis. I felt a certain tension here. I wanted to remain true to constructivist grounded theory, and I wanted to develop a conceptual analysis that created theoretical insights. I also wanted to stay true to participants' stories. As my analysis took shape, I was mindful of the risk of moving further away and being detached from participants' stories. However, whilst I was aware of this potential limitation, I found each data account to interweave into the next so strongly that this process took a very natural shape.

As I start looking across the data for categories and start raising the analysis, I feel the data pulling me. It's like a plant that is growing and all I can do is care for it as it takes its natural course. I feel as if the data speaks and it's like it's trapped and wants you to let it out. Perhaps this is in line with the stories emerging in the media now that have been waiting for so long. Perhaps it's the early years of research in this area just bursting to come through. Perhaps it is my voice and my experiences leading it, however, I keep trying to check it so it is not as the data leads me through

Box 19. Reflexivity

Whilst this process felt like a creative process, on reflection, it might have been beneficial to add an additional stage to the process that enabled

participants to comment and validate my interpretation of the data. Whilst this would have resource and time implications, I would consider introducing this in future studies of this nature. For example, maybe a focus group to explore the emerging tentative categories could provide essential insight.

An additional limitation of grounded theory relates to the debate surrounding the timing of the literature review (Chapter 1). Whilst some theorists argue that a literature review is not beneficial prior to fieldwork (Glaser, 1998), Charmaz (2014) took a different view justifying an early or minor review to provide context to the study. In this process Charmaz's advice was helpful for two reasons. Firstly, it was not possible to know at the start of the study what literature was more relevant and secondly, having an understanding of existing research on the topic from conducting an early review was helpful to shape my methodological design. It was particularly helpful for shaping the interview questions too. It was also helpful later in the research when it allowed me to generate a theoretical framework from the data and analysis. Whilst I felt guided by the data rather than the pre-existing theory I could return to the relevant literature to stimulate my thinking around the concepts that were being generated.

Whilst I believe the use of the grounded theory methodology was well justified for the present research, the reliance on interview methods alone may be a possible limitation of the study. Within a constructivist paradigm, the researcher constructs the theory, as such the findings represent just one of several possible constructions, theories and frameworks for a professional actor. Including alternative methods would have probably led to differing constructions of theory; for example, using ethnographic methods such as participant observation may have given a different perspective.

Overall, I found that constructivist grounded theory enabled me to elicit rich data from participants. It allowed me to explore both the experiences and process of actors as well as the relationship they share. At the same time

though, as previously stated, I was challenged by the huge amount of data generated by the constructivist grounded theory methodology and found that the analytical requirements of the process created some distance between the data and me. It is vital the researcher ensures to keep faith with the participant's stories throughout the process. Perhaps there are new ways I could test the methodology to improve it both to meet the objectives of the research but also as a key approach to social change.

#### **4.15 Future research**

All future research with actors is encouraged given the scant literature and the multitude of complexities discovered within the present study. Developing any of the original findings within this study would be of significant value to psychologists and actors. Further, exploration of the 'Addictive Nature of Acting' may be key to helping understand why acting feels so compelling. It would be particularly useful in understanding the psychological rewards that actors obtain through their acting, which appear to outweigh the costs. With this understanding, psychologists can better adapt their services to meet actors' needs. Research building on this framework and looking at preventative strategies and treatment outcomes with actors is crucial.

#### **4.16 Reflexivity**

Firstly, I feel immensely moved and privileged to have had this insight into my participant's lives. I feel passionate about this topic area and further research being done to support this population group. Secondly, I feel like I have learnt an incredible amount both as a researcher and as a practitioner through this journey. The findings have surprised me, in regards to the depth and severity of the impact on an actor. Looking back to the start of this research my knowledge was surface level. My prior assumptions were found to be accurate but only as a gateway to more a more complex network of processes and experiences. Thanks to the rich accounts of the participants,

I have developed a robust tapestry of understanding that is relevant both to actors but also to the world that watches their performances. Not only have I grown in understanding of this topic area, but within my confidence as a researcher as the research has grown, I have grown with it; learning to use constructivist grounded theory and develop a theoretical framework.

I believe that the framework developed gives the real first insight into 'what goes on' for an actor. I am fully aware that my experiences (as noted throughout), will have played a large role in the way the findings and framework have been constructed. Indeed, whilst writing up this research, various personal experiences have come to mind; I have chosen to include these throughout to demonstrate transparency. That being said, I do feel as though it has been the data that has prompted my personal experiences to come to mind rather than vice-versa. Nevertheless, the data would undoubtedly speak differently from another researcher's construction.

Writing the discussion chapter has been particularly challenging due to the overlapping nature of the categories and sub-categories. I wanted to write something clear that gives voice to participants accounts, that can be backed by evidence and is a pioneering piece of work. I wanted to acknowledge that not all experiences reported were negative, yet I felt it was hard to do this as the negative experiences were particularly dominating.

As a female myself, I felt especially connected to the hardships that female actors experience and a male researcher may have drawn different conclusions from the data. As a trainee psychologist, I tend to look at situations systemically and look to understand processes that occur within situations. When I embarked on my clinical training, I was working with actors and was naturally curious about the wider systemic issues within the acting industry; I could see actors struggling and looked to understand their processes. This has undoubtedly influenced how I have approached the research.



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## Appendix A: Ethical Approval



Psychology Research Ethics Committee  
School of Arts and Social Sciences  
City University London  
London EC1R 0JD

11<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Dear Sheena Kumar and Sara Chaudry

**Reference:** PSYETH (P/L) 16/17 30

**Project title:** A Grounded Theory Investigation into How Experiences of Working Actors Impacts on Their Psychological Wellbeing.

I am writing to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted approval by the City University London Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee.

### Period of approval

Approval is valid for a period of three years from the date of this letter. If data collection runs beyond this period you will need to apply for an extension using the Amendments Form.

### Project amendments

You will also need to submit an Amendments Form if you want to make any of the following changes to your research:

- (a) Recruit a new category of participants
- (b) Change, or add to, the research method employed
- (c) Collect additional types of data
- (d) Change the researchers involved in the project

### Adverse events

You will need to submit an Adverse Events Form, copied to the Secretary of the Senate Research Ethics Committee ([anna.ramberg.1@city.ac.uk](mailto:anna.ramberg.1@city.ac.uk)), in the event of any of the following:

- (a) Adverse events
- (b) Breaches of confidentiality

(c) Safeguarding issues relating to children and vulnerable adults

(d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues (a) and (b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than 5 days after the event. Issues (c) and (d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards

Course Officer

Chair

Email:

## **Appendix B: Advertising Poster**



**Department of Psychology**

**City University London**

**PARTICIPANTS      NEEDED      FOR**

**RESEARCH IN *ACTOR'S MENTAL WELLBEING***

***STUDY***

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study looking at how being an actor impacts on your mental health.

You would be asked to: take part in a 1:1 interview with the researcher to talk about your experiences.

Your participation would involve one initial interview,

each of which is approximately 60-90 minutes. (The researcher may contact you to request a second interview if needed).

For more information about this study, or to take part,  
please contact:

*The Researcher - Sheena Kumar*  
at

Email:

*The Research Supervisor – Sara Chaudry*  
at

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance  
through the *IRB* Research Ethics Committee, City University London.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the  
University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on or via email:

## Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet



### **‘A Grounded Theory Investigation into How Experiences of Actors Impacts on Their Mental Health’.**

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

This is a doctoral level study researching the experience of being an actor and how that may impact on an individual actors psychological wellbeing. The aim is to interview actors to understand more about their subjective experiences.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited as you meet the participant criteria of:

- ☐ Currently a working actor – acting being the main source of income comes from acting roles.
- ☐ Can identify with their chosen career to have impacted their psychological wellbeing.
- ☐ English speaking.
- ☐ 18+

#### **Do I have to take part?**

This research is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. If you feel any question the researcher asks you is too personal or intrusive you do not have to answer the question. This will not affect any future treatment of you, nor will you be penalized if you choose to withdraw.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

#### **What will happen if I take part?**



You will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes. This will be a semi-structured interview. In some instances, the researcher might re-approach you to follow up on your interview. This is a qualitative research study and will end in September 2018. The research can take place in a private setting of your choice. If you do not have an available setting the researcher can offer a confidential space at City University.

**What do I have to do?**

Before the interview, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form that describes the nature of the study and how it will maintain confidentiality. The consent form will describe your right to withdraw from the study at any time and your right not to answer any questions you do not wish to. During the interview you will be asked open-ended questions and will be prompted through the conversations.

You are invited to speak openly and confidentially about your experience as an actor.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

The disadvantage of taking part may be that you choose to relay a difficult or distressing experience. If this provokes any discomfort, stress or anxiety for you then the interview can be stopped.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The benefits of the study include providing insight for psychologists to understand and work better with the acting community. Further, this is a chance for you to tell the story of your experience which some may find to have a cathartic effect

**What will happen when the research study stops?**

In the unlikely event that this research study will be prematurely terminated, all data will be destroyed and will not be used for any other study.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Privacy and anonymity, all identifying information about you will be concealed. In written excerpts your name and identifying features will be changed. The anonymous data will only be seen by the researcher and her examiners all audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet which only the researcher will have access to. After 10 years the data will be destroyed securely.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

On completion of the study you will be contacted to inform you of the results of the research and to provide you with a copy of the publication.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You do not have to explain yourself and no penalty will be given to you. If you withdraw from the study after two weeks of interview, the data that you have given may have already been used for analysis. Therefore if you request to withdraw after these two weeks it will not be possible.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: [insert project title here]

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee  
Research Office, E214  
City University London  
Northampton Square  
London  
EC1V 0HB  
Email:

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been approved by City University London Psychology Research Ethics Committee,  
Reference: PSYETH (P/L) 16/17 30

**Further information and contact details**

Sheena Kumar, or [Sara Chaudry,

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

## Appendix D: Consent Form



Title of Study: ***'A Grounded Theory Investigation into How Experiences of Working Actors Impacts on Their Psychological Wellbeing'***.

Ethics approval code: PSYETH (P/L)

16/17 30

Please initial box

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | <p>I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records.</p> <p>I understand this will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being interviewed by the researcher</li><li>• Allowing the interview to be audiotaped</li><li>• Making myself available for a further interview should that be required</li></ul> |  |
|----|--|--|

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 2. | <p>This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s):</p> <p>To answer the research questions.</p> <p>I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write-up of the research.</p> |  |
| 3. | I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.  |  |
| 4. | I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information   |  |

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
|    | will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998. |  |
| 5. | I agree to take part in the above study.   |  |

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Note to researcher: to ensure anonymity, consent forms should NOT include participant numbers and should be stored separately from data.

## Appendix E: Debriefing Sheet for Participants



### *'A Grounded Theory Investigation into How Experiences of Actors Impacts on Their Mental Health.'*

#### **DEBRIEF INFORMATION**

Thank you for taking part in this study. Now that it's finished we'd like to tell you a bit more about it.

This research is to investigate how the culture and process of acting impacts on an individual's psychological wellbeing. Culture refers to the acting environment – classes, working (or not) and the dynamics within those settings. The process refers to what is happening when an actor takes on a character and how the embodied affect reacts with the individual.

This research looks at how those two things combined (plus anything else that arises from the interview) interact and effect the actors psychological wellbeing. An analysis method called 'Grounded Theory' will be used to analysis the data. From this research a theory will be produced about what causes the impact and what the impact is on individual actors. From here psychologists will be able to draw from the evidence in their work with them.

If this research has raised any concern for you can seek support from:

- ☐ Your GP
- ☐ The Samaritans by calling **116 123**
- ☐ If you wish to engage in counselling visit the British Psychological Society directory to find a psychologist near you on [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

We hope you found the study interesting. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

Researcher: Sheena Kumar,

Research Supervisor: *Sara Chaudry*,

Ethics approval code: PSYETH (P/L) 16/17 30

## **Appendix F: Interview Schedule**

1. Can you tell me about how you became an actor?
2. Can you tell me about the culture within the acting industry?
3. How does that impact to your wellbeing?
4. Can you tell me about the process that you go through when you play a character?
5. In what ways (if any) has this impacted your wellbeing?
6. What are the good things about acting?
7. whilst we've been talking is there anything that you haven't really thought of before this that's come up for you?
8. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the impact of your experiences better?

*Individual prompts were used between the structured questions to draw out the participants dialogue.*

## Appendix G: Example of Transcript and Coding

| Transcript from Participant 1   |   |
|---|---|
| R: Can you tell me about the culture within the acting industry?  | Initial coding  |
| P1: yeah...it's...quite....err... you have to be very ambitious and very determined. There's a number of factors involved to become succeed in inverted commas, but you have to be very ambitious it's a very ambitious (yawn), ruthless place and drama school is not a lot of fun in some ways, they are if you want to learn stuff but just in terms of people, it's quite bitchy. And theatre is very, I found theatre very difficult to work in. it's a very, generally sort of speaking a very public-school environment, most people there have been to public schools, on the whole quite posh. I mean not <i>a/ways</i> but on the whole and I just find with that comes a sort of weird arrogance as well and it all just becomes sort of cliquey and bitchy. My old headmaster used to say, he'd be like, he said it half-jokingly, but he meant it 'well you know if you have a bunch of women together it's like a wasp's nest in theatre, it's the worst thing ever'. Ha-ha and it was a bit like that in theatre, if you work on a play whether it was at drama school and the same experience professionally, the ensemble, the crew, the cast just everything can be so kinda of (yawn) bitchy and sort of horrible back stage and if you don't fit in for some reason then it can be really difficult and if some | <p>           Ambitious<br/>           Determined<br/>           Ambitious<br/>           Ruthless<br/>           Not fun<br/>           Learning<br/>           Bitchy<br/>           Theatre is difficult<br/>           Public school environment<br/>           Other actors<br/>           Other actors<br/>           Arrogance<br/>           Bitchy<br/>           Drama school<br/>           Theatre is difficult<br/>           Theatre is bitchy<br/>           Drama school<br/>           Theatre<br/>           Bitchy<br/>           Outcast<br/>           Difficult<br/>           Outcast<br/>           Other Actors         </p> |



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>people are really close then they will just like ostracize other people in the class if they don't like them or they don't fit in. I don't know if I'm explaining it very well, but yeah. Any other aspects you wanted to know about?</p>   |   |
| <p>R: Yes, how does the culture impact on your wellbeing?</p>  |   |
| <p>P1: err yes, it's interesting I mean, I think. I don't think it was very good because you have to deal with a lot of rejection, so there's lots of difficult aspects. There's the difficulty of the actor. one of my other old teachers used to say 'the job of the actor is when you're not working'. So when you have an acting job it's just yippee time and its fun</p> | <p>Impact</p> <p>Rejection</p> <p>Out of work</p> <p>On the job</p> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| to a certain extent but it's difficult especially when you start out and you are getting a lot of err... (yawn) knockbacks. Especially if you have been to drama school, and I was quite popular in drama school in some ways. I was certainly sort of elevated by the teachers, you know. Not like singled out for great things, I don't want to make it sound grandiose but like you know something along those lines. I got lots of main parts, they were all very encouraging, I had an agent by the time I left and I had also done a TV series before I had even left, do you know what I mean. Which was quite unusual do you know what I mean, I was like gearing myself up for non-stop work and it didn't quite happen. It wasn't a complete failure but it was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be you know. I thought I was like 'doo do doo' and that has quite a difficult impact because it has an impact on your self-worth you know what I mean because it's like that thing they say you're an ego maniac but with an inferiority complex, you know because you are just like completely, on the one hand you have to really believe in yourself and you have to have a lot of determination and really drive yourself forward and be like I'm going to get this job and a lot of passion which can be real you know but on the other hand even if you go to an audition and you nail it and you have all that ambition, determination and drive you still might not get the job. Even if you do a brilliant audition so it can get very disheartening and very confusing as well. You can genuinely go in and arguable do the best audition but you might not get the pat because you might not quite fit in. you might not have the right | <p>Difficult New actor Knockbacks Drama school Elevated by teachers</p> <p>Drama school Main parts Encouraging Working unusual Working as a student Expectation Hard Expectation Impact Self-worth Ego v inferior</p> <p>Self- belief Determination Drive Passion Might not get job Audition Rejection Disheartening Confusing Audition</p> <p>Looks Different reasons for rejection Job is to get part Negative impact Difficult Rejection</p> |
|--|---|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>look or get on with who else they've cast or you might look just like another guy they have cast in there. There could be a number of different reasons in there, but that's your job just to get the damn part so yeah that can have quite a negative, it's just quite difficult you know. Yeah, I'm sure it's not the only industry like that but it's quite hard dealing with all that rejection.</p> |  |
|---|--|

| Transcript from Participant 5  |   |
|--|---|
| R: In what ways (if any) has that impacted your wellbeing?   | Initial coding  |
| P5: I've definitely been affected before, I did a war play and it was erm that was also really intense because it was for hours every day of just like creating this imagery and research and reliving these hard experiences and you know you've obviously got to like see the blood, like relive it, you see the blood and you see I mean, you know I can't even imagine what people who have gone to war go through but just reliving those experiences just through the experiences they've had, gosh it's scary and erm I've also, I mean I think it was just because I was straining my voice but the night before my actual performance I started like puking up blood which was absolutely insane I've never done that in my life. That might have just been voice strain. | <p>Affected</p> <p>Intense</p> <p>Long hours</p> <p>Imagination / research</p> <p>Reliving experiences</p> <p>Imagination / embodiment</p> <p>Imagination / embodiment</p> <p>Imagination / embodiment</p> <p>Scary</p> <p>Voice strain</p> <p>Puking blood</p> <p>Impact</p> <p>Voice strain</p> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>P5: Yeah absolutely, its really intense, I think the most dangerous thing about acting is getting close to your life and the experiences you've had because they are defiantly that can just be very dangerous for your psyche I think and also just researching different characters, you know if you are playing someone like a murderer you need to understand why they are a murderer and you really need to have an honest outlook on humanity as a whole and really analyse everyone and that's, that can make you like really sad because you have to be honest, you can't sugar coat things you have to be very real and I understand why so many actors have depression because it's really hard to look at other people's lives and your own life and see what people do to each other, why they do it and it can be really sad. Even in comedy, that's when you really look at the honest truth of what people are going through you know. So yeah, I think it's, I mean that's just studying the work and people and taking aside your personal life as an actor and you know which is very uncertain and very you know, you never know where you're going to be, you could be away from your family for a year, it could be for four years you know. So, it sounds very depressing (laughter). There's so many good things about acting, I actually really love it!</p> | <p>Intense<br/> Dangerous<br/> Own experiences<br/> Dangerous<br/> Character research<br/> Character Understanding<br/> Character Understanding<br/> Honest / humanity<br/> Sad / humanity<br/> Honest<br/> Real<br/> Depression<br/> Analyse<br/> Humanity<br/> Sadness<br/> Truth<br/> Analysing<br/> Personal life<br/> Uncertainty<br/> Location<br/> Family<br/> Depression<br/> Good things<br/> Love</p> |
|---|---|

## **Section 2: Publishable Paper**

### **Use of Self: A Grounded Theory Exploration of the Psychological Wellbeing of Professional Actors**

Pages 229 to 260 were removed for copyright reasons

**Section 3: Clinical Case Study**  
**Grace – Discovering the Self**



Pages 262 to 299 were removed for confidential reasons