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Don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington; or, precarity and the performing arts

Sparling, Steven (2017) Don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington; or, precarity and the performing arts. In: UWL Research Conference 2017, 30 June 2017, London, UK. (Unpublished)

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Don't put your daughter on the
stage Mrs Worthington; or,
Precarity and the Performing Arts.

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Precarity

- Term used by sociologists to refer to the **spread of contingent work and insecure employment within the labour market.**
- The term is also used to refer to the **subjective condition of those who experience insecure work.**

Oxford Reference Dictionary

Adam Smith, writing in 1776 comments that the 'exorbitant rewards of players, opera-singers, opera-dancers, etc. are founded upon those two principles; the **rarity and beauty of the talents**, and the **discredit of employing them in this manner... Should the public opinion of prejudice ever alter with regard to such occupations, their pecuniary recompense would quickly diminish. More people would apply to them, and the competition would quickly reduce the price of their labour**. Such talents, though far from being common, are by no means so rare as it is imagined. Many people possess them in great perfection, who disdain to make this use of them; and many more are capable of acquiring them, if any thing could be made honourably by them. (Wealth of Nations, bk 1, pt 1, ch. x: 124).

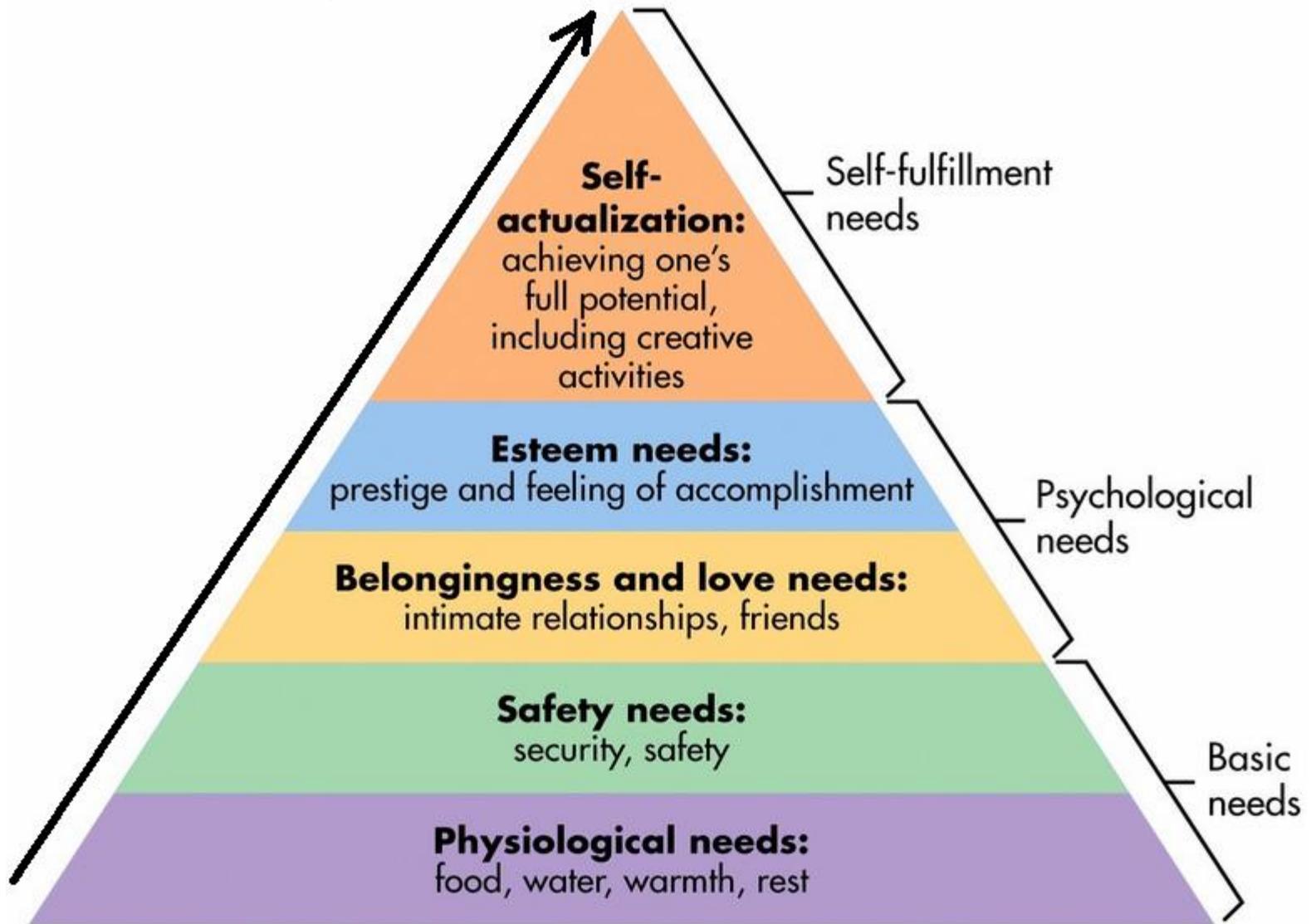
Data tells us **the number of artists is growing rapidly.**

US Census data found 386,000 artists in 1940, which rises five-fold to 1,931,000 by 2000 (Alper and Wassal, 2006).

Between 1982 and 1999 there was a 98% growth rate of artists in France (Menger, 2006).

Work preference models (Throsby, 2007; Alper & Wassal, 2006; Menger, 2006) suggest that actors prioritise the **psychic income** that comes from practicing their art over a **capitalistic pursuit of wealth**. While this may be true, there has been less research into the difficulties and hardships faced by actors as a result of this prioritisation and how this might impact on their ongoing ability to pursue acting work. If career longevity is determined by how long the actor is able to 'stay in the game' then an awareness of the implications of prioritising psychic income must be understood.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

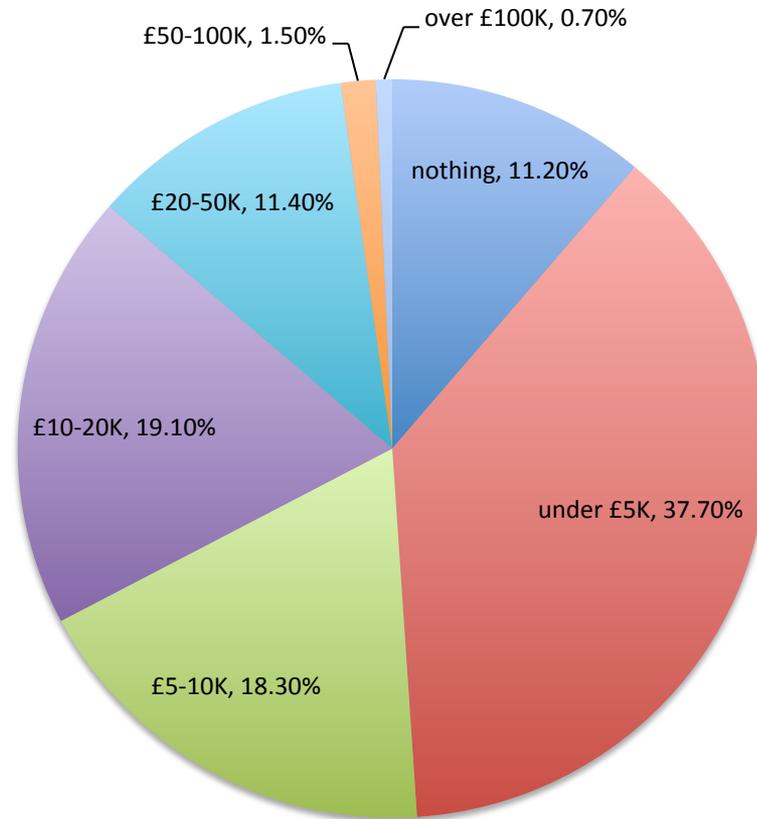


Research Questions

- What price do actors pay to be ‘in the game?’
- In the ultimate ‘market economy,’ with an ever-changing A-List/B-List of actors (Caves 2000), where supply greatly outstrips demand, and many actors only work a few weeks per year, what impact does this have on mental health and overall satisfaction?
- How do we prepare students for the roller coaster ride of a ‘Winner-Takes-All Economy’ (Caves, 2000) where a few achieve success and most do not?

A Review of (some of the)
Quantitative data about the
Employment Market for Actors

Annual Income from Acting



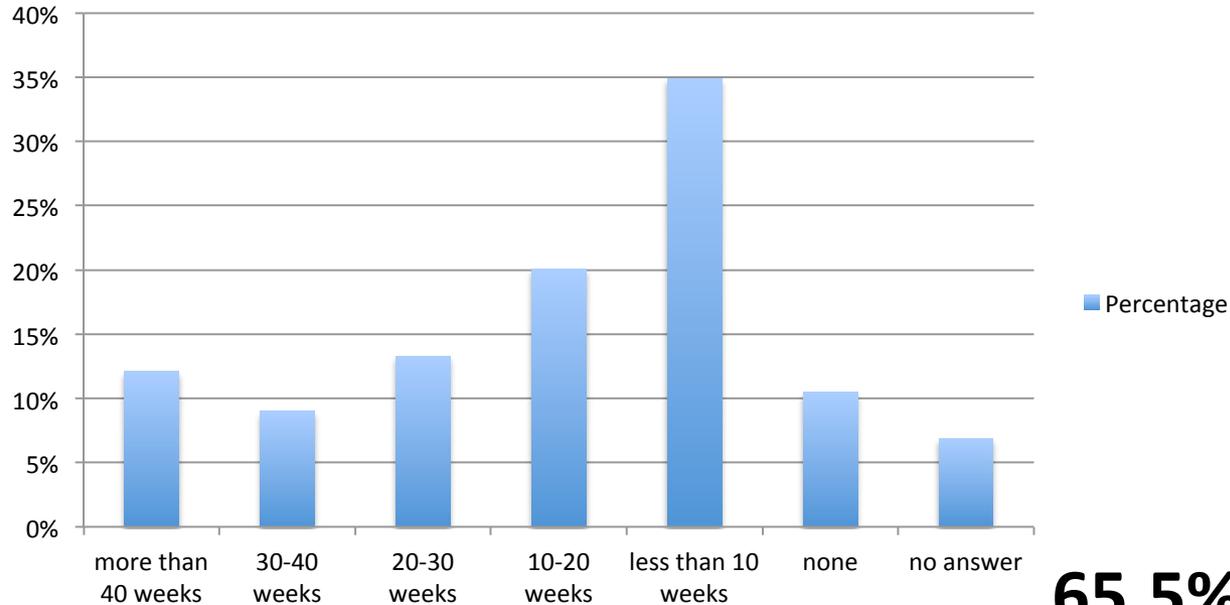
48.9% earn
under £5k

London Living
Wage £19K/
annum

86.3% earn
under £20K

Equity 2013 Membership Survey
n=3804

Weeks Professional Employment in previous 12 months



65.5% work fewer than 20 weeks/annum

Other Data on Employment

- HESA Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey 2013/14 (UK) [looking at graduates of higher education in their first year out of education]
- n=9665
- Of graduates of **Performing Arts** degrees from 2013/14, **29.9% employed in jobs in arts, design and media**

No-pay/Low-pay

- (Equity, 2013) 46% had worked for no money in previous year
- (Casting Call Pro, 2013) 70% had five no-pay/low-pay jobs in the previous year
- (Spotlight, 2013 n=50,000) 66% of members do work for no-pay/low-pay, or would do so. **87% of casting professionals thought there was a place in the industry for no-pay/low-pay work**

Inequality

- Gender: (Drama UK, 2014) at National Theatre 63% of roles went to men, 37% to women. In UK film 68% of roles went to men, 32% to women.
- Age: (Ibid) National Theatre, 51% of roles went to actors under 34 years of age, while only 19% to over 54. In Musical Theatre, 91% of roles went to actors under 34.

Class

- Data from Sutton Trust (Kirby, 2016)
 - 67% of British Academy Award (Oscar) winners and 42% of Bafta winners were privately educated.
 - [7% of the general population is privately educated]

Bullying and Harassment

- Federation of Entertainment Unions (Equity, BECTU, Musicians' Union, National Union of Journalists, and Writers' Guild of Great Britain) (n=4104)
 - 56% of theatre workers directly experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination
 - 68% of those working in film were bullied, harassed or discriminated against (only 28% reported it)
 - 2/3's thought that industry attitudes to respect at work were poor or very poor
 - 1/10 witnessed sexual harassment (including inappropriate sexual comments and groping)

‘The creative industries are seen as glamorous and there is great competition to get in and get on. But the reality is most workers are freelance or work on short-term contracts and have few statutory rights. There is the fear that there is always someone else hungry to take your place if you complain. The survey showed that there was almost an acceptance of the prevailing culture of bullying; an attitude of ‘if you can’t stand the heat then get out of the kitchen.’ One respondent said you were expected to put up with it “to earn your stripes and anything else was seen as a weakness.”’ (FEU, 2013, p. 1).

Mental Health

- Study by Arts and Minds (Hemley, 2015) in partnership with Equity, Spotlight and The Stage (n=5000):
 - 46% identify their mental health as poor or average
 - 40% describe physical health as poor or average
 - 20% had actively sought help for mental health issues

“Do the many poor and failed artists suffer? As far as I know, little research exists in this area; **it is not rewarding to do research on the dark side of the arts.** Generally people who are poor for a long time tend to become socially isolated, and artists are perhaps no exception. In their case the shame of being poor may well be supplemented by the shame of having failed as an artist.” (Abbing, 2011, p. 345)

Pilot Study

Nine semi-structured interviews with
'mid-career' actors (defined as 10+
years into career).

“I think also when you're a student you have that mentality that you haven't got very much money. And I don't think that I've ever really got out of that mentality. Just recently [husband] has been doing lots of telly and earning a lot more money and we're actually quite bad at spending the money because we're thinking, ‘yeah, but next year we might not earn anything’. And you get yourself into that mentality and you think, well I don't really know. I cannot rely on this job to support me forever necessarily.”

Participant E

“My final question is do you consider acting a career? Is acting a calling, or is it a vocation? How do you view the job of an actor?”

PARTICIPANT E: It's a hobby.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

PARTICIPANT E: No, that's not fair. I'm being flippant. I think for a very, very select few it is a career. And to most of us it is a calling. I mean, you wouldn't go through this unless you really, really wanted to do it. If I could find something else that I wanted to do as much, I would do that. But I haven't found a thing that is as rewarding and that I love as much.”

"the contempt of risk and the presumptuous hope of success are in no period of life more active than at the age at which young people choose their professions." (Smith, 1776, 126).