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**Living the Lives of Others: How Actors Experience Playing
Characters on Stage and How the Characters Affect Them**

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where other sources are clearly and identifiably cited.

Neda Hatami

Abstract

This PhD thesis is composed of two studies conducted using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and focusing on detailed accounts of personal, lived experiences that demonstrate both convergence and divergence. The main study was carried out first to gain insights into the lived experiences of theatre actors. In this study, interviews were held with ten professional male theatre actors. The aim was to explore what it is like to be an actor and provide information about experiences related playing characters and the psychological impact of acting, as well as obtain further insights into the inter-individual differences between the experiences of theatre actors. The first theme to be discovered was that acting was experienced as a calling, with theatre actors describing how becoming an actor was not so much a decision as a realisation that it was their vocation. The second theme related to actors' attitudes towards identification with characters, whereby their identity tended to be affected by the roles they played, but some actors had more control over this than others. A third theme was the positive impact of being on stage, with the subthemes revealing that acting was experienced as liberating and it had a transformative nature. Furthermore, performance boosted confidence and was perceived as a collective experience. Meanwhile, a fourth theme revealed that actors also experienced challenges and costs, with the subthemes being a sense of being rejected; a sense of loss at the end of a run; the possibility of substance and alcohol abuse; and the financial insecurity of the profession. The study identified potential refinements to the theoretical models, especially through the finding that profession-specific elements are necessary in theories about vocation. The most important practical implication was the need for better support concerning the psychological impacts of being an actor.

The second study was conducted among acting trainers, which confirmed these findings in the first theme: how acting trainers experienced the training career and the second theme was how trainers perceived the career of acting, with the trainers recognising that role-blurring could be a problem for actors. Nevertheless, they thought acting simultaneously provided positive experiences that could help actors to gain self-knowledge, develop more empathy and provide experiences that enable personal growth. The trainers also acknowledged the challenges facing actors, in terms of both the intense emotional experiences and the insecure subsequent position due to the minimal job opportunities and income volatility. While the trainers found the training career highly pleasurable as it helped students to become professional actors, they also felt training to be a demanding and sensitive role since they had to rely mainly on their experience and had limited explicit pedagogical foundations that would allow them to help their students address the issues they faced. The author argues that interventions are needed to provide a better offering in this respect and stimulate changes to the harsh circumstances.

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Section A.I Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Researcher's Personal Interest and Formulation of the Topic

I am sitting in a magnificent, beautiful theatre building in Tehran and watching Hamlet with the rest of the audience. However, through the story conveyed by the actors on stage using text, movement and facial expressions, I forget about the setting and become completely absorbed in the world being portrayed. In moments of self-awareness, I simultaneously observe how my face and body change every time things happen on stage. My heartbeat is moving along with the story and the wrinkles around my eyes are deepening as I squeeze them shut to stop my tears from flowing.

Reflecting on that night, I realised that I was completely in the story; I could be Hamlet. Yes, that night I was Hamlet for hours. I usually experience this sense of "being absorbed" when I am a spectator at a good performance. It is as if I lived in the skin of the role for some moments. It always makes me excited and curious; if I, as a member of the audience, have such a powerful experience of this performance, what is the experience of a theatre actor like? What it is like to spend nights, weeks and sometimes months playing the same character? What it is like to live with a character for all that time? How would their body feel while playing the character? What would it be like at the end, when the run finishes? Is it possible for an actor to fully leave the character behind? These and many other questions were posed in my mind, so I wanted to use them as the starting point for my PhD research.

To quote from the same Shakespeare play, Polonius' reflection on Hamlet — "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it"—nicely parallels the multitude of questions that the theatre evoked in me. That is, although the questions were numerous, they were not random. Nor were they a mere reflection of emotions or the experience of feeling

like someone you are not, which could, on its own, equally resemble madness. On the contrary, theatre is meant to elicit these experiences as a cultural expression (Forum Theatre, 2022a). Moreover, the questions provoked in me were clearly connected, in that they were all related to the psychological functioning of theatre actors. Thus, through my questions arose my decision to focus my PhD thesis on the theatre actor's experience of playing roles. Later, after an initial exploration of the scientific literature, I reformulated this broader theme into the more specific topic of how these aspects are affected by the experience of playing characters on stage.

1.2 Setting the Scene

To set the scene for readers of this thesis, let us move from watching the play in Tehran, Iran (my home country) to the UK, where my study took place. To provide a brief historical background, modern British theatre has its roots in the Middle Ages, a period heavily influenced by religion. Bible stories were performed in churches to teach them to largely illiterate parishioners, and the Bible was only available in Latin (Forse, 2008). During the Reformation, religious plays were suppressed, but audiences had come to love them, so more secular performances emerged and freedom for playwrights increased (Yerli, 2017). During this time, England developed as an international cultural hub, and Shakespeare's work should definitely be mentioned at this point (Forse, 2008). Hundreds of years later, his work still attracts packed audiences in theatres worldwide (including in Tehran), which illustrates his impact (British Council, 2016). Nevertheless, real cultural freedom in the theatre did not emerge until the 19th and 20th centuries. For a long time (until 1660), women were not allowed to act, and female roles were played by young men. The themes of plays were restricted for even longer because the elite accepted neither ridicule nor the glorification of political ideas other than their own (Forse, 2008).

The last two centuries of scientific and technological development (including the invention of movies) may have brought innovation, yet inequality and unfairness have also been evident in, for example, the exploitation and abuse of the working class, as well as the increasing poverty and degradation experienced by a large proportion of the population (Gray, 2020). Darwin, Marx and Freud applied the scientific method—then recently formulated—to their studies on the origin of species, the working class and the human mind, respectively. Their findings reached increasingly large audiences due to rising literacy rates (Cardullo, 2014; Drain, 1995; Gray, 2020). Their evidence and theories confronted the world with scientific reality and changed how the world and humanity were understood (Drain, 1995). Meanwhile, the work of Charles Dickens strongly influenced the UK since the author put ordinary people at the heart of his stories (Gray, 2020). There followed a period of “isms” (e.g., modernism, expressionism and impressionism) in the arts, including in theatre, which responded to the societal changes with new forms while retaining a common scepticism towards earlier modes of perception. Once shaped by religion, art was being increasingly affected by philosophy and politics, given the major impact of the First and Second World Wars in Europe (Cardullo, 2014).

The outcome of these developments has been 21st-century theatre, with its many forms and purposes. While it can be regarded as a form of entertainment, theatre is also seen as a way to communicate social issues. Theatre can increase the attention devoted to social problems, raise awareness of the marginalised and their needs, stimulate a willingness to support victims of crimes and harsh circumstances, as well as open discussions about political issues (McDonnell & Shellard, 2006). This implies that theatre actors are performing artists and that what they do is seen as more than a profession; they are fulfilling an ideological purpose. As Abbing (2002) explained, this has led to the paradoxical situation in which theatre actors, and artists in general, may be valued and their work may be stimulated by

subsidies and donations, yet they may not receive the same financial rewards as other valued professions. The general public see no need to pay actors more, despite fully embracing the image of the poor and ideological artist (Abbing, 2002). In addition, artists might not begin an acting career for purely financial reasons but because of their passion and the non-monetary rewards (such as attention and fame); this may explain why they accept low salaries (Abbing, 2002). While major stars gain exceptional fame and financial rewards, the romantic picture of becoming an artist with this status attracts too many candidates. The profession is not protected by a body of certified knowledge and actor numbers are not formally controlled. The resulting imbalance in supply and demand further depresses incomes for actors (Abbing, 2002). In the UK, theatre actors receive an average hourly wage of £13 (Forum Theatre, 2022b). This amount depends greatly on their experience, the role and the size of the theatre, hence the low median wage of theatre actors at slightly more than £10 per hour (Forum Theatre, 2022b). The harsh reality is that theatre acting pays less than acting in movies or TV commercials. The majority of theatre actors experience periods without work and often need to find additional jobs to maintain a decent standard of living (Abbing, 2002; Palmer, 2022). On the other hand, the appreciation of theatre can be illustrated through the high attendances, with millions of people visiting the theatre each year in the UK (UK Theatre, 2018). Furthermore, UK newspapers regularly feature theatre plays in their cultural news sections (see, for example, the following section of the Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatre>).

1.3 Outline of the Study

Having explained the research topic and personal motivation, as well as set the scene, the remaining chapters explain how the study was developed and conducted before revealing

the results that were obtained. The thesis follows the standard order of presentation.

However, it should be clarified that two studies were carried out.

Chapter 2 provides the first literature review, in which relevant definitions and findings from previous studies are presented in a structured and thematic manner. This chapter also explains the research gaps that were identified in order to reveal, firstly, the specific research question for the first study and, secondly, the aims of the study.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological considerations involved in the study. The work was undertaken based on interpretative phenomenological analysis, which is both a method and a research philosophy. While readers may be unfamiliar with the work of the founder of phenomenology, Husserl, and/or (all) later phenomenologists, those from a theatre background might be acquainted with phenomenology through the work of the playwright (and philosopher) Sartre. Nevertheless, the chapter was written so that all readers would find it accessible, whether they have prior knowledge or not.

Chapter 4 describes the method employed in the first study; that is, the chapter explains how the IPA methodology was used to design and conduct the research. This stage included participant recruitment, holding the interviews and analysing the data obtained.

Chapter 5 presents the results of this research, as well as the analysis of the data and themes, by providing the accounts of the participants.

Chapter 6 discusses the results of the study and elaborates on its limitations and strengths. Suggestions are also made for future research in this area.

After that, a second part follows describing the second study. As the methodology of IPA has already been described in full detail, this part includes a literature review in Chapter 7, the method in Chapter 8 and the results in Chapter 9. In Chapter 10, the second study is discussed first separately, after which in the final Chapter 11 follows a concluding discussion

that provides an integrated summary, as well as suggestions for future research and overall implications.

Section B. Study I: Lived Experiences of Theatre Actors

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As Boote and Beile (2005) stated, a “thorough, sophisticated literature review is the foundation and inspiration for substantial, useful research” (p. 3). The aim of this chapter is to present the existing knowledge about actors and the psychological functioning of them. The present study focused on exploring theatre actors’ experiences was carried out within the field of performance phenomenology. This is a field of study that seeks to understand the subjective experience of performers and audiences in the context of live performance (Bleeker et al., 2015; Fraleigh, 2019). Performance phenomenology emphasizes the importance of lived experience, perception, and interpretation in the theatrical context, and seeks to understand the ways in which these factors shape the performance itself (Bleeker et al., 2015). At its core, performance phenomenology is interested in exploring the ways in which performers engage with their bodies, emotions, and senses during a performance, as well as the ways in which audiences respond to these performances based on their own unique experiences and perceptions (Fraleigh, 2019; Grant, 2019). By examining these subjective experiences, performance phenomenology can help us gain a deeper understanding of the transformative power of theatre and the ways in which performance can shape our perceptions of the world around us (Bleeker et al., 2015; Fraleigh, 2019; Grant, 2019). As a first step, it was investigated what was known from the literature relevant for the present study. This chapter is organised as follows: first, the literature search process is described. Second, acting is defined because the concept is of considerable importance in this thesis. Then, an explanation is provided of the existing knowledge about who actors are. This section addresses the question of who becomes an actor, as well as their personalities, talents and skills. The chapter then describes the psychological functioning of actors. This section

also explains how an actor's personal characteristics are associated with psychological functioning, the emotional and psychological effects of role enactment and the existing knowledge that identity is affected by acting the role of a character. The section continues by outlining the broader context of acting, which consists of actors, directors and audiences on the one hand, and being part of a tribe and surviving harsh circumstances on the other. The chapter closes with a discussion of the research gaps and the aims of the current study.

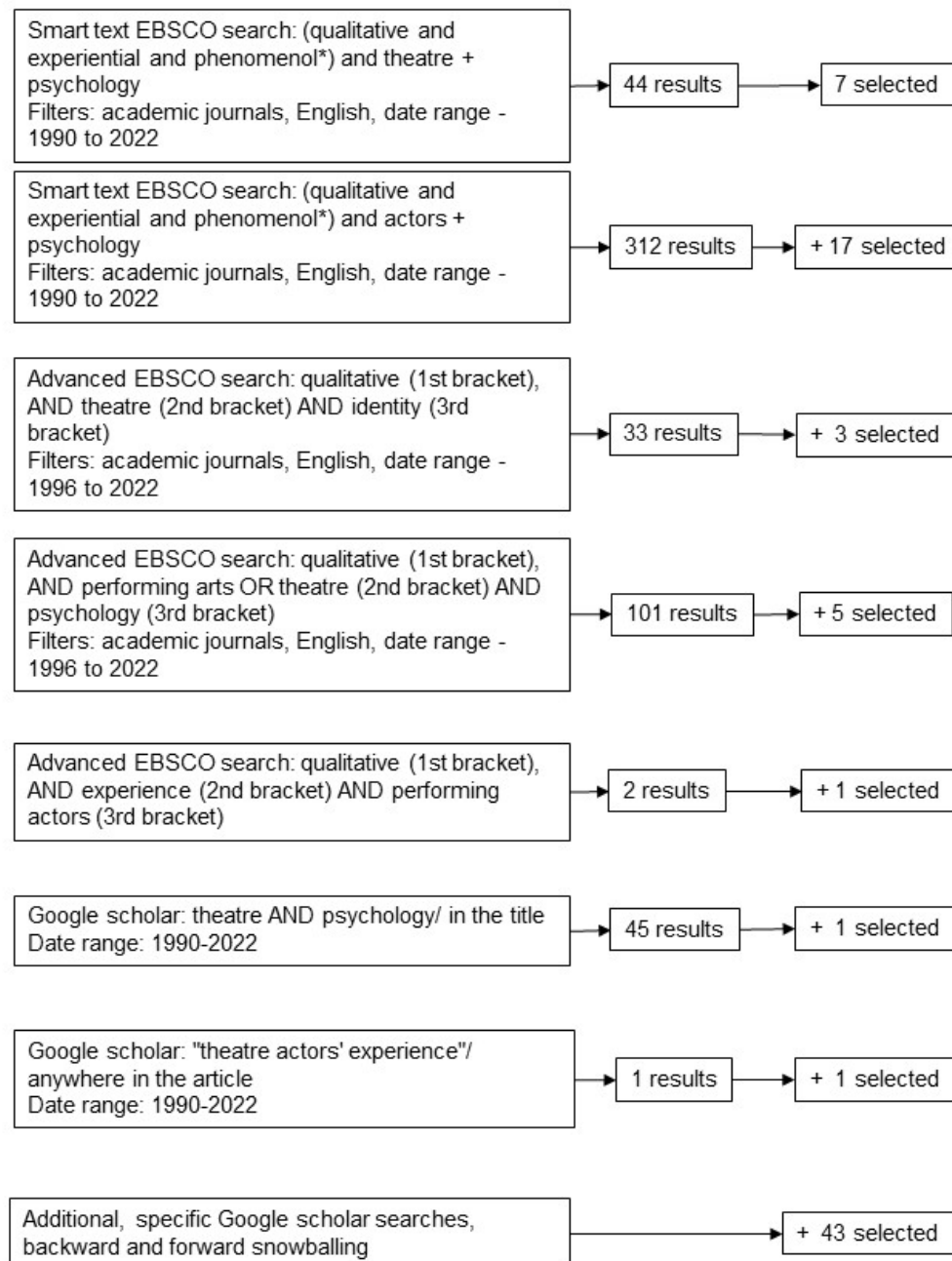
2.2 Literature Search

Boote and Beile (2005) described doctoral candidates as novice researchers who differ from other scholars because they normally do not yet know the relevant literature. As such, when I started to read the literature, I had no definite research question in mind and I needed to discover a research gap to guide my study. However, the overwhelming amount of literature produced when simply searching on Google Scholar for “actors psychological”, which amounted to about 2.5 million references, quickly revealed the need for both a strategy and focus. The literature search was performed in several steps, starting with the EBSCO host search engine using different combinations of keywords, as shown in Figure 2.1. Whereas literature from this century was considered the most relevant, the search included the later years of the previous century, with the somewhat arbitrary critical years being 1990 or 1996. The literature search started with EBSCO host and included the social sciences databases PsychInfo, PsycArticles and Google Scholar. Later, the Google Scholar search engine was chosen because it includes non-scholarly resources; however, at first, it was a big challenge to find relevant papers as the terms “acting” and “theatre” are very broad. So, in the first attempts, the number of papers that showed up as the result of the search was huge, like a hundred thousand or, in some cases, millions of papers came up. After consulting with my supervisor, he suggested narrowing the search down and limiting it by searching the papers

published in psychology journals and putting limitations on the years of publications and also using the filter on Google scholar advanced search called “using the exact phrase”. After this, I also tried other options in the settings of Google Scholar advanced search (such as using language and date range filters), and finally, the number of results was reduced to a manageable amount. At the end, I was able to carry out the literature review through seven separate searches, resulting in the selection of 35 papers in total. During the writing process, some highly specific searches were included (e.g., definition searches) and, as recommended by Jalali and Wohlin (2012), backward snowballing and forward snowballing were used. The former refers to retrieving relevant papers from reference lists and the latter refers to finding references that cite relevant papers (which is an option in the Google Scholar database). Thus, 43 more references were obtained for the literature review. As a result, a total of $N = 78$ publications were used for this literature review.

Figure 2.1

Overview of the Literature Search



2.3 The Act of Acting

Acting seems a difficult concept to define comprehensively. The Oxford Dictionary (n.d.-a) provides the rather vague definition of acting as “the activity or profession of performing in plays, films, etc.” The “etc.” in particular indicates the lack of a crystallised idea of the concept, but neither is “performing” sufficiently specific to enable a full grasp of the meaning of “acting”. The word “acting” originates from the Latin “agere”, a word with more than 40 different meanings depending on the context (Philips, 1987). Perhaps the simplest meaning is “to do”, and the term “acting” is still used in that way; the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.-b) defines “to act” as “something that somebody does”. Yet the various other meanings of “agere”, including “to drive” and “to treat”, signal that it refers to not only “doing” but also something with an impact (Philips, 1987). When the word is used in the context of the theatre, it features in other modern definitions of acting, “to pretend” and “to perform”; the second of these is the Oxford Dictionary’s definition of acting (n.d.-b).

Nevertheless, Guo (2021) claimed that the synonyms given in dictionaries do not sufficiently define acting. As he explained, acting can involve pretence, but it is not a synonym of the term as it also involves non-pretending. For example, actors often display genuine emotions on stage (Goldstein, 2009; Guo, 2021), and they may pretend certain behaviours but can also really carry them out, such as drinking a glass of water (Guo, 2021). Performance comes close to acting and will certainly be part of the experience of theatre actors, making it relevant to the current study. However, the terms are not the same because the concept of performance includes elements that are not strictly acting, such as ensuring one faces the audience so they can see the facial expressions being displayed (Guo, 2021). Therefore, acting can be better described as “a process of portraying the character’s features” (Guo, 2021, p. 61). The inclusion of the term “process” in this definition is important because it highlights that acting is not just the final performance on stage: it also includes many prior

moments of preparation and practice. If we seek to define acting as an art and, more specifically, acting in the theatre, it could also be regarded as a process of communication between actors and audiences (Guo, 2021). Referring to the impact that seems to be associated with the concept, the actor arguably intends to not only tell a story about someone but also make the audience experience the actor as being that character. Although imaginary, this is not the same as a lie, which a person should truly believe. Since the 20th century in particular, theatre has often been intended to be highly realistic (unlike ancient Greek theatre with its exaggerations and masks). Actors use their features to represent those of their character, with the intention that their audience imagines the performers are identical to their characters (Goldstein & Bloom, 2011; Guo, 2021).

When defined as such, the profession of acting is understandably intriguing from a psychological perspective. After all, it includes the themes of the self, the other and personification. Moreover, the balance between supply and demand has been upset by the large number of actors. Consequently, wages are low and job insecurity is high, both of which are reinforced by the limited run times of productions; as a result, permanent jobs may not be offered (Gardner, 2014). Therefore, both the profession itself and the broader context may affect theatre actors psychologically. Meanwhile, it should be acknowledged that acting, like other performing arts, is associated with passion, creativity, talent and loving the spotlight (Kogan, 2002). As the film actor Moreau explained, “acting is not a profession at all; it’s a way of living” (cited in Bernstein, 2017, par. 29). Thus, on the one hand, the cultural context must be taken into account; on the other hand, theatre acting might attract people with specific personalities, talents, skills and desires. Therefore, before determining how actors might be affected by their profession, we should take into consideration who actors actually are. This is explored in the following section.

2.4 Who are Actors?

2.4.1 Who Becomes an Actor?

The question of who actors are could start with the question, “Who becomes an actor?” This actually contains two questions, one asking who tries to become an actor (motivation) and the other asking who succeeds in becoming an actor (accomplishment). However, motivation and accomplishment are highly interrelated and difficult to distinguish because the same reasons that help someone accomplish becoming an actor might also have been influential in their wish to do so (Kogan, 2002). The most frequently mentioned factors that determine who becomes an actor are talent and personality (Dumas et al., 2020; Kogan, 2002; Nettle, 2006). According to Kogan’s (2002) theoretical model of career development in the performing arts, this is the starting point. As Kogan explained, it is highly likely that during development, talent and personality affect how a person advances. These factors are not static but are affected by experiences, which include social influences and performance-related opportunities, such as the chance to participate in a school-related performance. These experiences can help foster additional skills (e.g., learning certain techniques), help talent to flourish and, to a certain extent, potentially affect personality. Nevertheless, they create emotional and motivational experiences, such as the experience of flow and success. As such, this process can be regarded as developmental and self-reinforcing, ultimately resulting in the actual decision to become an actor.

Retrospective qualitative research inspired by this model has shown that students at a prestigious drama school in New York remembered that they had decided to pursue a career in dramatic arts at varying ages, with some being younger and others deciding later (Kogan & Kangas, 2006). Whereas other performance artists, such as musicians, often tend to be influenced by parental involvement in the same industry, this did not particularly apply to actors (Kogan & Kangas, 2006). In fact, qualitative research has revealed that some people

receive little or no support from their families when trying to fulfil their wish to pursue an acting career (Goldstein & Winner, 2009; Robertson, 2022). In the study by Kogan and Kangas, a build-up of experience was evident, with success on one occasion leading to more successful future experiences. This seems to ultimately form the decision to become an actor, despite the negative or risky aspects of the profession. As the theatre actor and researcher of the profession Robertson described: “Everything I had read and seen and been taught by my teachers told me it would be nearly impossible to make a successful career as an actor, but it was what I loved and I was good at it” (Robertson, 2022, p. 2).

2.4.2 Personality

Looking first at the “love” for acting, several studies have explored the underlying personality that creates this affection and seems the most likely to form the motivation to join the profession. Personality is defined as follows:

The enduring set of traits and styles that he or she exhibits, which characteristics represent (a) dispositions (i.e., natural tendencies or personal inclinations) of this person, and (b) how this person differs from the “standard normal person” in his or her society. (Bergner, 2020, p. 4)

The “big five” traits are the most frequently used to describe personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (Oshio et al., 2018).

Openness refers to being open to new things and being creative (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006; Oshio et al., 2018). Conscientiousness means being structured, having good impulse control and being attentive to detail (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006; Oshio et al., 2018).

Extraversion refers to enjoying and feeling energised by interacting with others, being social and talking before thinking (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006; Oshio et al., 2018).

Agreeableness is used to describe people who are cooperative, empathic and helpful (Dumas

et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006; Oshio et al., 2018). Finally, neuroticism refers to emotional instability: readily feeling stressed or worried and struggling to overcome negative events (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006; Oshio et al., 2018).

These traits have been investigated among actors by Nettle et al. (2006) and Dumas et al. (2020). In both studies, an Internet survey was used. However, Nettle distributed the survey only among professional actors (mainly from the United Kingdom [UK]) and compared them with pre-existing data from large UK samples, whereas Dumas et al. distributed their survey among international, English-speaking non-actors, actors and acting students. Moreover, Dumas et al. (2006) analysed the results at the facet level (i.e., the underlying dimensions of each key factor). Both acting students and professional actors were revealed to report more extraversion than the general population, as reflected in both enthusiasm and assertiveness. As Nettle et al. (2006) argued, this was associated with responsiveness to the reward of being on stage and the centre of the audience's attention. On the other hand, a qualitative study by Goldstein and Winner (2009) revealed that some actors claimed to have actually been shy and introverted during childhood, and they had become more extraverted by becoming involved in acting and being on the stage. Therefore, extraversion might contribute to becoming an actor or be a consequence of acting experiences.

Researchers have also found that actors and student actors reported more openness compared to the general population. While the intellectual facet was more strongly present in student actors than professional actors (perhaps reflecting their stage of life at the time of the survey), a particularly strong effect was discovered for the fantasy/aestheticism facet, which was elevated in both the students and the professionals. This closely aligns with other studies in which this type of openness was shown to be closely related, both in its construct

definition as well as empirically, to aesthetic activity and interest in arts (see, for example, McManus & Furnham, 2006; Grammatopoulus & Reynolds, 2013).

With respect to agreeableness, Nettle (2006) found a higher level of this trait among professional actors, while Dumas et al. (2020) revealed that whereas their levels of politeness were no different to those of non-actors, actors—especially student actors—showed more compassion in the sense of liking to help and be there for others. This might help actors to be more open to engaging with characters' experiences, while it could also attract people to professions that require group work (e.g., a theatre group) and contribute to the pleasure of others (e.g., an audience) (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006).

Interestingly, whereas Nettle (2006) found neither lower nor higher conscientiousness among actors, the more detailed analysis by Dumas et al. (2020) showed that despite the lack of difference in orderliness, student actors and professionals showed less industriousness than non-actors. Industrious people (who display hard work and great effort) tend to be more engaged (dedicated and absorbed) at work (Woods & Sofat, 2013). This is demonstrated by the fact that industrious people experience work as being more meaningful; in other words, they feel that work is worthwhile and important (Woods & Sofat, 2013). Whereas the literature did not indicate why being less industrious would be associated with becoming an actor, we can speculate that when lower work meaningfulness is experienced, it becomes more important to find work that is also one's passion and something one really likes. The choices of professions made by more industrious people, on the other hand, might tend to involve other factors such as salary and career opportunities. This idea was supported by the phenomenological study by Grammatopoulus and Reynolds (2013), who described how actors saw the attraction to drama as strongly related to the experience, which was described using terms like “valuable”, “enlightening” and “excitement”. This attraction could also be due to the flexibility and lack of rules.

Finally, with respect to neuroticism, Nettle (2006) found a trend for elevation among actors, while Dumas et al. (2020) found that professional actors especially had higher levels of neuroticism (in terms of both volatility and withdrawal). The participants in the study by Nettle were somewhat younger than those in the study by Dumas et al. (2020). As such, the fact that the strongest effect was found for the oldest professional actors might signify that neuroticism is not only a factor drawing people to the acting profession; it is also affected by having more years of life experience and, more specifically, having been an actor for longer. This point will be explained further when the current knowledge about the psychological impact of acting is discussed. With respect to neuroticism being a precursor of acting, Goldstein and Winner (2009) interviewed professional actors about their childhood, discovering that they remembered already being sensitive and attuned to other people's emotions from a young age. One actor described himself as "always extremely affected by the energy in a room, and quite quiet, interestingly enough, as I soaked it all in" (Goldstein & Winner, 2009, p. 119). Moreover, neuroticism results in more negative emotional experiences, yet this might also mean people improve their understanding of emotions, which is related to the skills necessary for acting. While neuroticism may not normally be associated with greater emotion understanding, Gentzler et al. (2020) found that compared to non-acting students, those majoring in theatre had more positive attitudes to negative emotions, as measured using a self-report survey that contained statements to respond to such as "I like it when movies make me feel sad, the sadder they better". A combination of experiencing negative emotions and "embracing" them seems to create more emotional awareness (Gentzler et al., 2020).

Whereas the studies described above focused on psychological traits that are not necessarily good or bad as each has positive and negative aspects (e.g., conscientious people can be structured and hardworking but also over-controlled), Davison and Furnham (2018)

studied personality disorder profiles. Using normed self-report scales, they found that actors in particular showed heightened subclinical levels of Cluster B traits, which relate to being antisocial (untrustworthy), borderline (unstable in relationships, from extremely negative to extremely positive), histrionic (attention-seeking) and narcissistic (arrogant). Gohil (2021) later confirmed that this type of profile was more common among both vocational and student actors compared to the general population. Furthermore, Ando et al. (2014) also adopted the personality disorder profile approach but focused on traits associated with an increased risk of psychotic illness (i.e., schizophrenia-like traits). Also using self-report scales, their findings were similar to those already described, in that actors reported heightened levels of impulsivity and distractibility. No reduced ability to experience social and physical pleasure was identified (Ando et al., 2014). Actors reported more unusual experiences (i.e., magical thinking and paranormal events) compared to the general population (Ando et al., 2014). The results of the latter three studies highlight what are often considered the more negative, or at least the madder, sides of actors' personalities, which for this reason are also described as exhibitionistic and hysterical (Goldstein & Yasskin, 2014). However, these descriptions seem exaggerated as Fink et al. (2011) showed that actors' self-reported psychoticism was significantly lower than the levels reported by people being treated for polysubstance dependency and not significantly different from the levels of university students.

2.4.3 Talent and Skills Associated with Theatre Acting

In a 1964 interview, actors and acting teachers Vera Soloviova, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner and Paul Gray discussed Stanislavski's Method, in which acting is approached as an art of experiencing rather than of representation. Without explaining the method in major detail, it is interesting that when discussing techniques and ways to act and improve acting,

Meisner stated, “What about talent? That isn’t the real inexorable primary tool. Either there is an actor or there isn’t” (quoted in the interview with Soloviova et al., 1964, p. 146). This quote is a reminder that when discussing the skills of actors, the question with which this section began is still, in part, being answered: “Who becomes an actor?” It is impossible to discuss skills without acknowledging that even though these, like personality, can be affected by the actor’s experiences of training and the profession, the underlying talent is always inherent and formed part of the reason for becoming an actor. As such, understanding who actors are does not involve establishing cause and effect; the major consideration is what makes them “different” from others, which seems especially important given that actors typically also feel different from others (Goldstein & Winner, 2009).

Of the skills described as part of the professional acting, perspective-taking is perhaps one of the most obvious. Displaying a character is regarded as an art that can be approached in different ways, with actors usually finding their own style. This can be more distant from the experience of almost “becoming” the character (Goldstein & Bloom, 2011; Kuric & Arenales, 2023). Actors must always be able to understand, firstly, a character’s motivations, beliefs and values and, secondly, that these might deviate from what the actor would experience, which is also referred to as “theory of mind”. In line with this assumption, Goldstein (2009) demonstrated that compared to youngsters with no acting involvement, young actors in the United States were better able to guess mental states from pictures of eye expression, as well as grasp the motivations, beliefs and values of movie characters.

Moreover, this tends to surpass a cognitive understanding and usually includes emotional perspective-taking. As Soloviova described in the interview mentioned above, “You have first to understand the character and then to feed this understanding with the feelings necessary to portray the character (and these may be very different from your own personal feelings in the same circumstances)”. Understanding and sharing another person’s

emotions is usually referred to as empathy (Breyer, 2020), and survey research demonstrated that student actors and professionals indeed self-reported high levels of empathy (Goldstein et al., 2009; Nettle, 2006). In line with this finding, ethnographic research reveals that actors experience increased empathic ability as it arises from their professional experience (Bergman Blix, 2019). Bergman Blix studied Swedish actors and judges using in-depth interviews, concluding that both types of professionals profit from the presence of narrative stories in their work, which could help them to engage fully with other perspectives and imagine being in another person's position. The fact that actors' perspective-taking and empathy are story-based was further emphasised by the finding that theatre students do not necessarily outperform non-theatre students in identifying facial emotion expressions (Gentzler et al., 2019). In an interview and observational study investigating how method actors create their roles, one actor described how he actively created a detailed narrative:

I created a history for the character I played. I decided that he has known this other guy in the play for x amount of years. And I really sat down and I calculated . . . if he knew him for five years, what logically would make sense for him, how many years would he know his girlfriend and why, and then I also sat down and calculated [for one particular scene], OK, I get up on Saturday morning at eight and it is very leisurely, I do my stretching, etc., and how long would it take for me to take a shower, have a cup of coffee, fall asleep again for a little while, wake up again and be at that restaurant by the time that I was supposed to be there. (Bandelj, 2003, p. 403)

Kuric and Arenales (2023) analysed more comprehensively how actors display emotions, discovering that this even surpasses their displays of empathy. Using interviews, it was discovered that actors showed more skills—perhaps better considered crafts—to achieve displays of emotions. Firstly, they form an advanced understanding of the character (in terms of factors like personality, motivation and context). This requires not only analysis but also

the craft of imagination: being able to reason with the “as if” world to form a picture and feeling of what it would be like (see also Bergman Blix, 2019). Many actors have been attracted to imagination and fantasy from a young age (Goldstein & Winner, 2009), and they appear to have a greater fantasy proneness than non-actors (Thomson & Jaque, 2012). Their imagination is also utilised when they need to improvise (Bandelj, 2003). Second, they show emotion regulation, controlling emotions in complex ways as they may need to suppress their own emotions while using their emotional experiences to best portray those of the character. They must also simultaneously control emotions to illustrate the correct intensity and desired expression for the specific theatre piece and setting (Kuric & Arenales, 2023). Gentzler et al. (2019) found that using self-report scales, theatre students indicated their greater emotional awareness (as previously described) and greater ability to amplify emotions, compared to non-theatre students.

Two additional skills need to be addressed. Firstly, actors need to be good at mimicking (Bergman Blix, 2019). They must be able to use accents, gestures and other expressions and behaviours that help them portray a character. Second, actors have to memorise substantial amounts, especially lines of text. Unsurprisingly then, when Goldstein and Winner (2009) compared the childhood memories of actors and lawyers, actors in particular were found to have memories of easily remembering texts from books, poems and lyrics. Moreover, Schmidt et al. (2002) asked actors to reperform a play more than five months after rehearsing it, discovering that they had remembered most lines literally. Besides memorising lines, many actors are known to use recollections of their own emotions to be able to display them. Whereas using emotion recollections for performance could be considered a skill, it remains unknown whether actors are better at remembering emotions. Moreover, it could be argued that this is a necessity that may harm the actor psychologically, with research revealing that despite not suffering more traumatic experiences than non-actors,

actors have more unresolved mourning and depersonalisation issues, on average (Thomson & Jaque, 2011; 2012). This implies that although actors generally seem to experience psychological functioning as the exercise of their passion (Reynolds, 2013), they also encounter negative aspects, as explained in the next section.

2.5 The Psychological Functioning of Actors

Based on the studies outlined above, a "stereotypical" actor can be described as an imaginative and fanciful person who is extraverted, open and agreeable, somewhat indolent, attention-seeking, unstable and neurotic, but empathetic, while they also have a good textual and emotional memory (Bergman Blix, 2019; Davison & Furnham, 2018; Dumas et al., 2020; Gohil, 2021; Goldstein & Winner, 2009; Kuric & Arenales, 2023; Nettle, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2002). However, the intention is not to reduce actors to average or commonplace characteristics. As storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi explained in a Ted Talk, “The single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete; they make one story the only story” (Adichi, 2009, 13:11). At this point, therefore, a careful formulation is that only one story is being created here (that is, in this chapter), which will highlight at least the most likely experiences of many (but not all!) theatre actors. The next section explains how these average characteristics of actors are associated with psychological functioning in general. The following sections discuss the current knowledge concerning how the different aspects of being an actor are affected by the acting experience and playing characters.

2.5.1 Being Who They are: How Characteristics Normally Relate to Psychological Functioning

The characteristics described in the previous section are associated with aspects of psychological functioning. A meta-analysis by Oshio et al. (2018) showed that extraversion, openness and agreeableness are positively associated with the abilities to control one's behaviour and display resilience when facing stressful circumstances. Thus, in actors, these more typical characteristics can contribute to more positive emotional functioning. On the other hand, neuroticism and—possibly to a lesser extent—conscientiousness were shown to have an association in the opposite direction (Oshio et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, extraversion, agreeableness and empathy in particular tend to contribute to better social functioning. Using a diary study, Asendorpf and Wilpers (1998) showed that extraverted people spent more time participating in social interactions and experienced more trust, while agreeableness prevented conflict. Empathy helps close relationships and positive interactions to be established; however, as Hodges and Klein (2001) argued, the literature also demonstrates the inherent costs of this, including the cognitive effort needed to really understand another person's position and the emotional cost of experiencing negative emotions. Moreover, the heightened presence of cluster B personalities is associated with increased risk to individual wellbeing among both types of people, including the risk of alcohol and drug addiction, as well as suicide ideation; meanwhile, the social interactions of people with type-B traits tend to involve more aggression and irritability (based on a literature review by Douzenis et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, the talents or skills of actors arguably equip them with a strong capacity to establish positive relationships, even more so when their other skills or talents are considered. Being imaginative and good at mimicking are known to contribute to positive social interactions. For example, Gueguen et al. (2009) explained that mimicking someone's

expressions (verbal or non-verbal) during interactions causes the other person to make more positive judgements and show more prosocial behaviour, probably because the action increases feelings of familiarity or even affiliation. Using an experimental design, Stel and Vonk (2010) demonstrated that people felt closer and experienced interactions as smoother when mimicking took place. Meanwhile, creativity and imagination can become negative factors in certain circumstances, such as when a partner counters desires by framing them as only fantasies, as shown in an interview study by Adams (2004). However, starting from a young age, creativity and imagination are employed positively to examine emotions and build relationships (additional explanations can be found in, for example, Rao and Gobson (2019) on the role of creativity in imagining in child development or Elisondo (2016) for interview- and biographical research-based explanations of how creativity in adults is always a social process).

2.5.2 Emotional Effects of Role Enactment

Bringing these findings into the world of actors, the initial focus is role enactment. Having explained empathy as a positive skill in terms of social interactions that incur cognitive and emotional costs, these emotional costs can be somewhat disturbing when playing traumatic scenes. Relevant to this topic is the work of Seton (2004; 2013), who described his experiences and observations during an ethnographic study of actor training. He found that actors could become traumatised by acting in certain scenes, such as playing a rape victim, even when they had never experienced this themselves. These findings offer a new perspective on the suggestion arising from the research by Thomson and Jaque (2011; 2012) that actors would not suffer from more traumatic experiences because these would only concern self-experienced events. The fact that actors can feel traumatised by acted events may be readily understood since actors incorporate much into their roles, including their

bodies, feelings and voices (Ambrose, 2017). Stern and Lewis (1986) discovered that during an experiment, method actors were better capable than other actors of creating galvanic skin responses, which are normally present under stress. This applied particularly to participants who were also normally noticed to sweat as part of their stress reactions. Even if actors try to detach themselves from their characters, research shows that people tend to be affected simply by bodily expressions like posture and facial expressions; for example, people feel more confident when working upright than when working in a slumped position (Stepper & Strack, 1993). In conclusion, the emotions of a character affect those of the actor.

Whereas support for actors in processing the associated emotions is not often part of official protocols, Seton described how this is often needed urgently. Panoutsos (2021) also noted this in an interview study, with one actor explaining: “I remember we used to get out of the theatre as quickly as possible, just sort-your-shit-together-as-fast-as-possible, ... especially if you have people waiting for you outside, ... sometimes not even completely taking off your make-up” (Panoutsos, 2021, p. 156). Another actor described how emotion regulation really was an individual and unsupported process:

If the show is emotionally very taxing, I will take myself off to a quiet area as I get out of costume and focus on bringing myself back to a safe, level mental space. I do this using techniques that I learned through counselling and therapy rather than through acting teachers.

(Panoutsos, 2021, p. 156)

In a very small-scale study in which three actors were interviewed, Nemiro (1997) found that they avoided certain roles because the emotions would be too intense or painful. The actors also described how performing certain roles had exhausted their energy, even to the point of physical depletion. However, the actors also mentioned how they experienced catharsis by being able to express certain emotions, indicating that enacting a character could

also have positive effects on wellbeing. Indeed, positive effects of role enactment on wellbeing were also identified by Robb et al. (2018) in an interview study among twenty Australian actors. The actors described the experience of acting a role as positively engaging and, in line with the idea that people choose this profession out of interest and because it corresponds to their talent, acting was also described as a calling. In other words, people who enjoy pretend and imagination might find acting highly pleasurable. At the same time, the emotional effects seem closely related to specific roles, as well as an actor's specific needs and experiences.

2.5.3 Identity Affected by Acting Characters

The effects of playing a role can involve more than merely the evocation of emotions. As stated above, acting is a process, so it can affect the actor even to the point of experienced identity. The concept of identity in psychology is approached in two different ways. The first one is identity theory, which views identity as one's reflections about the self and the process of identification. This means that individuals may identify themselves based on their personal characteristics or traits, such as "I am an actor" (Stets & Burke, 2000). The second approach is social identity theory, which places more emphasis on the self-categorizations a person makes (e.g., belonging to a group of professional actors or stage performers) (Stets & Burke, 2000). As such, identity in a very broad sense contains the characteristics that belong to people, including their roles, personality characteristics, beliefs, values and self-esteem (Stryker, 2007). Whereas emotions are not necessarily part of identity because they are evoked by situations, self-perceived neuroticism (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006) as a felt, stable inclination towards negative emotions can be regarded as part of identity. Emotions can also affect identity (e.g., lower self-worth occurs when experiencing negative emotions) and reflect how one experiences the self (e.g. one's disappointment after performing poorly).

Since identity largely concerns who you are, it is of major importance to people with a perceived calling, such as actors. Hirschi and Hermann (2012) investigated the effects of having a calling on quality of life by using a longitudinal online survey with two measurements, six months apart, among university students. Having a calling was found to be associated with a better quality of life because it led to higher vocational identity achievement. For actors, identity is associated with the profession in multiple ways. This subsection has explained the current knowledge about associations with playing roles and acting per se. In the next sub-sections, the social and contextual will be combined with identity.

In a phenomenology interview study, professional actors were asked to describe what stood out for them during the development of a specific character (Bosshart, 2006). From the start of their preparations to acting on the stage, the central theme was authenticity. One study participant expressed this as follows:

I, in the rehearsal, encourage myself to believe, just as simply as one were six years old and we want to be the queen of England, we can be, and believe it fully, or we want to be an astronaut, we fully believe at that moment that we are capable of flying. It's about imagination, but it's also about not saying it's impossible, about allowing myself that truthful human experience and in doing that it gets into my bones, it gets into my body. ("Rita" quoted in Bosshardt, 2006, p. 36)

The actors also mentioned using similarities between themselves and the character. The act of "becoming" the character can feel intense, sometimes even to the point of becoming an experience in which one forgets one is portraying a character but really feels it. The actors called this "being in the zone", which they described using phrases such as "spirituality" and "the muse decides to come to you" (Bosshardt, 2006, p. 58). From the flow

theory of Csikszentmihalyi (2014), these experiences can be better understood. A flow experience is defined as “a deeply involving and enjoyable experience...[where] a person is fully concentrated on the task at hand.” This experience can be reached when there is intrinsic motivation, there is a good balance between the challenges and the skills, and the person knows what needs to be done. If this combination is not present, people will be distracted or too self-aware in order to fully involve themselves in what they are doing (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). For theatre actors, it is the pleasure experienced in acting, combined with knowing the lines and what to do on the stage that helps them reach flow. Other performers too, perceive flow as inspirational and a peak experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). What seems to make it special for actors, is how it seems to result in a blurring of the self and the role (Brown, 2019; Burgoyne et al., 1999; Loveday et al., 2021).

While screen actors do not necessarily have exactly the same experiences as theatre actors, a phenomenological study among the former found that blurred lines can exist, with an actor’s identity becoming (temporarily) affected by playing a character, by which their emotions, behaviours and sometimes love life were impacted (e.g., feelings might develop for the actor playing one’s partner) (Brown, 2019). Another interview study of screen actors identified this, whereby one actor described how her co-actor got so into character that he even spontaneously acted upon the emotions he felt:

[While acting,] I said, “It’s always going to be you, Hunter”, and he grabbed me and kissed me then, and he wasn’t supposed to, and then they called cut and he was so in the moment that I went, “You didn’t let me say my last line”, and he was like, “What?” (Loveday et al., 2021, p. 16)

A similar blurring of boundaries has been identified in the experiences of student actors (Burgoyne et al., 1999) and confirmed among professional actors using neurological

data, with Greaves et al. (2022) measuring the brain activity of actors during a play rehearsal. When confronted with multiple auditory stimuli, the brain normally filters irrelevant information, thus allowing a person to focus. However, as one's name is so greatly associated with personal relevance, an automatic reaction occurs upon hearing one's own name. Greaves et al. (2022) measured a weaker brain response when the actors were playing their characters. Moreover, a qualitative study among professional actors revealed that they felt truly absorbed in their characters, sometimes even wishing that preferred aspects of a character would translate into their own daily lives (Robb et al., 2018). A qualitative study of actors' creativity and mental health explained how acting helped people get closer to their ideal selves (i.e., the way they would like to be): "I've always viewed acting as a way to be stronger, braver, bigger, more intelligent than I am in real life" (Seife, 2022, p. 47).

In contrast, anecdotal evidence suggests that acting affects an actor's identity to the point of becoming frightening. For instance, Sherlock Holmes actor Basil Rathbone gave up this role because he feared losing his identity to the detective (Geer, 1993). Hannah et al. (1994) suggested that this fear is not completely ungrounded. In their study, self-reported personalities were collected from actors upon their selection for a role. The director's choice to select the actors was shown not to be based primarily on personality resemblances with the actors' self-reports. However, over time, and especially from mid-rehearsal to performance, the actors' self-reported personalities started to more closely resemble those of the characters (Hannah et al., 1994). This was also literally experienced in Seife's study: "The character will inform you. It changes who you are" (Seife, 2022, p. 65). During the performance, participants often felt that their own identity disappeared from the scene altogether, which was described as "an out of body experience" (Seife, 2022, p. 65). In the literature, particular concern about the Method is expressed with respect to how character traits and character

confrontations with topics including racism, classism, sexism or heterosexism could become extrapolated into the lives and identities of individual actors (McCadden, 2014).

Returning to who actors are, their frequent embracing of an involvement with fantasy and pretend, as well as their tendency to be more open to unusual experiences (Ando, 2014; Goldstein & Winner, 2009; Thomson & Jaque, 2012), clarify that actors may experience role engagement as a calling and as part of who they are (Robb et al., 2018). As Panero et al. (2015) explained, the greater fantasy proneness and creative imagination generally reported by (student) actors make them more hypnotisable. This subsequently makes them “become” their character, which we can see as part of their identity. Therefore, while role involvement may confuse self-identity and other (character) identity, it is also a part of an actor’s identity, with many expressing how they “felt the most like themselves” when acting (Seife, 2022, p. 65).

This double-layered way of being for the actor is made explicit in Brecht’s epic theatre. In contrast to realistic theatre, epic theatre does not involve escapism but functions to create critical observation in the audience, often related to political themes (Ambrose, 2017). To achieve this, epic theatre utilises *Verfremdungseffekten* (German for estrangement effects). Distance is created by presenting the audience with effects that do not align with the expectations in the story, such as happy music in a sad situation. While acting, actors can create a *Verfremdungseffekt* by not (fully) embodying their characters (Ambrose, 2017). For example, they may not demonstrate the character’s comportment but show their own comportment, confronting the audience with the character while simultaneously demonstrating the actor (Ambrose, 2017). They can also step out of their role and use a narrative or reflection (Ambrose, 2017). As such, a double agency is created in epic theatre, whereby the audience perceives a character but also the presence of the actor. As most studies focus on actors’ experiences of realistic theatre, more specifically using the Method, it is

unknown how actors experience identity in epic theatre. However, a consciousness of the role and acting would likely not only affect the audience experience but also help actors to maintain a distance from their characters, although this would not necessarily be purely positive for the actors' wellbeing, as discussed shortly.

2.5.4 The Actor, the Director and the Audience

Another aspect affecting the psychological functioning of the actor is the continuous appraisal of their work. Using observations and interviews in a theatre, Orzechowicz (2008) discovered that during the preparation process, even though there is no audience yet, there is a director who evaluates the work. This is delivered not only through advice but also criticism and compliments, although the director has the ultimate aim of creating the best possible performance and, as such, was found to use both reassurance and humour (Orzechowicz, 2008). Nevertheless, the director is not a therapist: in both the semi-participatory study by Cingue et al. (2021) and the previously mentioned study by Robb et al. (2018), it became clear that stage directors can adopt harsh, or even cruel, approaches. For example, one actor in the study by Cingue et al. (2021) described the stage director as someone “who penetrated my soul like a hot knife into butter” (p. 23). Moreover, several actors in the study by Robb et al. (2018) experienced the continuous exposure to negative judgements as demoralising and humiliating. The actors in the study by Robb et al. also mentioned discrimination and claimed that the director and others had too much power, which led to helplessness in the actors who experienced it, particularly women. These findings seem all the more important considering that actors regard their profession as part of their identity. Therefore, the emotional skills described, in combination with the deep sense that acting is their calling, appear to help actors cope with such negative experiences. Various actors described this and saw themselves as self-coaches (Cingue et al., 2021).

The evaluation then continues because the actors are watched in their performance by not only the director but also the audience, which may contain people of more significance to the actors, such as agents or critics. Doyle studied the process of acting based on existing research (2016a) and by conducting her own ethnographic study (2016b), discovering that this type of evaluation made actors anxious during the preparation time before going on stage, and they again displayed self-coaching behaviours like using physical exercise or meditation to relax. Simmonds and Southcott (2012) interviewed different stage performers, including actors, about stage fright, who addressed this issue through self-talk (i.e., reassuring oneself or building confidence by focusing on positive thoughts). Nevertheless, it is important to remember the more positive attitudes that actors often display towards negative emotions, which became clear in the previously mentioned study by Seife (2022). Here, the association between anxiety and creativity was mentioned, with one participant stating: “Out of my anxiety comes a golden idea” (p. 53).

Actors feel self-conscious, but once on stage, these feelings seem to depend on whether it is a “good night” and the actor feels they are engaged with the character and drama world or a “bad night” on which there is more contact between the actors and reality (Doyle, 2016b). Distractions, such as noises among the audience or prop malfunctions, can return the real world to the actor’s focus of attention (Doyle, 2016ab). In the former case (a good night), actors find it easier to escape feelings of being evaluated by the audience, as one actor described in the study by Nemiro: “I became fully present, and they [the audience] didn’t matter in a way that was different. I wasn’t playing to them and asking [them] to ‘please, please like it’” (Nemiro, 1997, p. 234). At this point, the style of epic theatre might become a complication as it will be more difficult for actors to experience flow and escape the sense of audience appraisal. Relevant to this topic is the form of nomadic theatre, which is legend- and saga-based, with the actors typically spending less time preparing and being allowed greater

improvisation. The process is also less controlled and can be explained using the metaphor of a river, which will “run the way it runs” (Breed, 2017, p. 304). Using rituals and rhythms, the actors are in a trance-like state during the performance, but they are not as occupied with their roles compared to those in Western theatre. Theatre director Nurlan explained that in Western theatre, becoming a character can be challenging for identity:

In the West, actors usually concentrate on their roles from when they first wake up in the morning. They think about their actions and motivations and become psychologically connected to their characters and performances. However, this is not healthy. Actors live their lives outside of theatre and techniques must be made much more flexible with daily life and the world around us. (Nurlan, quoted in Breed, 2017, p. 302)

A similar conclusion was reached by Rivera (2013), who explained the consequences of facing identity challenges: “If boundary blurring of [the] role/self has occurred to the extent that the individual and/or the ensemble are [under] threat, other forms of immediate interventions may be needed, based on the resources of the artist community. They may include a mental health clinician, a psychiatrist, a spiritual leader, a body healer, and/or other specialists” (p. 5). Actors involved in nomadic theatre appear to have different experiences:

Within our methodology of nomadic theatre, our actors are able to prepare five minutes prior to the play and after the performance are able to get out of their roles within five minutes. They act only during the play as a ritual, thus they do not force their hearts and psychic state. (Nurlan, quoted in Breed, 2017, p. 305)

The end of this quote offers some insights into what can be more than “one story”.

Several studies have revealed individual differences with regard to stage fright (Steptoe et al., 1995; Goodman & Kaufman, 2014). Firstly, whereas most actors seem to experience some nervousness before going on stage, Steptoe et al. (1995), who examined stage fright among student actors, stated that fewer than 10% rated stage fright as a problem (which would be expected given their desire to become actors), but a substantial proportion (36.7%) experienced moderate stage fright, leaving 53.7% experiencing it as unproblematic. In line with the findings for Cluster B traits, some actors also reported using alcohol and cigarettes. Of the students who found stage fright a real problem, neuroticism was higher and extraversion was lower. However, considering that these participants were probably less likely to achieve the status of professional actors and that these levels of stage fright genuinely affected the actors' performances (in terms of their posture and use of voice, for example) (Steptoe et al., 1995), it is perhaps unsurprising that Goodman and Kaufman (2014) found no association between extraversion and stage fright in their survey study among professional actors. The same authors (2014) found that emotional stability, internal locus of control and being male were positively associated with lower levels of stage fright. The gender difference was explained by women being more self-monitoring than men in general, but the female experience of facing discrimination from directors (as previously mentioned) may also play a role in this.

On the other hand, the public might give positive evaluations both during and after a play. In the phenomenological interview study by Robb and Davies (2015), actors mentioned how non-verbal audience actions were experienced as reinforcing. This seems particularly important given the higher levels of narcissism found among actors (Davison & Furnham, 2018). Of course, actors do not rely solely on audience feedback; some have described using self-evaluation and having a sense of their standard of performance, either more subconsciously or through more conscious self-monitoring, whereby they adjust their

techniques as they act (Davison & Furnham, 2018). Still, audience feedback seemed to be the most important factor in their evaluations, and actors described feeling highly confused if they felt they had done a good job but did not receive a positive public evaluation (Robb & Davies, 2015).

Besides this evaluative layer, understanding the actor and the audience has another layer, in that acting can also be seen as a form of communication and thus as social interaction. Naturally, this differs from a conversation in which both interaction partners use words, listen to each other and try to get a message across. However, as has been evident from the start of this chapter in which acting is defined, performers on stage have an undeniable impact on their audience. Interestingly, experimental studies have demonstrated that group interactions shown by dancers on stage affected audience perceptions and even behaviours: if they had watched the solidarity of the dancers, the audience members later showed more cooperative behaviour during a group task (Van Mourik Broekman et al., 2019). As Bleuer et al. (2018) stated, theatre acting is an excellent form of knowledge mobilisation for this reason. To explain this further, the audience is usually affected by a play in ways that are more optimal than other methods because there is a certain aesthetic distance, which creates an optimal stress balance (Bleuer et al., 2018). Information can easily become too stressful, making people reject it, or too distant, whereby people feel no motivation to engage with the topic. With theatre, on the other hand, people can engage and identify with the characters while feeling safe (Bleuer et al., 2018). Konijn (1999) found that the spectators of a play reported intensities of emotions that were moderately strongly correlated with those of the character but, on average, less strong than those of the character, whereas felt empathy tended to be strong overall. Using a semi-participatory approach, Cinque et al. (2021) found that actors explained deeper meanings of the purpose with which they played characters, including the promotion of self-reflection, being a mirror to society and awakening

consciousness. They felt this was part of their calling and felt responsible for the emancipation of society (Cinque et al., 2021).

2.5.5 Being Part of the Tribe and Surviving Harsh Circumstances

While the latter finding reflects an idealistic point of view, in who they are, actors place great emphasis on these aspects of their job. One of the worst things they could imagine being is “just interchangeable things”, based on one actor’s description in the study by Cinque et al. (2021, p. 16). In another interview study by Alacovska and Kärreman, an actor explained this longing for uniqueness as part of identity: "Artists are special!" Pointing to her dyed green hair, Valeria opined that "being eccentric is part of being an actor" (Alacovska & Kärreman, 2022, p. 14). Not just feeling eccentric but also showing eccentricity implies that actors want to be both seen and acknowledged.

Recalling that Goldstein and Winner (2009) found actors to feel different from others enables us to better understand why actors find belonging and connectedness with their fellow actors, who were referred to in the study by Robb et al. (2018, p. 10) as “the tribe” and “family”. The world of arts in general and acting more specifically seems to be more accepting of individual differences and able to provide positive identities. For these reasons, acting is sometimes used as an intervention for people with mental health problems (Ørjasæter et al., 2017). Here, it is relevant to mention that actors and those for whom acting seems to be an effective mental health intervention have displayed some overlapping features. Fink et al. (2011) found that people who had psychiatric problems and were being treated for multiple substance addiction had similar levels of originality to actors when performing a creativity task. The qualitative study by Ørjasæter et al. (2017) revealed that being able to express creativity was effective in helping adults with mental health problems, while a quantitative study among children showed that for those with low self-worth,

improvisation acting classes positively improved their self-concepts (DeBettignies & Goldstein, 2019). If this is extrapolated to professional actors, the same-mindedness and creative culture would likely mean their profession could have a positive, almost therapeutic, effect as it would be a good match with their personal traits. Orzechowicz (2008, p. 143) referred to actors as “privileged emotion managers”, explaining that not only the acting team but also the broader theatre team of the house manager, stage manager and other staff would be there. This would facilitate an environment in which the actors could focus on acting and emotions.

However, acting is not intended as therapy for professional actors. In the study by Cinque et al. (2021), actors clarified that despite finding connections in the theatre, they still felt like outsiders from the rest of society. They felt they were even seen as crazy by outsiders (non-actors). Some also internalised these negative societal views, reporting feelings of shame when they got paid because they felt uncertain whether acting was really a job. Cinque et al. (2021, p. 40) identified multiple expressions within the therapeutic theme, some related to positivity and healing effects (e.g., “This is a type of work that allows me to be authentic.”) and others referring to psychological imbalance (e.g., “My maestro has taught me we actors are a bit bipolar.”). This can be explained by social identity theory: since acting is seen as a calling, the person identifies with this social in-group, yet this makes 'others' (that is, non-actors) the out-group.

Furthermore, precisely because of the blurred boundaries between the character and the self, actors also struggle with the connections they experience, wondering whether the latter are real or whether they actually exist between characters instead of between actors (Robb et al., 2018). As one actor in this study stated:

You feel like you've made a friend and after the show you realise that actually, probably it seems that you didn't, you know? And I think

we're all prone to that all the time because we're doing things that look and smell exactly like friendship. (Robb et al., 2018, p. 10)

Moreover, actors work with each other temporarily, perhaps only as long as a play is running. Since there are fewer jobs than actors, this world is also competitive, meaning others cannot always be trusted (Robb et al., 2018).

The work climate is also adversely affected by the negative attitudes of power holders, including directors (Bosshardt, 2006). Furthermore, the culture among peer-actors is described as one of drinking (Robb et al., 2018). This might be understandable, given the stress that develops because of the combination of job insecurity, financial problems, periods of feeling useless (Robb et al., 2018) and the typical personality profiles of actors.

Furthermore, a recent study confirmed that actors on average report more symptoms of depression and anxiety and lower levels of life satisfaction than the general population (Szabo et al., 2022). In psychology, this is referred to as “self-medication”, whereby about 25% of people have been found to drink alcohol to excess daily to find relaxation. This is often related to a wish to obtain relaxation away from experienced work stress (Frone, 2016). The prevalence seems to be higher among actors, as indicated by a literature review by Martin and Battaglini (2009), in which prevalence rates of 26.8% to 91.1% were reported which was confirmed in a more recent study (Szabo et al. 2020). This seems to be a personality in context interaction, with actors being more prone to anxiety and depression, having personality type-B traits that make them sensitive to substance abuse and frequently being in nightlife settings where alcohol consumption is more common and normal (e.g., after-performance drinks) (Robb et al., 2018). This decreases social hesitation about using alcohol (such as when one feels ashamed to be seen drinking or drunk) and increases social pressure, such as drinking to belong. As one actor explained:

Those that don't drink feel a sense of being isolated from the social fabric of the industry ... I've worked with actors that sort of have been drunk onstage and it's a lifetime of social drinking that they've not been able to manage and control late in their career. (Robb et al., 2018, p. 9)

A more serious issue is that besides alcohol, the majority of actors use drugs of some kind, such as marijuana (Martin & Battaglini, 2009). Nevertheless, actors see the acting process as part of their identity and they also regard suffering as part of this, as became especially clear from the studies by Seife (2022) and Cinque et al. (2021). Seife discovered that while recognising the benefits of therapy, actors also expressed concerns that attending therapy would decrease their creativity on the one hand and be stigma-increasing on the other. Cinque et al. (2021) further explained that actors regard the sacrifices they make as not a choice of a profession but as a way of being, part of their identity and following their calling. In contrast, an actor in another study explained how this world of drugs and alcohol had made her leave the profession.

Tiana, a 35-year-old actress, similarly confided that she had 'left the world of art theatre' because she could not cope 'with the emotional turmoil required to do arts' and the 'soul-corrupting atmosphere of drugs and alcohol'. Tiana had since started working for a local non-governmental organization, doing 'socially engaged drama with autistic children' as a form of self-help. 'I now help kids with my wonderful art!' she declared, adding that 'I've become mentally stronger and full of joy.' (Alacovska & Kärreman, 2022, p. 17)

Again, here we glimpse another story: a deviation from the mean.

2.6 Research Gaps and Current Research

The literature search revealed that the acting profession is usually a calling that people choose for many reasons other than merely seeking a career. Many actors have personality cluster B characteristics. To begin with, they are drawn to fantasy and the world of the imaginary, and they have a talent for acting, including perspective-taking and memory crafts, which they discover and augment throughout their lives. This helps us understand why some choose a profession that involves considerable financial insecurity. Previous studies have revealed the Janus-faced nature of acting for actors. On the one hand, it is their passion, their way of life and part of their identity, with theatre groups containing others who can feel like family. On the other hand, playing roles can be traumatising, actors still can feel like outsiders in society, and they often doubt the authenticity of work-based friendships.

Although there are some quantitative and qualitative studies on acting; most previous research has not focused specifically on the theatre actors' experience in depth. Thus, this study was focused on exploring actors' experiences and gaining an in-depth insight into their experiences of playing characters on stage and their impacts on actors' lives. This focus was expected to enable a clearer and deeper understanding of what it is like to be an actor and what are the psychological impacts of acting. In other words, the research gap to be addressed in the current study was that most studies have revealed an average picture by using just "one story", although heterogeneity has been glimpsed sporadically. The current research, however, focuses on the individual before the average. As explained later in further detail, this is typical of the phenomenological approach used for this purpose. Only in this way can the experiences of actors be authentically portrayed. Although communalities can exist, it would not do justice to actors to assume that all their experiences are alike due to the multitude of experiences that an actor can have and the differences between individual actors. To address these research gaps, the following research question was developed for this thesis:

What is the experience of impact of role playing? And what are the psychological impacts of acting?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter explains the research method used in the current study. Every study is designed and carried out according to a particular vision, also referred to as a research philosophy. This concerns worldviews about what truth, reality and existence (ontology) are, as well as ideas related to how knowledge can be acquired and what knowledge development is (epistemology) (Urcia, 2021). As such, it will be enlightening for the reader to be informed about these underlying thoughts so they can understand the author's decisions, as well as appreciate and evaluate the study. For the current study, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed, which is both a philosophy and a description of the specific steps the researcher should take when conducting a study. This chapter contains a description of the methodology, while the next chapter explains how more specific methodological guidelines and indicators of quality were used to develop the method used in this study. The chapter starts with a description of IPA, followed by an explanation of why IPA was chosen. The three theoretical foundations of IPA will be presented and explained in detail, after which the chapter closes with a short conclusion.

3.2 What is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)?

As the name indicates, IPA is a phenomenological approach, meaning that it is concerned with individual perceptions of objects or events. It is explicitly not about finding objective and general laws (Smith, 1996; 2017; Eatough & Smith, 2007; 2008; Willig, 2019). Instead, IPA is about discovering the meaning that individuals ascribe to objects and events; it is all about the insider's perspective (Smith, 1996). However, the term "interpretative" is included because it is acknowledged that the insider's perspective cannot be assessed

directly. One cannot really access the mind of another person to feel and experience exactly what they are feeling (Bakir & Todorovic, 2010). This may apply to an actor who is trying to be a character (s)he needs to play: even if they feel like they are becoming the character, this will always be how the actor interprets the role. In IPA, the research results obtained always depend on the researcher's conceptions as it is a double-hermeneutic and researcher make sense of participant interpretation of his experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Bakir & Todorovic, 2010; Smith, 1996).

IPA has developed within the discipline of psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Smith & Eatough 2007; 2008). Whereas many quantitative studies in this field are carried out and provide important information, it is acknowledged that qualitative studies are also needed in psychology, especially on topics that remain under-studied and/or concern sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This is because quantitative studies often rely on surveys consisting of predetermined questions, so the researcher must already know which questions to ask (based on a firm theoretical framework and prior studies) (Willig, 2019). IPA, on the other hand, is specifically useful for topics that are dynamic, contextual and subjective (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Yee, 2018). Considering the dialogue with quantitative research, IPA results can provide input for quantitative studies but also be a response to quantitative findings (Smith, 1996). For example, in the current study, the results from the personality surveys showing that certain traits are more common among actors (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006) drove the researcher's interest in how accounts from different actors revealed how their specific personalities interact with their experiences. This latter focus on particular experiential perspectives distinguishes IPA from other qualitative approaches. While IPA can reveal communalities in experiences, it also always takes into account individual lived experiences and describes the heterogeneity of samples (Larkin et al., 2019).

IPA is conducted by closely examining individual experiences (Kinsella, 2006). For this purpose, the researcher needs to use the reflections of the individuals concerned, which can be found in diaries or autobiographies. However, they are more typically obtained through interviews, which help people to develop reflections through the natural method of a conversation-like process of sense-making (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). The researcher must follow a systematic procedure, from holding the actual interviews to transcribing the text before arriving at sense-making to find themes (Smith et al., 2009; 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022; Warnke, 2011). This process and the quality criteria used in this type of research will be described in the next chapter, which presents the methodological choices. Overall, it is important to emphasise that IPA results in in-depth descriptions and thematical interpretations of the lived experiences of individuals by identifying both convergence and divergence (Smith et al., 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022).

3.3 The Choice of IPA in this Study

As stated previously, studies in psychology can be quantitative (using numerical quantifications and statistics) or qualitative (descriptive and interpretive); they can also use both as part of mixed-methods research (Khaldi et al., 2017). The method chosen depends on the research question and the underlying assumptions about knowledge and reality (i.e., the research philosophy) (Khaldi et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2015). Usually chosen when a study is strongly theory-driven (Willig, 2019), quantitative methods include testing hypotheses, proving laws and examining cause-effect relationships or differences between groups. These were not a good fit for the current study because, as explained in the literature review, most existing studies provide general information and stories of the average. In contrast, this study aimed to gain deep insights into the lived experiences of theatre actors. Whereas several theories were identified as useful for understanding the actors' experience,

such as why they chose the profession, merely following the expectations derived from these theories would not do justice to the diversity of day-to-day influences on and experiences of individual actors.

Instead, the present study required a qualitative approach that was more inductive and provided in-depth insights (Willig, 2019). As explained above, IPA fully recognises that experiences are subjective. The aims are to access these and determine what it is like to be in the position of someone undergoing certain experiences, assuming that this can lead to different perceptions and reflections for different individuals (Smith, 2017; Willig, 2019). This closely relates to the research philosophy underpinning IPA, the three theoretical foundations of which were adopted in the present study: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, 2017). These foundations will be described in the next section so that IPA can be more fully understood.

3.4 Phenomenology

3.4.1 The Origins: Transcendental Phenomenology

Phenomenology comes from the Greek words “phainomenon”, which means appearance, and “logos”, which means reason or study (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Phenomenology refers to the study of the essence of “phenomena”: things that exist of which the mind is conscious and things as they appear to us (Dowling, 2007; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Husserl, the founder of phenomenology (Christensen et al., 2017; Jardine, 2020), based his thinking on a critique of the idea that one can acquire knowledge by blindly relying on the experience of things, as empiricism proposes, and/or starting from the (logical) mind, as rationalism proposes (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Instead, Husserl advocated letting things speak for themselves and experiencing them directly and intuitively (Jardine, 2020), from which one could derive knowledge about things. This is reflected in Husserl’s motto,

“Zu den Sachen” (“back to the things themselves”) (Dowling, 2007). According to Husserl, human thinking is always conscious of the world and directed towards something other than itself, which is referred to as “intentionality” (Dowling, 2007). To avoid confusion with the way intention is used in daily language, intentionality in phenomenology should be understood as aboutness or directedness. Thus, phenomenology means reflecting on our everyday lived experiences of things to understand the nature of these experiences (Yee, 2018).

Husserl stated that people tend to have a natural attitude and accepting reality is separate from our subjective experience of it (Christensen et al., 2017). A natural attitude means one regards experiences in the world from a common-sense approach, simply taking things for granted without deploying doubt or critical analysis. However, one can choose to adopt a phenomenological attitude and reflect upon one’s experiences, suspending all one’s assumptions and theories about them. Husserl referred to this as “epoché”: bracketing or putting aside any preconceived ideas such as taste, individual experience, theory or judgement (Haas, 2003; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Epoché has clear parallels with the ways actors can engage with the characters they play; indeed, inspiration in the theatre world is derived from Husserl’s philosophy (Bonfitto, 2019). Furthermore, taking into consideration the experience of the audience, theatre stimulates them to release their natural attitude:

Theatre performance can be perceived as a unique occasion for a special phenomenological practice (πράττειν), rather than a self-referential hermeneutic game with self-referential signs. It performatively suspends the quotidian intentionality of being-in-the-world of the spectator. By putting the spectator’s imagination, perception, and recollection into play, theatrical performance grants the possibility for the spectator to re-discover and to reflect on their embedding in their intersubjective reality. Thus, we can say that post-dramatic theatre performance creates a provocative situation where the spectator finds themselves in a

world of uncertainty, where the otherwise well-known and objectified beings (human, animals, objects, etc.) present themselves as some incommensurable phenomena. (Benedek, 2020, p. 191)

This line of phenomenological thinking introduced by Husserl is referred to as “pure” or “transcendental” phenomenology (Yee, 2018).

3.4.2 Interpretative (Hermeneutic) Phenomenology

Later followers of phenomenology, however, disregarded the idea of being able to give meaning without interpretation. This started with Heidegger, a student of Husserl. Heidegger’s primary focus was Dasein (being) and being in the world (Dowling, 2007). Many followed the core idea of Descartes (“I think, therefore I am”), but this was challenged by Heidegger (Çüçen, 1998), who thought Descartes’s flaw was assuming that one can be reduced to thinking, because before one can think, one must be (Çüçen, 1998). Heidegger did not separate the subject from the object but stated that Dasein is completely interlinked with the world. Dasein, according to Heidegger, is central to everything and should be studied to prevent both randomness and being determined by others (Johnson, 2000). Dasein is determined by being thrown into the world and, in time, the nearing of death. Wihstutz compared this to the end of a theatre performance:

If a performance is capable of demonstrating and presenting temporality and its certain and irrevocable end in a particularly evident way, theatre, more than any other art form, could afford the spectator the opportunity to experience what Heidegger calls the ‘anticipation (Vorlaufen) of death’ (Wihstutz, 2009, p. 112).

The end of the performance is definitely “present” for both the audience and the actors. The audience might long for it (if bored), be surprised by it or hypothesise how the end will be. However, in all cases, they will be aware of the temporary nature of the

performance (Wihstutz, 2009). This also applies to the actors, who, as the previous chapter described, might experience stage fright in anticipation of a final audience evaluation (Doyle, 2016b) and feel reinforced when receiving positive responses at the end (Robb & Davies, 2015). The end of a performance can be seen as still part of the performance, with its rituals of the actors giving a final moment to be seen by the audience and subsequently receiving applause (Wihstutz, 2009). This consciousness, as Wihstutz (2009) claimed, might help increase the experience of Dasein. Similarly, for the present research, the researcher was aware of the fact that, in the end, the insights obtained should be clear for the reader and add to the existing literature about actor's well-being. The study was not random, but purposeful.

According to Heidegger, this experience is important because it is easy to follow existing rules and customs, as well as lose authenticity. Related to this idea is his description of things that are normally "ready-to-hand": we use them without explicitly analysing or being conscious of them (Harman, 2010). Only if something goes wrong do things become "present-at-hand" (Harman, 2010). For Heidegger, however, becoming conscious of one's experiences meant being able to make decisions that correspond to existing possibilities (which are limited by the world in which we live) instead of living the life of an 'average' person (Johnson, 2000).

Whereas a discussion of all phenomenological thinkers is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that IPA has also been influenced by the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009). The thoughts of the former about the body have been followed in IPA. According to Merleau-Ponty, mind-body dualism is a pseudo-problem (Kelly, 2002). If we start from our lived experiences, the world is there and we experience it through our bodies or, as he formulated it, "[I]t is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things'" (as quoted in Moran, p. 356). Phenomenology is augmented by re-achieving direct and primitive contact with the world.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty argued that this also means individuals have different experiences (Kelly, 2002; Smith et al., 2009). This point is particularly apposite to the present study. After all, actors have an embodied engagement with their characters. They “share” the same body as their characters and, as explained in the literature review, they can be personally affected by their acting (Ambrose, 2017; Seton, 2013; Stern & Lewis, 1986). For Merleau-Ponty, this would be logical and natural. As he explained:

Man can create the alter ego which “thought” cannot create, because he is outside himself in the world and because one ek-stasis is compossible with other ek-stases. And that possibility is fulfilled in perception as vinculum [unity, bond] of brute being and a body. The whole riddle of *Einfühlung* [empathy] lies in its initial “esthesiological” phase; and it is solved there because it is a perception. (quoted in Moran, 2013, p. 367)

The notion of *Einfühlung* used here by Merleau-Ponty was coined by the German philosopher Robert Vischer to refer to imaginary bodily perspective-taking, whereby *Einfühlung* literally translates as “feeling into”. The term is explicitly different from *Zufühlung* (feeling towards) and *Nachgefühl* (feeling along) (Ganczarek et al., 2018). Evidently, the “imaginary” bodily perspective-taking for the actor is more intense than our daily empathy with others because actors literally use the body as their tool. This perspective of Merleau-Ponty, the researcher kept in mind when listening to their stories to understand their experiences.

The final phenomenological philosopher to be described here is Sartre, who was also highly involved with the theatre and playwriting. This began in his youth, when he experienced that his mother and grandparents (with whom he lived) were preoccupied with pleasing and providing only a “show”. This made him describe himself as a “fake child” who

felt distant from the world and saw everything as “roles and props” (Bukala, 1976, p. 198). He wanted to be far more than an object controlled by adults (Curtis, 1973). Freedom, therefore, became a central theme in his plays and philosophical work (Curtis, 1973). Sartre's basic premise was that an individual comes into the world completely free in his decisions, from which moment he develops into himself to become completely self-responsible (Smith et al., 2009). In doing so, an individual is attentive to the influence of others and social relations, such as the self-consciousness evoked when one is observed by another (Smith et al., 2009).

Sartre used theatre as a way of communicating with a group and showing the difference between control and freedom by, for example, using masks to demonstrate the blankness and options that exist once we decide to give meaning to life (Bukala, 1976). It must be remembered that Sartre wrote his stories. Whereas actors may perceive their creative profession as a liberating process that “breaks down masks”, this is more likely to refer to their own liberation than that of the audience (Cingue et al., 2021, p. 23). Through this process, they might suffer from the control of the director if s/he functions as a “maestro”, with one actor describing how a director “manipulated me [the actor] and sucked my soul to foster his dark hole” (Cingue et al., 2021, p. 23). However, despite being in control of the story, Sartre ultimately found himself limited when using the theatre to communicate the meaning of liberty to the audience, especially since the theatre works with “the acts” (i.e., what is observable), whereas the decisional processes he wished to use to demonstrate individual freedom relied heavily on internal processes, only to be reflected in monologues that contained (too) many words (Edie, 1994).

In Sartre's philosophy, the parallels between play and acting in the theatre and in real life were central, and imagination could be considered “the fuel”. According to Sartre, freedom exists because of imagination (Stawarska, 2001). We use imagination all the time,

even when we think we are just perceiving and observing. If we look at a chair, for example, we only see part of that chair but have in mind a complete chair. Yet imagination enables us to go further than that and see all kinds of possibilities. Without imagination, there would be no choice because we would be unaware of the possibilities that are not presented to us (Stawarska, 2001). This also means Sartre emphasised not only the presence but also the absence of something or another matter. For example, our experience changes completely when we walk into a cafe and the person we thought we were meeting is not there (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher used this perspective of Sartre to become aware of how what the actors did not say also was informative, as will become clear in the discussion of the results.

These later perspectives are similar in being more than descriptive. As such, they can be referred to as “interpretative” or “hermeneutic” phenomenology, with the idea that finding meaning cannot be achieved in its deepest sense if the researcher uses complete bracketing (which is also considered unrealistic). Instead, the researcher will always use interpretation. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2019) describe how this process should be best thought of as *bridling*, referring to an attitude of openness that is used to engage in a phenomenological approach to understanding phenomena. Bridling can be seen as the process that researchers engage in when they constantly monitor and adjust their understanding, deliberately moving away from a natural attitude (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Vagle, 2018). This practice involves being present and questioning one's own understanding, aiming to open up various possibilities of understanding in order to avoid randomness or a too strong subjective account by the researcher (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Stutey et al., 2020). The hermeneutic process is explained in further depth in the next section.

3.5 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics concerns interpretations and finding meaning (Smith et al., 2009). One of the first to focus on hermeneutics was Schleiermacher, who described how the grammatical interpretation of a text might be objective but its psychological meaning is not (Smith, 2021). It depends on interpretation and can even be described as an art (Kinsella, 2006) because the meaning of a text is “holistic”: the meaning of the whole is more than the sum of the parts. As such, understanding a text depends on the insights and consciousness of the person reading and interpreting it. In the process of reading and reflecting, value is added, which can even mean that the interpreter comes to a better understanding of the content than the original writer did. Heidegger agreed with this and defined “fore-conception” as the prior experiences, assumptions and preconceptions that affect interpretations (Warnke, 2011). Nevertheless, this does not imply that subjective interpretation is the focus. Instead, hermeneutics is about a sense-making process in which phenomena are central. They influence the interpretation, which can subsequently affect the fore-structure. Gadamer (a German philosopher profoundly affected by Heidegger) described this as a dialogue between fore-conception and phenomena (Warnke, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

These ideas result in a hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). The whole of something consists of parts, yet the meaning of these depends on the whole, which provides the context (Smith et al., 2009). As such, if we want to interpret a text, reading it provides an initial understanding. This subsequently affects our sense-making while we continue reading or re-reading the text. For example, a theatre actor might say “I was relieved when the curtain fell”. Knowing that relief is usually comparative to an earlier situation during which a person felt anxious, one could interpret this by thinking that the person felt relaxation to some extent. Knowing that being on stage can be stressful, we might think that this relief refers to a successful performance. Moreover, the meaning of the words “curtain” and “fell” depend on

the context, which in this case is something said by a theatre actor. For example, we know this is not a curtain for a window. Then, if the actor continues by saying “I heard loud laughter from my father”, we may take this initial sense-making and make sense of this sentence within the given context. We might wonder if this person felt anxious about whether his father liked the play. We interconnect the sentences and, while reading and making sense of the second sentence, slightly adjust our interpretation of the first. Thus, phenomenological analysis cannot be performed in a linear stepwise manner. Instead, one must allow oneself to go forwards and backwards until the sense-making process seems to stabilise and no longer changes (Smith et al., 2009). As Smith stated:

IPA recognises that there is not a direct route to experience and that research is really about trying to be ‘experience close’ rather than ‘experience far’ (...) and experience cannot be plucked straightforwardly from the heads of participants, it requires a process of engagement and interpretation on the part of the researcher, and this ties IPA to a hermeneutic perspective. (Smith, 2011, p. 9-10)

Again, a parallel can be drawn with actors and the theatre. Wilshire (1976) described the theatre as “a ritual enactment of a fuller range of our potentialities. It is where we go to hear the resonances of our selves. It is a hermeneutics of the soul” (p. 205). Here, we again encounter the imagination and choices that Sartre emphasised were necessary for freedom. People often compare real life to the stage and see how people regularly 'play a role'. However, as Wilshire explained, this metaphor does not entirely hold because of the important differences between the roles we play in our daily lives and those on stage. This reiterates the definition of acting as “a process of portraying the character’s features” (Guo, 2021, p. 61) because what happens on the stage is reversible and not considered real by anyone. This differs greatly from the roles we play in daily life, which others can find

misleading. Moreover, the actions we commit while playing a role are real and the consequences do not magically disappear like they do for the actions of actors on stage. The latter resolve once a play is over: when Hamlet kills Claudius, both characters can appear for the final round of applause and the two actors can have drinks together afterwards (Wilshire, 1976). However, this means the theatre provides almost unlimited potential to experiment with possibilities and can therefore help in understanding the soul or mind (Wilshire, 1976). After all, these experiments make us aware of other possibilities, thus helping us reflect on the essence of ourselves and even humankind. When does theatre become “absurd” by reflecting something that people in reality would not do? (Wilshire, 1976).

In IPA hermeneutics, ‘applied’ means finding the meaning of experiences for individuals under certain circumstances (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger explained the essence of hermeneutics with the explanation of life as “thisly”: it is all about this person, in this situation, with these possibilities (Smythe et al., 2007). Finding themes, therefore, is not about finding generalisability in IPA but understanding experiences and identifying these to the reader as important (Smythe et al., 2007). Hence the third and final foundation of IPA, idiography.

3.6 Idiography

Idiography means focusing on the particular (Thomae, 1999). The sentence “I was relieved when the curtain fell” can only be fully understood if we consider it an expression of an embodied, situated and perspectival experience (Noon, 2018). We cannot assume that this same feeling of relief was also experienced by the actor standing next to this person on the same stage, nor that this same person will have the same experience the following night. Therefore, idiographic research is intended to provide greater insights into the particular. The literature review revealed the great importance that actors ascribe to idiography, as reflected

in the earlier quote about not wishing to be “just interchangeable things” (Cinque et al., 2021, p. 16), the view that “artists are special!” (Alacovska & Kärreman, 2022, p. 14) and the emphasis on the differences between experiences on “good” and “bad” nights (Doyle, 2016b).

Idiography, therefore, contrasts with nomothetic science, which involves discovering general laws that apply to large groups (Tomae, 1999). Nomothetic studies do not necessarily disregard the uniqueness of individuals but try to find averages and commonality (Robinson, 2011). In comparison, while an idiographic approach does not deny that commonality can exist, the main purpose is not to determine what applies to everyone but discover a deep understanding of individual experiences (Robinson, 2011). Through IPA, researchers aim to capture the lived world of people in a certain context or having a certain experience (Larkin et al., 2019). Certain similarities can be discovered and described, even to the level of between-group differences if the researcher focuses on subgroups (Larkin et al., 2019). However, the researcher that follows an IPA approach also always describes the variety of experiences that exist, including both within-group differences and often even within-person variations, as determined by time and contextual circumstances (Larkin et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009).

3.7 Conclusions About IPA

In conclusion, this chapter described how IPA was selected as the philosophical stance that corresponded to the aims of the current study, which were to describe the lived and heterogeneous experiences of theatre actors with respect to the roles’ impacts. As explained IPA contains three fundamental aspects: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Using IPA, the researcher tries to capture the participants’ experiences by figuratively using a magnifying glass to get to know individual and contextualised experiences, only to zoom out again in the second instance and gain insights into the whole

and the parts, the shared and the differences (Larkin et al., 2006). The next chapter explains how that was achieved in the present study.

Chapter 4: Method

4.1 Research Question

To reiterate, the following research question was addressed in this thesis: How do playing characters impact theatre actors and their psychological functioning ? As the literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrated, theatre actors' psychological functioning is best understood by recognising that acting is associated with certain personality traits, while the decision to join the profession, the working conditions and actors' role involvement are all associated with psychological wellbeing. Based on the research gap identified—that most previous research described an average picture and did not focus directly on the lived experience of actors or the effects of roles on them—the objectives of the present study were as follows:

- To gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of theatre actors
- To investigate how playing roles affects actors' lives.
- To augment the existing knowledge about the psychological functioning of actors
- To gain further insights into the differences and commonalities in theatre actors' lived experiences.

As described in the previous chapter, the IPA methodology was considered the most suitable approach to address this question and these objectives. In this chapter, the method used in the study will be described, starting with the recruitment process and participants, followed by the data collection. Then, the analysis procedures, as determined by the IPA approach, will be explained.

4.2 Recruitment and Participants

4.2.1 Recruitment Process

When applying IPA, the researcher tries to obtain a relevant and homogeneous sample (Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). When searching for experiences of phenomena, a specific phenomenon should be explored. For example, recruiting actors in general rather than West End theatre actors would complicate the research because compared to a West End theatre actor, the star of a Hollywood movie production (for example) has a very different context and experience in terms of working conditions and audience. As such, the composition of a sufficiently specific sample should be carefully considered. Moreover, IPA is pragmatic in that the sample to be recruited must be available and willing, as well as sufficiently small to enable a deep understanding and thick descriptions to be obtained. Participants are usually recruited through the researcher's network by approaching specific gatekeepers and/or snowballing (asking participants to find other potential participants) (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022). The best sample size has not been determined, but some have recommended using five to 10 participants (see for example Miller & Barrio Minton, 2016), while Smith and Nizza (2022) have recently suggested finding 10 to 12 participants for an IPA study.

Based on these recommendations, the decision was made to recruit participants through the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in London. Participants were recruited based on the following inclusion criteria:

- aged 25 years or older
- male actors
- a professional West End theatre actor
- active in the acting profession at the time of the study
- fluent in spoken English

- based in Greater London

Rationale for the Age Criterion. As the literature review revealed some differences between student actors and professional actors (Dumas et al., 2006), it remains unknown whether age or additional experience may have caused these effects. Nevertheless, the inclusion of younger actors was adjudged to have likely produced an overly heterogeneous sample. Besides, the researcher sought professional actors with some experience in acting, so younger actors (those under 25 years old) would have been less likely to provide rich data due to their relative lack of experience.

Rationale for gender Criterion. However, the first intention was recruiting male and female actors, due to receiving no interest from female actresses, we ended up focusing on the experience of male actors for this study. The details will be elaborated later in this chapter in the recruitment process.

Rationale for Choosing Professional Active Theatre Actors. As the aim of the study was to gain insights into the lived experiences of professional actors, this was a necessary inclusion criterion. Meanwhile, research into the experiences of professional theatre actors who were temporarily or permanently inactive would not have provided the rich and deep data sought in this IPA study as the experience of inactive actors might not be fresh or up to date. Furthermore, selecting such actors would have resulted in an overly heterogeneous sample.

Rationale for Selecting English-Speaking Participants. The IPA process depends greatly on understanding and language. As such, it was impossible to include participants who had not mastered the English language without the risk of misinterpretation or information loss. Moreover, the desire to obtain a homogeneous sample meant that only one location was chosen to recruit participants, with the primary aim being to find British actors

or actors who, if not originally British, had at least been long-term residents in Britain and could speak English fluently.

Recruitment Process. For the recruitment process, I contacted the RADA administration team and they passed my email address to the Graduate Relations Coordinator, who sent the flyer and information sheet I had prepared to all the actors who had graduated from RADA. Thus, potential participants received an information sheet (see Appendix A) describing the study purpose and procedure. I contacted interested actors individually to answer any questions they had; finally, I made appointments with those interested in taking part in the research and being interviewed. The participants were allowed as much time as they required to think about participation and ask questions (see 4.3 Ethical Considerations). The participants knew that participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The only exclusion criterion was an unwillingness to provide informed consent. The recruitment process went very smoothly and quickly, and I received considerable interest from the RADA graduate community, many of whom were keen to share their experiences as theatre actors. However, one challenge was that I only received emails from male actors, and no active female actors reached out to express an interest in participating in my research. Thus, although the initial intention was to focus on the experiences of both actors and actresses, it was decided to exclude female actors from this study and focus on the experiences of male actors. I received two emails from retired actresses who were interested in sharing their experiences, but as they were not professionally active at the time of recruiting, they were not included in the study. Receiving no interest from active actresses left the researcher with a question in mind about the possible reasons behind that. The researcher's explanation for this was that the difficulty of the career and the challenges that females experience in this industry make sharing their experiences hard for them and they might prefer not to speak up. However, the readers need to bear in mind that it

is just a personal speculation with no scientific support. Despite the major question about why no actresses had approached me to participate and share their experiences, I decided to proceed with only male participants and investigate their experiences while hoping that future research might offer the opportunity to explore the experiences of actresses too. Ultimately, I was able to recruit 10 actors who were professionally active and based in Greater London at the time of interviewing. The participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and protect their identity. For the same reasons other details that would make the participants known were also deleted from the descriptions.

4.2.2 Participants

The actual participants in the study were 10 professional theatre male actors. All but one had been born and raised in Britain. The other actor was born in another European country and had come to Britain to study. He had been living in Britain for more than 25 years at the time of his participation in this research, and he spoke and understood English perfectly. To protect the identity of this participant, no further details are presented. The participant pseudonyms are provided so they can be used in the results and to distinguish between each participant.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

The University Ethics Committee gave permission to conduct the study (reference number: 181972). For this investigation, no additional approval was needed. All the prospective participants needed to be aware of the study's purpose and all the procedural details before agreeing to participate. To fulfil this requirement, I briefly explained my study whenever someone contacted me about participation via phone or e-mail. If the person seemed a potential participant, I asked further questions to confirm they met all the inclusion

criteria and had received the information sheet which, as previously mentioned, explained the purpose of the study, the eligibility requirements and the data collection process. It also contained confidentiality information in case potential participants heard about the study from someone else. All the participants confirmed that they had read the information sheet.

Whereas the study involved no harm or risk, ethical issues always play a role in IPA studies since participants talk about their own experiences (Alase, 2017). Therefore, confidentiality and informed consent are particularly important in this type of research, and the study should take place in a setting that feels safe and comfortable for the participant (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022). To ensure the participants would feel as comfortable as possible, I gave them the opportunity to hold the study interview in a place of their preference. For five participants, this was a room at Birbeck University that I had pre-booked for this purpose; three others preferred their home and two preferred their workplace. Before starting each interview, I checked that the participant had completed the informed consent form and again explained their right to withdraw at any time up to three months after their interview, which was only to ensure that data analysis could start promptly. I provided my contact information in case the participants needed to contact me for this or any other reason after the interview, yet none did so. Upon leaving, all the participants stated that they had experienced the interview as pleasant, which was a mutual experience. I started this stage of the study with some apprehension for two main reasons; firstly, I felt responsible for ensuring the participants would feel safe discussing their personal experiences with me. Secondly, given that English is not my first language, I also felt concerned about interviewing British actors. However, the actual interviews felt very natural and fluent, and the feeling of being worried and nervous almost disappeared after a couple of interviews. From then on, I felt confident and comfortable about interviewing the actors, especially because I noticed that

the participants were collaborating, talking about their experiences and sharing their thoughts and feelings freely.

4.4 Data Collection

Whereas qualitative data collection as part of a phenomenological approach can be based on a range of information or resources (e.g., diaries or autobiographies), for several reasons, the default approach to IPA is to hold in-depth interviews (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Firstly, people usually feel most capable of reflecting on and discussing their experiences in a conversation-like manner. Secondly, during interviews, questions can be asked to stimulate and help the participants' reflections, while the researcher can also subsequently make sense of these (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). This is the most natural way for participants, so it was used in the present study.

Moreover, in IPA, the researcher must adopt an active role in data collection (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). They need to prepare for the interviews by creating an interview schedule (Smith et al., 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Table 4.1 provides the interview schedule containing the 11 questions that all the participants were asked. However, the schedule is only a guideline, and the researcher uses open questions and holds participant-led conversations to ensure that relevant and thick descriptions, as well as the reflections of the participants, are obtained (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022). I tried to listen carefully and follow the topics and issues raised by the participants, as recommended by Smith et al. (2019). The researcher can give prompts and ask follow-up questions, which I did for this purpose. In this phase, the researcher should also be careful to prevent any prior information from becoming preconceived ideas (Chan et al., 2013). From the hermeneutic perspective, however, complete bracketing is also not desirable; instead, the researcher should use any prior understanding as guidance and assistance in the making-sense process

(Matua & Van der Wal, 2015). This careful balance should result in an open and empathetic attitude (Smith et al., 2009), a fact I remained aware of during the interviews. I also reflected upon the process with my supervisor to ensure I complied with this requirement. For a researcher to obtain the essential information, participants also need to feel comfortable about expressing themselves and receive sufficient time to reflect. Thus, the interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and the participants were allowed reflection time during their session. For example, silences or prompts were used to help them share more details (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Keeping a written reflexive diary after each interview was also very helpful. In this diary, I recorded my thoughts and feelings about the interview, how it went and what feelings I experienced during the interview. I also noted any striking or interesting moments, as well as my contemplations on how I could potentially improve the interviews.

Table 4.1

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule
1. Can you tell me about how you came to be an actor/actress?
2. Could you tell me how you feel about being an actor/actress?
3. Could you tell me about a recent performance? (Prompts: What was it? How did you get into it? How do you feel about it?)
4. Would you describe the process of that performance as demanding or as relatively straightforward? (Prompts: physically, mentally, impact on social/family life)
5. Can you tell me more about the particular role you played in that performance?
6. How would you describe your relationship with the character you played? For example, some people might say the character was completely separate from me, while others might talk about getting lost in the role. What would you say for yourself about playing this role?
7. Would you say that playing that role has had any other impacts on you or your life? (Prompts: impacts on your relationships with others? on your lifestyle?)

8. Can you now think of a very different performance or role you had within the last year?
In what way was it different?
9. Would you say this other performance and role had any different impacts on you and your life
10. What was it like when you finished the run??
11. I wonder whether you have any other reflections on these topics from your overall experience as an actor?

4.5 Transcription

Before starting each interview, the participants were informed when I started the audio recording. I again explained their right to not answer a question and reminded them that they could withdraw from the interview whenever they wished. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim using the Otter application, which provides automatic transcription, therefore saving time and preventing the researcher from making mistakes. However, I re-listened to the interviews several times while reading along with the transcripts, not only to check them and correct mistakes but also to become more engaged with the data. In IPA, transcription involves more than simply putting spoken words into written form (Smith, 2009). Instead of, for instance, the prosodic level of extensive descriptions of non-verbal characteristics required in other kinds of research data gathering, IPA specifically demands theme-level information in the transcription (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn 2008). I also noted that while re-listening, the hermeneutic process had already started as I was able to follow participants' explanations with a richer understanding, remembering the full information they had provided during the interviews. The following signs were used in the transcription:

Editorial deletion of unnecessary material ...[...]...

A short pause: three dots ...

A long pause: (pause)

Non-verbal utterances: (laughs) (sighs)

Emphasised speech: *Italic text*

4.6 Analysis

The steps outlined by Smith and Osborn (2008) were used for the analysis, and each step is explained in detail in this section. Each transcript was analysed separately. Before moving on to the next participant, the analysis for the previous person was finished. This was done independently with the aim of keeping each case separate to retain the idiographic style. The stages of each individual analysis were as follows:

Reading and Re-Reading. The first analysis step described by Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (2012) is “immersing oneself” by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. For this purpose, I familiarised myself with the data by listening to the recordings while reading and re-reading the transcripts. This step is similar to diving into the ocean of a participant’s world and seeing that world from his point of view, feeling his feeling and delving into his lived experience. To ensure I could connect completely to this particular person, I took notes and recorded what struck me at the time of reading so I could return to my notes at a later stage when trying to grasp more fully which themes were present. I also focused on and read each transcript at a separate time to stay loyal to the idiographic framework of IPA. At this step of familiarisation with the data, I needed to read some interviews more than others as I found them more detailed or complex. At the end of this stage, when I felt I had a good understanding of each case, I was ready to progress to the next stage.

Initial Noting. After immersing myself in each participant’s world by re-reading the transcripts, systematic initial notes were taken. As Smith et al (2012). stated, this includes three levels of analysis: descriptive, linguistic and contextual. The goal of descriptive

comments is to describe the data's content. The researcher detects significant terms, explanations, descriptions and emotional responses when giving descriptive remarks. The next level of analysis is linguistic, which takes into account the "how" and the "what" of the textual data to help the researcher grasp the meaning behind the participant's remarks. The researcher takes note of pronoun use, pauses, laughter, functional features of language, repetition and metaphor use. Following that, the analysis enters a more interpretive level of study with the provision of conceptual comments. This contextual level of analysis includes the formation of meaning-related questions. These questions (or the preliminary language used in conceptual annotation, such as "seems" or "may") identify crucial concepts that the researcher believes might emerge. These three levels of analysis assist the researcher's meaning-making process, which will lead to the discovery of themes in the next stage. As Smith mentioned, the analyst's approach in this phase is based on a free and open textual style, and there is no firm framework for how and what the researcher could write. Instead, this phase is focused on his/her understanding of the data, whereby comments are written in front of each word or sentence of the participants. Richer data logically produces more notes. Table 4.2 shows a sample of how initial comments on Toby's interview were produced.

Undertaken before making emergent themes, these steps are intended to help the researcher become engaged and understand the worlds of participants to an increasingly deeper extent. I experienced this step as a deeper level of understanding of the data that makes the analyst ready for the next phase, emergent themes.

Developing Emergent Themes. At this stage, the researcher produces a number of "emergent themes" based on the comments and notes recorded in the previous stage; however, themes are more abstract and concise. The analyst narrows the number of exploratory comments whilst maintaining complex and deep interpretations of the participants' accounts. The whole process is based on the hermeneutic and double-

hermeneutic approaches since the researcher has been attempting to make sense of the participant's world and the participant has been trying to make sense of his own lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). In the previous stage, the participant's world had a central role; however, in this step, the analyst's interpretation has a significant and central role. In my experience, this stage requires the right mindset, focus and patience as it can be challenging. However, it must be emphasised that despite the challenges, this stage was a joyful and creative experience for me because of the central role played by the researcher and the capacity to create one's own interpretation. In the example of Toby's analysis Table 4.2 my initial notes on the transcript are shown in the right margin and my emergent themes are shown on the left. I used a color code to make sure the emergent themes, text and initial notes are aligned and clear for the reader. The colors used in tables have no meaning but showing the same colors in different columns are related to each other.

Table 4.2

Developing Emergent Themes for Toby

Emergent Themes	Interview Transcript	Initial Notes
<p>To feel disappointment: I am not where I deserve to be in my career</p> <p>Having to cope with rejections; need to be persistent</p> <p>Acting is a competitive profession: it is an overcrowded business</p>	<p>Researcher: Could you please explain more about this sense of frustration you mentioned?</p> <p>Toby: Yeah, sometimes I feel frustrated because I'm, I'm not, I suppose, I'm not doing what I, I what I feel I ... I'm not at a place in my career where I would like, I would like to be, and I would've thought I would be. You know, I would've thought I'd be more ... I'd have more traction in the business and I am, I'm, I haven't really got that, you know. And ... mm... and ... you know, I'm st ... it's still a,a,a,a, case of a struggle for just finding the next job, and having to struggle for that, and, you know, having to put up with lots of rejection, you know, which is what we do in this ... You know, you have to put up with a lot of rejection. Probably more rejection ...</p> <p>Well, no doubt, more rejection than acceptance and then. So the frustration is I feel I'm not where I would expect to be now in my career and the challenge. Yeah, the challenge, because you know you're up against an over ... It's such an overcrowded profession, so ... mm ... you know you're competing with however many other people. You know, I could go up for a part and be perfect, really good in my audition, but it really wouldn't matter how good I was because there'd be another five people, and it would be a question of whether those other five people, six people, ten</p>	<p>Does he think deserves more? he is not happy with where he is now / is it a sense of failure?</p> <p>A constant struggle/fear of being unable to get the next job</p> <p>Rejections are an undeniable part of this career/ The profession can be unbearable due to lots of rejection</p> <p>Severe rejections have been experienced over the years</p> <p>Sense of failure</p> <p>Overcrowded profession/ The challenge is competition</p> <p>Is there too many people?</p> <p>It doesn't matter how skilled you are/ There is lots of competition</p>

<p>A feeling of injustice due to the competitive nature of the career</p> <p>The temptation is to give up due to the challenges, so actors need to be toughened up</p>	<p>people, just met the, met the right ... tick the right boxes for that director's, you know, perception of that character. So it wouldn't really matter how good I am, you know. The business is spoilt for choice when it comes to actors. So that's certainly a big, big challenge. And also, I guess, another challenge is to keep the right attitude, you know, to maintain the right attitude, not get disillusioned, not get too hm ... fed up with it, you know, not, not give up, you know. I think that's a challenge.</p>	<p>Does the business sound unfair? The industry is spoilt for him</p> <p>Dealing with this unfairness is challenging/ repetition of right attitude/ is he fed up and disappointed?</p> <p>A sense of tiredness of dealing with lots of challenges</p>
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Finding Connections Between Emergent Themes. At this stage, analysts have a long list of emergent themes that need to be clearly grouped and clustered. The aim of this stage is to refine the emergent themes by “putting like with like, distilling, synthesizing and identifying the structure that can bring them together” (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 43).

After analysing Walter, one of the actors participated in this study, I had a long list of around 100 emergent themes that needed to be refined and categorised to produce a super emergent-theme table by finding the similarities and differences between them. For this purpose, all the emergent themes were printed and cut into separate pieces, as Smith et al. (2009) recommended. All the pieces were then put on a desk surface and, by moving them around and shifting similar themes closer to each other, several groups of themes were created. The key feature of this step is seeking to answer the question: “What should go with what?” Moreover, searching for convergence and divergence between emergent themes at the time of clustering was extremely helpful in finding meaningful connections to create a clear and comprehensive table of super-ordinate themes, which is a proper reflection of the

analysis of that particular interview. Some themes could be linked with others, but ultimately, some could not be clustered under any group and were omitted.

Table 4.3

The table of Super-Ordinate and sub-ordinate Themes for Toby

<p>Super-ordinate themes <i>Sub-ordinate themes</i></p>	<p>Extract</p>
<p>The challenges of acting</p> <p><i>A competitive career:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Acting is a competitive profession: it is an overcrowded business -Competitive business: need to do other things to survive -A feeling of injustice due to the competitive nature of the career <p><i>Rejections:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Having to cope with rejections; need to be persistent -Mental health of actors can be threatened due to rejections/need to develop psychological strategy to cope with rejections <p><i>Coping with ambivalences:</i></p>	<p>“It’s such an overcrowded profession, so ... hm ... you know you’re competing with however many other people”. (p. 4)</p> <p>“...only because of the numbers. You know, the amount of people who are in it, you know, just make ...”. (p. 3)</p> <p>“...it really wouldn’t matter how good I was”. (p. 4)</p> <p>“You have to put up with a lot of rejection. Probably more rejection”. (p. 4)</p> <p>“The challenge is to sort of keep the right attitude. Try and keep as positive and creative as possible ...”. (p. 5)</p> <p>“Depends on when you catch me, you know. Right now, I suppose I feel, I feel okay. I’ve been at it for a long time. Sometimes, I</p>

<p>-Ambivalent about the profession; sometimes thinks it was the right choice, sometimes wonders about alternatives</p> <p>-Ambivalent: not achieved as much as hoped; feels fulfilled</p> <p>What is acting?</p> <p><i>Discovery and exploration:</i></p> <p>-Acting as a continuous discovery of characters' worlds</p> <p>-Acting is discovery; finding humanity in negative characters is satisfying</p> <p><i>Acting as a journey of personal growth:</i></p> <p>-To develop a non-judgemental attitude by playing roles</p> <p>-Acting helps developing a sense of integration</p> <p><i>Identification with characters:</i></p>	<p>wonder, ... should I have tried to look for something else, aside from acting". (p. 3)</p> <p>"But I think it's a mixture of frustration, fulfilment and ...". (p. 3)</p> <p>"The process of discovery doesn't just stop on the first performance. It goes through to the very last performance". (p. 6)</p> <p>"There was a degree of feeling accomplishment that I managed to find a human being in that. So I was grateful that ... You know, I wasn't, I didn't feel frustrated with him, because I ... Although, there was always something more to find out". (p. 18)</p> <p>"I'm more accepting, more accepting and more tolerant, more accepting and more understanding ...". (p. 18)</p> <p>"[You] become more grounded, you know, human beings, which always more is interesting than, say, you're evil, or you're bad, or you're ... You know...". (p. 18)</p>
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<p>-Getting lost in the character: is it me or the character?</p>	<p>“Maybe I’m identifying with the frustration of the character and not realising it, you know, so I think that’s probably true with a lot of characters”. (p. 12)</p>
<p>-It is sometimes difficult to recognise whether it is the character’s feeling or their own (the actor’s)</p>	<p>“Maybe that was the king, you know, as well as Toby, getting angry about that.”. (p. 12)</p>
<p>-Is it my illness or the character’s? Actor’s body identified with character’s body</p>	<p>“So I don’t know if I identified with any kind of ... With that kind of ... Maybe a medical ailment that he had as well”. (p. 15)</p>
<p>-I was conquered by the character: my behaviour towards the other cast was influenced by the character’s personality</p>	<p>“My reactions to various other people in the cast as well, would’ve been, probably, to a certain extent, informed by ... you know, informed by the character”. (p. 15)</p>

Finding Patterns Across the Cases. This process is repeated from scratch for each case so that the overall process results in a table of super-ordinate themes for each participant. The final stage of analysis is searching for meaningful connections across the cases to create a common account of all the participants, which is shown in a group master table. For this purpose, all 10 super-ordinate theme tables were printed and spread on the floor. While looking for connections across the cases, I was thinking of answers to the questions recommended by Smith et al. (2009): “What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are the most potent?” These questions played a central role in finding connections and creating a master table for the whole group. This process is similar to the way an individual super-ordinate theme table

is created, in that similarities and differences are sought, as well as divergence and convergence between themes. This information is then clustered and relabelled. Transcript checking also formed part of this process to ensure the clustering process had been done in the most appropriate way. Each theme was supported by at least four to five extracts from the original transcripts. After finding shared themes and clustering them into different groups, the group themes were given appropriate titles that reflected the concept of each category. In this study, the master table contained five super-ordinate themes, of which two had sub-themes.

Table 4. 4

The Master Table for 10 Actors: Super-Ordinate Themes and Sub-Ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme
A. Acting is a “vocation” for actors	-
B. Actor’s attitudes toward the identification with characters	-
C. Positive impact of being on stage	Acting is liberating Transformative nature of acting Performance boosts confidence Acting is a collective experience
D. The challenges and cost of acting	Sense of being rejected Sense of loss at the end of the run The possibility of substance/alcohol abuse among actors Financial insecurity

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Acting is a “Calling” for Actors

The first super-ordinate theme, acting is a calling for actors, explains the participants’ motivations for becoming actors, in which they described the reasons for this decision and how they made meaning of it. A calling, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means “a strong desire or feeling of duty to do a particular job, especially one in which you help other people”. For actors, acting seems to surpass being simply a job or career: it is like a life mission they must perform, as their accounts reveal. Walter said:

If you're going to be an actor, the only qualification you have, you have to gain such pleasure and such inspiration and such power from the joy of performing that [it] has to be part of your system which you're born with. I think, I don't think you can learn it. (p. 8)

Walter mentioned how the theatre was part of his existence; he described the sense of integration with acting that he felt he had been born with. When describing how performing was part of his “system”, he seemed to be explaining how acting was part of his whole existence that he lived with, instead of being like a skill that can be achieved and developed. Toby associated the word “system” with the digestive system, his DNA, an innate part of his make-up and a quality he was born with. He emphasised that actors cannot learn this aspect; they are ‘born with it’. Thus, the actors regarded the decision as being about more than just becoming an actor: they were chosen by the profession, which has been their destiny since before they even were born. Toby also explained how enjoyable this experience was and how it was a source of pleasure that they (i.e., he and other actors) should simply follow their passion and their destiny, as well as allow themselves to be drowned in this pleasure and

experience integration with it. Liam explained his similar, apparently predestined, experience:

I once told a journalist I was born on stage and they believed me. They wrote an article about how my mother finally gave birth on stage. I literally meant metaphorically. I was born. I was born on stage when I came alive. (p. 14)

For Liam, acting meant ‘being born’, not just a joining career or a profession. It was ‘life’ and ‘being alive’. In this quote, he explained that he once told a journalist that his mother had given birth to him on a theatre stage. He intended to emphasise this experience but the journalist apparently did not understand this. The likely reason is that Liam’s metaphor of a pregnant woman giving birth to a boy on a theatre scene was strong and impressive. To him, theatre seemed “literary” and gave him the sense of being alive, as if life erupted in his veins when he was on stage. Theatre also gave him identity. Although he talked about the day of his birth, the theatre was not his biological birthplace; instead, he made meaning of his existence by performing on stage. However, while Walter talked about the joy and pleasure he experienced from performing, describing it more as a gift, Liam explained how being “on stage” was important for him, describing it as something he truly could not live without. Choosing to be on stage did not even seem to be a decision. For Liam, the stage was like a focal point where he was metaphorically born and a place that had defined his life journey since the moment of his birth. While Dean also experienced acting as his “calling”, he felt he needed to make a decision to follow it:

I wrote a very formal letter to my father. We never wrote like that, and I always used to talk on the telephone. And a week later, I got a very formal letter back from him saying, well, yeah, I saw it coming. Then, you know, he must have seen it coming. But I was so delighted

and so relieved that I'd made that decision. It was just an ... it was a decision which wasn't about ... it wasn't just about, this is what I want to do. It is, this is who I am, as well. It was an actual I; [there] was a feeling of identity of it. (p. 3)

Dean started by outlining how he formally announced he was going to be an actor, but this was not a decision about his future career: it was also connected to his identity and how it defined him. A strong passion seemed to be involved in the decision as his father admitted that he had known about it. Dean experienced deep relief after making and announcing this decision. He finally seemed to be following his passion and what made him feel alive. For Dean, acting was his identity and how he made sense of himself, hence his major sense of relief to announce it loudly or “formally”. Overall, Liam and Walter regarded acting as part of their system and something they were born with, but Dean saw it as a decision he had to make in order to be his real self. This meant the decision was about not only joining a profession but also following his identity. John’s story, however, was completely different:

I chose the Royal Academy, and that was the sort of “heart”. So it basically summed up [how] I rejected it completely my whole life, although it was always around me and in front of me, and I said, no, no, no, no, no, no, and then it was like, oh shit, of course, I have to do that. (p. 2)

John had spent his life rejecting the idea of becoming an actor. He explained that he had chosen RADA as his theatre school because of its importance and strong reputation. He described RADA as the “heart” and acting as a decision based on the heart, so he seemed to believe that his heart was set on RADA or theatre. However, he also emphasised that he initially rejected the idea of becoming an actor and described how hard he fought against it. Ultimately, however, he had to choose acting, follow his heart and become an actor. He

seemed to have experienced acting as an internal force from which he always tried to escape but continued to be haunted by. No matter how hard he tried to reject acting, he felt he had to become an actor as he was chosen by the profession; it was his “calling”. This duality was also evident in the experience of Jack, who explained:

It's ... it's tough, but it's also, you know, I wouldn't do anything else. I love it, and it's when it's, when it's good, it's really, really good but it can also be dangerous because you can be seduced by it. (p. 5)

Jack explained that the acting career (“it”) can sometimes be very challenging and difficult but despite all hardships, he loved it. This amount of love seemed formidable to him, further complicating his feelings about acting. However, he admitted he would not do any other job. No matter how tough acting might be, he “wouldn’t do anything else”. He seemed to identify a deep connection between the career and himself that he could not reject by any means. Like the other actors, Jack elaborated on how becoming an actor had been like a “calling” that he had to follow or a destiny that he had to live.

5.2 Actors’ Attitudes Towards Identification with Characters

The next superordinate theme, actors’ attitudes towards identification with characters, refers to their varying accounts of how they experienced the effects of their roles on themselves. Interestingly, as the personal experiences of playing roles on stage varied from actor to actor, they created a spectrum of experiences of their identification with the roles they had played. The spectrum ranged from Calvin, who emphasised how “you don't take it ... home”, to Henry, who explained in his account how fast his roles consumed him. Each account is discussed in detail and the actors’ individual experiences are explored in depth.

Then the day doing, it’s not you. You shouldn't take it home with you.

It's just a job, it's just a job. It's a great job, it's a wonderful job, but it's

just a job. You don't take it down to home, not used to, it did me damage. (pp. 23-24)

Kalvin explained that he never took roles home. However, since he repeatedly said, “It’s just a job”, albeit “a great job”, he seemed to be working hard to convince himself of this to maintain a distance between acting and himself. Moreover, when he was able to ensure that acting remained just a “job”, the danger of being consumed by his roles seemed less severe. Nevertheless, he had apparently taken roles home before and experienced this as damaging. He concluded that he should not let his roles affect him but keep a distance from them and regard acting just as a profession. Meanwhile, the experiences of Jack and Toby were different. Jack explained:

When you play a character night after night, the bits of it do then inevitably rub off on you and it leaves you, ... it can leave you feeling like you sound so slightly merged with, with the character in some ways, but that I don't think to a great deal. (p. 6)

In this extract, Jack admitted experiencing the impact that playing roles had on him, and he emphasised that this influence arose from consistently playing a role on stage for weeks and even months. As he explained, the character “inevitably rubs off on” him after a while. Jack “merged with ... the character” but not substantially, and he didn’t believe he had “a great deal” of identification with characters. Similarly, Toby stated that:

I definitely think that the characteristics or the traits of characters that one plays, the roles one plays, affect one’s day-to-day life, I think.

Not necessarily in a huge, profound way ... but subtly ... (p. 12)

He expressed a similar opinion to Jack when referring to identification with characters and how the characteristics of the roles he played impacted his life outside the context of the theatre. However, he regarded this impact as slight and not considerable, saying he had not

“not necessarily [been affected] in a huge, profound way.” In contrast, in other parts of his interview, Toby demonstrated how he experienced identification with characters in different dimensions: bodily, emotionally and behaviourally.

There were times where I thought the director in rehearsal behaved in an incorrect way, and I became very concerned about that. I was very concerned about, for instance, the ... I thought there were, certainly, injustices, you know, in the way in which ... I got very angry. But, of course, looking back on it, you know, the character I was playing would also get quite angry about that sort of situation. He wouldn't have liked to see injustice done. He wouldn't have liked to see somebody abusing their position or their power, you know. So in that respect, looking back on it, I'd say maybe that was the character, Adam, you know, as well as Toby, getting angry about that. (p. 12)

While playing a character who was highly sensitive to injustice, he suddenly noticed how he was concerned about the director's attitudes towards the cast and his fellow actors. However, he had not noticed this at the time of the performance. Only after reflection, when “looking back on it”, did Toby admit that he sometimes found it difficult to recognise whether he was displaying the character's feelings or his own. He felt confused about whether the emotions and feelings he experienced about the director's unjust behaviour towards his fellow actors were rooted in his personality or if the role (Adam) had taken over. Furthermore, the way he talked about the role indicated that Adam did not seem to him to be a fictional character but almost a real person. He mentioned two names, Adam and Toby, who he therefore perceived as having equal status. However, while he started narrating this story by questioning whether his feelings and reactions were coming from Adam or himself, he ended by saying he believed it was a combination of the two of them, Adam and Toby.

Adam had perhaps caused the emergence of Toby's real-world sensitivity to injustice. He specified how entangled these two (Toby and Adam) were and how this interaction and entanglement had continued (even until the time of the interview) to affect his feelings about and reactions to the performance, as outlined later. The following quote is relevant to this entanglement:

My reactions to various other people in the cast as well, would've been, probably, to a certain extent, informed by ... you know, informed by the character. (p. 15)

Here, Toby was stating how the roles he played affected his behaviour and reactions to people. The roles seem to have had extensive impacts at different levels and in different dimensions. Toby mentioned how the role impacted his relationships on a behavioural level, yet he continued to emphasise that this was "to a certain extent" because he intended to reiterate how no strong, powerful influence had caused him to lose himself completely and that the impact had been slight. However, as evident in Calvin's case, the message reads like his intention to convince or reassure himself. In another part of the conversation, he explained how the actual impact was hard to judge:

I suffer from ... I have something, ... which hits the balancing mechanism. I had it about eight years ago. It hit me, you know, quite hard ... I did notice that while we were touring, it was a bit worrying. About halfway through the run ... it was a five-month tour. Halfway through it, this started to kick in again, and there were a couple of times when I was on stage and so it became a worry. You know, it became ... it wasn't as severe, but I did have to go on stage once, and it was a question of, you know, not wobbling around, you know, because of my balance and so it became a real distraction ... That's a

curious one, as to whether or not ... because I know that [my] role ... suffered from kidney stones, you know, which put him in bed for a long time. So it was very, very painful for him. So I don't know if I identified with any kind of ... with that kind of ... maybe a medical ailment that he had as well. Maybe. I don't know ... (p. 15)

In this long extract, Toby explained his puzzlement about the way his body had responded to performing a character with a physical illness. He realised he was under this character's influence to some extent. The impacts were not limited to his reactions and feelings; they also affected how he experienced his own body. He reflected on the influence of the role on his body, realising that how the character's experience of pain or illness apparently shaped his (Toby's) own sense of the body during the performance period. He emphasised the embodied aspects of playing a character who was ill. As Toby said, while playing such a role, he started to experience a historical illness that had affected him eight years previously. This medical problem made him fear losing control while on stage. The interesting point is that the character only came alive when Toby walked around on stage, and when he was doing this, he suffered from both ailments. Thus, not only did Toby's illness recur suddenly after eight years, but he also felt like his body was dealing with two physical illnesses while he was on stage playing the role. This explains Toby's apparent confusion about whether it was his illness or that of the character. He did not know if the illness had indeed genuinely returned or if he was identifying with the role (with this identification strengthened by his previous experience of "real" pain). The ways in which the actor's body identified with that of the character and how the whole experience was so affected by the role made it difficult for Toby to differentiate his feelings as an actor from those of the character. Meanwhile, Liam shared his experience:

There are actors, Daniel Day-Lewis, for instance, who will entirely submit to the character. He said a fabulous thing, he said, he said, there comes a point, there comes a point in the process where, where the character starts to come up to him and his own life. He just feels it. And he said his own life, just recedes and recedes and recedes and he's there and that's him ... (p. 9)

Liam talked about Daniel Day-Lewis and how he completely allowed a role to take over him and his life. When Liam admitted that Day-Lewis's explanation of the process of submitting to the character was "fabulous", he agreed with Day-Lewis's description. The tone of Liam's voice indicated that he himself also experienced this. Liam elaborated on this by relating Day-Lewis's view that the moment the role is born is the time the actor's character begins to recede, almost as if the role and the actor cannot live at the same time under the same roof. When one comes, the other disappears: "he's there and that's him". This final sentence appears to refer to the moment Day-Lewis was entirely taken over by a role and fully identified with it. This seems completely different from the experience of Toby, who carried both his and Adam's illnesses onto the stage and under the same roof.

Liam's citing of another actor to describe this process is interesting; he did not explicitly say that this was how he experienced identification. While Walter was describing his own experience of identification with actors, he also referred to the experiences of other actors like Daniel Day-Lewis:

I think probably it's my job, it's all actors' jobs to go and explore the world that these characters live in. And there are some external examples of people who do that, Dan Day-Lewis is the most extreme, he was playing somebody severely handicapped and through the whole rehearsal period, and the whole filming period, he never

stopped being handicapped. I mean, this, this is an extreme behaviour, and this is a compulsion, you know, this is, so you relax and accept the mercurial shape-shifting protein, the shape-shifting nature of your own psyche, and the psyche of the characters you're playing. Now, that can be problematic for some people, you know. Acting can be very compulsive, very obsessive and some people get stuck in the characters, in character, or in unhelpful patterns ... I think it's very, I think it's very odd ... (p. 18)

Walter believed that exploring the character's world was an actor's job and this enables them to play the role on stage. However, some actors (like Day-Lewis) enter the character's world very deeply, finally getting absorbed by the role. He illustrated this through the example of Day-Lewis playing a disabled person and remaining disabled for the whole of the shooting. For some actors, acting and creating a role seems to involve immersing themselves deeply in the character's world and allowing that world to consume them and their life. However, Walter believed this to be a compulsive rather than necessary way of playing roles. Nevertheless, he admitted how roles had changed him as an actor and shaped him in many ways, while the psyche of characters had also changed him. Thus, a mutual transformation seems to happen between the character and the actor. As an actor, one just needs to allow the nature of this interaction to make changes and shape one's psyche. Walter emphasised the possibility that acting was or could become both an obsession and a compulsive experience for actors, causing them to become engulfed in roles. From his point of view, this was unhealthy and possibly even strange. He later continued:

You pretend you spend all day pretending at being an awful person or to be a timid, anxious person. And if you do that for weeks and weeks, you're going to start dreaming it. So you're learning about

these different sides of your imagination and your own package, your own collection. It really does start to be like that when you have big parts. (p. 26)

Although his view seemed to be that becoming trapped in roles could be problematic and unnecessary, he still detected the impact of characters on himself, particularly when playing major roles. This seems inevitable in the experiences of actors. He referred specifically to “pretending” to be someone else on stage, with this ongoing pretence leading to a merger between himself and the role to the point at which he started to dream it. If a role starts to penetrate the actor’s world, he said, the actor could learn from the character while that role had taken over, resulting in a mutual impact. At the end of this quote, Walter stated that this merging interaction is experienced particularly when an actor plays a major part and spends more time with the character. Thus, Walter clearly believed that what happens between an actor and the character has a mutual impact and that during this journey, they identify with each other.

Sam shared his experience from another angle:

If you've been playing a very brave person, you'd be more likely to fling yourself [to] the defence of somebody, though what happens when, but that's, if that's and that there's a there's a positive thing. I mean, I don't know if you are playing a violent person, I tend to play nice people. (p. 12)

In this extract, Sam elaborated on the experience of a role’s impact, based on the personality traits of his previous roles, which had always been positive (“nice”). He explained how these characters had positively affected his reactions in his life away from the theatre stage. He gave an example of how playing the role of a brave person had made him brave enough to defend people. However, he questioned whether the same would happen if he

played negative or aggressive characters. Sam's preference for playing positive roles may indicate that this preference had been established because he was aware that a negative and violent character might have the same (if not a stronger) impact on him, which he attempted to avoid by playing only "positive" roles. While Sam's story naturally shifts the focus to the potential positive effects of playing a role, the intensity he experienced can be instructive if close attention is paid to his words. He expressed this as "more likely", suggesting he had not experienced being completely taken over or found identification to be compulsive or odd, as Walter had. Moreover, he displayed no sign of struggling with this. In fact, he was even searching for words, perhaps because he was normally not occupied with this type of experience. He was only trying to reflect on the experience at that moment, realising that he regarded it as positive but that it might differ for negative roles, which he had not experienced himself. This contrasted considerably with the experience of Henry, who strongly believed in being taken over by a character, as he explained:

When I engage in a role, when I get into contact with the role ... It immediately ... takes over my unconscious world. (p. 3)

In this extract, Henry clearly stated how roles had strong and immediate impacts on him. He seemed completely aware of this, having not only realised it during the interview. For him, the process seemed to begin when he "get[s] into contact" with the character and continued until he felt he could fully identify with the character, at which point his unconscious had been taken over by the role. In this sense, Henry experienced a more intense and immediate impact as he did not describe the effect of roles, as the other actors had, but used the phrase "takes over".

5.3 Positive Impact of Being on Stage

By being on stage, actors experience different kinds of positive impact. In this section, the positive and pleasant effects of being an actor—acting is liberating, the transformative nature of acting, performance boosts confidence acting is a collective experience—are presented and discussed in detail.

5.3.1 Acting is Liberating

In their interviews, the actors shared how acting was a liberating experience in which they felt free to be whomever they wanted or behave in a way that is not necessarily approved of in real life by their society and culture. Thus, they found acting to be a liberating experience, as shown in Sam's story:

It's just a kind of ecstasy and it's beyond judgement because it's beyond the judgement ... It's free ... that, that freedom to be within the structure and to be wholly free and beyond judgement and beyond the censure of other people is a wonderful feeling. (p. 5)

Sam described his experience of being on stage as a kind of “ecstasy” and a deep feeling of happiness as he was not being judged for his actions or personality on stage. For Sam, this liberating characteristic of the theatre stage was an immense source of enjoyment and joy that was rooted in feeling free of being judged and feeling that he was in a place that was protected from the usual judgements and disapproval of people and societies, which could be highly restrictive in regular life. Thus, freedom on stage seems to be an extremely valuable and liberating experience for actors. Everyone is aware of the restrictions entailed by living in a civilised society and how the social rules enabling people to coexist peacefully must be followed. However, the price of this is to behave within a socially approved framework. Thus, people are not free to do whatever they want, whereas actors on stage have

the luxury to experience a different life without being judged or punished. As Dean explained:

[When] you're on the stage, you're in a kind of, as you're playing like a child plays, you're allowed to play like a child's allowed to play. And you're allowed to imagine, you're allowed to pretend. (p. 15)

For Dean, the permission given to actors by the theatre was the strongest aspect of this liberating experience. Like other participants, he experienced freedom on stage as he was “allowed” to be someone else, exactly like when he was a child and could pretend to be whomever he wanted. This permission is only given to adults like Dean under the roof of the theatre and on stage, and only as an actor is one permitted to live this freedom. For Dean, the boldest aspect of this liberation arose from being allowed to play, which is a reminder that civilised human beings in society are not allowed to be free to do whatever they want or be whomever they want; this is the price humankind pays for being civilised. Therefore, this restricted permission for actors seems not only a liberating experience but also a potentially transformative element.

Liam elaborated on his experience:

The further it's removed, the more enjoyable it can be because you're dealing with things that you wouldn't normally have to deal with. At the moment, I'm playing gangsters for some reason. I'm playing all the gangsters and I'm shooting people. I'm being not very nice, [but] it's just fun. It's deplorable. But it is, you know, I, I got to shoot people ... (p. 6)

In this extract, Liam mentioned how characters who differ from himself in terms of personality were more interesting to play since he would be exploring and experiencing new worlds. By playing a very different character, he encountered a new world, new challenges

and new feelings that he had never previously met in his own life. Thus, although he did not directly mention the “freedom” he experienced, we can infer that his role felt like a new adventure. Moreover, he did not need to worry about the consequences of his actions since everything was happening on stage, which is a protected place for actors, as Walter also mentioned. Liam explained how he found playing a gangster to be interesting and fun. He (as the gangster) could shoot people, kill them and have a very adventurous life, while Liam (as himself) could experience all those adventures with his body on stage. He could feel, think and behave completely differently from how he did in real life, and it was liberating for him to feel free to be whomever he wanted on stage. This was a liberating experience. He added:

Because the one thing, one thing you don't do as an actor is grow up, it's no necessity to grow [up]. If you're encouraged to grow up, that would probably hinder you as an actor. Well, how fabulous is that? [laughing] ... The nature of the work is playing. (p. 5)

Liam further elaborated on his experience; he regarded acting as playing, which meant he needed to find that little child-like Liam within himself to be able to create a character. This implies a belief that actors must be in contact with their childhood and that losing that connection with their inner child would hinder them in their profession. Growing up seemed somewhat restricting and limiting. Saying that actors do not need to grow up implies they need to keep that inner child alive because playing a role on stage closely resembles playing as a child. Liam claimed this was “fabulous” because, like children, actors are free on stage, free to role play and free to lose themselves in imaginary worlds. An actor is free to be a hero like a child can be Spiderman or Ironman. Thus, Liam appeared to regard acting as an activity that freed him and allowed him to be a child again. Meanwhile, Walter elaborated on his experience:

This is our own space, this is protected, we're safe and we're trusting each other. And we're here to play. You can be whoever you want. (p. 30)

Walter felt very safe on stage, and his description of the stage as “our own space” suggested he was expressing a sense of belonging to the theatre and stage; that he felt supported and protected in these places. Moreover, those working there could depend on, support and trust each other (that is, their fellow actors). Walter saw the stage as a unique and specific place that was unlike any other in the world because he regarded it as “protected”. This was a sense he did not experience in other places he went to. This implies that he felt the outer world did not protect him and was not safe enough for him to be the person he really wanted to be. Walter also described the stage as somewhere “you can be whoever you want”, as it was his own safe, trustworthy and protected place. These characteristics differentiated the theatre stage from the unprotected and wild world in which he felt he could not be whomever he wanted.

John emphasised another aspect:

This is exactly what I'm here to do. Get naked and make a fool of myself. Because in that moment, you just go, you relate and you go on. You're doing the thing that I can't do in my real life. I just want to be free to fail. (p. 5)

In this extract, John mentioned how he could do things on stage while not being allowed to do them in real life, which seemed a liberating experience for him. He clearly stated he wanted to be free to make mistakes and fail. According to his account, the theatre and the stage were the places he could even be free to “make a fool of [him]self”. His on-stage roles gave him the freedom he did not experience in real life, where he would probably be judged by his behaviour and his actions would have consequences. While on stage behind

the mask of a character, John felt free. The points he mentioned illustrate the standards imposed by society on people, who are bombarded daily (as he is) with values that are not necessarily their own desires but that must be followed to gain acceptance and approval in a tribe. However, the theatre provides actors with the opportunity to remove these burdens in a safe place called the “stage”, with no fear of failing or being adjudged a failure. An actor could actually play a role who had failed in terms of employment or marriage. However, the major difference is that the actor would not be judged for that character’s failure because he would only be playing a role. John’s experience was similar to those of other actors for whom acting was a liberating experience as they were allowed to “be whoever they want”, as Walter mentioned, or “to play like a child”, as Dean stated.

5.3.2 Transformative Nature of Acting

Acting seemed to be a transformative journey for the actors in which they learnt about themselves and others. According to the participants’ accounts, acting was an exploratory journey that facilitated their personal growth and enabled them to develop holistic, non-judgemental views of people. By acting as characters, actors become involved in the lives of others; consequently, they would be more understanding and empathetic in relation to themselves and others. Walter explained how he experienced transformation in the theatre:

It's like they take off the locks. Take all the locks off say, as a life-changing transformation can happen through the drama. [It] doesn't have to be professional, [it] doesn't have to be, it's about being given permission to be free ... You can explore whatever you want, it is magic. It's transformation, it's alchemical. The alchemy of theatre, in its purest form, is what it is to be a human being. It's so real and powerful. (pp. 30-31)

Walter found theatre to be a magical and transformative experience that could “take off the locks”, helping him to be free and explore whatever he wanted. He described the process of feeling free due to drama as a “life-changing transformation”. Drama allowed him to be free to explore, enabling him to explore whatever he liked. This freedom seemed like a magical experience to Walter, who later described it as a “transformation”. He compared drama to alchemy, implying it was a catalyst for change by giving actors the freedom to explore. As Walter mentioned initially, theatre removed the social locks and encouraged actors to delve into their characters, which led to enlightening experiences. For Walter, this resulted in a “transformation” like alchemy, which converts base metals into the most valuable one, gold. Similarly, drama could be regarded as an alchemy that illuminates the dark world of an actor or character, a transformation that starts by removing the locks. Walter started to recognise those possibly suppressed or neglected parts of his being, and being an actor provided an opportunity for him to discover these aspects. He then let the alchemy of theatre change and transform him for the better. Furthermore, this strong and powerful explorative journey enabled him to get in touch with other aspects of his personality that could be lived and experienced through acting. John claimed to have experienced a “purge” through acting:

To do that night after night is like a f***king purging of your system.

It's a cleansing. I come off stage and my skin is glowing. I feel just

like spent, like I'm in a warm bath, so [that's] the reason why I do it.

(p. 11)

Like Walter, John experienced a transformation but elaborated more on its physical aspects. He explained how his body experienced a transformation by being on stage. He described this as a “purging” and very strong cleansing that occurred after performing regularly. Acting is a physical activity in which the actor’s body is used to tell a story, while

their voice, muscles and all parts of their body are used to perform, so the transformation is not just psychological growth; it can also be experienced with the body. John admitted how the glow affected his skin after a performance, highlighting the impact of acting on actors' bodies and the bodily transformations they can experience. The stage appeared to provide an opportunity for John to experience a true physical and psychological detoxification, and it helped him to remove the unwanted parts of his system. His description of this reminded the author of people in long-term retreats or successful therapy, both of which result in their transformation. Liam shared the following in his account:

It's why actors make good psychologists because initially you, the understanding of yourself, foremost has to be pretty reasonable, pretty profound, because then the job you do, and then the understanding of other characters and other people that you've had to work within. You've got those two, those two levels ... My job is therapy. Cries every day is either every day dealing with myself, that is either working or not working, or every day my professional job dealing with other people and characters and things like that. (p. 30)

For Liam, being on stage was similar to being in therapy. He talked about two levels of understanding that apply to actors during their careers, leading to a transformation and a deep change: understanding the character can become completely entangled with the understanding of their own personality. He appeared to indicate that having to deal with characters and delving into them deeply enabled him to know roles better, which consequently caused him to know himself better. While acting was a "job" for Liam, his personality and psyche became engaged in the process because he needed to use his own character to create a role on stage. Thus, he did not regard understanding the character as separate from understanding himself. This led him to feel like he was in therapy, getting in

touch with his dark side, experiencing this and using it to create roles. Finally, through knowledge and awareness, and with the help of therapeutic dynamics on and off stage, the change happened. He also mentioned the consistency of this journey by relating how “every day” he had to deal with the same profound psychological aspects of both the character and himself. Finally, this consistency and the intensity of regular work blossomed like a transformative therapy. Toby also described a change that occurred due to being an actor:

It does educate me into being more understanding, not being too judgemental, because ... well, it gives you an insight. You've actually bothered to look into the way somebody behaves, the way they are, then I guess I'm more accepting and tolerant. As a result, [I'm] probably more curious about why somebody does what they do, rather than, rather than, rather than judge them, you know. Mm, ... as this or that, you know. I suppose, in a way, yes, they become more grounded, you know, human beings, which always is more interesting than, say, you're evil, or you're bad, or you're ... you know. (p. 18)

Toby admitted how playing roles had taught him to become more understanding of others and less judgemental. The experience he mentioned resembles Liam's view that a deep understanding of the personalities of others and yourself could be transformative. However, Toby used the verb “educate” to describe the change he experienced through acting. Theatre seemed to have taught him to be a better and more patient person. He believed acting and playing roles provided him with insights into other human beings, the ways they behave in different situations and their choices. Playing roles, engaging with characters and preparing to play them created opportunities for actors to get in touch with the attitudes of others and understand the reasons behind peoples' behaviour. This helped Toby to be more accepting and patient with others. Acting seems a highly subtle way of allowing actors to enter the

world of others, see the world from other perspectives and put themselves in the position of their characters. As a result, actors can extend their horizons of human behaviour and become more accepting. Toby explained how he was now more curious about the reasons for people's behaviour, rather than judging them or dividing people into good or bad, or white or black. Instead, he had developed an integrated attitude whereby he regarded everyone as interesting and valuable without trying to judge or categorise or label them as "evil". This demonstrates how theatre, playing characters and the overall acting experience helped Toby to develop integrity and such a mature approach. Arguably, this not only happened in relation to others but also changed actors' attitudes towards themselves, making them even more understanding of different aspects of their own behaviour and enabling them to experience wholeness and unity with all their own traits, mistakes and darkness or in other words personal demons. As a result, theatre can expand actors' views on human beings, helping them to make peace and integrate with others and, hopefully, themselves. Finally, Calvin shared his transformative journey:

Three years have gone by, and actually I realised that what I said was wrong. I didn't become an actor because I hate myself; I became an actor because I love myself and I love every different side of my character. Every different version of myself I can possibly be, and that's something that drama school gave me. (p. 8)

Calvin admitted that he had started acting while he hated himself. Although he initially thought self-hate was his motivation for becoming an actor, three years into this career, he realised he loved himself. Being an actor, with all its requirements and all he had experienced—from preparing for performances, rehearsals, relationships with the casts and finally performing on stage—led him to a transformation from self-hate to self-love. He claimed he was initially wrong to hold the idea of self-hate, but the transformative power of

acting apparently caused him to experience a major shift towards his current feelings about himself, so that initial self-hate was most probably not wrong. For Calvin, acting had been a journey from the darkness of hate to the light of love, which appeared to result from getting in touch with various aspects of his personality, finding himself in each role, understanding the roles and making peace with both the roles and himself. At the time of his interview, he loved not only what he was but also “every different version” of himself that he could possibly be. This acceptance and love went beyond how he described himself since he would also accept all possible versions of his future self. This all arose from the exploration of, cognition of and getting in touch with his own character through the roles he had played. He referred to theatre school as the core of this transformation, and the same peace, understanding and acceptance mentioned by other actors can be identified here. The qualities resulting from the transformation happened through the acting experience. Calvin’s relationship with himself had transformed through theatre and he had become more caring.

According to the accounts of participants, actors experience different types of change and transformation that result from the acting journey and playing characters on stage. The following theme illustrates how their experiences also affected their confidence.

5.3.3 Performance Boosts Confidence

This section relates the actors’ stories of how acting increased their confidence, giving them the strength and power to not only shine on stage but also feel more confident in their real lives. The stage seemed like a magical place where they had the opportunity to enter a fantasy world, use their body and communicate with the audience through the performance. All these aspects helped the actors to gain confidence and change their relationships with themselves. As Liam said:

[The] stage just gives you a massive, massive confidence that it's a wonderful space. The space, the space of a stage is the most, it's the most incredible space I can think of. (p. 15)

Liam explained how the stage increased his confidence, and he tried to emphasise the strong impact by repeating the word “massive”. He also referred to “the space” of a stage and how amazing it was. For him, the theatre stage was the most wonderful place he could imagine. The combination of improved confidence and the wonderful space seems to have created an amazing, unique experience. Contemplating this combination suggests a potential link between the massive size of the stage and the strong impact of the theatre on actors’ confidence. When Liam was talking about “massive confidence”, he was also referring to a massive physical space, given that the adjective “massive” is usually used to describe how big a place is. Here, the massive stage featured extensive lighting and decoration, while hundreds of people were sitting and waiting for his acting and the story he would tell. Thus, the “massive confidence” resulted from the massive place; the massive number of people who had paid for tickets and whose eager eyes were fixed on the stage; and the story the actor was going to tell and show through his body and words. This is a glorious time for actors, when they shine and enhance their confidence. Meanwhile, Sam highlighted another way that acting could boost confidence:

The confidence that it gives you an expressive potential of communication with people, for cerebral for, for someone who is relatively cerebral, quite shy ... (p. 2)

He elaborated on the communicational aspects of being a theatre actor. He referred to himself as a “cerebral” and “shy” person who was probably unsuccessful in expressing himself as a person in real-life situations due to his shy and possibly introverted manner. However, the stage gave him sufficient confidence and skills to communicate with people,

fellow actors and the audience. As the theatre stage seems to have given Sam the ability to express himself and communicate, it is understandable how precious this could be for a shy person who is usually passive in social situations and definitely not expressive. Thus, the miracle of the stage is its capacity to turn a shy person into a communicative and expressive one. John's experience also involved a story about being on stage and enhanced confidence:

There were soldiers who came to see that show who broke down crying after the show. Mothers of soldiers who saw that show and broke down crying off of that show. You can't fully understand it, unless you're in it, and you're doing it, and you're there. When you see your mother going, that was my kid, you can't, but I never talk about this stuff. (p. 13)

John also reported his experience of how acting increased his confidence by explaining more about the connection between the audience and the actors under the theatre roof, where he felt he could control the audience's emotions through his performance. This seems to be a two-way impact as the audience's reaction to his performance determined how he felt about himself and his skills as an actor. He referred to the audience, specifically the soldiers and their mothers, and how his performance had affected them emotionally and made them cry. For John, the ability to have such an emotional effect on the audience seemed profound. Being able to manipulate the audience's feelings and even their behaviour by making them cry reminded him that it was he and his performance on stage that could control people's emotions. He could make them laugh or cry, happy or sad, and he felt proud of himself. This pride arose from not only having such a strong impact on the audience's emotions but also his mother's pride in him, which was demonstrated through her loud announcement that "It was my kid" who made them cry. Calvin also explained his experience:

I wanted to be an actor because I hated to be myself with passion ... I saw acting as a way of not being myself, sort of acting as a way of being more courageous, more courageous, because I always sort of saw myself as quiet. I hated it for a while ... And the thing is, with acting is really wonderful is there seems to be some sort of switch that flips I don't understand, and it happened ... There's something about the sort of nurturing of the creative thing in a room and in a safe environment, where you're able to be sometimes more honest than you can be in life. (pp 2-3)

Kalvin started by describing his motivation to become an actor and how this was fuelled by a strong sense of self-hate. He seemed to be struggling to accept who he was as he mentioned the passionate nature of the hatred he was experiencing towards himself. The theatre seemed to give him the opportunity to be someone else, someone braver and more assertive whom he could accept and probably like. Therefore, theatre had helped him in his journey from self-hate to self-acceptance and increased his self-confidence, as he mentioned later. At the end of the excerpt, Calvin noted how the safe and nurturing environment of the stage provides actors with an opportunity to embrace themselves, boost their confidence through playing roles and practising life in a fantasy world of fantasy, as well as learn how to open the door from self-hate to self-confidence; this is the miracle of theatre. However, he still did not understand how this change happened but his experience convinced him that it had.

5.3.4 Acting is a Collective Experience

This section explores the collective nature of theatre, as well as how actors experience it and make meaning of it. As Dean explained:

It's a collective activity. It demands that we look after each other and share with each other and be generous to each other. (p. 14)

Acting was a collaborative and collective experience for Dean, in which actors and other backstage team members cared for and helped each other. Dean said they “share” and are “generous” with each other. The group could be compared to a tribe, with its members spending a long time together while rehearsing and performing, which could be weeks or even months. They grow increasingly close to each other until they create a sense of 'us' against any other group. The members of this tribe face challenges and hardships together, which seems to strengthen and deepen this bond. A crucial function of being in a group is feeling safe and supported, and the actors in this study appeared to feel part of a larger group whose members looked after and embraced each other when necessary. Meanwhile, Liam explained:

So the relationship with the audience is greater in comedy. I mean, you know it's hard to explain but you read the mood of an audience, you can read the mood of an audience on stage virtually right from the beginning, and you can't see it because the lights are very bright. You tend to hear strange, the strangest things, silences of, the different amounts of silence, is so different, in different parts of a single play in different theatres. (p. 17)

Liam elaborated on his experience from another angle. Although still a collective experience, he mentioned how audiences were part of this group. He referred to another 'us' that was created between the actor on stage and the audience. As the actor, he had sensed a connection with audience since the opening of the play, feeling their happiness and sadness even while he could not see them properly due to the lights. The link went beyond simply seeing the audience with his eyes. He seems to have connected deeply with them and their

feelings since the very first moment he went on stage. He felt that emotions existed despite the silent audience, as if the silence was coming from sadness or happiness. An invisible, strong bond seems to exist between actors and the audience, and a unity or whole (in other words, a group) can be created under the theatre roof. Liam's use of the phrase "It is hard to explain" might imply that this connection with the audience is a phenomenon that exceeds normal experiences in real life. This connection is two-way: an actor plays and performs, making the audience think, cry or laugh, while the audience simultaneously affects the actor through their reactions and responses to his or her performance. We can imagine that all the aspects involved in this experience—the place, lighting, sounds, actors, audience and silence, as well as the story at the heart of this unity—all are deeply connected and cause this specific experience to happen. Liam also mentioned the uniqueness of each group and connection, expressing the differences from place to place, story to story and night to night. This was a unique collective experience. Theatre is a bodily experience and Liam's description of the connection with the audience implies that he experienced this bond with his whole body, which seemed to be involved in the here and now, as well as connected to the bodies of the audience members. A flow of energy was moving between them. He was telling a story using his body, muscles, voice and whole presence, all of which were connected to the bodies and emotions of those in the audience. As mentioned previously, this is a two-way bond in which an audience seems to feel and experience both a story in their bodies and a connection through their emotions because the actor playing a character on stage determines how the audience feels at a given moment. Walter shared his experience:

When you perform, you begin to really explore experientially the nature of relationship, audience, performers, fellow cast members, and you realise that you're not separate. (p. 20)

Walter mentioned that one aspect of being an actor is exploring relationships with the world. A relationship forms between all those participating in an event, from the audience to the cast members. However, the most striking aspect of this experience seemed to be the feeling that “you are not separate”. He was likely referring to the sense of belonging that grows between the group members as they spend large amounts of time together, share similar experiences and undergo the long journey as a team who support each other. Walter found the strongest impact was the feeling of being connected and not separated. The human fear of being lonely and separated is both prominent and existential, and everyone must address it in their lives. However, Walter revealed that being an actor made him part of a larger community with shared interests and experiences, which made him feel connected to the other group members. Sam also shared his experience:

The bond that you get with a group of actors that were there is where it really works and people are really happy together. That's the thing that when people get to the end of the show, if they cry, they're not crying because they're not going to play that part again. They cry because the sense of community is really like nothing else. (p. 14)

In this excerpt, Sam started by describing the “bond” he experienced with the group of co-actors and how this connection made them happy during the whole journey and cry at the end of the run. Sam emphasised that their crying was not due to being sad about finishing but the reality that they and everyone else would be returning to their own lives and have to surrender this sense of community. He admitted that the ending was painful because of the enforced separation from their team members, loss of the safety that arose from being a member of the team and return to the reality of a world in which everyone was alone. Sam mentioned that this sense of belonging was different from any other experience for him,

which probably applies to all actors. Walter, Dean and Liam also said they had experienced a sense of safety, pleasure and connection.

Different perspectives on the experience of finishing a run will be revealed in the following section on the challenges of acting.

5.4 The Challenges and Cost of Acting

Being an actor has various consequences. Acting is a demanding career and sometimes difficult to cope with due to the hardships that this industry imposes on actors and the lack of support they are offered. Due to the high numbers of actors seeking work and the low demand for them, they frequently experience rejections after auditions. Furthermore, after creating deep relationships and strong bonds with fellow cast members, they must say goodbye and move on after a run. Moreover, this career involves numerous positive and negative experiences, making actors vulnerable to certain mental health problems. In this section, the hardships of acting are presented from the actors' perspectives.

5.4.1 Sense of Being Rejected

In this study, the actors expressed the difficulties they encountered after graduating from theatre school and when they had to start looking for work. They explained how going from one audition to another left them with a lack of control and a sense of rejection. As Toby claimed in his account:

You know, having to put up with lots of rejection ... well, no doubt, more rejection than acceptance and then, so the frustration is I feel I'm not where I would expect to be now in my career. (p. 4)

Toby explained how dealing with a sense of rejection that led to disappointment was an experience integral to this career. While some acceptances were issued, the number of rejections was definitely higher. Here, Toby referred to the rejections that actors often experience after auditions, whereby they try their best to get a job, compete with other actors and hope to play that role, but they get rejected instead. Toby spoke of the frustration and disappointment he experienced whenever he was rejected. His sense of constant frustration after so many rejections as an actor resulted in the idea that his current level in his profession did not reflect his previous expectations. He obviously expected to have reached a higher level with more jobs. He apparently had a sense that the business was unfair and he had not expected that number of rejections when he started the career. Although he recognised the need to cope with rejections and knew they were part of the reality of this career, he had not been ready for the volume of rejections. Toby's extract indicates a general sense of disappointment with the career and the industry due to the unpredictable difficulties he had encountered. Carl elaborated on the sense of passivity he had experienced:

I don't think many people realise quite how little control actors have over what they do. I mean, not only do they, you know, wait, wait for the phone to ring and go for an audition and then waiting to hear if they've got the part. That's one aspect of lack of control ... (p. 5)

Carl found the lack of control to be the greatest challenge he had experienced. Going to an audition and waiting to hear from the company was difficult. His repetition of "wait" indicates an attempt to describe the intensity of such moments, as perceived and experienced by him. The passivity he experienced and the inability to do anything were particularly challenging since he believed that outsiders know nothing about this situation, which actors experience regularly. Walter also shared his experience:

I mean, so the difficulties are surviving, getting work, maintaining your self-respect, your self-esteem, your vision, in terms of why I am doing this? What is the purpose of being an actor? It's a ridiculously difficult and quixotic and eccentric profession. (p. 6)

Walter believed the experience to be tough and survival to be challenging. He mentioned how actors who are offered no performances or work might quit the profession due to these difficulties. While Toby also mentioned these points, Walter went beyond this by explaining how such challenges and difficulties caused actors to question themselves and their motivation. He cited “maintaining your self-respect” as one of the challenges, implying that when actors experience the highly intense, competitive environment and so many rejections, they start to question their abilities, skills and qualities as actors. They wonder if they are good enough, if they are talented at all, if they will ever get a job and many other self-doubting questions, most likely due to the tough situations in which they find themselves. These doubts, as Walter said, lead actors to continue questioning their professional life, their vision of their own future and (finally) their motivation for being and remaining an actor. The pressure of these situations and the hardships experienced often seems to exceed their control. For some actors, these issues exceed their tolerance limits, and they might ultimately become demoralised and leave the career. Walter described the profession as not only difficult but also “eccentric”, apparently referring to how acting is strange, unusual and different from other professions. His use of the phrase “quixotic and eccentric” indicates how unusual and unpredictable he found this career. Liam elaborated on the hardships of being an actor from another perspective:

Let's get them in, let's patronise them and get them in, and you know, you've got CEOs of companies who can't even speak, they cannot

deliver some basic information, or a lecture, or can't stand up and do a PowerPoint presentation, and they have to, they ask us. (p. 28)

Liam was sharing his experience of being patronised by the industry and how he felt the whole auditioning process to be humiliating. He mentioned how company CEOs were in control despite their lack of professional or artistic knowledge of acting. While Liam seemed to be referring to the same hardships as other participants, he was actually highlighting a different aspect. He felt humiliated by the industry and its rules. Carl's sense of lacking control in this career was similar to Liam's description of the passive position and lack of control over the process of getting work. Consequently, actors were being chosen instead of being active, which felt very humiliating. Even worse was the feeling when he, as an actor, should be chosen by a company manager or non-artistic person. This experience led to anger and dissatisfaction towards the industry regulations and the treatment of actors. John expressed how actors often feel:

Young actors are working with, you know, feelings of jealousy, or feelings of compare, comparison, or anger, you know, at the industry.
(p. 9)

As a young actor himself, John elaborated on the challenges that his generation regularly encountered in this profession. Like Walter and Liam, he talked about the competition inherent in the career and claimed that the dominant spirit of the industry was a feeling of jealousy and being compared to others. While his explanation was similar to that of Walter and Liam, John referred more to the feelings experienced by actors, particularly young actors, due to the need to compete for jobs. This implies that the competition is probably even more intense for young actors: compared to older actors, they are less experienced and the number of them looking for work is higher since this career has seen a sharp rise in demand among the youth. Besides, having less experience and being new to the

industry means the self-esteem of young actors might be tested more severely by rejections and competition. Like Liam, who talked about the humiliation he had experienced in the industry, John expressed an anger caused by the many challenges: the crowded professional community, the need to compete and the numerous rejections. Jack also illustrated his experience:

It's a very difficult job to stay sane doing because of the rejection. (p.

2)

Jack explained how difficult was to stay “sane”. He found the experience of so many rejections had exceeded his tolerance limits, and he appeared to be struggling to maintain a healthy mindset while remaining within the industry. The numerous challenges and rejections had affected his mental health and he mentioned the difficulty of surviving mentally. Like Walter related how hard it was to survive in the profession and not quit due to the hardships, Jack spoke about how difficult was to survive mentally and psychologically. After all the competition, rejections and self-doubt that actors experience, as all the participants talked about, the logical final question would be how they psychologically survive and “stay sane” in an insane industry.

One difficulty experienced by professional actors is chasing jobs and getting rejected due to the high level of competition. The next theme refers to the sense of loss when a run finishes.

5.4.2. Sense of Loss at the End of a Run (When Death is Experienced at the End)

In this sub-ordinate theme, the actors elaborated on the challenges experienced at the end of a run, which start with the difficulty of saying “goodbye”. As Henry explained:

When I finished with three months, four months job, it's just terrible.

Yeah, it's like something dies. (p. 17)

For Henry, finishing a run was like experiencing a death. After weeks or months of performing on stage, which involved narrating the same story, making friendships with the crew, travelling together and, more importantly, playing the same character and living within that character's skin for such a long period, finishing meant dying for him. Although terribly painful, all actors must ultimately undergo this inescapable pain. When he said, "something dies", he seemed to be referring to the mourning associated with death. The job had finished, the tribe was disappearing and the character would be lost, so he would suddenly face an emptiness and a death that brought a sense of mourning. Calvin also shared his experience:

And then you die when you get out, and you gotta take the mask off,
go somewhere else. (p. 26)

Like Henry, Calvin felt the experience of death was highlighted; however, Calvin believed that the end of the run was his death, not the death of something or someone else. Calvin appeared to feel this sense of death more strongly; it was closer to him and it was actually his own. He continued by describing how he had to "take the mask off", indicating his feeling of being attached to the character and the mask he had worn during the whole performance period. Yet as much as finishing and leaving the show was like experiencing his death, this did not seem to prevent him from seeking another character, mask, world and performance; instead, it motivated him to do so. Therefore, this cyclical journey of being born with a character, living, dying and being born again continues. John's view was as follows:

Have a massive cry, because you feel like you've been holding
something. So that flushes out. (p. 14)

As with Calvin and Henry, John referred to his sense of loss at the end of a run. He felt sad and cried because of a sense of belonging to something for a long time, but this would be lost when the run finishes. This indicates that he could get used to the experience,

performing on stage for weeks or months and getting addicted to all the applause and cheers from people. Then, all the support and friendships suddenly finished, and he probably felt he suddenly had nothing to hold on to. Finally, he experienced a loss and an emptiness due to the end of a powerful experience. Jack elaborated on this from another perspective:

When the job is done and there's a sense of, well, what am I going to do now, [I] can move on to something else ... [It's] so sad because you do form very intense and quite intimate bonds with the people you're working with. (pp. 10-11)

Jack's experience differed somewhat from those of the other participants as he experienced not only sadness due to losing the relationships formed during the performance period but also anxiety when he asked himself, in reference to his future, "What am I going to do now?" This was followed by another question expressing his worries about being unable to move on. Like the other actors, he seemed to experience strong and intense bonds with the cast but these were lost when the run finished. Therefore, he faced a sudden emptiness that made him question his ability to move on, which seemed to derive from a sense of being paralysed by those losses. This demonstrates how deep and meaningful the relationships and the whole experience had been for him, such that the end of the run caused him existential concern and doubts about himself and his future. The implication is that Jack found the sadness and pain so extremely deep that they caused a sense of being unable to move on.

Dean also described his sense of loss at the end of a run:

You get very close to people over a short period of time. It's a very, it's very intense being in a company and each company should play to production as a, as a very definite atmosphere, and then suddenly, it stops and it is, it is odd and there is a loss. There is a kind of mourning, it's gone, and it will never mean we might revive it. (p. 15)

Dean explained his experience of loss by emphasising how “sudden” this was and how he felt “it’s gone”. He experienced a strong and sudden sense of loss which seemed like a death. Close and intense relationships and friendships formed during the performance; however, when a run finished, everything apparently “stops” for him. This was like a shock to his system because after an intense period of being close, people “suddenly” had to say goodbye, which was a sense of loss he then had to deal with. Suddenly, something had gone and disappeared; in other words, something had died so he needed to mourn, as Kalvin and Henry also stated. However, he knew that what had gone would never return, which made the experience more difficult for him and different from the experiences of the others. Dean highlighted how what had gone would never return and had gone forever, which made the pain more intense. However, Carl experienced saying goodbye slightly differently:

When a run finishes you feel, well, I suppose, a sense of when you're fulfilling you know, where's, where's my next job? And you feel a sense of anti-climax and you feel, what am I going to do now? You feel, hmm, you feel I suppose that you're just gonna say you're saying goodbye to the character. But then aren't you really just saying goodbye to the job? (p. 16)

Here, Carl mentioned a different point to those made by other actors. He spoke about two opposite feelings he experienced at the end of the run, one being a sense of fulfilment and the other a sense of “anti-climax”. His sense of satisfaction due to completing the run became a sense of doubt and ambivalence about the future. The difficulty he experienced was not only because of leaving the character he was playing; it also led to a sense of worry about his future. Would he be able to get another job? At the end of each run, he seemed to be saying goodbye to both the job and the character since there is no guarantee in the acting world of getting another job. Thus, whereas the performance was a real joy and excitement,

he would inevitably experience the opposite feeling, which he referred to as an “anti-climax”. He seemed to fluctuate emotionally from pure joy to the darkness and sadness of saying goodbye.

5.4.3 The Possibility of Substance/Alcohol Abuse Among Actors

Due to the challenges and hardships that professional actors experience, maintaining a healthy mindset seems difficult. The nature of the career causes psychological vulnerability in many actors, which can lead to alcohol and drug abuse. In this section, the actors share their experiences of this. As Henry explained:

Acting is a recipe for depression, a recipe for drinking, a recipe for having difficult relationships, you know. (p. 19)

Henry illustrated the psychological challenges of acting and how actors might develop depression or drinking problems. He also mentioned that actors might experience relationship difficulties. He seemed to apply the word “recipe” and repeat it three times to emphasise the intensity of this difficulty, while he highlighted that the formulation of acting could result in depression and addiction. The use of the word “recipe” implies that acting leads to mental health problems by default. For Henry, acting provided instructions for how to be depressed or alcohol/drug dependent. He seemed to refer to these problems (depression or addiction) not as mere possibilities for actors but inescapable certainties. Liam also shared his view of the challenges facing actors:

It is a classic syndrome that you will have discovered, and they didn't, I mean, they are actors [who] commit suicide, actors are in rehab. Actors are all over the place. (p. 13)

Liam had a similar experience to Henry, claiming that actors were vulnerable and referring to the high rate of suicide or admission to rehabilitation centres among actors due to

the psychological issues they experience. He stated the high frequency of these issues in the profession and how this was a “classic syndrome” for actors to cope with. The difficulties encountered by actors during their professional career seemed to make them vulnerable to a wide range of psychological issues. Liam’s view that “actors are all over the place” indicates he was highlighting how actors are prone to severe mental issues, which could make them seek ways to alleviate the pain. Jack noted one reason for the mental health issues that actors experience:

There are endemic mental health and addiction issues within the industry ... It's unpredictable. It's very unpredictable. I mean, the, it's what they say is like, it's feast or famine ... The desire to maintain those, those adrenal highs and those, those, that sense of being up rather than having to deal with disappointment. (p. 4)

He believed the rate of mental health and addiction issues in the industry was high, as others mentioned in their accounts. However, Jack approached this from another perspective by highlighting the fluctuations that professional actors experience, which make them feel the career is “feast or famine”. The impression given is that those two experiences are extremely different. One of these involves the on-stage highs when the story and performance are happening. The best part is when the audience are surprised by the actors performing beautifully; when the actors notice they have affected the audience; and when the building and stage, with all the lights and decoration, help the actors to see themselves as kings of the stage, with enormous power to affect everyone under that roof. All these aspects create a glorious moment for the actors that results in an “adrenal” rush inside the veins. These joyful moments are perceived to be like a “feast”, but each “feast” in this career is followed by a “famine”. All those glorious moments are highly precious and definitely bring considerable joy and pleasure to actors because they want to save and experience such moments as much

as possible. Nevertheless, the process of experiencing high moments might ultimately lead to addiction. Considering that actors off stage must deal with the hardships of their careers, which are far from those beautiful shining high moments, is a reminder of how extreme their fluctuations could be. These points imply a bipolar career composed of “feast and famine”, with actors having to cope with all these aspects on their own. Walter added:

I think actors get addicted to the joy, freedom, power of performing
... (p. 22)

Walter was elaborating on a parallel mentioned by Jack. He highlighted the possibility of becoming over-familiar with the positive experiences of the profession. The joyful and pleasurable aspects of the career, the deep sense of freedom and control actors develop, as well as the sense of being in charge that they experience on stage, all cause actors to experience an unreal joy that many desire to maintain and re-experience, but the potential consequences include addiction problems.

5.4.4 Financial Insecurity

A major challenge for actors is to keep going and get jobs because the number of people in the profession is not balanced by the number of jobs available. Thus, many actors need a second job; otherwise, they would be unable to survive. This leads to considerable difficulties and insecurity for actors, forcing them to deal with the constant worry about their unknown future, as well as experience frustration and anxiety. While struggling to continue in the profession, many finally have to quit. However, even those able to continue may experience a sense of foreboding about the future. As Walter explained:

Ten per cent or 15% of the actors are employed at any one time;
everybody else is unemployed. And the number of actors who can
make a living out of acting, just acting, is 2%. So you know the

statistical odds of being successful and making your way in the profession professionally as an actor, is, the odds are very high against you ... It's really hard, it's very competitive. There aren't as many jobs, the funding for the arts in this country has diminished hugely over the years. (p. 5)

In this extract, Walter's reference to the statistical rate of unemployed actors illustrates how conditions are detrimental for actors. He stated that just 2% of actors could make a living through acting as their only profession. Thus, getting a job seemed to be a constant worry and battle. This starts with one project finishing and the search for another: this endless search enforces the low survival rate among actors. Walter also emphasised the difficulty and competition involved in finding work since the number of jobs was limited. He blamed the UK system for not supporting art in general, as well as reducing art and theatre funding, which had further complicated the situation for actors and led to high unemployment in this profession. This had also created a highly competitive environment for actors. When Walter referred to the difficulties of this profession, the most challenging aspect was apparently the competitive environment, which could cause considerable insecurity and anxiety among actors.

Meanwhile, Liam shared his experience:

You never think you're going to get, ever get another job in your life.

Because that's how, that's how this job works. It goes up and down ...

I've got to earn money; I've got to feed the kids. So you have a constant battle to maintain your stability in the face of absolute instability. (p. 24)

At the start of the excerpt, Liam stated how actors “never” think they will get other work. The disappointment and darkness he experienced with reference to this, as well as the

sense of disappointment and negativity about the possibility of getting another job were seen as integral parts of this career. He added, "... that's how this job works", demonstrating how he experienced a sense of disappointment about the reality of the career. Yet as an actor, he just needed to accept this reality, despite the lack of control. Meanwhile, by saying, "It goes up and down", he seemed to be referring to the instability he had experienced during his career as an actor. The situation might periodically improve but the lack of security and stability might result in recurring declines in fortune, which is the story of jobseeking for many actors. Liam then described the financial difficulties caused by the competitive nature of getting jobs. As a father and breadwinner, he felt he had to provide for his family, such as having to "feed the kids", yet even meeting such basic needs could be a challenge for actors due to the difficulties of getting work. He also outlined how working as an actor meant living with instability. Perhaps the greatest difficulty for actors is obtaining financial stability and security in this "absolute" unstable career. For professional actors, this is a "constant battle" and an unrelenting challenge. Meanwhile, Toby stated:

You know, the amount of people who are in it, you know, just make ... The work is just not there most of the time, you know. So that means, in order to, in order to survive, I have to do other stuff which has nothing to do with acting ... I think it's a mixture of frustration, fulfilment and ... I'd say I have regrets, because I don't feel I'm where I would like to be in my career. (p. 3)

He referred to the lack of balance between the number of job opportunities and the number of actors seeking work, which led to competition. The work "is just not there most of the time", so actors tend to struggle to find their next job. In many cases, they take on other jobs that are unrelated to acting, despite this being the profession they studied for, trained for and dreamt about. Actors clearly feel sad about having to take on other jobs or even quit the

profession just to survive and meet their basic needs. Toby explained the emotional consequences of the competition and financial insecurity within the profession. Toby's use of the phrase "frustration and fulfilment" resembles Liam's view that "it goes up and down"; both actors seemed to be facing instability, which could be mentally exhausting in the long term. Toby felt that actors were treated unfairly in their careers and by the dominant vocation driving them. After many years of working in the field, he had not reached the level he had expected to, which was very disappointing. Toby experienced not only disappointment in his career but also fulfilment. Nevertheless, he still felt regret as he believed he was not where he had aimed to be, despite probably working hard. Thus, his sense of frustration and regret seemed to exceed the fulfilment he experienced.

Kalvin also described his experience:

It's marvellous to see that the fact that it's not about the talent, really, in the job, in this job. It's not about your talent, it's about how well you can sell yourself ... In order to keep us afloat, you got to get a string of other jobs. I don't really have a lot of money, I'm pretty ... I'm really quite broke, which means that I'm living in between my dad's and my mum's house. (pp. 13-14)

He was being sarcastic when he said how "marvellous" the situation was. This sarcasm was rooted in the anger he was experiencing towards the career. He blamed the whole system, claiming that success as an actor was not based on talent or acting experience; actors also needed to "sell" themselves, which is a concept completely contrary to the artistic soul of the theatre and performance. Calvin explained how as an actor, he had to "get a string of other jobs" to survive. He considered himself "quite broke" and did not even have his own place to stay and sleep, so his life involved moving between the separate houses of his parents. Henry illustrated the feelings associated with this type of experience:

I experienced a lot of difficulty from being a freelance actor: from having to audition a lot, from the lifestyle that acting brings. I think that's quite, that gives me a lot of stress and anxiety and difficulty. (p. 10)

Henry reflected on the difficulties he encountered as a freelance actor. Like the other participants, he had to try hard to find work by going from one audition to another. For him, this seemed a continuous journey involving stress, anxiety and constant worry. He then mentioned how this was the “lifestyle” for actors, which would not end as long as they were working and they would just have to cope with it. Mental strength is required to deal with a “lifestyle” comprised of continuous anxiety and instability. However, Dean’s experience was slightly different:

I've been very lucky. I've kept going for almost 50 years, and I never had to earn money doing anything but acting, which is very lucky, because most people have long periods out of work. (p. 5)

Dean seems to have been lucky, having never needed non-acting jobs to survive. Yet he still referred to the normal reality, recognising that many actors must do other work to make money and survive. He considered himself “very lucky”, having sustained 50 years of professional work. His choice of words serves as a reminder that many actors are not that lucky in terms of professional survive. His luck in being able to get jobs constantly over 50 years is ironic, given the unusual nature of his situation. The actors’ accounts stress that normality in this career means having difficulty in getting another job and being “unlucky”.

The journey seemed to be a challenging experience for the actors: this is a career of unknowns, including not knowing whether work will be immediately available. The actors did not know where their next job would come from, which caused considerable financial

difficulties and insecurity that they had to deal with. Those who cannot do so might even have to quit the profession.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction to the Discussion

In this last chapter, the research is discussed. The chapter provides a discussion of the themes that were found. This discussion makes connections between my empirical findings and some of the extant literature.

6.2 Acting as a Calling

One highly important theme became clear: theatre actors experience acting as a calling. This applied to all the actors in this study, from whose accounts it can be concluded that acting was part of their identity. Whereas the literature review indicated that specific personality characteristics were explained as factors that might contribute to who becomes an actor (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006), this research reveals that the actors did not experience this as such. That is, while we can theoretically understand those for whom acting can feel like a calling based on personality theory, we should simultaneously acknowledge that for actors, acting feels like an integrated part of who they are and have always been, without regarding this as caused by specific traits. The results from this study align with the findings obtained by Robb et al. (2018), in which Australian actors also revealed they experienced acting as their calling.

The current study supplements the insight that actors have different experiences of acting as a calling. Walter found it pleasurable and Liam saw it as valuable, reflecting the positive experiences of both. On the other hand, several other actors described how they regarded acting with more mixed feelings. Nevertheless, most did not feel that becoming an actor was truly a choice; instead, it was experienced as their destiny. This was different for Dean, however, who experienced it more as a decision, yet this was still not comparable to the decision to try a certain profession because it fits one's skills or seems pleasurable when

there may be similar alternatives. Dean felt that being an actor was also part of his identity, yet he needed to embrace this. Dean's experience, therefore, closely relates to Sartre's placing of value on being responsible for the life decisions one takes, with the alternative being a loss of authenticity.. In the context of career development for theatre actors, Kogan's theoretical model from 2002 and previous research from Kogan and Kangas in 2006 suggested that becoming an actor involves a developmental, self-reinforcing process that ultimately leads to the decision to pursue acting as a career. However, the detailed personal accounts of actors in the current study suggest that for many, the decision to become an actor is not a conscious choice but a realization that they were meant to perform or that they have no choice but to follow their passion for acting. Therefore, it may be necessary to modify Kogan's theoretical model to better fit the experiences of theatre actors, as their career development process may be different from what the model suggests. While Kogan's model provides valuable insights, the personal experiences of theatre actors suggest the need for a more nuanced perspective on the decision-making process to become an actor, changing the concept of "decision" into the idea of "realization of identity/a calling".

The theme of acting as a calling also relates to the work of Cinque et al. (2021), who explained the difference between a calling and other "work" in terms of meaningfulness. Jobs and careers are focused on financial gain and advancement, respectively, but a calling is more than a means to an end; it is an end in itself that contributes to the greater good (Cinque et al., 2021). Given that their circumstances dictate that work is not always available, wages are low and others do not always appreciate acting at its full value, theatre actors experience this as what Cinque et al. (2021, p. 17) described as "existential hardship". In the present study, this is reflected by the actors' struggles to embrace their calling. Many contrasting phrases were used, with positive terms referring to the calling (e.g., inspiration, love) and negative terms reflecting the hardship (e.g., tough, dangerous).

6.3 Actors' Attitudes Towards Identification with Characters

Whereas in the first theme, the actor's identity was central and the actors firmly regarded acting as who they were, the second theme demonstrated how the actual act of acting—acting that was not meant to signal the profession but involvement in a role—instead made actors confused about their identity. This further confirms the observation made by McCadden (2014), who explained that anecdotal support existed for the idea that character identification leaves traces on the actor's identity. Similarly, Rivera (2013) described how in the field of acting, becoming a character seems to be used interchangeably with being a character. All the actors experienced certain effects of a role on themselves, albeit in different ways and at different intensities. Some also mentioned how this affected their social interactions, explaining how they might behave differently towards other people because they had become more like their character.

Several actors seemed to wish to minimise this experience. Two actors also referred to Academy Award-winning actor Daniel Day-Lewis, which perhaps also indicated a need to justify a potential entanglement with a character. That is, perhaps they wanted to highlight not (just) the personally experienced impact of identification but (also) the fear of it being abnormal or, as Walter described it, as “a compulsion” and “very odd”. As explained in the literature review, actors are sometimes described as exhibitionistic and hysterical (Goldstein & Yasskin, 2014), and they may demonstrate both personality cluster B traits and traits that increase the risk for psychotic illnesses (Ando et al., 2014; Davison & Furnham, 2018). As such, it can be readily imagined that actors might, firstly, fear losing their sanity if they feel their identity is affected or even taken over by their roles and, secondly, believe that other people might perceive them as crazy.

Interestingly, one actor (Sam) described character identification as a positive experience that he used in daily life in his social interactions. Here, the true value of IPA is demonstrated through the discovery of not simply one average story but also a diversity of experiences. Sam's experience revealed the relationship with the concept of pretence. Pretence, as Guo (2021) argued, is often part of acting but also occurs in daily life. Sam's use of pretence in daily life seemed to be a controlled way of utilising the fact that one can come to resemble a character. This type of control seemed possible for some actors, such as Calvin. He explained in his story that he used to be affected (or even damaged) by taking acting home, but he apparently managed to find a way to change this. For others, this seemed impossible. Henry explained how roles even consumed his unconscious world, while Toby was unclear about which feelings (psychological and physical) were really his own and which came from a character. Toby's experience aligned with the finding revealed by Hannah et al. (1994) that over time, actors' self-reported personalities start to resemble more closely those of their characters.

Interestingly, McCadden (2014) expressed concern that topics involving discrimination and power abuse could be reinforced by role engagement because (at least when using the Method) actors strongly engage with their characters. According to McCadden, a consciousness of this effect may help to counter this. However, it is highly questionable that consciousness would help to any great extent. After all, the actors seemed to recognise that they were affected by their character engagement. This applied particularly to Henry, who explained how a character immediately took over his unconscious world. Nevertheless, a consciousness of being affected did not prevent it, based on the actors' experiences. This was described most clearly by Toby, who acknowledged that his responses to injustice were influenced by a character's identity. His character became angry about power abuse, so Toby was similarly enraged. Therefore, perhaps a play itself can have a

useful function. That is, exposing discrimination and racism through examples of characters who not only experience and show victimisation but also demonstrate strength, counter-pressure and possible victories could be a powerful way to positively alter the attitudes of both an audience and the public.

It should be realized that part of the reason why role involvement impacts the psychology of theatre actors is the emotional contagion. It is not just some of the character's' personality affecting their behaviour. When actors fully immerse themselves in their roles, they often experience the emotions of their characters as if they were their own. For example, actors may experience heightened levels of stress or anxiety as a result of their involvement in emotionally intense roles. They may also experience a sense of disorientation or confusion as they navigate the boundary between their own identity and that of their character. In the present study, Toby referred to how he took over anger from his role and Walter talked about anxiety of a character. From the literature, it had also been found that actors may avoid roles from they expect emotions could be too intense (Nemiro, 1997). Yet, with the poor financial situation of actors, this will not always be possible. As found by Seton (2004; 2013), actors can have experience indirect trauma because of playing certain roles. The personality effects of role involvement further complicate this matter. It means that, even when an actor could cope well with certain emotional experiences in general, when playing an emotionally intense role and being affected by a character not handling these feelings well, it may be more harmful even.

Despite these potential challenges, many actors report that their involvement in theatre has a positive impact on their overall psychological well-being. For example, some actors report experiencing a sense of catharsis or emotional release as a result of their involvement in emotionally intense roles. Additionally, involvement in theatre can provide a

sense of purpose and meaning, which can help to promote feelings of happiness and fulfilment.

Overall, the psychology impact of role involvement for theatre actors is complex and multifaceted. While involvement in emotionally intense roles can have both positive and negative effects on psychological well-being, many actors find that the rewards of their work far outweigh the challenges.

6.4 Positive Impact of Being on Stage

Through the third theme, the positive impact of being on stage, the actors' feelings and entanglements can be better understood. Three subthemes emerged at this point: the experience that acting is liberating, the transformative nature of acting and the experience that performance boosts confidence. These are discussed in the following subsections.

6.4.1 Acting is Liberating

The subtheme of acting being perceived as liberating seems to contrast with the previous super-ordinate theme, in which the identification with acting was perceived as intense and overwhelming, which does not associate with the lightness of the term 'liberating'. When the feelings and experiences of actors are considered, however, two layers can be distinguished at each point. On the one hand, there is the strong connection with being an actor, which is part of one's identity; on the other hand, one can also have mixed feelings about being an actor and find this overwhelming due to living constantly in two worlds. This corresponds to being an actor and acting: the 'normal world' in which one has the profession and status of an actor is set against the fantasy world that exists on stage.

This layering and inclusion of two worlds develops the understanding of why acting is so difficult to define, as discussed in the literature review. In daily life, the term is used as a verb (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.-b), while being an actor is defined as an art and a profession (Guo, 2021). Yet for the actors, it is “a process of portraying the character’s features” (Guo, 2021, p. 61). The present study indicates that this process has different sides. Whereas the feelings experienced during the process might be confusing and one might feel affected in normal life, the presence in the fantasy world is central to the positive impact of being on stage. As explained in the literature review, people who enjoy pretending and imagination can find it highly pleasurable to act (Robb et al., 2018). What the present study adds to this, is the finding that all actors felt that the stage was "their place" where they could play, not have to grow up and not be judged.

The latter was related entirely to which role they were playing at a given moment and separate from the fear of being criticised as an actor (that is, in the ‘normal’ world) (Cingue et al., 2021; Robb et al., 2018). The actors were clearly referring to the opportunity acting offers to temporarily be someone else and display behaviours without consequences. Hence first subtheme as this was described as liberating: feeling free or even in ecstasy. This was closely related to identity, whereby actors feel a sense of belonging, protection and safety.

6.4.2 Transformative Nature of Acting

The second subtheme was formed through the actors’ descriptions of acting as transformative. They experienced acting as an opportunity to better understand others and not just a mere experience. Goldstein (2009) confirmed this by showing that actors have a more advanced theory of mind. The actors also described acting as a way to get to know themselves better. These transformative processes are related Wilshire’s (1976) concept of “a hermeneutics of the soul” (p. 205). An actor learns from role-playing because it goes beyond as if. The actor can also experiment and interpret a role using a what if frame of mind by

asking “What if this person were me?” or “What if I performed this behaviour?” (Wilshire, 1976). Even if an actor feels the role is different from their own identity, social relations are affected because playing a role helps the actor to recognise the perspectives of others. From the identification with characters theme, it nevertheless became clear that this can be confusing with respect to identity. That being said, the actors also mentioned that acting made a person less judgemental, which aligns with previous studies showing that actors seem to be more empathetic (Bergman Blix, 2019; Goldstein et al., 2009; Nettle, 2006).

Furthermore, what the present study showed, was that the positive impacts of being on stage included helping actors to *identify parts of the self* that were otherwise more covert and helping the self to change in a positive direction, such as becoming less shy. In this sense, the acting is not just fostering social skills, but also helps actor’s self-development in other ways, and was found to influence identity in a positive manner.

The actors in the current study also reported an improved *understanding* of the self in terms of self-compassion. One of them, Kalvin, was particularly clear that acting had caused a transformation of his identity, which had mutated from self-hate to self-love. This relates to the description in the literature review of actors feeling different from other people (Goldstein & Winner, 2009). While this may be experienced negatively when growing up, once they discover the calling of being an actor and a place that fits, actors can change how they feel about themselves.

6.4.3 Performance Boosts Confidence

The third subtheme identified was that performance boosts confidence. Not only is this confidence caused by finding a place and gaining better insights into the self, it is also about experiencing greater confidence through the meaningfulness of acting. The reader is reminded that acting derives from the Latin *agere*, often translated as “to drive” or “to treat”,

signalling that it refers not simply to doing, but to doing with an impact (Philips, 1987). For the actors, this was closely related to the ability to affect the emotions of others. Certainly, seeing that people were touched by their work meant that actors could feel valued. Due to such audience responses, the actors seemed to feel that their identity was justified. To use Walter's words again, actors are not "very odd", but artists who are appreciated. Confidence also seemed to arise through the described identity transformation caused by experimenting with different behaviours and feelings, which can help the development of certain parts of the self. All the positive aspects of acting seemed have a mutually complementary impact. Transformation may have an impact on actors' perceptions, which could lead to them growing up and developing positive attitudes towards themselves. In turn, this could result in self-love and boost their confidence.

Moreover, on the deeper level, when this subtheme is connected to the others, confidence seems to be related to the first subtheme, acting as a calling. Considering how actors feel that acting is part of who they are, the ability to act is a confirmation and an experience of being who they are. Previous researchers have described these using words such as "valuable", "enlightening" and "excitement" (Grammatopoulos & Reynolds, 2013). In the present study, similar words were used, including "wonderful", "incredible" and (referring to the profession) "more honest". This can be better understood using the "contingencies of self-worth" theory developed by Crocker and Knight (2005). As they explained, the importance of self-esteem lies in what people believe makes them worthy as a person; whereas one person might value academic functioning or sports, actors focus mainly on their artistic functioning as an actor. In domains of contingent self-worth, people attempt to validate their abilities and qualities; as such, they will feel motivated. This is also seen in musicians, who are also seen to experience positive feelings (enjoyment, euphoria) when reflecting on successful performances (Sutherland & Southcott, 2020). However, as shown by

the fourth theme (the challenges and cost of acting), this also involves risks because when self-esteem is more contingent on a certain type of success, failure and rejection have more detrimental consequences.

6.4.4 Acting is a Collective Experience

The final subtheme was acting as a collective experience. Actors experienced their engagement with other actors as bringing a sense of closeness and belonging, confirming previous research (Robb et al., 2018). The literature review explained how actors can find it important to be connected to others similar to themselves; that is, those who love imagination and pretence, as well as having the same sense of individuality and acceptance of others (Ørjasæter et al., 2017; Orzechowicz, 2008).

The existing body of work is augmented by the finding of the present study that the feeling of community with other actors is due to not only the experience of being with other like-minded people but also the shared experience. Actors felt that being on stage in a role and as part of a story was an intensive experience, and sharing this with others created a bond. This highly natural human reaction to emotional experiences has also been demonstrated in other areas of research. For example, a study revealed that natural disasters lead to heightened solidarity in the affected communities, with people feeling a sense of unity and showing more altruism (Kaniasty, 2020). As explained in the literature review, acting can be a highly emotional experience, potentially even resulting in Symptoms of trauma when real-life traumatic events have not been experienced by the actor (Thomson & Jaque, 2011; 2012). As such, the comparison with natural disasters is not inappropriate. A close similarity is evident in the finding that health professionals are often vicariously exposed to traumatic events through their contact with direct trauma survivors who provide details and display the consequences. For health professionals social relationships and support also appear to be

highly important for positive recovery from these indirect experiences (Manning-Jones et al., 2016).

A form of connectedness was also felt regarding the relationship with the audience. Although audience members may seem to be passive receivers, the actors clarified that communication takes place and can be noticed, and they felt that the audience would be living the experience. This is an interesting point because previous studies have mainly provided information about the role of the audience as feedback providers. On the one hand, actors have been shown to worry about an audience evaluation and become distracted by audience members who make them (actors) aware of the real world (Doyle, 2016b; Nemiro, 1997). On the other hand, positive audience evaluations were described as reinforcing (Robb & Davies, 2015), but these actors were discussing sharing feelings and experiences with the audience. Considering how important this world is for actors and how they can feel like outsiders in the real world, in terms of social relationships, the present study revealed a connection, whereby an audience can seem temporarily part of the on-stage world.

6.5 The Challenges and Cost of Acting

When actors shared their views on the challenges and cost of being an actor, the negative aspects of their experiences fell into four subcategories. First, the difficulty of acting as a career was linked to a sense of being rejected. Second, the intense experience of playing a role in a story was accompanied by a sense of loss at the end of a run. The mental consequences arising from both these subthemes implied a third: the possibility of substance/alcohol abuse among actors. Finally, financial insecurity was an important subtheme of the main challenges and cost theme. These subthemes are discussed in detail.

6.5.1 A Sense of Being Rejected

The profession of acting is insecure and vulnerable, as explained previously. As research has shown and as emerged in the current study, the criticism received by actors can be painful and is related to skewed power relations, which might exist because actors feel they have no choice but to accept criticism (Cingue et al., 2021; Orzechowicz, 2008). In the literature on the concept of a calling, the term “dark side outcomes” is used to explain how following a calling can have favourable and unfavourable consequences, whereby it is beneficial for wellbeing but leads to a greater willingness to make sacrifices for the purposes of work. This subsequently jeopardises mental health (Thompson & Bunderson, 2019). For example, a firefighter may develop a trauma because (s)he risks being exposed to dangerous circumstances, while a teacher risks burnout by spending more time and energy at work, as well as being more willing to suffer stress, compared to someone for whom work is “just a job” (Thompson & Bunderson, 2019). Actors may be forced to accept the critiques and negative attitudes of others, as well as engage with insecure, emotionally intense work for low wages (Gardner, 2014).

As in previous research, the actors described negative feedback as an experience that felt more than unpleasant and was perceived as humiliating (Robb et al., 2018). The current research augments the body of knowledge by indicating that the connection with identity means such feedback might also be experienced as a sense of rejection of the person. Based on the contingencies of self-worth theory, this can be readily understood (Crocker & Knight, 2005), precisely because actors regard acting as a vocation and part of who they are, so it determines a considerable degree of their self-worth. The motivation to achieve success is, therefore, immense, but the costs of failure are disastrous. This was clearly demonstrated through the actors' words. Whereas the term "disappointment" corresponded to a generally

negative situation, other words were also used to show that acting involved far more: it was described as being about "surviving" and as a "very difficult job [in which] to stay sane".

Of specific interest is one word used by Walter in this context, who explained in relation to rejection that being an actor was a "quixotic" profession. This word derives from the 17th-century literary character Don Quixote, who dreamed of bringing chivalry back to its original glory and intended to achieve this by becoming a knight-errant, but he is portrayed as ridiculous (a word also used by Walter) and as losing his grip on reality. Thus, Walter's choice of the word "quixotic" reminds us that while being an actor is a calling, it also involves being close to insanity. Although he asked, "What is the purpose of being the actor?", he answered this himself when he said "quixotic". More than anything, acting means following ideals despite knowing this will be very difficult.

With respect to actors' relationships, the theme of rejection contrasts strongly with the ways actors described other aspects of their relationships. While generally experiencing strong bonds with others due to their like-mindedness and sharing the emotional experience of playing a role in a story, actors might experience jealousy and competitiveness. Robb et al. (2018) discovered similar emotions in their study, in which actors also cast doubt on whether the real emotions experienced in social relations with peers were due to acting. However, this was not expressed as a concern by the participants in the present study. Instead, they referred to being young, suggesting that through experience, the issue of competition between actors might become less serious. Furthermore, actors referred to a lack of control: one is chosen by others instead of being able to choose one's roles. These aspects were negatively related to self-determination: the experience that one is in control of one's behaviour and performs behaviours out of free choice, either through purely intrinsic motivation or because of the high value placed on the (goals that can be obtained with that) behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Creativity is strongly linked to the need for self-determination (Sheldon, 1995). Yet

self-determination is connected to the presence of autonomy, positive relationships and experienced competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, while following one's calling is surely intrinsic and suggests the experience of strong self-determination (Conway et al., 2015), negative feedback that creates feelings of rejection and a lack of control detracts from this, leading to negative effects on wellbeing. This exacerbates the negative consequences of identification with characters (as explained earlier).

6.5.2 Sense of Loss at the End of a Run

The third subtheme provided more information about the effects of identification with characters. The actors explained how this was linked to not only how identity can be affected by a role and how a character's experiences can be felt, but also the attachment one must release once a theatre run is over. Although work is always temporary, the extent of the actors' involvement led them to describe this ending as a loss, which they cried about and even mourned. It is important to reiterate that the experiences were heterogeneous in intensity, whereby some participants (Henry and John) talked about losing "something" but Calvin expressed this as feeling his own death.

Furthermore, several actors mentioned losing the closeness to the other company members. This puts into perspective the comments about competition and jealousy presented in the rejection theme. Above all, bonds were felt. Considering how a company can feel like a family, a useful comparison is the relationships between siblings. After all, brothers and sisters are also known to feel jealous and have interactions that involve negative emotions while simultaneously being sources of social support and intense positive emotions (Dunn, 2002). Seen from this perspective, it is comprehensible why actors claimed to feel great sadness when leaving a company. This insight has received little attention until now. While some actors have expressed the importance of the daily ending of a performance and thus the

play's ending (Doyle, 2016b; Wihstutz, 2009; Robb & Davies, 2015), this is considerably different because an actor only says goodbye to the audience and knows that a new performance will be given. The temporary nature of peer relationships was previously mentioned only by Robb et al. (2018). This aspect differentiates acting from other professions that commonly involve a calling and in which peer relationships usually last longer (such as medicine or teaching).

6.5.3 The Possibility of Substance/Alcohol Abuse Among Actors

As described above, all the negative psychological consequences linked to being an actor help us to understand the increased risk of substance and alcohol abuse among actors. This was clear from the experiences of the actors in this study and has also been described in previous work (Martin & Battaglini, 2009; Steptoe et al., 1995). The actors described this aspect in general terms but did not seem to distance themselves from it. None of the comments showed that the participants were trying to indicate that alcohol or substance abuse did not concern them. Instead, the use of generalisations seemed to signal that the problem was commonplace and strongly associated with being an actor, as Robb et al. (2018) also found. In their study, drinking was mentioned as a social event. While the actors in the present study did not directly refer to this, the fact that they described it as being part of actors' lives suggests that they had had the same experience. It seems likely that drinking behaviour is common and understood by others, rather than an activity that others would try to stop or disapprove of.

The literature review described how addiction can be a form of self-medication (Frone, 2016) associated with actors' difficult working conditions and personalities. Personality type B traits were found to be more common among actors; these have been linked to sensitivity to substance abuse. Henry, who stated that acting was a recipe for

depression and drinking, referred to this directly. In addition, the present study reveals that actors might be more prone to addiction because it resembles the “high” experienced when acting and being on stage. Actors seem to experience acting as very similar to taking drugs, perhaps due to the combination of not having to address reality and the desire to achieve the same, intense positive feeling when off stage.

6.5.4 Financial Insecurity

The final subtheme of challenges and cost was financial insecurity. As referred to in the literature review, Abbing (2002) comprehensively explained the reasons for this. In general, artists are valued and their work is supported by subsidies and donations, but paying them well is unnecessary because the public embraces the image of the poor and ideological artist, while artists accept low salaries because they regard acting as their calling.

Furthermore, there is no balance between supply and demand, with the profession left unprotected by a body of certified knowledge (Abbing, 2002). In the present study, only one participant, Dean, managed to make a living from being an actor. He had become an actor through his decision to choose a profession he felt was part of his identity. From the present study, it is unclear whether this signifies that Dean was the best actor or simply better able to “sell himself”, which Calvin described as being a greater determinant of success than talent.

When explaining this, Calvin might also have been trying to self-protect his self-worth. To reiterate, Calvin had experienced a transformation from self-hate to self-love and, over the years, had found ways to better manage the emotional impact, but he still described the ending of a theatre run as similar to his death. People tend to avoid situations of rejection and failure in order to protect their self-esteem (Crocker & Knight, 2005). However, when acting was felt to be a calling, this seemed not to be an option. For someone like Calvin, who obviously experienced acting as highly intense and connected to identity, an alternative might

be to find external attributions for failure. Research has shown that, for reasons of self-worth, a frequently beneficial action is for individuals to attribute acceptance after a job application as internal, stable and within their personal control (Ababneh et al., 2014). Rejection, on the other hand, is usually attributed not to one's own characteristics, as well as being seen as unstable and due to situational factors (Ababneh et al., 2014). However, given the statistics, actors can make external attributions but they will be unlikely to identify temporary causes. Instead, they know that their chances of securing a job or gig are very low. This means that actors can make self-serving attributions of rejection by imagining that its causes are factors other than their talent. While this may protect their self-worth, it will give their future a very gloomy perspective. As expressed by the actors in this study, they had no expectations of a brighter future and accepted as a fact their continuous struggle to find work whenever they tried. Moreover, by suggesting that self-selling might be more important than talent, a sense of injustice might also be experienced.

Furthermore, given Sartre's argument that the absence of something also matters in hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009), it is interesting to note how little the actors said about their other jobs. Whereas they mentioned the need to do non-acting work to support themselves, this was apparently experienced as purely negative. None of the actors stated that such jobs made them feel part of society, helped them find pride, were part of their identity or provided them with social relationships. Research has shown that people can be motivated to have multiple jobs by the greater financial security this offers, as well as the wish to work more hours and the different utilities derived from these jobs (Böheim, & Taylor, 2003; Campion, 2020). Yet the actors regarded having non-acting jobs as driven only by the first incentive.

Arguably, this cannot be fully explained by the fact that they saw acting as their calling. High school teachers, who often experience their work as a calling, have demonstrated multiple motivations for having a second job (Hanling, 2005). These teachers

tend to receive low wages and might only be able to work part-time in teaching (Campion, 2020). Besides improving their financial situation, teachers also mentioned that a second job provided them with a place in society, helped them fill their hours and enhanced their skills (Hanling, 2005). The latter was only found when their second job was related to their speciality, which helps us to understand the difference with actors. Being trained as a high school teacher involves teaching skills and professional knowledge (e.g., in language, science or mathematics). This can help them find a profession in which they feel both comfortable and skilled (Hanling, 2005). On the other hand, actors might have more difficulty in finding a second job that is better paid and more secure than acting, as well as being a good fit with their specific talents and skills.

Moreover, actors in another study regarded having another job as potentially concerning in terms of identity because it might reduce their acting to the level of a “hobby”. Art is experienced by an artist not as a hobby but as their societal identity (Campion, 2020). In particular, taking a non-artistic second job might be experienced as failure and damaging to one’s identity (Campion, 2020). This differs from teaching, which is not done as a leisure time pursuit or hobby. These explanations help us to understand the struggle mentioned by the actors within the subtheme of financial insecurity, which appeared to be unsolvable without damaging their self-esteem.

Section C. Study II: Lived Experience of Acting Trainers

Chapter 7: Introduction and Literature Review

Based on the findings of the first study, that was focused on the lived experiences of theatre actors, new questions arose about how they were prepared and how those responsible for this felt about both their tasks and responsibilities as well as about the acting students who are mentioned in this study as “actors”, as they are actively engaged in performing activities during their acting courses. It was, therefore, decided to carry out a second study focused on the lived experiences of acting trainers and their view on acting students/actors. For this purpose, a new literature review was carried out to better understand what was already known and what were the research gaps as will be described in this chapter. The chapter starts with a brief description of the literature search. To better understand the working life of acting trainers an explanation of modern acting methodologies will be provided. Thereafter, the different techniques used by teachers/trainers of theatre acting will be described. The following section outlines how trainers of acting perceive the impacts of their teaching on their acting students, as well as the correspondences and mismatches between the students’ educational needs and what teachers are offering them. This information will provide a better understanding of how theatre acting trainers might experience their role (including the positive and negative aspects), which will be discussed in as much detail as possible, based on the existing literature. The chapter closes by identifying the research gaps and outlining the aims of the study.

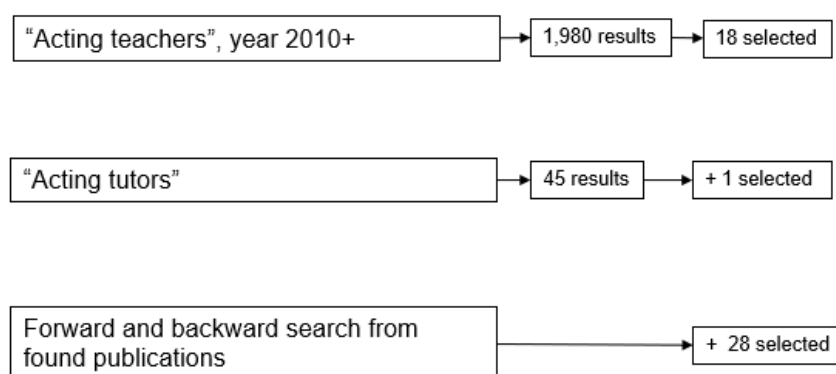
7.1 Literature Search

Based on prior experience of searching for literature within the large domain of theatre acting, it was decided to use the Google Scholar advanced search as the search engine. In contrast to other scientific search engines, Google Scholar would include scientific

dissertations, books and papers in non-peer-reviewed journals that might be relevant to the present study; for example, this search engine would locate an article written by an acting teacher. After trying various keyword combinations (e.g., “drama school”, “theatre school”), the term “acting teachers” was chosen as the starting point because, according to the first page of results, this seemed to produce the most relevant publications. Other keywords retrieved more general results including, for example, works on acting education for high school students. To find the most recent papers, a filter was used to select works from 2010 onwards. The selection of papers was based on titles and abstracts. Despite the many search hits, the process was facilitated by the researcher's familiarity with some of the literature. An additional search was performed based on the keywords “acting tutor” with no year filter, from which one additional paper was selected. Furthermore, when papers of particular interest were located, their bibliographies were checked for studies that seemed to refer to the same topic. The researcher also checked whether papers referring back to a specific publication could also be relevant, which is an option in Google Scholar (“cited by”). The full literature research process is presented in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1

Literature Research Process



7.2 An Explanation of Modern Acting Methodologies

Stanislavsky is regarded as the father of modern acting techniques (Griffin, 2005; Krasner, 2012). He was a Russian actor and director from the early 20th century who developed a highly influential system of acting (Pitches, 2005; Schnitzler, 1954). His approach emphasised the importance of realistic, naturalistic performances, which were to be achieved through a series of exercises and techniques aimed at engaging the actor's emotions, imagination and sense of truth (Pitches, 2005). The key elements of the Stanislavsky System include the use of objectives, the creation of subtext, as well as the exploration of character motivations and desires (Sawoski, 2010). Stanislavsky's ideas have had a lasting impact on the world of theatre, and many of his techniques and concepts continue to be used by actors and directors today. Subsequently, Strasberg, Meisner and Adler are among those particularly credited for further advancing theatre acting methodology into the Method, which is currently the most prominent methodology in theatre acting (Krasner, 2012; McFarren, 2003; Russel, 2008; Shirley, 2010). While inspired by Stanislavsky, these three figures also made various important modifications and progressions.

Strasberg's method evolved primarily from Stanislavsky's idea of affective memory. Affective memory means encouraging actors to use their own remembered emotions to connect with a character's circumstances (McFarren, 2003; Shirley, 2010). Stanislavsky later abandoned affective memory, however, because he felt it did not result in consistent performances (Magnat, 2014). Strasberg's important contributions to the Method included the implementation of various exercises to help actors concentrate and relax (Krasner, 2012). His sensory exercises help actors develop their imagination and emotional life (Kilian, 2019), while the relaxation exercises help actors to reduce mental and physical tension (Krasner, 2012). Script analysis is intended to help actors understand a character's motivations, actions and logic (Krasner, 2012). Finally, improvisation is intended to reveal natural behaviour and

a character's sub-textual goals (Krasner, 2012). These techniques will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Meisner felt that the affective memory used by Stanislavsky, and by Strasberg following Stanislavsky, could take an actor out of a scene itself because they are focused on their own emotions. Being out of reach for others, these emotions are made unavailable to their co-actors on stage (Shirley, 2010). Meisner, therefore, developed his own approach to acting, known as the Meisner Technique (McFarren, 2003; Shirley, 2010). Like the Stanislavsky System, the Meisner Technique emphasises the importance of truthful, authentic performances (McFarren, 2003). However, Meisner's approach focuses more on the actor's ability to react to their fellow actors and their environment, rather than the creation of a detailed inner life for the character (Strandberg-Long, 2019). Based on repetition and improvisation, Meisner's exercises are designed to help actors listen and respond truthfully in the moment, thus decreasing self-consciousness and increasing spontaneity (Strandberg-Long, 2019).

Adler's most important influence has been her belief that actors should not draw their inspiration primarily from their own experiences (Krasner, 2012; McFarren, 2003). Instead, she argued that the actor's imagination of the character's setting—in terms of time, place and circumstances—made the social, historical and cultural context more relevant (Darvas, 2010). According to Adler, actors can stimulate their imagination by understanding the character's life through reading, music and observing other art forms (Krasner, 2012). However, actors should be able to feel it; for this reason, Adler emphasised that actors can personalise the process by selecting and creating inspirational experiences to which they can relate (Darvas, 2010).

Thus, whereas Strasberg had a psychological focus, Meisner focused on the behavioural and Adler adopted a more sociological approach (Krasner, 2012). However,

central to all of these approaches and key to the Method is the concept that actors should present a realistic performance that is as authentic as possible (Darvas, 2010). This has resulted in the common code for modern actors, which outlines that they should learn to personalise their roles by drawing from their own actual or imaginative emotional and psychological experiences (Krasner, 2012). Nevertheless, exceptions to this code are acknowledged, given that some forms of theatre either do not include this personal emotional involvement or do so to a lesser extent (Mann, 1999).

7.3 How Acting Teachers Work

Theatre acting teachers are responsible for guiding and educating aspiring actors on how to develop their craft, refine their skills and bring characters to life on stage (Bilic, 2022). Acting training in the modern Western world is generally a vocational endeavour: it concerns the passing on of the necessary skills and experience to new generations of actors by those who have already established their status as actors (Davidson et al., 2022; Prior, 2007). Thus, acting teachers are in a unique position due to their knowledge of the profession from inside and outside. They are familiar with its effects, pleasures and difficulties from their own experiences, as well as from observing others (Bilic, 2022).

Teaching acting is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a deep understanding of the craft of acting, as well as the ability to connect with students on an emotional level. Roger (1982, p. 14) even concluded that due to the developments in how theatre acting should be thought and delivered, the job of teaching acting had become “dangerous” and “acting teachers must, in effect, become psychologists”. Moreover, the teaching of actors is different from many other vocations because acting is an art, so it is considered to require both talent and creativity. Therefore, acting teachers need to continuously adapt (Bilic, 2022; Knowles, 1995). As times change, art also changes and

develops (Bilic, 2022), so teachers cannot copy or fully rely on the teaching practices they confronted during their own education. Instead, they must adjust to contemporary demands (Bilic, 2022). As a result, a teacher should also be able to see the world through their students' eyes and willing to discover with the students, although they themselves remain responsible for guiding the process (Bilic, 2022).

Seton, who conducted an auto-ethnographic study of actor training in Australia (as a participant-observer), discovered that in their work with students, acting teachers used mainly practice and practical examples, certainly to a greater extent than they offered theory (Seton, 2010; 2014). Furthermore, theatre acting teachers have been found to use a range of techniques and approaches to help students learn (Knowles, 1995). One strategy is the use of improvisation, which allows actors to explore their characters spontaneously and organically without the constraints of a written script (Darvas, 2010). Improvisation encourages actors to be present in the moment, react authentically and explore their characters' motivations and emotions (Krasner, 2012). Improvisation can also help actors develop a sense of trust and collaboration with their fellow actors, which can enhance the quality of their performances (Krasner, 2012).

Another strategy used in theatre acting education to teach character development is script analysis (Baron, 2013). This involves a detailed examination of the script, looking at the character's backstory, motivations, relationships and emotional arc (Krasner, 2012). This allows an actor to develop a deeper understanding of their character and their place in the overall story (Baron, 2013). Subtext is important in the context of script analysis; this refers to the underlying meaning or implication beneath the surface of the text (Baron, 2013). In other words, the actor tries to understand not only the text but also the deeper meaning of the story being told. By understanding their character's journey, actors can make more informed choices about their performance, thus creating a more nuanced and believable portrayal, as

well as improving their delivery of the intended emotional impact on the audience (Krasner, 2012). Script analysis also helps an actor memorise a script, as revealed by a systematic investigation of real-world script learning (Noice, 1996). For example, by analysing the sentence, “Don’t pester me now, please”, we might conclude that the character sees the other person (the other role in the play) as a bothersome child because the word “pester” is typically used with children (Noice, 1996). This realisation will help the (student) actor not only find the correct intention and attitude but also remember the line and not get confused by a word with a similar meaning (e.g., bother).

In addition, theatre acting teachers might use various techniques to help actors connect with their emotions and bring authenticity to their performances. These techniques include physical warm-ups, breathing exercises and relaxation activities, which can help actors access their emotional range and connect more deeply with their characters (Krasner, 2012). Other techniques might include mindfulness practices and visualisation exercises, which can help actors develop a stronger sense of presence and focus. Acting teacher Ingleson (2022) assessed how students experienced the effects of mindfulness and meditation exercises, revealing that 98% claimed these activities had helped them, particularly to focus but also to relax.

To support the learning process when using all these techniques, acting teachers must provide students with regular feedback and constructive criticism (Dreyer-Lude, 2015; Kornetsky, 2016). This can help students understand where they are succeeding and where improvement is needed (Krasner, 2012). Teachers should also help students develop a deeper understanding of their characters and performances (Krasner, 2012). Feedback should be specific, clear and actionable, and it should be delivered supportively and constructively (Kornetsky, 2016). This is associated with the necessity for teachers to create safe and supportive learning environments in which students feel comfortable exploring their

characters and experimenting with different techniques (Krasner, 2012). These aspects of the work require a strong understanding of the emotional needs of students, as well as a willingness to adapt teaching styles to suit each student's individual needs (Dreyer-Lude, 2015; Kornetsky, 2016; Krasner, 2012).

7.4. Impact of Teaching Acting on Acting Students

In their work, acting teachers aim to foster the development of their students such that they become professional actors. However, research has revealed the complicated nature of the impact of teaching acting on students. For example, Taylor (2016) interviewed different types of staff (including teachers and psychologists) and students, identifying multiple themes when issues were discussed. When considering the impact of teaching acting on students, the first topic is the extent to which this education achieves its intended goal: preparing students for the acting profession. Secondly, it would be useful to consider how education influences students in terms of their well-being during their studies.

7.4.1 Education Shortfalls in Preparing Students for Their Future Needs

In the context of the first topic, an ongoing debate concerns the best way for actors to perform and how this can be taught, although the overall consensus seems to be that acting education tends to help actors to become better performers (Bilic, 2022). In fact, acting education has a central role in preparing students to present their characters, and it is where the teachers' passion is generally seen (Hadley & Kelly, 2020; Miller, 2010). Nevertheless, as theatre is often intended to have a cultural impact, it has been argued that acting students should be given more opportunities to develop the skills required to understand the public impact of their work (Hadley & Kelly, 2020). For example, it is no longer considered

appropriate to show stereotyped representations of historical events related to marginalised populations or individuals (especially oppressed or vulnerable groups) because more nuanced and realistic presentations can be more effective in raising awareness of human rights issues (Hadley & Kelly, 2020; for an example of the presentation of an older person, see Jackson, 2011). Therefore, students are required to learn how to see themselves “as agents of change with personal responsibility to shape the work they are inhabiting as actors” (Hadley & Kelly, 2020, p. 54) and to “develop skills to reflect, flip perspectives, and pursue alternatives” (Hadley & Kelly, 2020, p. 58). Although this may seem to be making an already difficult profession more strenuous, it might actually relieve some of the burden because it can increase the connections that (student) actors feel with the world (Hadley & Kelly, 2020).

Furthermore, Lewis and Adams (2019) explained that education for student actors should not focus solely on acting skills. These students will also need to be outstanding, self-determined and independent strategists with a range of skills (e.g., commercial and technological) as it is complicated to find work in the industry, even if one disregards the continuously changing demands. The authors suggested students would benefit from also learning to devise; theatre should be co-created instead of retaining the traditional way, whereby the actor is controlled by the text and the instructions of the theatre director (Lewis and Adams, 2019). Whether this approach would (sufficiently) help students is, however, unclear. Even if the power balance improves, many students will still face a future of insecure employment and the associated financial problems unless changes occur in the balance between demand and offering. From the literature examining the problems faced by current actors, acting education seems to fall short in this respect (Gardner, 2014; Robb et al., 2018). Little attention has been given to what students might need to either cope better with the situation of financial insecurity or fight for improvements to the image and status of the

profession, which itself is partly to blame for the harsh circumstances that actors face (Abbing, 2002).

Another important aspect is that acting education, while positive in terms of teaching students how to show realistic and authentic characters, is thought to provide insufficient emotional and psychological support and tools to help students address the emotions and role confusion that acting can induce (Seton, 2014). Research among actors showed that they often experience role confusion and the impact of playing roles that evoke negative emotions as problematic and they use self-medication in the form of alcohol and substance abuse. This alcohol or substance use also can be related to the aforementioned job insecurity and financial problems (Martin & Battaglini, 2009; Frone, 2016). As described in the next subsection, today's acting education is apparently failing to prepare students for these aspects, while emotions and role-blurring have also been recorded during the educational experiences.

7.4.2 How Education Impacts Acting Students

With respect to the more direct impact of education on acting students, three Australian studies are particularly informative. The study carried out by Taylor has already been discussed. In 2017, Robb and Due undertook an in-depth study to investigate how acting training affects students in terms of psychological well-being. They interviewed seven students and eight trainers, discovering both positive and negative effects of acting education on students. Innes (2021) based a subsequent study on interviews with four students and four trainers, the aim being to investigate how acting students can be trained in resilience.

The most positive students stated how acting training had helped them grow personally and master the craft of acting (Robb & Due, 2017). This was hardly surprising, given that most actors choose the profession because they regard it as a calling (Robb et al.,

2018). This is normally one of the most important selection criteria used by drama schools, which seek commitment, passion and motivation in potential students (Taylor, 2016).

The drama school community was also found to be experienced as generally positive and like a supportive family (Robb & Due, 2017). While relationships with peers were experienced as close, teacher-student relationships also tended to be closer compared to those identified in other instruction areas (Taylor, 2016). However, some concerns were expressed about the intensity of these relationships, which were caused by the unusual level of intimacy brought about by the shared experience of acting. Similar to observations made about relationships among professional actors (Robb et al., 2018), some worries were reported about the extent to which these relationships were real or limited to particular situations (Robb & Due, 2017).

Given that feedback is such an important part of acting education, it is likely to affect students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the effects can be both positive and negative. As Kornetsky (2016, p. 2) noted, “Extreme imbalances of power may lead to teaching through belittlement and harsh criticism”. In contrast, students have also demonstrated the ability to understand that feedback comes from another person’s desire to help them improve and prepare them for receiving future feedback, with actors tending to be evaluated frequently (by, for example, directors and audiences) (Kornetsky, 2016). The study by Innes (2021) revealed that the feedback provided by the previous generation of teachers was considered to be given in a manner that was maladaptive and destructive for self-esteem, having been presented negatively and unconstructively. Students were told plainly what they had done wrong in the eyes of the teachers. While the teachers who participated in the study expressed the intention to do this differently, the provision of feedback focused on student learning meant the students continued to feel the teacher feedback they received did not fulfil this goal, leading to an emotionally unsafe learning environment.

Furthermore, the combination of the intensity and the high workload was found to cause stress among acting students (Robb & Due, 2017). Although seen as a sacrifice they were willing to make (Taylor, 2016), this had negative consequences, even to the point of physical health problems. Having a social life outside their education was also seen as difficult (Robb & Due, 2017). These issues were exacerbated by their being unable to experience appropriate preparation for the subsequent poor prospects of earning a living through acting. The study by Robb and Due appeared to show that students were well aware of this, but fear and worry were caused by the lack of solutions.

Further concerns were identified in the literature that acting education can be emotionally upsetting for students because they need to increase their emotional range. This seems especially disturbing if students are required to use their own personal memories for this purpose (Taylor, 2016). The students in the study undertaken by Robb and Due (2017) described how their beliefs were continuously challenged, how they were confronted with emotionally laden material and how they had to use their own emotional experiences to connect with the characters. Moreover, in both the study by Robb and Due (2017) and the work by Innes (2021), students experienced in-depth explorations of the characters' personalities and experiences as affecting themselves and as blurring the self and the character. Taylor (2016) also noted that acting students could be very young (aged around 17) and still developing emotionally. The trainers recognised the emotional impact of educational practices on the students and explained that this could even be dangerous, especially if students' past traumas were triggered (Robb & Due, 2017). However, the teachers found it difficult to identify the point of excess and acknowledged their lack of skills to help students cope psychologically with these issues. Some teachers said they were delivering education, not therapy (Innes, 2021; Robb & Due, 2017). Students, in turn, feared to ask for help

because they felt that, first, this would jeopardise their career prospects and, second, they needed to determine how to de-role largely by themselves (Innes, 2021; Robb & Due, 2017).

As the literature also shows, the effects of education on acting students are further complicated by the perception that people must have the right talent to enter the profession, which is known to attract people with certain personality characteristics. Robb and Due (2017) mentioned that to become professional actors, students must have the traits of empathy, self-awareness and commitment to thrive in the development process.

Perfectionism, on the other hand, was seen as a negative trait for (student) actors because of the constant criticism they would face. Furthermore, mental health difficulties were found to be not only caused by students' education but also more common among them upon their entry to drama school (Robb & Due, 2017). This contrasts sharply with the view of many acting teachers and psychologists that acting students need emotional stability in order to succeed as an actor (Taylor, 2016). As described in the study by Taylor (2016), emotional breakdowns are common, and even suicide can occur among theatre acting students.

Finally, studies have shown that both during their studies and afterwards in the theatre scene, the rigorous competition creates scope for favouritism and power-abuse, with the latter often being particularly felt by women and marginalised groups (Innes, 2021; Kleppe & Røyseng, 2016). Many experience unwanted comments, enquiries and contexts, as well as sexual harassment from those in power-positions (Kleppe & Røyseng, 2016). The #metoo movement has helped create awareness of the problem (Innes, 2021; Park, 2022) but it has by no means been solved, and it even seems to have increased during the COVID-19 outbreak as the creative professions struggled in this period (Coner, 2021). In the study by Innes (2021), it was mentioned that teachers must become more sensitive to the themes of diversity and inclusivity, while teachers explained how they had only recently started developing ways to be more gender-sensitive.

7.5 Impact of Education on Theatre Acting Teachers

Described above are the visions for how acting should be taught and the more concrete aspects of how theatre acting teachers tend to work and how this affects students. This subsection explores a deeper level of understanding of the profession of being a theatre acting teacher. The literature on this topic is, however, scarce. Most insights can be derived from the more anecdotal accounts of acting given by teachers in various publications, in which they provide their opinions, and from acting teachers quoted in other papers. These sources indicate that teaching acting can be both rewarding and challenging for theatre acting teachers and tutors.

On the one hand, seeing students growing and developing their skills can be incredibly fulfilling, and an immense sense of pride and satisfaction can derive from a successful performance (Miller, 2010; Prior, 2005). This can be identified from teachers' tones of voice and descriptions. For example, in the paper by Gillett (2016), soulfulness is evident in the descriptions of the process and exercises he used with his students when following Stanislavsky's method. He described this with great self-awareness and detailed not only what he needed to be doing but also why and how his teaching required improvisation and full presence. In the study by Prior, teachers explained their aim of preparing students for professional acting via metaphors (e.g., "to broaden the acting muscle", p. 229) and words conveying genuine motivation (e.g., "the desire to help", p. 234).

On the other hand, the emotional demands of teaching can be draining, and the pressures of working in a competitive and demanding industry can be stressful (Prior, 2005). One challenge is the emotional toll that teaching can take on theatre acting teachers and tutors. Teaching acting requires a strong emotional connection with students, and it can be difficult to see students struggle or fail (Innes, 2021; Prior, 2005). Teachers have also

expressed how they are unprepared for teaching acting, do not know how to do it and learn on the job (Prior, 2005). Acting teachers know that their students' job prospects are poor, and they might worry about whether their students will actually find work in the future (Zazalli, 2013). Some teachers have also expressed great concern about how their training might affect their students. An early example can be found in the work by Gross (1982), who explained how teachers must search for the best ways to help their students, make them fear-free and deploy psychological techniques, but this should be done with great caution to avoid causing emotional harm. Gross also explained the difficulty of achieving this level of teaching expertise as time and money must be devoted to educating oneself. Nevertheless, the literature appears to indicate no consensus among acting teachers on the extent to which acting students must be provided with social, emotional and spiritual skills to help them address the emotional impact that the profession brings about in actors (Taylor, 2016). Other authors noted a concern that focusing excessively on reasoning about emotions and spirituality could kill creativity, as Hensey (2019) explained but did not agree with. Seton also mentioned this aspect, describing how teachers seemed to consider the vulnerability of actors desirable, even necessary. Meanwhile, Taylor (2016, p. 141) concluded that teachers "were not overwhelmed when confronted by emotional 'meltdowns'". On the other hand, Seton et al. (2019) noted that at the Australian Theatre Forum, organized for theatre professionals, concern was expressed about teaching acting to teenagers, where self-harm and high suicide rates were mentioned and the professionals acknowledged that they did not know how to respond.

Nevertheless, knowing the emotional impact of being trained as an actor, and of acting in itself, can also inspire acting teachers to make a change in this respect. For example, Blackstone described her positive experience following a personal development course during her own studies. This inspired her to start teaching the course herself with a specific

focus on creating compassion through the recognition of similarities and differences. This was achieved by introducing different acknowledgement exercises, whereby students sat in front of each other and maintained eye contact (e.g., “What I see in you that I see in me is...”; Blackstone, 2020, p. 6). This technique is typically used by acting teachers, based on Meisner’s focus on creating connections between actors (Blackstone, 2020). An important aspect is the soulfulness with which Blackstone described how trainers can use this technique; she clearly derived satisfaction from it and, from the perspective of feminism, she also identified its potential use in countering oppression in the community. Similarly, Metcalf (2019) explained how she used constructive feedback and dialogic leadership to be more of a coach to her acting students so that they would not feel hindered by insecurity; she proudly quoted positive feedback from students.

A key challenge faced by theatre acting teachers and tutors is the need to balance their own artistic pursuits with their teaching responsibilities. Many educators are also working actors, and they may struggle to find time to pursue their own creative projects while also teaching and mentoring students (Prior, 2005). Furthermore, they might feel their students’ performances reflect on them; in fact, they are often approached to become teachers because of their acting talent rather than any display of teaching experience (Prior, 2005). This may explain why, despite the teachers expressing positive intentions to focus on their students’ well-being and reduce their fears, students have claimed that their teachers require affirmation from the students and that “a lot of ego” exists (Innes, 2021, p. 8).

Acting teachers can also find the locus of authority difficult. As explained previously, contemporary pedagogical practice requires the teacher to be more open to learning along with the students than is the case in more traditional practices where the teacher is in full charge. Education should be student-centred (Metcalf, 2019). This also means the teacher must follow a process of monitoring the effects of their teaching, paying attention to the

reactions of the students and adjusting their approach if necessary. This has led some teachers to describe themselves as coaches rather than teachers (Prior, 2005). Another reason for this is that acting is regarded as determined largely by talent and impossible to be fully taught (Prior, 2005). However, providing constructive feedback can be difficult, as noted in the previous section, and this has indeed been experienced as hard by teachers. As Dreyer-Lude (2015, p. 25) claimed, “Sometimes it is hard to say just what you mean in a way that can be heard by the listener”.

The problem of authority, however, is more profound than in other teacher-student relationships, as explained in the previous section. While these topics usually are studied from the perspectives of students and actors, acting teacher Hartley (2020) explained how she and other (male and female) acting tutors struggled to avoid situations that violated human values, such as ethnic and racial profiling when casting certain roles. As Hartley pointed out, changes are needed and an awareness of positionality should be created in a “system that is currently racist, ableist, patriarchal and capitalist, and perpetuates an industry that might be considered toxic” (Hartley, 2020, p. 17). The matter is sensitive, and there is a natural reluctance to, firstly, question teachers explicitly about such behaviour and the underlying causes and, secondly, confess to such behaviour. However, it was instructive that some issues were highlighted spontaneously by teachers. Hartley also captured the sentiments of at least some teachers, demonstrating that they felt shame and suffering, perhaps due to partaking in harmful activities and being part of a toxic system.

7.6 Drawing the Parallel with Teachers in Music

Given the small literature base on how education impacts theatre acting teachers, it can be taken into consideration what is known about the changing sense of identity between performer and teacher in the domain of music. The reason for this is that there are parallels

between these two teaching professions. Both music and theatre acting teachers are often performers themselves, and thus must navigate the complex relationship between their identities as performers and their roles as educators. In addition, both music and theatre acting teachers must work to develop their students' skills and abilities, while also fostering a love and appreciation for the art form itself. This requires a deep understanding of the art form and the ability to communicate that understanding effectively to students.

In 2009, Pellegrino provided a narrative literature review about music teachers identities. She described that in the identity of music teachers, being a performer is often more important than the role of the teacher. It can be stressful and conflictual finding the time balance in making music as a musician, being a teacher and also having other life experiences, and also having these different self-perceptions. As argued by Pellegrino, these two parts of identity should become integrated, seeing the teacher role as part of the love and engagement for music rather than as a separate part of identity. It appears that this is easier for those who feel a passion for teaching and/or being a role model while age and experience also help (Pellegrino, 2009).

Mills (2004) research provides more insight into the reasons why experience can help. This study focused on how alumni who had returned to the conservatoire as professors (performer-teachers) differed from other alumni. It was found that many did not primarily see themselves as teachers, and also that teaching usually had not been a desire; rather it was a decision made because of financial reasons or they had been asked to teach. Nevertheless, the performers-teachers differed from non-teachers in their broader interests and focus on continuous learner. Over time, they experienced the teaching as something they could also develop in and as helpful for improving their own performance.

Research among pre-service music teachers further shows that they primarily focus on their love for music, wanting to be a mentor and inspire students (Ballantyne et al., 2012).

Yet, during their education they experience profit from pedagogical and theoretical underpinnings in their education and come to balance the musical and educational aspects (Ballantyne et al., 2012). Focusing on the career from early to experienced teachers, research shows the musical activities, knowledge and techniques are a given, something that is already part of who they (the teachers/teachers-performers) are. It is the pedagogical part of being teacher where they can develop in and where their confidence over the years shows growth (Ballantyne & Canham, 2023).

In conclusion, these studies show that having a calling for a performing art can be more salient in the identity of teachers-performers and in becoming teachers, a transition is made (Pellegrino, 2009). There is a new domain in which competence can be reached, yet this is something that they will most likely have to grow into and pedagogical skills and student-focused learning are not self-evident (Ballantyne et al., 2012; Ballantyne & Canham, 2023; Pellegrino, 2009).

7.7 Research Gaps and the Aims of the Present Study

From the literature review, it can be concluded that being an acting teacher is a challenging and rewarding process that requires a deep understanding of the craft of acting, as well as the ability to connect with students on an emotional level. Furthermore, the literature reveals discrepancies between what acting students need and what their teachers are offering, while different views were expressed about the role of the teacher, especially in terms of the management of students' emotions. The teaching profession of the acting teacher can be described as developing. Different images of teachers were obtained, with some seemingly harsh (providing negative, unconstructive feedback and displaying inappropriate behaviour like sexual harassment) but others described as emotionally close and as coaches.

One gap identified in the literature was that the lived experiences of acting teachers have not usually been the central focus of the studies. Instead, when teachers were interviewed or if they also published themselves, the usual topics were their views on the needs and education of students. As such, broader questions about how acting teachers feel about their job of teaching and their experiences of the job cannot be answered with full certainty or depth. Moreover, while most tutors focus on teaching students how to play characters, which is perhaps better phrased as coaching students such that they can develop their skills in this area, researchers have not addressed how acting teachers experience this. Instead, this area of the literature focuses on either the techniques or the seen emotional impacts, while the teachers are mentioned only as experienced by the students. As such, the aim of the present study was to answer the following questions:

- What is the lived experience of theatre/drama acting teachers/trainers/tutors?
- What is the experience of actors from the perspectives of trainers?

Chapter 8: The Method

8.1 Research Questions

The following two research questions were addressed in this study: What is the experience of working as an acting trainer? What is the experience of actors from the perspective of acting trainers?

The aim of this study was to exploring the experience of the tutors/trainers of actors at drama school. The researcher also aimed to investigate in depth how trainers regarded the experience of actors by exploring the trainers' views on this from an experiential and idiographic psychological perspective. As in the previous study, IPA was used in this work (Smith et al., 2009), so the researcher attempted to investigate the lived experiences of individuals in depth and how the participants made sense of their experience as trainers, whether they were referring to their own experience or that of actors. The procedure employed was the same as that of the previous study, as outlined in Chapter 4. However, the steps followed for this study are explained in detail in this chapter.

8.2 Recruitment Process

8.2.1 Recruitment Criteria and Their Rationale

Based on the standard IPA recommendations (Smith, 2009), the participants were recruited according to the following inclusion criteria:

- Employed by a drama school in London, the name of which has been omitted for reasons of confidentiality
- Aged between 25 and 50
- Active as an acting trainer
- Being an experienced acting trainer (at least 5 years)

- Fluent in English

Rationales for inclusion and exclusion criteria: We aimed to recruit active and experienced trainers from the same school as the purpose of this study was to gain insights into the lived experiences of acting trainers, so these inclusion criteria were essential. As each school has its own regulations and principles different from other schools, it was necessary to recruit trainers from the same school to have a homogeneous data. Moreover, the trainers needed to be fluent in English because in IPA, the aim is to explore the experiences of individuals in depth. The participants had to be able to speak fluent English to share their thoughts and feelings during their interviews.

8.2.2 Participants

The participants in the study were professional acting trainers (tutors), one male and two females. All the participants were given pseudonyms, as in the first study. The names are only needed to distinguish between the participants so the reader can recognise which findings and quotes across the themes are associated with which trainers.

Four professional acting trainers were initially scheduled to take part in the study. Two were male and two were female, although gender was not considered as an inclusion or exclusion criterion. However, it was later decided to leave one participant out of the study due to the quality of data.

8.2.3 Ethical Considerations

The participants in this study came from acting backgrounds, having started as actors at the beginning of their studies or careers. Therefore, the ethical approval for the second study was the same granted for the first. Approval for the first study in this investigation was

granted by the Department of Psychological Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Birkbeck, University of London, and no additional approval was needed. As in the first study, all prospective participants needed to be aware of the study's aims and all the procedural details before participating. Potential participants contacted me by phone or e-mail. If a person met the inclusion criteria, I checked if they had any further questions, after which we discussed the purpose of the study and certain relevant information that was also presented in written form. Furthermore, I explained to them the confidentiality of their participation, the necessary informed consent and their right to withdraw at any time during the research project.

To ensure the participants felt as comfortable as possible, I followed the same approach that had worked effectively in the first study by giving the participants the opportunity to be interviewed in a place of their preference. For this study, they all asked to be interviewed at their drama school. Before starting each interview, I ensured that the participant had completed the consent form and I again explained their right to withdraw at any time during the investigation. Based on the experience of the interviews for the first study, after which no participants contacted me with questions or to withdraw their participation, the participants in the second study were asked, if they wished, to contact me within one week after the interview (the appropriate contact information was provided). This shorter period seemed more appropriate than the three months provided in the first study. Again, none of the participants contacted me after their interview. The interviews felt natural. Having carried out the first study, I had obtained some experience and felt secure. I paid attention to the participants' non-verbal communication during the interviews to check whether they felt comfortable, which seemed to be the case. This was further confirmed after the interviews by the fact that none of the participants asked to withdraw from the study.

8.3 Data Collection

I prepared myself for the interviews by making an interview schedule, which is shown in Table 8.3.1. This schedule was used for guidance and prompts, while follow-up questions were used to match the direction of each interview. Recognising that I already had more information about the topic, I paraphrased frequently to verify that I was not misinterpreting anything based on my expectations. I also allowed the participants to have reflection time. The interviews took between 50 and 90 minutes. However, after transcribing four interviews, it was decided to omit one interview as the data was not sufficiently deep for an IPA study. In spite of the researcher's attempt to conduct a deep interview, this participant answered questions more theoretically. Thus, three of the four interviews were analysed.

Table 8.3.1

Interview Schedule for Lived Experience of Acting Trainers

Interview schedule: Lived experience of acting trainers
1-Could you tell me how you decided to become an acting trainer? Prompts: What were your motivations/reasons for starting to teach?
2-How do you feel as an acting tutor? What is it like being an acting tutor?
3-How would you describe your relationship with your acting students? How deeply do you become involved with them?
4-How is the experience of teaching students how to play characters and characters (emotionally, physically and mentally)?
5-Do you experience any challenges while teaching acting? If yes, what challenges?
6-As a trainer, how do you think actors experience role-playing? What are the challenges and pleasures of role-playing?
7-How does the industry treat actors?
8-How do school programs prepare actors for this profession (mentally and psychologically)?
9-Are there any other thoughts you would like to share?

8.4 Transcription

Based on the positive experience from the first study, Otter was used again for the automatic transcription of the interviews. Then, I re-listened to the interviews while reading along with the transcripts to check them and become more engaged with the data.

8.5 Analysis

After familiarising myself with the transcribed interviews by re-reading it and making initial notes, the Emergent themes were identified for the individual participants. After producing emergent themes for Mary, the researcher refined and categorized them to make the table of the super-ordinate and sub-ordinated themes for her, on the same process that was done for the first study. See Table 8.5.1. This process was carried out for Bob and Rose as well.

Table 8-5-1

Table of Super-Ordinate and Sub-Ordinate Themes for Mary

Super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes	Interview transcript
<p>Acting training: Enjoyments: -Watching the aha moments of students is a big pleasure/ helping students to explore and learn is enjoyable</p> <p>-The moment of noticing transformation in students are exciting</p> <p>-Watching students create characters is enjoyable</p> <p>It is a deep personal work: -It is a personal and deep work with students</p> <p>-Trainers get involved deeply with personal issue of students</p>	<p>- seeing something click in someone, you know, when suddenly they understand something that they didn't understand before (p.2)</p> <p>- when a young actor suddenly makes a realisation that's really extraordinary (p.20)</p> <p>- one of the pleasures is just seeing who people bring into the room (p.3)</p> <p>- the work is personal (p.8)</p> <p>- they have to bring themselves to the character. So, it's personal. So one of</p>

<p>What Drama schools offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Drama schools clarify the process and the hardships for acting students -Drama schools try to support students due to their vulnerable position -Students now have a strong emotion support in school which before did not <p>Actors:</p> <p>Acting is personal and actors are vulnerable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Actors put parts of themselves on stage and it is personal and makes them vulnerable -In this career the rejections and judgements feel very personal -The judgement toward the roles can be perceived personal by actors <p>Actors and characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The roles have a physical effect on actors as they embodied them -Some characters change the actors' thoughts and view on things -Actors create characters on stage and identifying with characters are inevitable -Actors create characters out of their lives so there is a bond between them -To separate from characters after performance is important for actors -The world does not see who actors really are/actors are in the shadow of their roles 	<p>the challenges is how you how you kind of take care (p.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we get them to make their own work. So, they understand the challenges/5 - we were trying to protect them from the industry (p.5) - we've got really strong student support now (p.20) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's really personal. Whether someone likes your performance or not (p.3) -if you don't get a job, because of who you are, because of who it feels like you are, that's slightly different (pp.3.4) - So if somebody doesn't like it, you feel like they don't like you (p.3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I felt like he sat up three inches taller in class after that, it's like he physically embodied somebody (p.11) - I think it can change the way they're thinking (p.12) - they will naturally find places where they personally identify with the character, you kind of can't help it (p.12) - whatever they create has to come from somewhere in their lives (p.13) -, it's really important to find ways to separate (p.13) - world will see them in a really particular way. (p.14)
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<p>-Actors lives in parallel lives; they have parallel relationships as the characters 'world are real for actors</p> <p>How actors are seen:</p> <p>-sometimes there's a real disconnect between what the world sees of actors and what they feel</p> <p>-The appearance of actors can be easily judged by industry/ actors' body perceive like a tool by industry</p> <p>-Actors are judged by their look</p> <p>Actors and lack of control:</p> <p>-lack of control/ actors are chosen for roles, they usually do not choose</p> <p>-Actors have little control on the industry -Having agency within career is the most important skill actors need to develop</p> <p>Actors and the industry:</p> <p>-Actors' needs are usually ignored by industry as it is a project led industry</p> <p>-It is a journey full of ups and downs due to working and not working periods</p> <p>-It is not a stable job: Actors have a nomadic lifestyle, they can't settle</p>	<p>- they can have multiple relationships at the same time. And I mean, I don't mean sexual partners, I mean, like, they will create imaginary friendships on stage and on screen (p.16_</p> <p>- what the world sees of you and what you feel like (p.23)</p> <p>- I don't like the length of your hair, or I or I didn't imagine them looking like this (p.22)</p> <p>- the only industry which can choose to cast you to employ you, based on how you look or how you sound (p.22)</p> <p>- actually, she really wants to do something completely different. Or if the non-binary person who's six foot two wants to be an industry (p.230)</p> <p>-and how it is to have agency within your career (p.26)</p> <p>-I don't think the industry massively thinks about them. I think the industry thinks about itself (p.24)</p> <p>- experience kind of wild highs and really bad lows, like, the shift between when you're working as an actor or when you're not working as an actor can be can be massive (p.4)</p> <p>- there is a kind of nomadic group, you go through different groups of people, your career wishes (p.15)</p>
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After that, I moved on to the stage of finding convergence and divergence in the experiences of the different participants and creating the final master table 8.5.2 for the three participants. This contains two parts: firstly, the experience of actors through the trainers' eyes and, secondly, the lived experiences of the trainers. The first part was developed using the super-ordinate themes: actors and characters, the positive experience of acting and the challenges of the career for actors. For most super-ordinate theme subthemes were developed to provide further detail of the aspects that belonged to the themes. See Table 8.5.2.

Table 8.5.2*The master table of super-ordinate and subordinate themes for three acting trainers*

Part	Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinatetheme
The lived experience of the trainers		
	A. The pleasures of training	-It is a transformative experience -It is a constant discovery
	B. Acting training as a demanding and sensitive role	
Acting career through the eyes of trainers		
	A. Actors and characters	-The impact of roles -Blurred lines and the significance of the separation
	B. Positive impact of acting	-Acting is exploration -Acting is self-development
	C. Challenges of the career for actors	-Lack of control in an unstable career -Acting is personal and actors are vulnerable

Chapter 9: Results

9.1 The Lived Experience of Acting Trainers

In this part we elaborate the lived experience of acting trainers, what their pleasures are in this career and also what challenges they deal with on a regular basis.

9.1.1 *The Pleasures of Training for Acting Trainers*

In this super-ordinate theme trainers are sharing their pleasure of being an acting trainer; which are coming in two sub-themes; It is transformative, and it is a constant discovery.

It is a Transformative experience

. All acting trainers find the experience enjoyable and transformative, in this part we elaborate how they feel about their experience. According to Bob:

I found it [teaching] so transformative, so amazing, that it honestly took my, it took my desire away from wanting to be an actor. And actually still, to this day, I want to be a teacher more than I want to be an actor myself, which is quite a wonderful thing ... It's more about skill, rather than talent. And it's so, for me, it was, what overtook me was, well, if you can train people and teach them magic, I thought, I saw what I really want to do. And that's what I've been doing ever since. (p. 1)

For Bob, being an acting tutor seemed a wonderful experience as he found it transformative for actors, and he had created that transformation. The amount of joy and satisfaction he experienced was evident when he stated, “It took my desire away to be an actor”. Whereas he started his journey aiming to become an actor, the pleasure of being a tutor changed his mind and he no longer wanted to be an actor. He later explained this

satisfaction further by mentioning how acting is a skill and that he, as a teacher, could guide students and actors to become skilful and effective professionals. This gave the impression that the “impact” he made was another source of joy for him, in addition to the transformation itself. He could cause changes in actors and “teach them magic”. Moreover, by comparing his position to “magic”, he seemed to be highlighting the transformative nature of teaching acting and, consequently, how satisfying it was for him as a teacher to see the changes in his students. Mary also shared her experience:

When a young actor suddenly makes a realisation, that's really extraordinary, that they can, they can perform in a different way, or they've certainly got more skills than they had before. Like, those moments of realisation are always really exciting. (p. 2)

In an excerpt from her account, Mary mentioned how wonderful the moment was when young actors discovered that they could perform differently. Like Bob, she referred to teaching skills to actors and how doing so impacted and changed their performance. She described how exciting it was when “those moments of realisation” happened for actors. However, they seemed to gain more than a realisation because they visibly changed and became more “skilled” due to the knowledge taught by tutors like Bob and Mary. Mary also appeared to find it satisfying to make such a difference and actually be a source of the transformation in an actor’s performance.

It is a Constant Discovery. The acting training journey is full of exploration and discovery for trainers. Here they share how constantly they learn and discover in this career.

According to Rose:

You learn something new, every, every day. So there's that that's my journey, really, of understanding what it was in acting that I wanted, and ... I think it's the process in itself that I find so wonderful. That's

an, that's what I felt like this is, this is something that I need to do. (p.

2)

For Rose, her career was a stream of learning each day. She enjoyed how much she learned every day as a tutor and felt this was wonderful. She not only enjoyed this constant learning but also needed it in her life. She gave the impression that her career was lively due to this continuous learning.

According to Bob:

It's having a simple, clear guide, a clear route, a clear technique that allows me to lose myself consciousness and play and enter a state where I'm perpetually discovering, perpetually exploring, perpetually playing. And whatever the nature of the scene or the interacting having so much fun...(p. 2)

Although Bob claimed the technique of teaching seemed simple, he felt able to lose himself in the experience and forget about himself while he was “perpetually discovering”. Seemingly, the pleasure and the discovery that Bob identified in his career had become entangled and formed his overall experience. In the last part of the excerpt, he mentioned how the whole experience was centred around self-discovery, play and pleasure. This was similar to Rose’s experience of enjoyable, constant learning. Mary also shared her view:

I feel the pleasures ... will always remain the same, which is just seeing something click in someone, you know, when suddenly they understand something that they didn't understand before. (p. 2)

Mary related how enjoyable it was to watch the experience of the ‘aha’ moment in acting students and see “something click in someone”. When acting students or actors noticed or suddenly realised something, this seemed like a discovery. As the teacher watching this moment of understanding, Mary seemed to find this very exciting. The fact that it was not

Mary finding out and discovering something did not diminish the pleasure of the moment. Perhaps observing this moment of discovery was even more enjoyable, which distinguished Mary's experience from those of Bob and Rose. While they enjoyed learning and discovering themselves, Mary enjoyed observing other actors' moments of discovery.

9.1.2 Acting Training as a Demanding and Sensitive Role

Being an acting trainer is not just enjoyable, although it comes with challenges as it is a sensitive role dealing with human being. Here the trainers explain what the challenges are for them. According to Rose:

We're living in a tricky, tricky age and I think there's much more pressure on trainers to hold that safe space. In times where we don't know what that safe space is yet ... We're dealing with the human brain and human emotion, human experience. So it becomes, becomes a great responsibility, as well, I would say, so, so quite scary at this time to do it because you are in uncharted territory a little bit, you're trying to find your way. (p. 4)

In this excerpt, Rose claimed that trainers were expected to create a safe place for actors while they did not even know what exactly was considered "safe". By describing this era as "tricky", she was apparently referring to a recent increase in the pressure on trainers. Acting training seemed a major responsibility for trainers as they worked with "human beings" and the territory was unclear. She seemed to be describing how individuals can be different, as well as how boundaries and territories can vary from one person to another. This made the situation difficult for the trainers as they were expected to take responsibility for the needs of actors and students, as well as create a "safe place" for them. However, people

might have different concepts of a “safe place”, which Rose found scary. Mary elaborated on various other challenges that trainers experienced when working with individuals:

That's also one of the challenges as well, that we're teaching individuals that, and it's where the work is personal. So you're teaching individuals where the work they do is personal to who they are. Despite the fact it's a character, they have to bring themselves to the character. So it's personal. So one of the challenges is how you, how you kind of take care past already of those students in the training of being an actor. (p. 3)

Mary mentioned how “personal” this work was for actors and how this element made their careers difficult. Trainers must demonstrate and explain the lines between reality (the actor’s world) and imagination (the character’s world). Otherwise, as mentioned in some accounts, actors might perceive judgements (for example) as personal, which could make them vulnerable. Trainers, as Rose also mentioned, were expected to take responsibility for the care of actors/students, although the “personal” nature of the work made this challenging.

According to Bob:

The only thing, I suppose, the resistance, trouble I have sometimes is people being worried or resistant to feeling, whether it's good or bad, and it's guiding people through the idea that feeling is okay ...
Sometimes students can feel very vulnerable and sometimes it's trying to hold a space that feels okay, we've got to be vulnerable ... (p. 7)

The challenge Bob experienced was addressing the resistance among acting students to being themselves. Some were unable to allow themselves to feel their own emotions as this made them vulnerable. Bob’s responsibility, he stated, was to create that “safe space” mentioned by Rose. Bob had to remind the students that feelings were okay, even if they

caused a sense of vulnerability. Bob seemed to regard working with feelings and vulnerability as a challenge since these topics are personal and sensitive. At the end of this extract, he used “we” when stating it was acceptable to be vulnerable, which implies that he tried to share his human vulnerability with his students to create that safe space for them and encourage them to feel their emotions. However, this remained a challenge as vulnerability, personal aspects and feelings might be considered sensitive topics with which to work. Perhaps this is why Rose also said the responsibility in this career could be “scary”.

it's good to remind yourself that it's not easy. It's scary, it's vulnerable.

It's all of these things... (p. 9)

Rose in this quote mentioned it is good to remind herself the challenges of the career as it is scary. It seems reminding the challenges helped her to stay alert and cautious about the vulnerability that comes with acting career. It seems that the vulnerability she referred to is due to those personal and sensitive stuff that Bob and Mary also mentioned it in their stories.

In the next part we discuss the experience of actors through trainers’ eyes.

9.2 Acting as a Career Through the Eyes of Trainers

In this part we explore the experience of actors through the trainers' point of view. While in the first study, the lived experiences of actors were explored, in this study we tried to explore it from another perspective. In the first super-ordinate themes, *Actors and Characters*, the impact of the characters that actors play on the stage – through the eyes of trainers- is discussed. This Theme is connected to Actors' Attitudes Towards Identification with Characters in the first study. In the first study we saw how participants could be placed on a spectrum with regard to how much they thought the characters they played on stage influenced them once they were off the stage. It is interesting now to look at this issue through the different lens of those who are involved in training actors.

9.2.1 *Actors and Characters*

The Impact of Characters. In this subtheme, the impact of characters on actors is discussed from the perspectives of trainers. All the trainers participating in this study believed the characters impacted the actors playing them on stage in different ways and to varying extents. Here, Mary shared her perspective on this:

I definitely see confidence emerge through playing certain characters. So for example, we did some scenes from X, last term there [was a] Channel Five series with a famous actress. And there was a character who I think, would not have necessarily thought of himself as the person to play X. And he played and by allowing him to go through the research of a character that he wouldn't necessarily consider himself to play, by playing that, I felt like he sat up three inches taller in class after that. It's like he physically embodied somebody that nobody would ever expect him to play and there was a real sense of power that that gave him I think ... (pp. 10-11)

Mary thought characters could impact an actor's confidence and body. She shared a story about an actor who took the part of a character in a play for a famous television show featuring a famous actress. The actor came to embody the character by changing in height as she noticed that he looked taller after the performance. Mary mentioned the embodiment of the character and the sense of power he (the actor) experienced by playing that role. In fact, the actor had never considered himself suitable to play that character so it seemed like a major surprise for him. However, it is not completely clear from Mary's story whether the impact was due to the role's characteristics or the opportunity of appearing in that television series with a celebrity co-star. Mary also stated:

They [actor] can have multiple relationships at the same time. And I mean, I don't mean sexual partners, I mean, like, they will create imaginary friendships on stage and on screen. And they'll kind of yeah, that that really, she will somehow be real at the same time, is it? Not be weird at all, because it's imaginary, but interesting in their brain, it's kind of real ... (p. 16)

According to Mary, the world of a character stays with the actor who plays them. Actors experience those imaginary worlds through imaginary friendships and relationships in their real lives. She said that actors have "multiple relationships", some of which occur only in their heads and minds. This implies that actors have other lives, which may seem "weird". Yet for those who experience such roles, as well as live such feelings and thoughts, these lives seem "real"; they just do not exist in this world. Actors seem to have parallel lives, which continue in their minds and bodies after the performance. In the next account, Rose shared her perspective:

I think a character that you play for a long time will always stay with you in a certain way. There's always something, an experience. It's

like a memory and experience that, that you will always carry with you. Hopefully, that's a positive experience, or, or even a learning experience of having empathised with someone ... (p.17)

Rose believed that characters stay with actors for “always”. She and Mary shared similar perspectives on actors’ experiences of carrying characters inside themselves. Both participants seemed to recognise an undeniable connection between actors and characters that continues in the memories and minds of the performers. Rose was unsure if that was a positive and pleasant experience, but she thought that it was at least an opportunity for actors to “learn” and broaden their horizons by exploring the lives of others and shaping their sense of empathy. This gave the impression that the experience could be hard and bitter, depending on the world in which a character lives and the experiences the character undergoes. If characters do stay with actors—as both Mary and Rose believed—it can be readily imagined that the feelings and the experiences of those characters might also stay with them. But what if those worlds are dark, the experiences are painful and the parallel relationships involve heartbreak? In the next section, the trainers explain in detail why actors need to separate from their characters.

Blurred Lines and the Significance of the Separation. In relation to this subtheme, the trainers shared their ideas on how significant it was for actors to take care of their mental health by separating from characters after performances, particularly if they had played a negative character. Bob shared his perspective:

My personal belief is that actors need to have clear frameworks and clear groundwork so that they know when they're working and when they're not working because I think it can be quite dangerous when those lines blur. So for example, if we look at the actor Daniel Day-Lewis, [he really] blurs those lines; he will live as the character for

months on end while the film is filming. And I don't think that's safe,
I also don't think it's useful. (pp. 11-12)

Bob mentioned the importance of maintaining firm, clear boundaries with the character and not taking the character home. Keeping a distance between work and real life seems vital for actors' mental health since blurring the lines between the two areas and combining them could result in damage. Bob referred to Dea Day-Lewis staying in character for a long time; however, he argued that this was neither safe nor necessary. Instead, he emphasised that these lines should not be blurred. Rose also shared her view:

I think when the character, when you have to research or go into
really difficult areas of abuse, I think it's really important to safeguard
yourself in that respect. (p. 17)

Rose believed that actors must "safeguard" themselves, particularly when playing characters who are having difficult experiences. This indicates that actors spend a long time with the characters they play, whether doing research to know the character and their world better beforehand or while playing the part. The character's impact could be strong, so what if the character comes from a difficult area or experiences abuse or other hardships? By mentioning that characters might encounter difficult experiences, she was emphasising how necessary it was for actors to separate themselves from their characters. Mary also believed in the separation of actors from characters:

It's really important to find ways to separate or separate from the
character. So there's lots of talk about like, giving yourself time to
come out of character at the end, giving yourself time to go in. And
knowing what's you and what's the character. (p. 13)

According to Mary, finding ways to separate from characters is a basic and necessary function for actors. She believed actors need to dedicate time to come out of their roles after a

performance. She seemed to indicate that this is not easy and that actors need to devise a strategy for practising this separation. Like Bob, she seemed to believe that finding the lines and boundaries would help actors to separate from their characters. She highlighted the importance of self-knowledge in this regard; by knowing “what’s you” and “what’s the character”, actors would improve their ability to find their way out of the character and the character’s world.

While in the first study the actors shared their experiences regarding the identification with roles on a spectrum from Calvin, who doesn’t believe in taking the roles home to Henry, who explained in his account how fast the character take him over, here in the current study trainers share their stories of how characters and roles affect actors in many ways and how all trainers [three participants] believe it is necessary for the actors ’mental health to separate from the roles .

9.2.2 Positive Experiences of Acting

In this super-ordinate theme, we explore positive experience of acting through trainers’ perspective. There are similarities between what actors shared about their positive experiences in the first study and how trainers see it in actors. As elaborated previously, actors make sense of acting as a positive experience and the related themes from the actors in study 1 were: Acting is liberating, The transformative nature of acting, Performance boosts confidence and Acting is a collective experience. Here in the next two sub-themes we elaborate trainers ‘perspective on that.

Acting is Exploration. This theme explores the trainers' perspectives on the positive impact of acting as an experience. The first subtheme is "acting is exploration". Mary shared her view on this:

They [actors]'ll be away from home a lot. And they'll be making new friends. There'll be exploring worlds that they didn't even know existed on stage. They'll do deep dives of research into like the war in Croatia or, or the Bosnian war, or they'll do research into what it's like to live in 15th-century England. So they kind of can be time travellers, which is really exciting to explore. They're an explorer of emotion and time and space and relationships. (p. 16)

Mary saw acting as an exploration journey for actors. To play a character, they need to familiarise themselves with the world of that role by researching the character's life. She used a hypothetical example of an actor whose forthcoming role might be someone experiencing the "war in Croatia" or the "Bosnian war". Each role comes from a world into which an actor needs to dive in order to be able to play the role effectively, which is an exploratory experience for actors. Mary stated that actors are "time travellers" as the imaginary world has no limitations: characters might come from the 15th century or the future. An actor's mission is to travel to different times and worlds to explore the experiences and feelings of characters from those worlds so that they can tell the audience a believable story. Thus, playing each character is an exploration of a new world, which opens the door to new relationships, friendships, emotions and environments. Actors need to become world explorers to ensure they are good storytellers on stage. However, Rose outlined another angle of this exploration:

You've got to know how you interact, and who you are, how you see the world, how you interact with the world, then we can start to see

how far away are you from a character. So if you get to know yourself first, then you read about character and you're, you answer all the questions by character, are you a mile away from them? Or are they really close to you, actually, you need to figure that out before you know where you need to change or what characteristics you need to go into ... (p. 13)

In this excerpt, Rose explained how actors need to start knowing themselves to be able to play characters. Understanding how a character sees and reacts to their world is important since this is the necessary base and foundation on which an actor creates the character. The previous section discussed the importance of actors' having self-knowledge so they could recognise the lines between themselves and characters and thus separate from their roles. However, Rose emphasised the significance of self-exploration for actors as this enables them to know how a character should be played. Despite a marginal difference—Mary believed actors are world explorers while Rose highlighted how they are self-explorers—both regarded acting as exploration.

Acting is Self-Development. In this sub-theme trainers elaborated how the experience of acting could lead to a transformative and self-development experience for actors. According to Rose:

I feel like society is becoming much more, much further away from each other. But in the act of training, that's where we get that space to really focus on someone else, and to really interact with someone else, and to forget about the norms and the, you know, forget about who we are out there for a minute ... We're able to experiment with humanity with at least I just think is magical. I think it does change

you as a human, to be able to do that, to find empathy for others, but also for fictional characters. (p. 3)

Rose believed that as an experience, acting brings people closer to each other. Through knowing themselves and exploring their character's world, they become familiar with the lives of other people, which broadens their horizons as humans. Acting seems to help actors get out of themselves by seeing other people and how they interact with their own world. Thus, actors can forget themselves, even for a few minutes, which is like magic and changes actors as human beings. They develop "empathy" for others and undergo self-developmental experiences. Through her comments, we can infer that Rose's view was completely opposite to the argument that actors are selfish and narcissistic, cannot understand others and cannot access the worlds of others while acting. In fact, she implied, an actor's journey helped them to not only explore such worlds but also develop empathy towards other people, whether they were fictional characters or real. Mary also stated how acting enabled actors to develop:

They'll make a decision that this person is grumpy and you'll be like, okay, well, why are they grumpy? What do they want? What's the journey they're going to go on? But they'll, they'll be really two-dimensional. And we'll need them to be three-dimensional. So we'll need to see that grumpy person smile. And, and to get people like, I think actors can, young actors can be quite judgemental about the play. So getting actors not to judge their characters. So yeah, I mean, that's been really, it's been really interesting. (p. 8)

Mary argued that actors initially have a two-dimensional view of a person. As first, they would question their characters, perhaps labelling them as "grumpy". This seemed more common in younger actors; however, they would be expected to develop a three-dimensional

view in which people are not categorised as merely good or bad, grumpy or smiley. Instead, actors must develop non-judgemental attitudes towards their characters, as well as understand them and their behaviour. A form of personal growth seems to happen to actors during this journey, which helps them to develop integrated non-judgemental attitudes. Mary found this very “interesting”. Both Mary and Rose appeared to believe that acting makes an actor.

However, in the current study trainers shared how they see acting as exploration for actors and considering their views on the necessity of separating from characters in previous theme, self-exploration seems the best way to establish a clear line between the self and the character in their perception. Actors see the positive experience more as liberating, transformative, boosting confidence and how it is a collective experience. The similarity between actors’ and trainers’ perspectives is how both see the experience as transformative and explorative for actors. As previously discussed in the first study, actors could establish a non-judgmental view toward roles, others and themselves through their acting experiences and this is what trainers observed in actors too.

9.2..3 Career Challenges Experienced by Actors

This section discusses the trainers’ views on the challenges that actors experience during their professional careers. The challenges can be divided into different subthemes: Lack of control in an unstable career and Acting is personal and actors are vulnerable. In the first study actors elaborated the challenges, they face in this career in the following themes: Sense of being rejected, Sense of Loss at the End of a Run, The possibility of substance/alcohol abuse among actors and financial insecurity. There is a big alignment between actors’ stories and the trainers perspective of actors challenges, as will come visible from the discussion of the themes.

Lack of Control in an Unstable Career. This sub-theme explores the trainers' perspectives on the challenges that actors encounter in this unstable and unpredictable career.

Bob believed:

It is necessary for the actor to cultivate a lifestyle if they would like to be an actor and commit to it as it's a lifelong commitment. And it is to create a life that makes it sustainable for them to live with that kind of brutal uncertainty and on a linear pathway. You know, for example, as a teacher, it's like, well, you know, there's quite a clear pathway, but ... for the actor, they could do a showcase and they could sign with an incredible agent straight away, and do loads of great work for a couple months and never work again, or they might not sign for a few years and just work, work, work. And then finally, they get a big break, or they might live a whole life and never get a really good job.

(p. 12)

He regarded the industry as brutal towards actors and said the environment was unpredictable. He compared the job paths of trainers and actors, which were clear for the former but “brutal” for the latter. He referred to the unclear future for actors and how they must take care of themselves and their professional life. Bob emphasised the importance of cultivating a lifestyle that would help them to survive in this brutal and unstable industry. This excerpt highlights that actors must adjust to this brutalism, from which there appears to be no escape. Actors can only stay in this career and survive by being flexible, accepting the reality of the industry and committing to it for life. Rose shared her view:

I think they (actors) have to become business-minded and proactive.

They have to chase the work, they have to make the work. And not just, as it used to be, wait for the phone to ring. (p. 20)

In this excerpt, Rose mentioned how actors must actively “chase” jobs. She believed that to become successful, actors must develop a business mindset instead of waiting for work. While Rose was urging actors to be proactive, we might perceive that, at a deeper level, she was referring indirectly to the passive nature of an actor’s situation, over which he or she has little control. In reality, actors must wait to be contacted and offered work. Rose argued that actors need to change this situation by establishing a business mindset.

Mary also referred to the situation for many actors:

[You] experience kind of wild highs and really bad lows, like, the shift between when you're working as an actor or when you're not working as an actor can be can be massive, it can be real waves ... You might find yourself on set [in] one of the biggest shows in the world, being driven and picked up and fed and changed. And then two days later, you might find yourself working back in a shop. Because that's the reality of what the majority of actors do. And actually, that's for me, that's great. Because when you're back in a shop, you see real people, you observe the world around you. (p. 15)

She mentioned how actors encounter fluctuations in the industry and that these could be dramatic. She used the phrase “wild highs”, which recalls how Bob described the industry as “brutal”. The two trainers clearly regarded the industry as wild and brutal for actors. However, Mary later shared another angle of her perspective. She continued to mention the unpredictable reality of the acting industry, in which actors might appear in a major show for a long time but then undergo a period of unemployment that would make them highly insecure and might lead to them working in, for example, a shop to survive financially. However, for Mary as a trainer, such work was a “great” opportunity because actors could develop their knowledge about real lives and real people, which would help them in their

careers. She seemed to be referring to the skills that actors could develop by spending time in real and vivid environments. However, the question arises about their mental health and/or the sense of anxiety they probably experience when, due to an unclear future and the unpredictable industry, they must work in a shop. This would not be voluntary or even based on “choice” but a situation imposed on them due to the challenges of the profession. Thus, whereas trainers might view non-acting work as helpful for developing actors’ skills, such work is not a choice but a limitation imposed by the industry. Mary later made this clear:

I don't think the industry massively thinks about them [actors]. I think the industry thinks about itself. You know, it's project-led, they're making TV, they're making films, they've got a budget, they've got a market to sell to ... (p. 22)

She explained the reality as she saw it: not only did the industry fail to consider actors’ needs to a great extent, but it was also “project-led” and making money was the central focus. Her impression seemed to be that actors are only important as long as they are helping the system to profit and make money. In the next section, the trainers share further perspectives on the challenges faced by actors.

Acting is Personal and Actors are Vulnerable. This section outlines trainers’ perspectives on the personal dimension of acting for actors and how they are prone to be judged by others. Mary gave her view:

It's really personal whether someone likes your performance or not. Because ultimately, although you're performing the script, their performances, you're putting something of yourself on stage. So if somebody doesn't like it, you feel like they don't like you ... It's really complicated. It's really, really complicated. Because I think if you go out and you don't get a job, as a marketing manager, you might be

upset. But if you don't get a job, because of who you are, because of who it feels like you are, that's slightly different. It's quite difficult to quantify, like any artists [are] difficult to quantify, I suppose ... (p. 3)

Here, Mary explained how she saw acting as a personal experience for actors, in which everything might be perceived as personal. She mentioned how a character played by an actor might be the target of judgement by the industry or the audience, and this judgement might feel personal to the actor. Acting is different from any other job in that actors put their bodies, voices and even feelings on stage, and they can feel exposed and vulnerable in such situations. Mary believed that even when actors are judged for the quality of their performance, this might feel personal. She elaborated on this as follows:

It's that's not just, that's not just about race. It's partly about race, but it's about, it's about style, it's tone, it's about height. It's about all the kinds of things that, that when you're rejected from a part, you might think, oh, they didn't like my work ... I think it's a hugely vulnerable position. I think, I think being an actor is incredibly vulnerable. And it's a really, it's a really specific person that can survive that. (p. 5)

She explained how attitudes towards an actor's performance could be perceived as being related to their race, look or style. This gave the impression that Mary was highlighting the personal nature of this career, which may make actors sensitive and vulnerable to judgement. This is one factor for the low survival rate in this career.

Rose shared the following view:

I think it can be it can be quite scary, scary. Well, it can be scary when they think that they're showing something that others think is them when it becomes too close [to their own personality] because we're talking so much about authenticity now. And people playing

themselves on stage and, and that when you're playing someone completely, completely different works and completely set, a different set of circumstances it can be scary if, if they think that you think watching me that, that's me, oh, yeah. Especially with scenes that are intimate or scenes that are violent. (p. 14)

She stated how “scary” a situation could be for an actor when they might be judged by the character they are playing on stage. Rose mentioned how at drama school, actors are asked to use their own personalities to make characters come alive on stage; however, the price is often the actors’ vulnerability. It seems that on the one hand, actors feel they are playing themselves on stage while on the other hand, they are scared to be judged by the characters they play. She believed that when characters are violent or scenes are intimate, the feeling of vulnerability is exacerbated. Thus, similarities or differences between characters may be less important. Actors are putting their bodies and personalities in the open and letting people judge them, whether the judgement is professional and concerns the performance, as Mary mentioned, or it comes from the audience, who may have little idea about the characters. In the latter case, actors could still find the situation unpleasant as roles tend to become part of themselves. This seems to be a multilayered and complicated situation. On one layer, an actor might be judged by playing the character of a murderer, for instance. At this point, their likely worry would be whether the audience judges them by the negative characteristics of the role. However, on another layer, an actor develops bonds with the characters they play and (as Rose mentioned), they are taught at drama school to use their own personality to play a role. Thus, each judgement and expression of dislike about a role might be perceived as personal.

In the first study, actors shared how they experience rejections due to the competitive nature of this industry. Trainers also shared this view and explained what challenges actors come across in this unstable career that results in an experienced lack of control. However, actors in the first study elaborated more on a sense of loss at the ending of a role, the possibility of alcohol/substance abuse and financial insecurity. In the current study trainers expanded the discussion about how personal and private this career is for actors and how this makes them vulnerable.

Chapter 10: Discussion

10.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter. As with the discussion of the first part of the study, the chapter links the themes that were found to previous findings.

10.2 Training Career

The first master theme concerned how the training career was experienced. This was divided into, firstly, the pleasures of providing acting training and, secondly, whether the role of providing training was experienced as demanding or sensitive. This will be explained in the following subsections.

10.2.1 The Pleasures of Training

As described in the literature review, seeing students grow and develop their skills has been perceived as highly fulfilling, while training has been described as a role that evokes a sense of pride and satisfaction when students evidently improve their acting (Miller, 2010; Prior, 2005). This was also revealed in the present study, whereby Bob even found the experience of being an acting teacher so amazing that he no longer wanted to be an actor; instead, he wanted to continue teaching. The pleasure was described in relation to the impact teachers have on students. This was similar to the main motivation given by school teachers, who often experience teaching as a calling (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012). Acting trainers, on the other hand, often sensed their initial calling was to become an actor, with many having established careers in this field (Davidson et al., 2022; Prior, 2007). The accounts of the acting trainers in the present study indicated that the meaningfulness of their work with the

students and their passion for acting could be strong enough to match their feelings about being an actor. In their role as trainers, there is still the core of the theatre and acting that they are passionate about, similar to how, other teachers of arts can experience this. The richness and development that this experience (i.e., becoming a teacher) creates is well described for the field of music education by Southcott and de Bruin (2022) as: “Initially as learners, then teachers, then researchers, teacher educators and academics in music education, we have lived the entanglement of becoming throughout our careers, and we continue to do so” (p. 2). In conclusion, the trainers described the pleasures of providing training in terms of its transformative nature and how wonderful it was to make a change.

The existing literature also revealed the multifaceted nature of the profession of being an acting teacher, which itself required continuous adaptation (Bilic, 2022; Knowles, 1995). The findings of this study, however, show that this was not experienced as negative but as a constant discovery that the acting trainers enjoyed. The constant learning, self-discovery and establishment of relationships with students were mentioned as positive aspects, all of which created a journey. This might be attributed to the personality traits more common among actors: extraversion, openness and compassion, in the sense of liking to help and to be there for others (Dumas et al., 2020; Nettle, 2006).

10.2.2 Acting Training: A Demanding and Sensitive Role

Concerning the negative aspects of being an acting trainer, the trainers’ relationships with the students were often described as personal and close (Bilic, 2022; Taylor, 2016). The trainers were well aware of their responsibility to create safe spaces, yet they felt insecure about knowing, firstly, how best to meet the students’ needs in this respect and, secondly, when the individual students and year-cohort would be safe. In relation to the concept of

resilient vulnerability (Seton, 2013), Bob mentioned how students should feel accepting of their feelings and vulnerability.

The tutors felt insecure, even scared, about the responsibility to create safe spaces. This can be understood from the finding that they might be confronted with students displaying signs of severe psychological problems, including self-harm or even suicide (Seton et al., 2019), probably caused by complex interactions of personality, prior experiences, youth and the emotional impact of the education and acting experiences. Learning on the job and not having been provided with specific techniques (Prior, 2005) seemed to make teaching a highly difficult enterprise. The accounts of the tutors in this study confirmed Roger's conclusion (1982) that the job of teaching acting is dangerous and effectively requires tutors to become psychologists.

10.3 The Acting Career Through the Trainers' Eyes

The second major theme discovered was the acting trainers' descriptions of how they saw the acting career. Within this theme, they talked about actors and roles in relation to the impact of characters, as well as the difficulty and importance of separation from a character. Furthermore, they referred to both the positive impacts of acting and the challenges of the career for actors. These sub-themes are explored in further detail in the following subsections.

10.3.1 Actors and Characters

When talking about actors and characters, the acting trainers mentioned firstly the impact of roles and, secondly, the related importance of separation from characters. With respect to the impact of characters, the acting trainers were positive. While not necessarily claiming that all the aspects were pleasurable and fun, they noted how the connection that an

actor forms with a character provides growth and learning experiences. Mary provided the example of actors gaining confidence through playing a character that he would not have considered a good fit for himself, and she also explained how the experience of role involvement provided a richer experience of relationships. This latter point about social enhancement through acting was also explained by Rose, who connected it to empathy. This positive effect with respect to social relationships, as Mary explained, was because the imaginary world provides real experiences in terms of feelings. The reality of an experience is likely due to the Method training that actors undergo to be authentic on stage (Darvas, 2010). Thus, while the situation is not real, the feelings of the actor are. As mentioned in the first part, actors were found to be more empathic than the average population (Bergman Blix, 2019; Goldstein et al., 2009; Nettle, 2006) and this process seemed to start among acting students. The acting trainers who participated were not simply reflecting on their own experiences; they really observed how characters changed their students. For instance, Mary described how they appeared to change in physical stature and even develop fashion choices resembling those of the character.

However, when discussing the importance of separation from roles, the acting trainers acknowledged also the negative aspects of acting a character. Here, blurred lines were mentioned, as was the fact that some characters would experience difficulties such as abuse, which might affect the students emotionally. This confirmed the experiences of students in previous studies (Innes, 2021; Robb & Due, 2017). For this reason, all the acting trainers agreed on the importance of maintaining some degree of separation from the characters. This was explained by Seton (2004; 2013; 2014), while he and others also suggested applying more concrete exercises and approaches to stimulate personal growth, as well as providing more coaching to (student) actors (Blackstone, 2020; Metcalf, 2019). According to Seton (2013), tutors and teachers can help to create what he termed resilient vulnerability. This was

coined to acknowledge that acting entails a certain vulnerability that cannot be completely avoided. Yet, as became clear from later publications by Hensey (2019) and Seton et al. (2019), little seemed to have changed. The acting trainers in the present study still expressed few ideas about how to help students, mainly referring to self-exploration but failing to mention concrete ways in which they had helped their students achieve this. For example, Rose said, “There are ways”, with no further explanation. Her comment further highlighted that the emphasis on knowing oneself seems like a new development. The implications section of this study contains a discussion about potential ways to improve resilient vulnerability.

10.3.2 Positive Experience of Acting

The subtheme of the positive experience of acting revealed Adler’s more sociological emphasis, which was mentioned as providing students with opportunities for exploration. According to Adler, the actor’s imagining of the character’s setting in terms of time, place and circumstances facilitates the delivery of an authentic performance (Darvas, 2010 Krasner, 2012; McFarren, 2003). The acting trainers explained that these perspectives also helped young acting students to enrich their experiences, at which point the parallels with travelling and time-travelling were made. Further, Adler had described that making the perspective taking self-relevant was necessary to achieve authentic acting of a role (see Darvas, 2010) and this was also acknowledged, framed as having to get to know oneself first before one can know what to change to represent the role and how to get into it.

This sociological exploration was regarded as a meaningful process that assisted students’ social growth, in the sense of developing empathy and being able to enlarge one’s worldview. Nevertheless, as theatre is often deployed to have a cultural impact, some have argued that acting students should be given more opportunities to develop the skills required

to understand the public impact of their work (Hadley & Kelly, 2020). At this point, the acting trainers' perspectives revealed the shift in theatre culture: no longer did it provide stereotyped representations, but nuanced and realistic presentations that would raise awareness of human rights (Hadley & Kelly, 2020). The participants explained the judgemental attitudes of students towards characters and how acting education could help them grow in this respect. Thus, they would achieve a more comprehensive view of people instead of holding one-dimensional views that envisage good versus bad or wrong versus right. As Hadley and Kelly (2020) explained, this can increase the connections that (student) actors feel with the world. The acting trainers in the current study also sensed this as they recognised how acting helped students grow socially and connect with humanity.

10.3.3 Challenges of the Career for Actors

The final subtheme of the first overall theme, the acting career through the trainers' eyes, was the career challenges for actors that the trainers identified. This consisted of reflections on the lack of control in this unstable career, as well as the personal nature of acting and the vulnerability of actors.

The first topic, the lack of control in this unstable career, relates strongly to a point revealed in the literature review: acting education might not meet or provide for students' needs. As Lewis and Adams (2019) explained, acting students need to become outstanding self-determinant strategists with a range of skills, and they ideally gain control by co-creating the theatre. The trainers also identified how actors have very little control over the industry. Bob's solution was for students to create lifestyles that adjust to this lack of control as an assumed fact. Yet this would be very difficult, given that many actors seem to self-create lifestyles that do not benefit health through substance use as self-medication and the acceptance of suffering (Cinque et al., 2021; Martin & Battaglini, 2009; Seife, 2022; Szabo et

al., 2020). Two other trainers referred to a mindset change. Rose thought that actors needed a business mindset and to become more active. Mary, in clear contrast, tried to identify a positive side of the situation, mentioning the potential importance of staying connected to the real world because opportunities might arise from there during times without work. As the literature review indicated, the present study also seemed to highlight the scarcity of attention given to how students might alter their situation or how the image and status of the profession could be changed (Abbing, 2002). This was clear even though the participants claimed the industry was only concerned about making money, not about actors. This point is addressed further in the implications section.

The second topic refers to the personal nature of acting and the vulnerability of actors, Being an actor was seen as a vocation and part of one's identity, while the participants also noted how an actor brings themselves to the stage in terms of both physical features and style. This is strongly related to the role and the blurring of boundaries. These aspects make the judgements that take place very personal and highlight why the tutors felt that failure in acting is more harmful than in any other job or profession. While not explicitly mentioned by the tutors in this study, the literature review indicated that acting students are particularly vulnerable in this respect due to their youth (Taylor, 2016) and the mental health issues identified among many students upon their entrance to drama school (Robb & Due, 2017).

Rose explained another stage of potential rejection experiences, whereby actors or acting students can feel judged by the audience about features of their current character. This observation had not been mentioned in the literature. Involvement with characters' personalities and experiences has been acknowledged to have emotional consequences (Innes, 2021; Robb & Due, 2017), but the fact that the audience can also experience this boundary-blurring and may judge the actor for a character's personality or decisions had never been acknowledged in the literature as something that increases the emotional burden

of the job. However, the actions of a professional tend to be seen as reflecting a person's virtues. Mitchell (2015) described this using medical examples, such as a pharmacist writing prescriptions for an abortifacient despite her personal belief that abortion is immoral. This might be confusing for the pharmacist and give the patient the wrong impression about the pharmacist's beliefs. An experiment by Tukachinsky (2019) showed that similar attribution errors are made when seeing actors perform, although it was made explicit in this case that fiction was meant to be shown. In Tukachinsky's experiment, the participants watched a movie in which an actress played either a positive or a negative character, after which they were shown a public service announcement about a charitable children's hospital featuring the same actress. While the participants' perceptions of the actress's real personality were affected by whether they had seen her acting a good or bad character, these views also carried over into the subjects' feelings about her subsequent philanthropic message (Tukachinsky, 2019). The present study indicates the need to further address the effect that playing a character has on the actor. This might be particularly relevant for young acting students, given their apparent predisposition to be highly judgemental about their characters. This could further alleviate their fears about audience judgement.

Section D: Conclusion

Chapter 11: Concluding Discussion

In this final chapter, the results of both studies will be discussed together. For this purpose, the chapter starts with an integrated summary of the findings, bringing together the themes that were found in the mutual topics of both studies and explaining the contributions of each. Thereafter, the strengths and limitations of the studies will be discussed. Next the implications will be described, before providing suggestions for future research that are based on the study limitations on the one hand and on the study implications on the other hand. The chapter closes with a conclusion.

11.1 Integrated Summary of the Findings

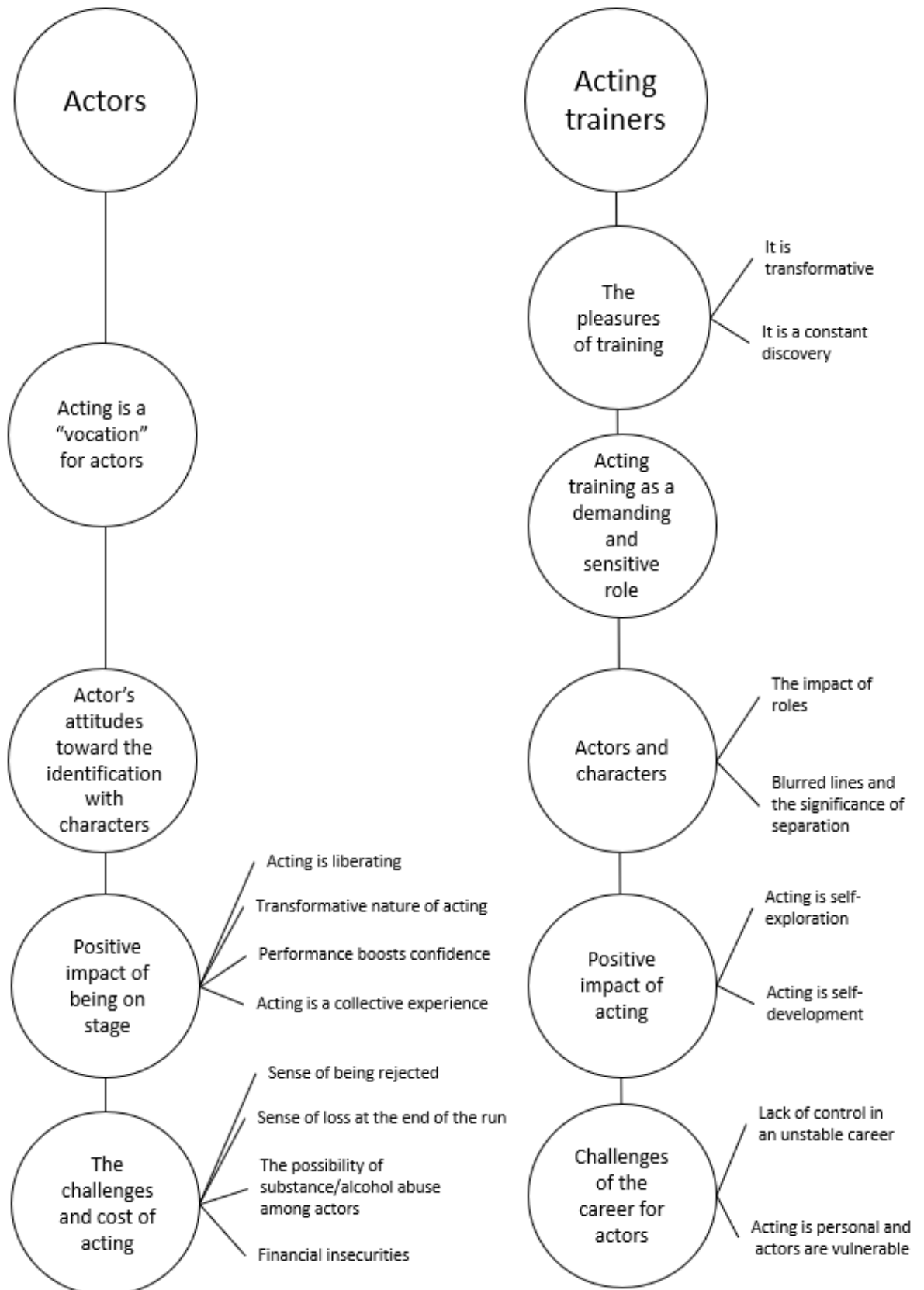
This thesis was a journey that started with an outsider's interest in the ways theatre actors experience playing characters. As part of the audience, I had been intrigued by the way I felt part of the play and the main character, and I decided to focus my PhD thesis on the lived experiences of theatre actors. The limited existing literature presented a largely average picture, with little sensitivity towards individual differences. Yet none of the works were fully centred on a deep understanding of actors' world, their psychological functioning and their experience of role playing in depth, which may seem the most important aspects of an actors' lives. As such, the first study of this thesis focused on the question: "How do role-playing experiences impact theatre actors?" A further gap in the literature was a lack of focus on the lived experiences of acting trainers, while from the results of the first study the question was raised how the actors are prepared in their training. Limited knowledge was available about the trainer's feelings about their teaching positions and experiences of training actors, especially in terms of playing characters. Therefore, a second study was carried out that focused on two questions: "What is the experience of working as an acting

trainer?” and “What is the experience of actors from the perspective of acting trainers?” An interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology was followed in both studies. Figure 11.1.1 shows a summary of two studies.

Figure 11.1.1

Themes of the Two Studies

Themes



11.1.1 Acting as a Calling

In the literature, acting has been defined as “a process of portraying the character’s features” (Guo, 2021, p. 61). Previous studies have shown how actors, on average, are imaginative, fanciful, extraverted, open, agreeable, somewhat indolent, attention-seeking, unstable, neurotic and empathetic. They also have good textual and emotional memories (Bergman Blix, 2019; Davison & Furnham, 2018; Dumas et al., 2020; Gohil, 2021; Goldstein & Winner, 2009; Kuric & Arenales, 2023; Nettle, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2002). These characteristics do not only apply because of how they develop themselves to become professional actors and are affected by their work. They also relate to who becomes an actor, which involves a build-up of experience whereby a combination of talent and personality leads to success. This experience facilitates further development and additional successful future experiences (Kogan, 2002; Robertson, 2022). Despite Kogan’s (2002) description of a career in the performing arts as a decision, this later seemed inapplicable to the profession, which was more likely experienced as a calling (Robb et al., 2018). The first study revealed that the experience of acting as a calling was strongly present among the actors who participated. Moreover, the actors felt acting to be an integrated part of who they were and had always been, without seeing this as being caused by specific traits. Instead of identifying a decision to become an actor, they felt more of a realisation that they were actors.

With respect to painting not just an average picture but also identifying individual differences, it must be emphasised that all the actors experienced acting as their calling. However, this was not experienced with the same emotional values, with different actors focusing on seeing acting as pleasurable, valuable or dangerous. The second study brought additional new insights into how one’s vocation can change. The initial calling of one acting trainer had been to become an actor, but this changed to being a trainer of actors.

11.1.2 Identification with Characters

In both studies, the participants referred to identification with characters. For the actors, portraying characters was their main focus, which also became clear from the definition. In modern acting, the most influential strategy is the Method, central to which is the concept that actors should present a realistic performance that is as authentic as possible (Darvas, 2010). For this purpose, acting training utilises practice, improvisation, script analysis and techniques to help actors connect with their emotions (Baron, 2013; Darvas, 2010; Knowles, 1995; Krasner, 2012; Seton, 2010; 2014). Yet the literature revealed clear evidence of boundary-blurring, in which actors are affected by their characters (Burgoyne et al., 1999; Greaves et al. (2022); Loveday et al., 2021). This latter process can be experienced as positive, but it can also have negative effects such as confusion. It sometimes even results in indirect trauma when a character's experiences are really felt (Panoutsos, 2021; Rivera, 2013; Seton, 2004; 2013).

The first study provided further evidence of the fact that actors feel they are affected by the personality and emotions of their characters. As was discussed in Chapter 6, involvement in roles is a complex psychological process. The actors feel the personality of the characters taint their own, and experience emotions as if they were their own. This can affect their feelings, but also coping style even to the level of trauma as became clear from the literature Seton (2004; 2013). A third layer in this complexity is the actors' concern about how they are affected by their roles and how this may affect the image that others have of them.

The second study clearly demonstrated that the trainers also recognised the positive and negative aspects of identification with characters. One positive was that acting appeared to result in greater opportunities for learning experiences since students could place themselves in situations that would otherwise not have been part of their world, such as other

places and eras. Although imaginative, the authenticity with which characters are played seems to make these experiences almost real, with real thoughts and feelings evoked. Meanwhile, the trainers also acknowledged the negative effects and therefore found it important to retain some separation between the self and the character. However, for actors, the concern that trainers and peers may know about their psychological troubles can be a concern as well. This can mean that some may not seek timely help and support during their education. Further, from the side of the trainers, it may be difficult to know where to draw the line between creating rich, yet intense acting experiences for the students and preventing psychological harm.

11.1.3 Positive Impacts

Being who they are and doing what they do was identified to make actors more socially oriented, empathetic and closer to their group, which some described as being a family. Actors also felt connected to and reinforced by their audience, yet the latter also made actors vulnerable, gave personal critiques and caused intense emotional experiences (Cingue et al., 2021; Doyle, 2016ab; Goldstein and Winner, 2009; Robb et al., 2018; Robb and Davies, 2015). From a sociological perspective, the trainers suggested that the strong social orientation was connected to the rich and diverse experiences that derived from acting, which was a similar explanation to that proposed by the actors. The consequences for the actors were that they could experiment and interpret the role in a what if manner, which would help them adopt the perspectives of others (Wilshire, 1976). These experiences were seen to be transformative and to make actors less judgemental.

This was considered particularly important for the students, who were seen to still be thinking in terms of black-and-white, paying insufficient attention to nuance and being overly judgemental about characters. The likely causes were their youth and lack of experience. The

goal of modern theatre is to provide nuanced and realistic presentations of characters to serve human rights awareness (Hadley & Kelly, 2020), which was translated by the acting trainers into the goals they had when teaching their students: to foster their social development and help them connect with humanity.

Moreover, acting has been recognised to attract people who love imagination and pretence; have a sense of individuality and emotional depth; and emphasise the acceptance of others (Ørjasæter et al., 2017; Orzechowicz, 2008). This was connected to the feeling that being part of the acting community was valuable. Fellow actors felt like family, with its similar positive (connection, bonding) and negative (competition, having to let go and say goodbye) aspects. Furthermore, the actors' accounts revealed that connections were also felt with the audience. The audience was not just reinforcing when they showed appreciation as a form of positive feedback. Their reactions were also felt to be a bond, whereby they were sharing an emotional experience with the actors during a play.

Both studies demonstrated that being or becoming an actor is an essential part of one's identity as an actor or acting student. This can be explained by the participants' perceptions that acting was a calling. Moreover, becoming part of the theatre world was found to help create a sense of belonging, protection and safety. On the one hand, this caused actors to experience intense positive feelings. They were able to act and because they perceived being an actor as part of their identity, felt highly positive about this. Being on stage, playing characters, they experienced as ecstasy. On the other hand, this also made actors more vulnerable, whereby a critique of the work was often experienced as a critique of the self. This also seemed to limit their opportunities to make a living since other (non-acting) jobs would not be as fulfilling and might even feel wrong by making them less of an actor.

Still, the second study showed that even if another meaningful profession can be found (in this case, being an acting trainer), the experience might be different.

An actor's identity is affected by the roles they play. Both studies showed that despite the intensity and potential negative consequences, this also had clear positive sides. Actors were seen to grow, as well as get to know and strengthen aspects of themselves that might otherwise have remained in the background. Actors were also seen to gain confidence through acting. The acting trainers regarded this as a highly fulfilling element of their task, whereby they would see students grow and develop. Training actors was demonstrated to be a highly rewarding profession as the trainers could recognise they were making a change.

11.1.4 The Challenges and Harsh Circumstances

The studies further confirmed and highlighted new aspects of the challenges and harsh circumstances of actors and their trainers. Similar to the descriptions in the existing literature, the strong connection with identity appeared to make the position of being a theatre actor very fragile because of the imagined concept of the poor artist, the low wages, the job insecurity and the confrontations with power abuse in the profession (Abbing, 2002; Cingue et al., 2021; Robb et al., 2018). For actors, feeling that acting is part of who they are can make it a quixotic profession, but many are willing to make the sacrifice.

The combination of who actors are and what they confront was found to result in an increased likelihood of psychological problems, as well as alcohol and substance abuse (Martin & Battaglini, 2009; Szabo et al. 2020). While actors might demonstrate above-average emotional awareness and regulation, this applies in terms of the amplification and acceptance of negative emotions rather than diminished negative feelings (Gentzler et al., 2019). Moreover, actors tend to be highly motivated to achieve success, so acting well can boost their confidence. However, rejection was often experienced as personal and as a

rejection of the self, so perceived failure can be disastrous, even to the extent of feeling that acting was just about surviving. While providing pleasure and fulfilment of their vocation, role involvement was also found to have a psychological impact that can be experienced as negative, even traumatic.

This combination of harsh circumstances and emotionally sensitive individuals entering a tough world that apparently offers little in terms of financial gains and job security was recognised by the trainers, but they struggled to identify what they could offer their students. Being a trainer was described as a scary experience because the emotional suffering of student actors was highly visible to their trainers. This was due to the greater emotional instability and vulnerability identified among students upon their entry to drama school, as well as the effects of becoming an actor. The acting trainers found it difficult to know how to create the safe spaces students needed and how to create in students the resilient vulnerability described by Seton (2013).

As explained in the discussion of the second study, acting trainers seem to need more formalised education (to use suggestions made by previous authors) to help their students enhance their vulnerable resilience. Such education might also stimulate trainers' awareness of and thoughts about how societal- and community-level initiatives could improve actors' situations. There is a good opportunity to achieve this, with the second study showing that the trainers enjoyed their profession because they experienced the need to develop positively as a continuous discovery and journey. Furthermore, it is found that receiving education to become or develop as a teacher in other areas, can help feel a sense of community with others too, as is nicely illustrated from the following quote of an educator of in-service teachers: 'Together, we listened, we laughed and at some points we cried too ... or at least some of us did. Then there came a point where everyone had spoken, and everyone had listened' (Waterhouse et al., 2021, p. 4). This could help acting teachers as well, seeing how they feel

vulnerable. Nevertheless, it still seems that therapists for acting students are needed as part of the educational staff.

11.2 Strengths and Limitations

While researchers that use a positivist research philosophy usually discuss the strengths and limitations of their study in terms of validity and reliability, the phenomenological approach has a different purpose than positivism. While the latter aims to find objective and generalizable results, the aim of the former (phenomenological studies) is to provide insight into heterogeneous, lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This has, of course, implications when considering the strengths and limitations of a study (Shinebourne, 2011). To establish if an IPA or other qualitative study has been carried out to a high standard and has produced valuable and useable knowledge, the literature describes four dimensions to be evaluated: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance (Shinebourne, 2011; Yardley, 2015). These will be discussed in this section.

11.2.1 Sensitivity to Context

IPA is considered to be particularly useful for contextual topics (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Yee, 2018). However, only when the researcher makes sure to be sensitive to context, the results will be meaningful and provide insight into how subjective experiences are to be understood in the whole of the circumstances, including current settings as well as prior experiences. In the present study, sensitivity to the context was increased by paying attention to what was known from the existing literature, where it became clear that careful attention should be paid, for example, to the fact that the working conditions of theatre actors are

insecure and tough. Then, in the interpretation of the stories, the layering of the experiences, being about the self as an actor, as an artist, and as a member of society was taken into account, which made it possible to understand how actors experience living in almost two different worlds, being on stage and being in the “normal” world. These were particular strengths of the study.

A limitation, however, must also be noted with respect to sensitivity to the context. In the first study, only male theatre actors participated. As such, it is unclear to what extent the results would be different or similar for female theatre actors. While this need not be problematic, as the results can be applied to male theatre actors only and future research could be carried out investigating female theatre actors’ experiences, the pure fact that only males participated, evokes questions. That is: it raises awareness of the limited attention that up to now has been given to gender, as well as to sexuality in research, including the current studies.

11.2.2 Commitment and Rigor

Commitment and rigor is shown by the researcher in the depth of engagement in all phases of the study, making sure that the study is carried out with sufficient detail and expertise (Yardley, 2015). In this study, this was maybe not fully accomplished in the sense that the recruitment somehow did not result in female participants. It is unknown what may have caused this: was the information not properly distributed among the female theatre actors, were they coincidentally already involved in another project that was focused on females, or were there hesitations among women because they had more negative experiences that they did not wish or dare to share with an unknown researcher? The research complied with the ethical standards and was carried out in a respectful manner, fully informing potential participants about their rights. In this sense, there is also a limit for a researcher who cannot control all circumstances.

Besides this point, in both studies, commitment and rigor were shown by the carefulness with which the interviews were carried out, the depth and detail of the listening and re-listening of the interviews, as well as the reading and re-reading, taking notes, and thinking and analysing in order to derive at the themes (Shinebourne, 2011). As a result of this, the present research has provided new insights into the experiences of actors and trainers, revealing not only themes, but also individual differences within these themes. What is more, commitment is visible in the fact that a second study grew out of an interest to complement the findings of the first.

11.2.3 Coherency and Transparency

Transparency was achieved in the two studies by providing the clearest quotes of themes found (Smith et al., 2009). Subsequently, coherence is also important in interpretation and argumentation (Yardley, 2015). The insights reached by the researcher should be conveyed in a way that is clear and logical to the reader (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Where the search and analysis of all the material was a process, with themes often starting with small sub-themes, structures have been clarified for the reader and themes have been discussed in their interconnectedness. Certainly, the established hierarchy where two themes contain sub-themes can be helpful for the reader to see the larger connections as well.

An essential step in achieving coherence was to name and make understandable the apparent contradictions in the perceptions of the actors, who used both very positive and very negative words. The fact that the world on stage is a very important one for actors, which they are completely absorbed in and struggle with themselves because they are affected by it in their identity, was essential to understanding their experiences. In addition, the first theme of the first study was discussed first for a reason: only when the reader understands that being an actor is experienced as a calling, something that is a realization of who they are and not an arbitrary decision, can a reader also understand how there is an intricate interplay of the

positive experiences that being an actor offers with the flipside of hardship, which is accepted. With respect to the discussion of the themes of the second study, a conscious decision was made in presenting first the acting trainers own experiences, to then better be able to value their reflections on the acting career. Finally, in this last chapter, the reader was provided with an integrated summary of the two studies.

11.2.4 Impact and Importance

The final criterion, Yardley (2015) explains is that the impact of the importance of a study relates to the objectives of the study and the readership it is intended for. Throughout history, the theatre has developed as a cultural expression, that is appreciated and has a societal impact (British Council, 2016; Forse, 2008; McDonnell & Shellard, 2006) signifies the importance of its continuation and development, which in turn is dependent on the theatre actors and their training.

For the first study, a research gap was identified in the sense that prior research usually had not explicitly been focused on the identity and relationships of theatre actors and that an average picture was painted. Solving this research gap has theoretical and practical importance. It can, on the one hand, increase insight into psychological processes that take place in actors, and in people with a calling more in general, which are theoretical advancements. Moreover, it can provide a better understanding of the needs of theatre actors to function well, which is particularly important considering that they are known to suffer more often from mental health problems and addictions (e.g., Martin & Battaglini, 2009; Robb et al., 2018;).

With respect to the second study, it augments the existing literature, which had hitherto focused little on trainers and their experiences. Researchers have examined either student perspectives or the techniques used by trainers to help students display authentic acting. Prior studies revealed that teaching acting requires a strong emotional connection with

students, that being confronted with students' emotional burdens can be difficult (Innes, 2021; Prior, 2005; Zazalli, 2013) and that trainers feel ill-prepared (Prior, 2005). These points were confirmed by the present study. With respect to the trainers' experiences, new insights were gained into the pleasures of teaching. While the accounts of acting trainers have highlighted that they experience pride and satisfaction (Miller, 2010; Prior, 2005), the present study revealed that these emotions were strongly associated with the trainers experiencing them as continuous discoveries and journeys, as well as the ability to help other persons grow.

Further, with respect to the needs of students, the second study confirmed the complicated nature of the offering in terms of both preparing students for the harsh and insecure circumstances of being an actor (Abbing, 2002; Gardner, 2014; Robb et al., 2018) and the emotional impact of playing characters (Seton, 2004; Seton, 2014). Moreover, the study reveals that the trainers regarded these topics as important and felt a desire to help, yet there was no full consensus on how to do this. Furthermore, while some studies have revealed ego and authority problems, the present study showed that, at least for these participants, trainers experience a daunting responsibility. Many were insecure about, and cared about, their students' futures. The more specific implications of the findings of the studies will be described in the next section 11.4.

11.3 Study Implications

When it comes to the implications of the present research for theory, it is especially worth noting how important it is to understand that while the experiences of different actors can be contained within the same themes, they contain a degree of heterogeneity. This should be included in the theoretical models, to do justice to the individual experiences. Instead of looking for explanations of how an actor forms into an "imaginative and fanciful person, who is extroverted, open and agreeable, somewhat indolent, attention-seeking, instable and

neurotic, but empathetic and with not only a good textual, but also emotional memory" (as it was described in 2.5 based on the literature), we can look for the theory of how precisely the individuality of actors and the unique values this offers, could be served. Moreover, this focus could help develop knowledge on the development of stereotypes and how these might be countered, inspired by the existing literature on stereotypes that has not yet incorporated theatre actors, or other artists (e.g., see Duguid, & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; FitzGerald et al., 2019). In the end, this can also be of practical value when ways are discovered to reduce the stereotypes, and what is of specific interest in this respect is that the theatre is often used to combat stereotypes.

A second theoretical implication was already mentioned in the discussion of the first theme. Kogan's (2002) theoretical model of career development should be changed for theatre actors, perhaps also for other callings, as a calling was not perceived as a decision but as a realization of what one already was. It stresses the difference that should be made between a calling and a job or a career (Cinque et al., 2021). A calling is more than work and forms an essential part of identity (see also Thompson & Bunderson, 2019). In the theoretical models, therefore, it makes sense to focus on the "calling" part, where similarities can be assumed between different callings (e.g., actors, teachers, health care workers with a calling), as well as develop contextual-specific explanations that apply to the profession that belongs to a specific calling. One can discriminate between characteristics of the calling that seem to play a role in the attraction and felt identity congruence with the calling (such as the role involvement for theatre actors, and the fact that one's life depends on your actions for a heart surgeon), and practical contextual work factors. To provide examples of the latter, if we again take the example of a heart surgeon, the salary, in contrast to that of the theatre actor, will be high and the power of the heart surgeon will be strong, again quite in contrast with that of the theatre actor that suffers from the power of the director. These circumstances seem to be

more of a by-product for those who follow their calling, but as the current study demonstrates, can have substantial psychological impacts.

A practical implication of the present study is that it further reveals the necessity of support for actors in dealing with both the psychological impact of role involvement as well as the sense of being rejected, the sense of loss at the end of the run, the financial insecurities, and their vulnerabilities to substance and alcohol abuse, whether resulting from these factors and/or susceptibilities. The heterogeneity in experiences found in the present study, suggests that there are possible ways of dealing with the emotions. Some seemed to have more control than others, and the transformative nature of acting revealed that the acting experience can also increase psychological insights and help develop positive skills, such as empathy. These positive experiences could maybe be fostered by training and coaching.

The understanding that trainers experience being a teacher as highly pleasurable means they are motivated, increasing the likelihood of their being open to improving their teaching. This argument can be further supported by the insecurity they expressed concerning the provision of safe spaces. Several initiatives to achieve this have been described in the literature (Blackstone, 2020; Metcalf, 2019; Seton, 2013), but these seem to have been offered piecemeal rather than systematically to acting trainers as part of the process by which they become teachers. This was probably because acting trainers have usually trained to become professional actors themselves instead of following a teaching education with the purpose of becoming a teacher (Davidson et al., 2022; Prior, 2007). The present study suggests, however, that more formalised education for acting trainers should be established. This closely resembles the view that teachers in general need to develop specific sets of skills. For example, elementary and secondary school teachers need subject knowledge but also pedagogical skills, including classroom management (Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Acting trainers could use trust-building exercises, improvisation games and open discussions about

personal experiences to foster self-care and mindfulness skills, as well as a willingness to take risks and embrace failure (Seton, 2013; Seton et al., 2019). These insights could be transferred to acting trainers, along with the most suitable didactic forms to use with students.

Moreover, both studies showed that acting is personal and vulnerable. Whereas this issue cannot be fully avoided, it causes severe emotional problems, meaning that support would be very welcome in this respect. While this is associated with the importance of helping acting trainers to develop the wide-ranging resources needed to help students become professional actors, it may also mean that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary. The findings strongly illustrate that an ongoing debate concerns whether education should also be therapy. While the participants Rose said, “It is not therapy”, the students did appear to need psychological help (Roger, 1982). Having a therapist among the teaching staff would probably offer added value, especially given the observations that acting education attracts students who might already have emotional issues and that experiences during the training can trigger past trauma (Prior et al., 2015; Rivera, 2013, Seton, 2013). Further, specific tools and methods might be developed more from within the profession. Where some actors see themselves as self-coaches (Cingue et al., 2021), it seems to be a loss of possibilities if this happens on the individual level and is not further developed and improved by using evidence-based methods of reducing stress and increasing emotional intelligence combined with the positive experiences of actors of “what works”. The strength of the sense of community that the theatre actors referred to in the present study provides confidence in this idea. In other professions, this approach is already used. For example, the “Battle Buddies” intervention was developed for nurses and combines commonly found successful coaching in emotion regulation and stress reduction techniques with peer support (Albott et al., 2020). Another example is the intervention used by Schoeps et al. (2019) to prevent burnout in schoolteachers by providing a small-group intervention to teachers focusing on improving

emotional intelligence and group coherence. The benefit of these kinds of interventions is that they can be tailored to the specific characteristics of the profession and can be experienced as less stigmatizing by the participants, as part of improving the skills for their work instead of “being in therapy”, that some fear could decrease their creativity and increase stigma (Seife, 2022).

A final implication is associated with the lack of insights shown by the trainers into how they could make a difference regarding the students’ future circumstances or help students to cope with their likely futures. In other professions, there is a greater acknowledgement of the layers of influence that can be used, which might be helpful models for the acting context. For example, the Montreal-Toulouse Biopsychosocial Model for Dentistry developed by Bedos et al. (2020) for dentists specifies that decisions and interventions occur at three levels: individual, community and society. The individual level concerns knowing the patient. A parallel for acting trainers would be to reflect on how they can support specific students; the present study demonstrated the trainers’ awareness of this aspect. However, the society level concerns structures, laws and socio-political decisions. At this level, the dentist makes decisions within professional organisations and advocates better financial arrangements for patients (Bedos et al., 2020); similarly, the acting industry could work to establish better circumstances for actors in the form of, for example, improved salaries, contracts and working circumstances. The community level for dentists refers to the potential patient group (Bedos et al., 2020). The parallel for the theatre could be the public, but also the directors and theatres. This would seem to require a change in how the industry regards actors in order to change the focus. As the present study indicated, one difficulty was the industry’s focus on making money rather than on actors’ wellbeing. Awareness of this and initiatives to address it could be fostered by acting trainers. That is not to say they should take full responsibility, but by being motivated to help and concerned about their students,

they could start to create more explicit awareness and communities, as well as help students to gain insights into these possibilities instead of requiring that students adjust their lifestyles.

11.4 Suggestions for Future Research

New studies could focus more on gender and sexuality in the experiences of theatre actors, potentially revealing how these topics affect lived experiences and providing further insights into power abuse in the profession. This could also be done using an IPA approach, which proved valuable for discovering themes and individual differences in the present study. However, researchers exploring these topics are advised to include careful preparation by initially talking with important gatekeepers, taking time to build relationships, concluding interviews sensitively and using therapeutic interviewing (Dempsey et al., 2016).

With respect to the implications for theory development, future researchers would find it worthwhile to use insights from the field of stereotypes to further investigate the formation of stereotypes about actors, including the image of the poor and ideological artist (Abbing, 2002) and that of the exhibitionistic and hysterical actor (Goldstein & Yasskin, 2014). A mixed-methods approach might be used in such research, combining the quantitative methods more commonly used in this field with qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding (FitzGerald, et al., 2019). Besides contributing theoretical understandings, these insights could be relevant when formulating initiatives at the community and society levels to improve actors' circumstances; as such, they might also have a practical purpose.

With respect to other practical implications, future studies could further develop and evaluate interventions for actors. Based on the current study, specific and useful issues to include in these interventions could be role involvement; the difficulties actors seem to have in engaging in other work for reasons of financial security in a way that would foster their self-esteem; the sense of rejection; and the danger of addiction. These studies could involve

comparing the effects of previous suggestions (see Blackstone, 2020; Metcalf, 2019; Seton, 2013) but also integrating effective elements into more comprehensive programs. This could enhance the wellbeing of not only acting students (and thereby the later generation of actors) but also acting trainers, who seem to feel scared and suffer emotionally by seeing the emotional consequences in their students.

Future researchers could also investigate the effects of different role-playing experiences. Firstly, this could involve the playing of powerful characters versus characters who are victims and who suffer without being able to fight or find solutions. Given that actors are affected by their character's personality in positive and negative ways, the first role-playing experience would likely contribute to their wellbeing, whereas the latter could result in negative emotional experiences and struggles with boundaries. In addition, the former might also be more effective in addressing discrimination and injustice because it provides the audience with not only insights and awareness but also an understanding of what could be different. This could also be addressed in future studies.

Another angle could be to compare Method acting with the use of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekten* (Ambrose, 2017). As described in the literature review, this has not yet been undertaken. Within this type of play, more distance is created between the character's identity and the actor's identity, so actors might find it easier to retain control of the character engagement. Yet the extent to which this type of theatre is better or worse in denouncing injustice remains uncertain because the deeper sense of Brecht's work is not generally understood (Apgar, 2007). A third comparison could be made with nomadic theatre, where acting is performed like a ritual, which might also help actors to separate role and self (Breed, 2017). Again, little is known about this since almost all the existing studies have focused on Method acting, which is far more commonly used.

11.5 Concluding words.

Both studies undertaken for this PhD thesis provide further confirmation that actors have a profession that is seen as a calling and that the position involves intense positive and negative experiences. Identification with characters was seen to provide personal and social learning experiences, but it was also experienced as confusing due to a blurring of the boundaries between the character and the self. This was occasionally even traumatic when a character's emotions were really felt, which also resulted in intense feelings when the role ended. Strong connections were identified between experiences and those attracted to the profession, with actors acknowledged to be willing to make sacrifices for their calling and more susceptible to both psychological problems and substance abuse. From these observations, it can be concluded that acting students might profit from improved methods of fostering their vulnerable resilience, yet trainers can only provide this if they are equipped with the appropriate pedagogy. Meanwhile, more thought about how to change the harsh circumstances and ways of acting might also help actors and trainers.

The important new contributions made by the present study include the fact that acting as a calling was not experienced as a choice but as a realisation. Heterogeneous experiences were also discovered, with actors varying from experiencing their calling as positive, valuable, dangerous or scary. Boundary-blurring was found to be more controllable for some than others. Furthermore, a new insight from the second study was the acting trainers' positive perceptions of their job, which they saw as a continuous discovery and journey. For one trainer, this had even developed into a new type of calling.

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Tables

Final Master Table of the First Study

Master table of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes

A. Acting is a “vocation” for actors

Walter: “It has to be part of your system, which you're born with, I think I don't think you can learn it.” (p.8)

Liam: “I once told a journalist I was born on stage and they believe me, I wrote an article about my mother finally gave birth on stage. I literally meant metaphorically. I was born. I was born on stage when I came alive.” (p.14)

Dean: “It was a decision which wasn't just about what I want to do. It is this is who I am, as well. It was an actual feeling of identity.” (page.3)

Josh: “I rejected it completely my whole life, although it was always around me, and in front of me, and I said, No, no, no, no, no, no, no. And then it was like, Oh, shit, I have to do that.” (p.2)

Jack: “suppose it's it's tough, but it's also you know, I wouldn't do anything else. I love it. And it's when it's when it's good it's really really good back and also be dangerous because you can be seduced by it”.(p.5)

B : Actors’ attitudes toward the identification with Character

Kalvin: “then the day doing it's not you shouldn't take it home with you. It's just a job. It's just a job. It's a great job, it's a wonderful job, but it's just a job. You don't take it down to home, not used to it did me damage.” (pp.23.24)

Jack: “when you play a character night after night, the bits of it do when inevitably rub off on you and it leaves you leave it can leave you feeling like you sound so slightly merged with with character in some ways but that I don't think to a great deal.”(p.6)

Walter: “you pretend you spend all day pretending at being an awful person or to be a really timid, anxious person. And if you do that for weeks and weeks, you're going to start dreaming it. So you're learning about these different sides of your imagination and your own package your own collection. It really does start to be like that when you have big parts.” (p.2)

Sam: “If you've been playing a very brave person, you'd be more likely to fling yourself in the defensive somebody though what happens when but that's if that's and that's there's a there's a positive thing I mean, I don't know if you are playing a violent person I tend to play nice people.” (p.12)

Toby: "I definitely think that the characteristics or the traits of characters that one plays, the roles one plays, affect one's day-to-day life, I think. Not necessarily in a huge, profound... But subtlety, sometimes. And I think that becomes slightly, probably, more amplified or magnified when you're in the midst of your fellow actors who are in the same play" (p.12)

Liam: "there comes a point in the process is where the character starts to come up to him and his own life. He just feels it. And he said his own life, just recede and recede and recede. And he's there. And that's him" (p.9)

Henry: "when I engage in a role when I when I get into contact with the role...it Immediately ... Takes over my unconscious world."(p.3)

C: Positive impact of being on stage:

1. Acting is liberating:

Walter: "this is our own space, this is protected, we're safe, and we're trusting each other. And we're here to play. You can be whoever you want" (p.13)

Liam: "the further it's removed, the more enjoyable it can be because you're dealing with things that you wouldn't normally have to deal with." (p.6)

Sam: "it's just kind of ecstasy and it's beyond judgement, because it's beyond the judgement... It's free...that that freedom to be within the structure and to be wholly free and beyond judgement and beyond the sensor of other people is a wonderful feeling" (p.5)

Dean: "that you're on the stage you're in a kind of as you're playing like a child plays, you're allowed to play like a child's allowed to play. And you're allowed to imagine you're allowed to pretend." (p.15)

John: "you're doing the thing that I can't do in my real life. I just want to be free to fail." (p.5)

Kalvin: "I just realized I really enjoyed the sort of there's a kind of euphoric feeling of just being someone else." (p.1)

Jack: "Then they have been, have been inspired to, to, to repurpose themselves into a multitude of different characters in in order to feel a sense of validation and a sense of self." (p.16)

Henry: "I think also acting fits into a part of Me which is quite interested in analysing myself thinking about myself thinking about different aspects of myself, the confusion and the anxiety that brings sometimes the freedom." (p.2)

2. Transformative nature of acting

Walter: "you can explore whatever you want, it is magic. This transformation, it's alchemical. The alchemy of theatre, in its purest form, is what it is to be human being. It's so real and powerful." (p.31)

Liam: “my job is therapy. Cries every day is either everyday dealing with myself, that is either working or not working, or everyday my professional job dealing with other people and characters and things like that” (p.30)

Sam: “because it's a non-judgmental safe space ... because I don't have the courage to be this person in real life.” (P.15)

Toby: “it does educate me into being more understanding, not being too judgmental, because... Well, it gives you an insight. You've actually bothered to look into the way somebody behaves, the way they are, then I guess I'm more accepting and tolerant.” (P.18)

Dean: “you identify with different aspects of yourself you explore different aspects of yourself like I guess you know been in therapy, but I guess like they would in therapy” (p.12)

John: “.And to do that night after night is like a f..king purging of your system. It's a cleansing. I come offstage and my skin is glowing. I feel just like spend. Like I'm in a warm bath, so the reason why I do it.” (P.11)

Kalvin: “Three years have gone by. And actually I realized that what I said was wrong. I didn't become an actor, because I hate myself. I became an actor, because I love myself and I love every different side of my character. Every different version of myself I can possibly be. And that's something that school gave me.” (P.8)

3. *Performance boosts confidence*

Liam: “stage just gives you a massive, massive confidence that it's a wonderful space, the space, the space of a stage is the most it's the most incredible space I can think of” (p.15)

Sam: “the confidence that it gives you an expressive potential of communication with people, for cerebral for for someone who is relatively cerebral, quite shy...” (p.2)

John: “Mothers of soldiers who saw that show and broke down crying off of that show. You can't fully understand it, unless you're in it. And you're doing it. And you're there.” (P.13)

4. *Acting is a collective experience*

Walter: “when you perform, you begin to really explore experientially, the nature of relationship, audience, performer, fellow, cast members. And you realize that you're not separate” (p.20)

Dean: “it's a collective activity it's a demand that we look after each other and share with each other and be generous to each other” (p.14)

Sam: “the bond that you get with a group of actors that were there is where it really works and people really happy together is that's the thing that when people get to the end of the

show, if they cry, they're not crying because they're not going to play that part again. They cry because the sense of community is really like nothing else" (p.14)

Liam: "So the relationship with audience is greater in comedy. I mean, you it's hard to explain but you read the mood of an audience, you can read the mood of an audience on stage virtually right from beginning. And you can't see it because the lights are very bright. You tend to hear strange, strangest things, silences of the different amounts of silence is so different in different parts of a single play in different theatres" (p.17)

Jack: "you go through that shared experience together, and you come out friends for life, you come out going through a real real journey." (P.16)

D: Challenges and the cost of acting

1: Sense of being rejected:

Toby: "you know, having to put up with lots of rejection ... Well, no doubt, more rejection than acceptance and then, So the frustration is I feel I'm not where I would expect to be now in my career" (p. 4)

Walter: "I mean, so the difficulties are: surviving, getting work, maintaining your self-respect, your self-esteem, your vision, in terms of why I am doing this? What is the purpose of being an actor? It's a ridiculously difficult and quixotic and eccentric profession." (P. 6)

Liam: "Let's get them in, let's patronize them and get them in. And you know, you've got he got CEOs of companies who can't even speak, they cannot deliver some basic information, or a lecture, or can't stand up and do a PowerPoint presentation. And they have to, they ask us. " (P.28)

John: "what young actors are working with, you know, feelings of jealousy, or feelings of compare comparison, or anger, you know, at the industry" (P.9)

Jack : "it's very difficult job to stay sane doing because of the rejection" (p.2)

2. Sense of loss at the end of the run

Henry: "When I finished with three months, four months job, it's just terrible. Yeah, it's like something dies" (P.17)

Kalvin: "And then you die when you get out. And you gotta take the mask off, go somewhere else" (P.26)

John: "Have a massive cry. Because you feel like you've been holding something. So that flushes out.". (P.14)

Jack: "When the job is done and there's a sense of, well, what am I going to do now, can move on to something else ...[...]...So sad because you do form very intense and quite intimate bonds with the people you're working with" (pp.10.11)

Dean: “you get very close to people over a short period of time, it's a very it's very intense being in a company and each company should play to production as a as a very definite atmosphere. And then suddenly, it stops and it is it is odd and there is a loss. There is a kind morning, it's gone. And it will never mean we might revive it.” (P.15)

Walter: “it's finished, bye... it's kind of shocking. You lose your family.” (P.28)

3. *The possibility of substance/alcohol abuse among actors:*

Henry: “It's [acting] recipe for depression recipe for drinking recipe for having difficult relationships, you know?” (p.19)

Liam: “it is a classic syndrome that you will have discovered, and they didn't I mean, they're actors commit suicide actors are in rehab. Actors are all over the place.” (P.13)

Jack: “there are endemic mental health and addiction issues within the industry.” (P.2)
“ the desire to maintain those those adrenal highs and those those that sense of being up rather than having to deal with disappointment” (p.4)

Walter: “I think actors get addicted to the joy, freedom, power of performing. So when performing is really working Theatre in particular, but it can happens in movies.”(P.22)

4. *Financial insecurities:*

Walter: “10 or 15% of the actors are employed at any one time everybody else is unemployed. And the number of actors who can make a living out of acting, just acting is 2%. So you know, this statistical odds of being successful and making your way in the profession professionally as an actor, is, the odds are very high against you.”(p.4)

Dean: “I've been very lucky. I've kept going for almost 50 years, and I never had to earn money doing anything but acting, which is very lucky. Because most people have long periods out of work”(p.5)

Toby: “You know, the amount of people who are in it, you know, just make... The work is just not there most of the time, you know. So that means, in order to, in order to survive, I have to do other stuff which has nothing to do with acting.” (P.3)

Liam: “I've got to earn money, I've got to feed the kids. So you have a constant battle to maintain your stability in the face of absolute instability.” (p.24)

Kalvin: in order to keep us afloat, you got to get a string of other jobs. I don't really have a lot of money, I'm pretty I'm really quite broke. Which means that I'm living in between my dad's my mom's house. (p.14)

Master table of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes for three acting trainers

The lived experience of acting trainers

A-The pleasures of training for acting trainers

1-It is transformative

Bob: I found it [teaching] so transformative, so amazing, that it honestly took my, it took my desire away from wanting to be an actor. And actually still, to this day, I want to be a teacher more than I want to be an actor myself, which is quite a wonderful thing ... It's more about skill, rather than talent. And it's so, for me, it was, what overtook me was, well, if you can train people and teach them magic, I thought, I saw what I really want to do. And that's what I've been doing ever since. (p. 1)

Mary: When a young actor suddenly makes a realisation, that's really extraordinary, that they can, they can perform in a different way, or they've certainly got more skills than they had before. Like, those moments of realisation are always really exciting. (p. 2)

2-It is a constant discovery

Rose: You learn something new, every, every day. So there's that that's my journey, really, of understanding what it was in acting that I wanted, and ... I think it's the process in itself that I find so wonderful. That's an, that's what I felt like this is, this is something that I need to do. (p. 2)

Bob: It's having a simple, clear guide, a clear route, a clear technique that allows me to lose myself consciousness and play and enter a state where I'm perpetually discovering, perpetually exploring, perpetually playing. And whatever the nature of the scene or the interacting having so much fun...(p. 2)

Mary: I feel the pleasures ... will always remain the same, which is just seeing something click in someone, you know, when suddenly they understand something that they didn't understand before. (p. 2)

B- Acting training a demanding and sensitive role

Rose: We're living in a tricky, tricky age and I think there's much more pressure on trainers to hold that safe space. In times where we don't know what that safe space is yet ... We're dealing with the human brain and human emotion, human experience. So it becomes, becomes a great responsibility, as well, I would say, so, so quite scary at this time to do it because you are in uncharted territory a little bit, you're trying to find your way. (p. 4)

Mary: That's also one of the challenges as well, that we're teaching individuals that, and it's where the work is personal. So you're teaching individuals where the work they do is

personal to who they are. Despite the fact it's a character, they have to bring themselves to the character. So it's personal. So one of the challenges is how you, how you kind of take care past already of those students in the training of being an actor. (p. 3)

Bob: The only thing, I suppose, the resistance, trouble I have sometimes is people being worried or resistant to feeling, whether it's good or bad, and it's guiding people through the idea that feeling is okay ... Sometimes students can feel very vulnerable and sometimes it's trying to hold a space that feels okay, we've got to be vulnerable ... (p. 7)

Acting career through the eyes of trainers:

A-Actors and characters:

1-the impact of the characters

Mary: "he wouldn't necessarily consider himself to play, by playing that, I felt like he sat up three inches taller in class after that. It's like he physically embodied somebody that nobody would ever expect him to play and there was a real sense of power that that gave him I think ..." (pp. 10-11)

Rose: I think a character that you play for a long time will always stay with you in a certain way. There's always something, an experience. It's like a memory and experience that, that you will always carry with you. Hopefully, that's a positive experience, or, or even a learning experience of having empathised with someone. (p.16)

2-Blurred lines and the significance of the separation

Rose: I think when the character, when you have to research or go into really difficult areas of abuse, ... I think it's really important to safeguard yourself in that respect. (p. 17)

Mary: "It's really important to find ways to separate or separate from the character. So there's lots of talk about like, giving yourself time to come out of character at the end, giving yourself time to go in. And knowing what's you and what's the character. "(p. 13)

B-Positive impact of acting:

1-Acting is exploration

Mary: ". There'll be exploring worlds that they didn't even know existed on stage. They'll do deep dives of research into like the war in Croatia..." Page:16

Rose: "if you get to know yourself first, then you read about character and you're, you answer all the questions by character, are you a mile away from them? Or are they really close to you, actually, you need to figure that out before you know where you need to change or what characteristics you need to go into ... (p. 13)

2-Acting is transformation

Rose: “We're able to experiment with humanity with at least I just think is magical. I think it does change you as a human, to be able to do that, to find empathy for others, but also for fictional characters.” (p. 3)

Mary: “They'll make a decision that this person is grumpy and you'll be like, okay, well, why are they grumpy? What do they want? What's the journey they're going to go on? But they'll, they'll be really two-dimensional. And we'll need them to be three-dimensional. So we'll need to see that grumpy person smile. And, and to get people like, I think actors can, young actors can be quite judgemental about the play. So getting actors not to judge their characters. So yeah, I mean, that's been really, it's been really interesting.” (p. 8)

C-Career challenges experienced by actors:

1-lack of control in an unstable career

Bob: It is necessary for the actor to cultivate a lifestyle if they would like to be an actor and commit to it as it's a lifelong commitment. And it is to create a life that makes it sustainable for them to live with that kind of brutal uncertainty and on a linear pathway. You know, for example, as a teacher, it's like, well, you know, there's quite a clear pathway, but ... for the actor, they could do a showcase and they could sign with an incredible agent straight away, and do loads of great work for a couple months and never work again, or they might not sign for a few years and just work, work, work. And then finally, they get a big break, or they might live a whole life and never get a really good job. (p. 12)

Rose: I think they (actors) have to become business-minded and proactive. They have to chase the work, they have to make the work. And not just, as it used to be, wait for the phone to ring. (p. 20)

Mary: [You] experience kind of wild highs and really bad lows, like, the shift between when you're working as an actor or when you're not working as an actor can be can be massive, it can be real waves ... You might find yourself on set [in] one of the biggest shows in the world, being driven and picked up and fed and changed. And then two days later, you might find yourself working back in a shop. Because that's the reality of what the majority of actors do. And actually, that's for me, that's great. Because when you're back in a shop, you see real people, you observe the world around you. (p. 15)

2- Acting is personal and actors are vulnerable

Mary: It's really personal whether someone likes your performance or not. Because ultimately, although you're performing the script, their performances, you're putting something of yourself on stage. So if somebody doesn't like it, you feel like they don't like you ... It's really complicated. It's really, really complicated. Because I think if you go out and you don't get a job, as a marketing manager, you might be upset. But if you don't get a job, because of who you are, because of who it feels like you are, that's slightly different. It's quite difficult to quantify, like any artists [are] difficult to quantify, I suppose ... (p. 3)

Rose: I think it can be it can be quite scary, scary. Well, it can be scary when they think that they're showing something that others think is them when it becomes too close [to their own personality] because we're talking so much about authenticity now. And people playing themselves on stage and, and that when you're playing someone completely, completely different works and completely

set, a different set of circumstances it can be scary if, if they think that you think watching me that, that's me, oh, yeah. Especially with scenes that are intimate or scenes that are violent. (p. 14)

Appendices

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES BIRKBECK UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CONSENT FORM FOR: A qualitative study of actors' experience of the effect of role playing on their relationships and identities.

I have had the details of the study explained to me and willingly consent to take part. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular questions in the interview. Also, I may withdraw my consent for the study up to 2 weeks after the interview without giving any reason.

I understand that audio recordings will be made at the time of transcribing interviews, all personal identifying information will be removed. The data will not be used or made available for any purposes other than the research project.

I understand that all information given will be kept confidential and the only person who have access to the personal data is the researcher and all data will be identified by a code, with personal details kept in a locked file or secure computer with access only by the immediate researcher.

I understand how the results of the study will be used. The results will be written up for a thesis and results will be presented at conferences and written

up in journals. Every attempt will be made to prevent any possible identification of participants from the data presented.

I confirm that I am over 16 years of age

There should be two signed copies, one for the participant, one retained by the researcher for records.

Name (participant):

Signature:

Date:

Name (researcher): Neda Hatami

Signature:

Date:

For any further information you can contact the researcher:

nedahatamy@gmail.com

