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**THE USE OF MENTAL STRATEGIES BY PROFESSIONAL NORTH
AMERICAN STAGE AND FILM ACTORS**

by

TIMOTHY C. MURPHY

B.Com, Carleton University, 2000

THESIS

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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ABSTRACT

The application of sport psychology principles and theories have now moved beyond the athletic arena and branched off into non-athletic domains. Gould (2002) noted, “moving beyond the psychology of athletic excellence is an important development in our field” (p.247). Recently the mental strategies of various non-athletic domains such as musicians (Talbot-Honeck & Orlick, 1998), performing artists (Hays, 2002) and business people (Jones, 2002) have been researched and discussed. Research of actors regarding their memorization of lines (Noice, 1991; Noice, 1992; Noice & Noice, 1997), their experience of flow (Martin & Cutler, 2002), and their experience of stage fright (Steptoe et al., 1995) has been conducted, however, no research has explored the mental strategies used by professional stage and film actors.

The purpose of this research has been to explore and understand the mental strategies used by professional North American actors. Twelve (n=12) professional actors from Canada and the United States were interviewed using a semi-structured open-ended interview guide.

Inductive analysis revealed that the actors used seven major mental strategies including: character preparation, focus while performing, pre-performance routines, imagery, confidence, optimal energy level, and performance evaluation. Elements of career success were also discussed. These findings shed light on specific strategies and techniques regarding the use of mental strategies by professional actors. It is hoped these findings will open the door to future research in this field and bring an understanding of relevant mental strategies for improving performance in the field of acting.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Imagine that it is the opening night of a play in New York City. A young lead actor takes a Broadway stage for the first time. In the crowd are newspaper critics, talent agents, family, and friends. This is the most important night of his young career. How did the actor prepare for his performance? What is his focus as he steps on the stage? What is running through his head? How does he deal with these thoughts and distractions?

Over the past twenty years, sport psychology researchers have addressed these questions with regard to such varied athletes as Olympians and professional golfers (e.g., Gould, Eklund & Jackson, 1992; McCaffrey & Orlick, 1989; Orlick & Partington, 1988). Sport psychology research and application has now branched off into non-athletic performance domains, known as ‘performance’ psychology. Researchers and consultants (Gould, 2002; Hays 2002; Jones, 2002) believe that the lessons learned from sport psychology research should continue to be applied to other performance domains. But why should actors learn from athletes, when they can learn from themselves? Why has the high profile performance domain of professional acting, which shares much of the same performance demands as sport, not been researched? I have asked myself these same questions.

Literature and research regarding the mental strategies of “performing artists” exists to a limited extent. The term “performing artist” includes actors, singers, musicians, and dancers (Conroy, Poczwardowski, & Henschen, 2001; Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002). The sole research of the mental strategies of professional actors has been essentially ignored. Recently, Gould (2002) stated, “Moving beyond the psychology of athletic excellence is an important

development in our field, as it allows us to help numerous other individuals with our performance-enhancement knowledge” (p. 247). Researchers have already progressed this development into other performance domains including studies with astronauts (Orlick, 1999; Sprung, 1995), surgeons (McDonald & Orlick, 1994, Tribble & Newburg, 1998), musicians (e.g., Talbot-Honeck & Orlick, 1998), business people (Jones, 2002) and dancers (Zitzelsbeiger, 1999). My research has expanded our current knowledge of ‘performance psychology’. I have ventured into a new haystack of knowledge that has remained generally untouched, in the hopes of finding a needle that seemingly has never been searched. And what better way to find this needle than from the source - professional actors themselves.

The purpose of my research has been to explore and understand the mental strategies used by a small group of professional North American actors. For the term “mental strategies” I have included their mental strategies and preparation prior to performance, their focus and strategies during performance and their mental approach after performance. For the term “professional” I imply that the individual actor currently or recently earned a majority of their income through acting. For simplicity of writing, the term “actor” includes both males and females.

The general research questions that guided my thesis were the following: What kind of mental strategies do stage and film actors engage in? What are the specific strategies they employ before, during, and after performances? What techniques or strategies do they use to implement these mental strategies? The aim of these main research questions was to help achieve the following objectives:

- i) To explore the mental strategies used by professional actors to achieve best performances
- ii) To understand the specifics (when, how, and why) of the use of these strategies before, during, and after performances

The methods for attaining these objectives will be further discussed in the Methodology chapter. The research questions led me to explore and understand the mental strategies that these actors employed. In the end, the aim of my research was to continue expanding our performance psychology knowledge.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Research on the mental strategies of amateur actors and performing artists exists to a limited extent, including areas of stage fright, coping mechanisms and mental skills (Conroy, Poczwadowski, & Henschen, 2001; Marchant-Haycox & Wilson, 1992; Martin & Cutler, 2002; Osborne & Franklin, 2002; Poczwadowski & Conroy, 2002; Steptoe & Fidler, 1987; Talbot-Honeck & Orlick, 1998). Researchers and consultants have noted the important potential of transferring the knowledge of sport psychology mental training to other domains, including the performing arts. Thus, the review of literature has been divided into five segments, to present a logical order of these domains – athletics, performing arts and finally acting. The five segments include:

- a) a brief overview of sport psychology research into mental strategies and peak performance
- b) the growing research and application of performance psychology
- c) similarities of “performing arts” and sport - domains and mental strategy needs
- d) existing mental strategy research of performing artists
- e) psychological research of actors

Finally, the large gaps in research concerning the mental strategies of professional actors will be discussed.

Overview of Mental Strategies and Best Performance Research

In the past 25 years, much sport psychology research has been done on mental strategies surrounding best (or peak) performance. Privette (1981) defined peak performance as a “superior level of behaviour” (p. 58) and outlined absorption,

spontaneity, and expression of self as key components of such a performance. Ravizza's (1977) qualitative research with athletes outlined key factors that surrounded best performance including: narrow focus, full attention, and the ability to execute basic skills. The work of Ravizza and Privette laid the groundwork for best/peak performance research; however their research did not include a large number of athletes or many with elite experience.

Orlick and Partington (1988) attempted to bridge this gap with an extensive study of over 200 Canadian Olympic athletes. Their research included both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews. Orlick and Partington concluded that of any readiness factor, "mental readiness provided the only statistical significant link" (p. 129) with performance. Mental strategies that were linked to best performance included: imagery training, attentional focus, quality training, mental preparation for competition, and learning elements of success. From this research and other studies, Orlick eventually developed his Wheel of Excellence, which was last conceptualized in 2000 (Orlick, 2000). Elements of this model include: commitment, confidence, focused connection, mental readiness, ongoing learning, distraction control, and positive imagery.

Other researchers have outlined what they believe to be key mental skills or strategies in performance. Vealey, Hayashi, Garner-Holman, and Giacobbi (1998) outlined three key skills: foundations skills (volition, self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence), performance skills (optimal physical and mental arousal, optimal attention), and facilitative skills (interpersonal and lifestyle management skills). Gould, Eklund, and Jackson (1992) interviewed U.S. Olympic wrestlers and concluded much the same as Orlick and Partington (1988). They found that "before best matches, wrestlers

followed mental preparation plans(...), were extremely confident, totally focused, and optimally aroused” (p.358). Meanwhile, Jackson and Roberts (1992) elaborated the research on flow by Csiksentmihalyi (1979, 1988) and compared the occurrence of flow and peak performance among 200 collegiate athletes. Findings indicated “that flow is experienced to a greater degree in the athletes’ best performance than it is generally when they compete” (p. 165). Jackson and Roberts also concluded that a majority of the athletes’ best performances were mastery focused while a large majority of worst performances were outcome focused.

Growing Application and Research of Performance Psychology

Sport and performance psychology research and application has now reached beyond the boundary of athletic domains. Since its inception in 1998, the *Journal of Excellence*, founded by Orlick, has published applied research related to excellence and mental strategies in a variety of disciplines. As well, in December 2002, for the first time the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* dedicated an entire issue to non-athletic domains. Sport psychology and mental training has been applied to such wide domains as everyday living (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002; Orlick, 1998), business people (Jones, 2002), surgeons (Tribble & Newburg, 1998), and as mentioned, performing artists. Researchers have called for more of such research to understand the mental strategies of other performance domains (Gould, 2002; Hays, 2002; Jones, 2002). Jones noted that sport psychology’s applications may easily be extended to the business world while Hays stated, “with the maturation of the practice of applied sport psychology has come recognition of the ways in which knowledge of performance excellence may address performance issues among other populations” (p. 299). Hays, Gould, and Jones

each make it clear that sport psychology can and should be applied to non-athletic domains.

Performing Arts and Sport: Comparison of Domains and Mental Strategy Needs

Performing artists face similar pressure as do athletes to perform frequently in front of critical audiences. The demand to perform and succeed is forever present when in a sport setting or performing arts domain. Martin and Cutler (2002) compared theatre and sport:

Many similarities (...) exist between sport and theater. To achieve excellence both activities require long hours of practice over many years. Sustaining motivation over time in the face of failure and disappointment also is important. Both actors and athletes are responsible for their performance, which occur in socially evaluative settings. (p. 344)

Others noted the comparable pressures to perform (Osborne & Franklin, 2002; Steptoe & Fidler, 1987). Due to this, Hays (2002) reflected that both athletes and performing artists face similar psychological demands. Reflections from Gertz (1998), a renowned opera coach, and Fageus (1999), a musician, noted the value of mental training for musicians in several situations. Gertz highlighted the importance of concentration and visualization for improving a singer's performance while Fageus found that mental training can help musicians prepare to perform. Most importantly Fageus noted that "mental training can help a musician feel and function well" (p.6). Poczwadowski and Conroy (2002) researched the coping skills of performing artists and found that "excellence in coping precedes excellence in performance" (p. 313). Others have also highlighted the need for mental training among performing artists (Hays, 1997; Wilson, 2002).

Literature supports the fact that both athletes and performing artists face similar settings which demand similar mental strategies. The literature also supports that performing artists can benefit from mental strategies, the same as athletes have. This leads us to our next section.

Research of the Mental Strategies of Performing Artists

The mental strategies of musicians, singers, dancers, and 'performing artists' as a group have been studied to a limited extent (Osborne & Franklin, 2002; Poczwadowski & Conroy, 2002; Steptoe & Fidler, 1987; Talbot-Honeck & Orlick, 1998; Zitzelsbeiger, 1999). Most research focused on a single mental strategy. Steptoe and Fidler (1987) and Osborne and Franklin (2002) researched stage fright of musicians and found that positive thoughts were the best strategy to deal with this anxiety. Osborne and Franklin found that "(...) performance anxiety occurred because performers felt constantly evaluated against a perfect standard" (p.89).

Talbot-Honeck and Orlick's (1998) study was the only research that directly addressed the mental strategies of high level performing artists to achieve excellence. Orlick's (1988) model of excellence was used to analyze the interviews of 16 professional musicians. It was found that musicians demonstrated the use of five elements of Orlick's Wheel of Excellence as well as additional elements such as: spontaneity, creativity, and flexibility. These three were viewed as adding enormously to "musicians' big picture of mental readiness for excellence" (Talbot-Honeck & Orlick, 1998, p. 70). The research concluded that elite musicians were highly committed, had a positive outlook and were focused on the present.

Green and Gallwey (1986) also discussed the mental training of musicians to achieve excellence, but no theoretical research was performed. Rather they provided a “how-to” guide for musicians to apply Gallwey’s theories from his prior research with tennis players (Gallwey, 1977). Nonetheless the authors emphasized several of the basic mental strategies from sport psychology literature such as confidence, imagery, and positive thinking.

Psychological Research Regarding Actors and Acting

A handful of research articles were located which discussed “psychological concerns” of actors including line memorization, personality changes, and hypnosis (Fowler, 1998; Hannah, Domino, Hanson, & Hannah, 1994; Noice, 1991; Noice 1992, Noice & Noice, 1997). The work of the Noices was the most extensive research of professional actors. Noice (1991) studied the different processes in which professional and novice actors learn and memorize scripts. She found that professional actors “construct far more elaborations than novices” (p.425) and rely more on learning by gist than by rote. Although, her intentions were to study memorization, her findings included discussion around character preparation concluding that the “role-learning process of an actor is based on the construction of an underlying network that is colorful, interactional, life-like, and far richer and more detailed than the text itself” (p. 429).

The second study of Noice (1992) involved seven professional actors and elaborated further on her initial study. She concluded that actors need to derive meaning and explanations for each line before it is committed to memory. The process involved asking several who, what, why, where, when and how questions about their character and others.

Hannah, Domino, Hanson, and Hannah (1994) studied the change of student actors' personalities throughout a production run. In general, the actors' perceived personalities became more similar to their characters' during the rehearsal and production period. Hannah et al. reiterated the points brought forth by Noice (1991, 1992) regarding that actors need to explore and understand their character. The effectiveness of hypnosis techniques for characterization among university students was studied by Fowler (1998). Findings suggested that hypnosis "may have facilitated the actors' apparent adoption of new personae" (p. 249). Once again, reiterating Noice's (1991) findings, Fowler found that the improvement in characterization may have occurred because hypnosis allowed the actors to focus on the character's objectives. Fowler also engaged the students in imagery and self-talk techniques to improve performance.

The only two studies located regarding mental strategies of actors were those of Martin and Cutler (2002) and Steptoe et al. (1995), which studied flow and stage fright among university actors, respectively. The study of Martin and Cutler used the Flow State Scale to determine whether university student actors experienced flow. They concluded that all of the dimensions of flow were present and the actors were strongly motivated intrinsically to perform because acting was stimulating. This research unfortunately did not study the mental strategies employed by these amateur actors to achieve flow, nor to achieve best performances. Steptoe et al. (1995) conducted a quantitative survey which researched stage fright amongst student actors. Nearly half of the students reported stage fright to be a severe or moderate problem and it impacted breathing and characterization. Prior to performances the most common "behavioural responses were deep breathing and relaxation, trying to be alone, and memorizing lines." (p. 33).

Wilson (2002) explicitly discussed the use of positive self-talk and imagery to help actors improve their performance and he made the link between the performance of actors and the positive, solution-focused nature of sport psychology. Unfortunately, similar to the work of others, (Fageus, 1998; Gertz, 1999; Green & Gallwey, 1986; Hays, 2002) Wilson's comments were based on experience and application, not research.

Thus, there exist only two published studies which researched the mental strategies of acting regarding performance, the work of Steptoe et al. (1995) and Martin and Cutler (2002). Neither studied professional actors and the research of Martin and Cutler failed to discuss the mental strategies used by the student actors to achieve flow. The lack of research of mental strategies with regards to professional actors' performance leads to the final section of this chapter.

Gaps in Research and Rationale for Study

The application and research of sport and performance psychology has expanded to a variety of performance domains, including performing arts, and thus acting. An actor faces similar social appraisal and pressure as an athlete. Unfortunately, the use of mental strategies by successful professional actors to perform in their domain has not been explored. Just as the fields of sport and performance psychology have learned lessons from elite surgeons and musicians, professional actors can enrich our knowledge of excellence in performance. Jones (2002) stated, "the conclusion is that the principles of elite performance in sport are easily transferable to the business context, and also that sport has a considerable amount to learn from excellence in business" (p. 268). Considering acting's similarities to the athletic domain, I believe sport and performance psychology can learn from acting as well.

Hays (1997) argued that sport psychologists knowledge can be applied to performing artists (i.e. actors). To assess the relevance of this position, sport psychology researchers must first understand the mental strategies of professional actors. To jump from consulting athletes to consulting actors, before researching the differences and needs of these artists, may be counterproductive in this new consulting area. It is my belief that the application of sport and performance psychology cannot be moved forward properly into new non-athletic performance domains before research is achieved. My study has taken the first step in bridging this gap of existing research through my objectives of exploring and understanding the mental strategies of professional actors. The next chapter outlines the methodology used in achieving these objectives.

Chapter III: Methodology

The objectives and purpose of this study led to a qualitative design. This chapter outlines the aspects of my qualitative methodology including: research design, participants, interview guide, data collection, and data analysis. I have also discussed the steps and procedures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

It is important for the researcher to find a fit between the various parts of a research project – aligning the purpose, research question, design and methods (Punch, 1998). Essentially the methodology of research should be driven by its purpose. The use of open-ended semi-structured interviews, were best suited for my research as it allows the researcher to explore and understand the participants and topic of study (Martens, 1987; Rubin & Rubin, 1995, Weiss, 1994). Weiss noted that “depth and development is achievable in qualitative interviewing” (p.7), while Orlick and Partington (1988) also outlined reasons for using interviews when exploring best performances among athletes:

Interviews are considered appropriate because (a) interviews provide an opportunity for the open searching and probing necessary to explore new topics, such as athletes’ personal mental strategies (b) interviews enable the investigators to learn and understand the terms athletes use to discuss mental strategies topics. (p.106)

Sample of Participants

The type of sampling used was purposive, where specific people or settings are deliberately chosen in order to provide information that can not be accessed using other sampling techniques (Maxwell, 1996). In total 12 professional North American actors were involved in this study. Four of the Canadian participants were recruited through the

permission of a prominent Theatre Festival and the remaining eight were recruited through third party contacts of Professor Orlick and myself. All recruiting complied with the University of Ottawa's ethical standards. In the end, seven Canadian actors from major Canadian cities were interviewed from November 2003 – February 2004. As well, five professional actors from New York City were interviewed in early December 2003. All 12 actors had at least four years of professional acting experience - ranging from 4 to well over 25 years. For the purpose of anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each actor, and the description of 'Years of Experience', see Table 1 below, indicates only a maximum 25+ years of experience. Nearly every actor (11 of 12) discussed stage performance(s), while 8 of the 12 discussed film/television performance(s). Each interview was conducted face-to-face in the participant's city of location.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Location	Discussed Theatre	Discussed Film
Ben	M	25+	Canada	X	X
Cathy	F	20	U.S.A.	X	X
Christine	F	22	Canada	X	X
Daniel	M	23	U.S.A.	X	
David	M	20	Canada		X
Gary	M	25+	U.S.A.	X	X
Henry	M	4	Canada	X	
Lyle	M	4	Canada	X	X
Michael	M	5	Canada	X	X
Sheila	F	20	U.S.A.	X	
Stan	M	25+	Canada	X	X
Tara	F	22	U.S.A.	X	

Interview Guide

The face-to-face interviews were conducted using the Actor's Interview Guide (see Appendix A) which was developed through discussions with Professor Orlick, review of the Musician's Interview Guide (Talbot-Honeck, 1994), and two pilot interviews. The pilot interviews were conducted with actors who each had four years of professional acting experience. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to decide the type of interview structure (and thus analysis) to use, either using an interview based on Orlick's Wheel of Excellence (deductive) or using an open-ended semi-structured (inductive) interview guide. Professor Orlick and I decided to focus each pilot interview on one production run that the participant was pleased with and was in recent memory. A production run is defined as the actor's engagement in a production from beginning (i.e. getting the role and learning the script) to their final day of stage or film performing. It could last a few days, a few weeks or over a year. The first half of each interview was structured around Orlick's Wheel of Excellence (2000). The second half was a semi-structured, open-ended interview and mainly involved two types of "grand tour" questions, including a "specific grand tour type question" and a "typical grand tour type question" (Spradley, 1979). The specific grand tour question involved the participants walking through a recent production run that they considered to be one of their best. Each pilot interview also included a brief typical grand tour question where the actors were asked to describe an average day when they performed.

Upon analysis of the two pilot interviews and discussion between myself and Professor Orlick, we believed that the second half of the interviews elicited richer data

from the actors and would allow for greater exploration and understanding of the mental strategies used by them. As well, researchers have noted that open-ended semi-structured interviews allow a deeper understanding in comparison to structured interviews (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001, Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For these two reasons, an open ended semi-structured interview guide was chosen and thus an inductive method of data analysis was chosen as well.

The interview guide's structure remained generally the same throughout the 12 interviews. As with any semi-structured interview, it was flexible and included probing questions about new themes that emerged (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each interview began with "rapport building biographical questions" (Miller & Crabtree, 2004, p.191) surrounding the actors introduction to acting, professional acting, and recent stage and film productions. Each interview then proceeded with the 'specific grand tour question' surrounding one of the actor's best production runs. Several probing questions were also asked (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), for example, a detailed description of the character preparation, specifics of their focus while performing, and detailed examples of imagery.

Within the discussion of a best production run, each interview also included the aforementioned 'typical performance day grand tour question'. Several probing questions were asked, including: their routine when they arrived on set/at the theatre, their focus in the dressing room/trailer, and their focus before entering a scene. Each interview included a question regarding what the actor felt enabled them to remain a successful professional actor. Most interviews also included questions about an actor's best single performances.

Brief follow-up interviews were conducted through phone and e-mail with half of the participants because further clarification was deemed to be of value. Two stages of

member checking were conducted with several of the actors. These will be discussed in the “Trustworthiness” section of this chapter.

Interview Protocol

Interview Setting

Each interview was conducted fact-to-face. I traveled to various Ontario cities from November 2003 - February 2004 and to New York City in December 2003.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that was comfortable for the actor. The duration of the initial interview was between 80 minutes and 120 minutes.

To gain the best data from the participants, I attempted to establish contact with each actor prior to the interviews. I was able to speak to and e-mail each actor, except those at the Theatre Festival, prior to their interview. I also requested their acting resumes; six actors provided me with such information before their interview. My intentions of these contacts were three-fold: to get to know the actor on a more personal level, to explain the purpose of my study, and to give the actors time to consider the mental strategies they employ. It was hoped that the continued communication with the actors prior to the interviews helped create a comfortable environment for the interviews. Throughout the communication I kept notes of the conversations with each participant so that when I conducted the interview I had knowledge of the actor to draw from. I believe that the established relationships with the actors increased my ability to follow through with Rubin and Rubin’s (1995) seven stages of an interview including: creating a natural environment, encouraging conversational competence, and showing understanding.

Data Recording Procedures

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed from late December 2003 until early February 2004. This procedure allowed me to listen to the first interviews to help find emerging themes that could be discussed in the remaining interviews. All interview tapes were kept under lock and key in Professor Orlick's office.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Culver, Gilbert and Trudel (2003) recently discussed three important factors in enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research: data collection instrument, member checking, and peer debriefing. The following sections indicate the steps I took at enhancing these areas of trustworthiness.

Data Collection

It is regarded that the main instrument for data collection is the interviewer (Richardson, 1994). Biddle et al. (2001) emphasized that the researcher/interviewer should present their credentials and experience to further increase the trustworthiness of their data collection. I believe I was, and remain, well-qualified and experienced to research professional actors. First, I have a fair amount of experience with stage and film acting through involvement in university productions and numerous "Acting for Film" courses taken in Ottawa. In the past year, I have also been involved as a background performer in four feature length films shot in the Ottawa area.

Second, my academic experience helped guide me throughout the data collecting and analysis process. I have taken EDU5471 - Micro Counseling, APA6100 - Qualitative Data Analysis in Sport Studies, APA6301 - Research Methods in Sport Studies, and APA6905 - Advanced Topics in Sport Psychology. All four gave me the foundations for

my review of literature, research methodology, data analysis and interviewing. The most important class regarding interviewing technique was Micro Counseling. This applied theory class gave me weekly experience with interviewing peers regarding issues they wished to discuss using various listening, probing, and other interviewing techniques. As well, I consulted an elite female canoeist and teenage trampolinists in spring 2003, which gave me experience with applied consulting. My bi-weekly meetings with Professor Orlick gave me insight in how to interview and approach the actors. Lastly, the two pilot interviews conducted in October 2003 provided me with the experience of interviewing professional actors prior to my actual data collection.

Biases

Biddle et al. (2001) recommended that qualitative researchers discuss their biases. Bias can not be eliminated in qualitative research. It begins with the research question. As a student of sport psychology, I approached these actors wanting to understand their use of mental strategies; an ethnographer may have based their research question on the 'culture' of being a stage performer. I bring an educational bias to this research, influenced by the teachings of general sport psychology concepts I have learned at the University of Ottawa. My educational bias is also influenced by the supervision of Professor Orlick and the constructs he believes to be important. This educational bias may have affected my data analysis. In the hopes of limiting such influence, member checking was used to receive feedback from the participants. This will be discussed in the next section.

I also bring a personal bias into the research through my own acting experience. This bias has its pros and cons. By having experience in acting, the actor's may have not

felt a need to fully explain their mental strategies and techniques because they may have assumed that as a person with some experience, I would understand what they were discussing. This personal bias may have limited the actors from disclosing certain topics or strategies that they thought to be routine or obvious. However, the personal bias I brought to the research also had a beneficial component. My experience with acting, albeit not nearly as extensive as the actors interviewed, allowed me to inquire and dig deeper around issues that the actors discussed because I had knowledge of the acting domain. The semi-structured open-ended interview guide may have proven difficult to use by an outside researcher with no acting experience. Although some actors did not require very much probing, others required several probing and redirection questions during the interviews. My personal experience as an actor allowed me to probe and ask exploration questions in instances where the participant was not elaborating. An interviewer with no acting experience may have completely ignored exploring certain topics because they did not have the language or the knowledge of the acting domain. The experience I have may have also elicited more trust from the actors and created a more 'conversational' interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). An 'outside' researcher with no acting experience, although skilled at interviewing, may have not garnered such a relationship with the participants.

Member Checking

Maxwell (1996) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) emphasized that the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is further realized when participants are involved in validating the data (interviews) and the findings of the researcher. As such, I included my participants in the validation of both the data and my results.

Upon the completion of transcribing and editing each interview, I forwarded the interviews to each participant to have them verify that what I recorded was what they intended to say. Ten of the twelve actors returned their transcripts. Only one actor discussed changes to the transcript. It did not involve changes to the content, rather making a section of their interview more anonymous.

During the final stages of data analysis, I forwarded a thirty five page draft of an initial version of the Results section to six participants so that they could comment. They were instructed to read the findings and comment on the categorization, the appropriateness of the quotes used to reflect the strategies/techniques and their overall perception of the findings. Three actors responded, each noting that the content was relevant, accurate, and interesting. The following quotes reflect their opinions regarding their review of the draft version of the findings.

I read your paper and found it very interesting. My first thought was that I'd like to hear everyone's interviews in full because they were so interesting to me. I found I agreed with much of what everyone said. I thought about making comments right on your document, but so many of them would be 'I agree!' and 'Yes, exactly.'

(Tara)

Very intriguing and universal I think. Seems we all share so much of the same feeling and theories about our work. I think the categories are very interesting and well documented. (Sheila)

I think you have the material for a very interesting paper...if there is anything that is 'true' about acting it is that there are many, many, many ways to approach it and

that people are very opinionated about what is correct. I feel like if it works for you
– great. (Cathy)

The comments from Sheila, Cathy, and Tara provide support for the data analysis process. The actors' interest with the data demonstrates a willingness of professional actors to learn more about mental strategies used in their profession. During this process, further comments regarding various mental strategies were been integrated into the Results and Discussion chapter.

Peer Debriefing

Maxwell (1996) also recommended the use of peer debriefing as a way of increasing the validity of a study. I met with Professor Orlick on a bi-weekly basis to provide updates and receive feedback regarding my progress of data collection and analysis. I also met with my research group of two other graduate students and Professor Orlick on a regular basis. These meetings included discussions regarding some of the interviews, feedback regarding the initial analysis of data, and reading through the analysis to provide feedback regarding which quotes best reflect the specific strategy or theme.

Analysis of Interview Results

Similar to Rubin and Rubin (1995), who noted that the process of data analysis “begins while interviewing is still under way” (p. 226) and Maxwell (1996), who noted that data analysis is also involved in the transcribing and rereading of the transcripts, the analysis of this research was continuous. The analysis involved the development of three levels of ‘themes’. Tesch described a ‘theme’ (1990) as “a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information” (p.

116). The themes have been termed 'Major Strategies', 'Sub-category Strategies' and finally 'Specific Strategies and Techniques' (used within these strategies) and summarized in the Mental Strategies of Actors table in the Results chapter (see Table 2, p.28). For the purpose of this paper, the term 'theme' represents any of the three levels of the key mental strategies.

Major mental strategies, such as character exploration and focus while performing emerged during the pilot interviews and a few of the initial interviews. During this time other areas of exploration began to develop as well. Further major strategies, sub-strategies and specific strategies/ techniques emerged throughout the remaining interviews, through discussions with Professor Orlick, and our research group. In February 2004, four interviews were imported into NVivo and coded according to the already established major, sub, and specific strategies. When new themes emerged, the Key Mental Strategies table was modified to reflect these changes and the interviews were recoded to account for the new themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). These themes were also discussed with Professor Orlick. The categorization of the various themes changed and remained flexible until theoretical saturation was reached which occurs "(...) when the categorizing of new data fits adequately into the existing organizing system without the emergence of new themes or categories" (Cote, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993, p. 131). Upon theoretical saturation, the remaining interviews were imported into NVivo and the data was coded according to the final Key Mental Strategies table. Upon completion of the coding, numerous coded reports were generated in NVivo for each theme. The reports for each meaning unit included data from each interview where that

particular meaning unit was discussed. Limits to this study are discussed in the final chapter – Discussion and Future Directions.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this research has been to explore and understand the mental strategies used by professional North American actors. Inductive analysis was used to analyze the data gathered from the 12 professional actors interviewed. The analysis of various mental strategies and other considerations are discussed in detail in this chapter. First, I have provided a contextual explanation of a typical professional actor's work environment and a contextual explanation of the presentation of the results.

Contextual Explanation of Stage and Film Acting

To offer a contextual reference for the reader, the following is a brief description of a typical production run for a stage and film actor. The information was gathered indirectly from the interviews and through personal experiences.

A stage actor will normally receive the script anywhere from one to five months before the first live performance, depending on the Theatre Company and producers of the show. The actor will usually read the script over several times and begin character preparation. Prior to rehearsals, most theatre companies will have 'round table' discussions where the actors and director discuss the characters, the story, and their relation to each other. Rehearsals will start usually between three to eight weeks before a show. Over the first few weeks actors may put in forty hours. While in the days and weeks before, they will spend long hours in dress rehearsals getting the final product finished. When the production run begins, the show will normally run five to six days a week and could last a few weeks to over a year. No matter how big or small the actor's role, they will be involved in the production from the start to finish. The typical performance day for a stage actor is structured and set. Due to union contracts, there is

normally a set time they must check into the theatre, they then normally do a physical and vocal warm-up and get into costume and make-up. During this time the actors begin mentally preparing to perform for the show. The actors know exactly when the show begins, when they are to be on stage and in terms of lines and blocking, the show is the same every night. When the show begins, it will very rarely stop. Thus the actors must deal with distractions that they are faced (forgetting lines, light and sound miscues, disruptive audiences) and continue on. The typical day for a stage actor is four to six hours, and is controlled.

Differences exist when comparing stage and film performances. Depending on the size of the role and the budget of the film, a film actor may receive the script from a day before (supporting role) up to a few weeks and a few months before shooting begins. Film actors have much less time to rehearse due to the financial constraints of the production companies. As well, a film script may change multiple times over the course of a production, even in the few minutes before a scene is to be filmed. The time an actor is involved in a film production also varies depending on the size of the role. 'Day players' are typically involved in one or two days of shooting and only appear in one to a few scenes. Lead and principal actors are normally involved in an entire production which may last anywhere from two to five weeks, or longer for very big-budget productions. In comparison to a stage actor, the typical day of a film actor is never the same. Each day, a shooting schedule is set; however the schedule usually undergoes changes, most of which may be delays. A film actor's performance may be delayed up to three hours and then given five minutes notice before they are to be on set. The delays occur due to the crew setting up lights, camera, audio and other technical considerations

that go into shooting a scene. When a scene is shot, it is never shot once. Multiple takes are shot from different angles as insurance or to provide 'cover', in case one take was not sufficient due to poor sound or light. For this reason, each take is not all or nothing. If a mistake is made, the camera is stopped rolling and the scene is re-shot. However, pressure still exists, as the film used to shoot movies is very expensive. Producers prefer to take the least number of retakes as possible. The typical day for a film actor could last up to 10 -16 hours, involves a lot of waiting, and is usually quite unpredictable.

Contextual Explanation of the Presentation of Results

A decision was made to begin this section with a discussion of personal best performances for two reasons. First, the structure of the interviews were centered on one of the actor's better production runs and best single show performances. Secondly, best performances were attributed to the successful implementation of the seven major mental strategies.

The findings of this study have been presented by discussing each major mental strategy separately, including: Character preparation, Focus while performing, Pre-performance routine, Imagery, Confidence, Optimal energy level and Performance evaluation. As discussed, where applicable the major strategies have been further broken down into sub-categories and specific strategies/techniques. See Table 2 below.

The decision to present each major strategy individually was to allow the exploration and understanding of each. It is understood that each strategy does not exist alone, rather they are interrelated. For instance, imagery was used by actors during preparation and to improve focus and confidence. Character preparation was found to help focusing, confidence, and distraction. The purpose of this paper was not to examine

the interrelatedness of various strategies, rather to explore and understand each. The issue of inter-relatedness will be further addressed in the final chapter.

Table 2

Mental Strategies of Actors

<i>Major Strategies</i>	<i>Sub Strategy</i>	<i>Specific Strategy/ Technique</i>
Character Preparation	Internal Exploration and Understanding	- approach it as an organic process - approach it as their own process - open to exploration - use intuition - relate character to self - fall in love with character
	External Exploration and Understanding	- investigate/ask questions - do background research - develop character's history - allow text to inform them about character
		- over preparation
Focus While Performing	Focus On Other Actor(s)	- focus on listening (receiving message) - focus on speaking (delivering message) - focus on process in between listening and speaking.
	Focus On the Process of Acting	- focus on being in the moment - focus on circumstances of scene - focusing on the character they are portraying - letting go while on stage
	Distraction Control	Distraction control - engage in strong character preparation - help fellow actor - deal with distraction immediately - decide to keep going and focus in the moment -

Pre-performance Routine	Focus on Becoming Character	- focus on costume/make-up - run lines - focus on character's nuances
	Getting Ready to Perform	- engage in physical warm-up - relax and be alone - focus on performance - follow the same routine - arrive early - prepare during the day
Imagery		Imagery used: - in character preparation - when entering a scene - for technical preparation - other uses
Confidence		Ways of increasing confidence: - engage in positive self-talk - act confident - leave confidence on set/stage
Optimal Energy Level		- engage in positive self-talk - ask 'Why am I here?'
Performance Evaluation	Process	- constant process of assessment - question performance - engage in different methods - deal with critics
		- define purpose for evaluation

Statistical references (i.e. 3 out of 12 actors discussed self-talk as a strategy before entering the stage) were not used for two reasons. Firstly, the semi-structured interview guide did not address the same specific strategies and techniques for each actor. Rather the actors were free to discuss what strategies they used. Thus, the reason an actor did not discuss a specific strategy/technique may have been because they did not employ it or simply because they failed to disclose it. Secondly, the purpose was neither to find the best or most popular strategy/technique nor to make any statistical inferences. I recognize that it is still useful to the reader to understand the approximate prevalence of the specific strategies discussed. For this reason, extreme cases are discussed, such as when all 12

actors or only one actor discussed a specific strategy/technique. In all other cases, the term 'most' denotes when approximately seven or more actors discussed the strategy/technique, while 'some' indicates that it was discussed by approximately six or less actors.

A separate section on the actors' personal views of becoming and remaining successful in their professional careers is also included at the end of this chapter. The actors discussed issues such as keeping perspective, enjoyment, group support, and self-awareness.

Best Personal Performances

To facilitate the presentation of results related to best performance for these actors, they have been divided into (i) production runs and (ii) single shows/scenes.

Best Performances – (i) Production Runs (Long-term)

Numerous themes emerged when the actors discussed their best production runs, including: enjoying the character they were playing, being connected to their character and the project, and going through a personal process of character preparation. The most often discussed theme for best production runs was the actor's enjoyment of playing their character. Actors noted both enjoyment in playing the role and feeling that the role was appropriate for them to play:

People need to laugh, but they also need to cry. Those are the best roles, when you get to do both, and that was a role where I got to do both. Those are always my favorite experiences. I feel my work is most successful when that happens. When I could have them laughing and then I can get them right here (grabs heart) at another point, or even in the same scene. That activity is the most exciting thing in the

world. Moving people to laughter and then to not necessarily tears, but to feeling something. Changing people somehow or in some way is I think why we all do this. (Sheila)

There have been two or three shows I have been in, that the roles were wonderful. They were true gifts to the actor and those occasions have occurred, where it was just such joy. (Stan)

If I feel that it is a character that I enjoy doing or a character that gives me a lot to do. A nice meaty role that I feel really good about doing, that is one thing that helps. (Tara)

I experienced it as 'I'm here' and that happens with projects. You just feel like you are really on it. You are in it and you are doing it how you want to do it. You are doing the best that you possibly can. (Cathy)

I suppose that when you are feeling you are doing your best work, is when you are the most centered, and most grounded. You can remember those. That is probably when you are the most grounded and most centered - when you have been allowed to go through an organic process. (Christine)

Some actors noted that during their best production runs they felt the character they were playing was a good fit for them. For example, Sheila said, "It is a very rich role. And it is one, that I knew that I was really suited for", while Christine said, "I felt very attached to her. Sometimes when someone is portrayed in writing, as someone without dignity I love finding a way to give them intelligence and dignity."

Best Performances – (ii) Single Show or Scene (Short term)

Every actor said their best performances occurred when they were completely immersed in the moment or totally engaged in what they were doing. In their opinion, the scene or role they were playing felt real. The following quotes highlight the connection between being in the moment and best performance:

It was less about the mechanics of the camera, the lighting, the boom mic that is inches from your face, and it was more about capturing something that really happened. So that there would be a moment where I forgot they were present. That was when I would give a good performance, when all I cared about was getting that person to respond to what I had to say. (Gary)

I felt very, very pleased and very, very connected. I knew I was very concentrated, I knew I was right there. (Cathy)

It was real, it was real. (Ben)

That is why I do it, the successful performances are the shows where I step back and the character steps forward, where I am less self-conscious, and I really invest in playing this role where I am completely immersed in it and then the good stuff happens. (Sheila)

The best performances are also where you are most connected to the other actors. It is a huge thing. (Sheila)

During the one scene after we had killed them there was snow falling from the lighting grids, and there was a machine dropping fake snow, but the way that the light hits these little flecks of white stuff...there were moments where it just felt like I wasn't on stage. It didn't feel like I was acting. I'm not saying it was real, but

what I am trying to say is all of the artifice melted away. It wasn't acting with a capital A, it wasn't theater with a capital T, it was just a person living, breathing, and reacting to what was happening. When that stuff happens it feels incredible.

(Henry)

Looking back that was probably the best performance I've had in five years because it was just electric and I could tell the people were sitting on the edge of their seats when I was telling the story. It is hard to describe, like in the moment. It is just that feeling that the audience is as engaged as I am. That is probably the goal of any actor. (Michael)

I can tap into what that feeling was. I think there were a number of shows where it just all fell into place. I didn't have to work at it or push it. (Henry)

Less Than Best Performances

After discussing best performances, some actors also discussed some of their 'less than best' performances. The following quotes highlight some of these performances where self-doubt, distractions and a lack of pre-performance preparation affected their performance.

If I ever get nervous or if I don't feel prepared, I overextend myself and push myself, because I desperately want to be good at what I'm doing, because there is always a sense of self edifying. It is a problem when you are performing if you are thinking about how well or poorly you are doing, then you are shot. So you do all the preparation before, so you don't think about it. If you start to think about I'm really messing this up, then you are, because you are not thinking about the right things. You are not thinking about what you are trying to achieve, what you're

trying to do. You're just not listening or looking, you're thinking about something else, your mind is in another place and that is when you can mess things up, lose your line, and just not do your best work. (Henry)

There have been times where I've had partners who clued in and partners who have not and sometimes then the performance just becomes all about don't screw up the lines, those have been some of the worst performances I've given. (Gary)

So the demons rise again with critics and friends in the audience and with people that you think are foes in the audience. Then I start seeing everything through their eyes. You start second-guessing what you do and you watch what you do. And those are your worst performances. (Sheila)

If I do not warm up enough, if I don't allow that first half-hour to shut the world out then that can get in the way. Even in a company that is tight, you still have conflicts when you are working here for a year. There is going to be a day that somebody pisses you off, and you cannot let that go on stage and sometimes it does. (Michael)

Ben and Sheila felt that their worst performances came when they did not let the character be their own and when they were fixed on one way of interpreting them. Ben said "I never figured it out, still to this day, I never figured out what they wanted. The fundamental problem I think was I had one interpretation that influenced how I spoke". Sheila noted, "I was locked in to what she [her character] did, I could never own it for myself. And I never felt I was successful at it."

How the Actors Achieved Their Best Productions and Performances

The actors discussed how they got to this point of achieving best productions and performances. Through inductive analysis seven major mental strategies employed by

actors attributed to performance excellence. These include character preparation, focus, while performing, pre-performance routine, imagery, confidence, optimal energy level, and performance evaluation.

Character Preparation

Mental and physical preparation has been found to be a source of sport confidence (Vealey et al., 1998). Orlick and Partington (1988) found that Olympic athlete's preparation and performance greatly influenced their mental readiness. The 12 actors interviewed in this study reiterated how important character preparation was for them in achieving best production runs and performances. David summed up the importance of preparation by saying, "If you are not prepared, you cannot listen and if you are not listening then you cannot invest in the scene."

In essence, 'character preparation' for these actors is best described as a personal process of comprehension and exploration of the character and integration of themselves into the character. The actors used different approaches to explore, to the point where they could at best understand their character. Essentially they used both internal/personal methods and external methods. These methods of character preparation are discussed below.

Internal Exploration and Understanding of Character

All of the actors felt that the internal process to explore and understand their character was vitally important for their performance. They each went through their own personalized process of character preparation including: (a) having the process be organic, open and their own; (b) using intuition in making choices; (c) relating to the character; and (d) respecting the character they were portraying.

Their own, 'organic' and open process.

Most actors discussed how their best character development came through their own personal exploration and when it was not overly influenced (by the director or by another actor who had played the same character previously). The actors used the terms 'organic' and 'being open' when discussing the process. Essentially, the actors who referred to it as an organic process described it as a process of finding the character from within. Christine described her struggles during one play, where she felt the director overly influenced her preparation and did not allow it to be a personal process, she said:

She [the director] kept saying 'I don't want to see any vulnerability in this character.' Well of course, when it was reviewed it said I had done a good job with the character but it lacked vulnerability. I felt uncomfortable because I hadn't gone through the exploration. I may have come out at the end and said there is not going to be any vulnerability but if somebody tells you that at the very beginning, what are you exploring? Nothing, you are simply moving through trying to achieve their end but it is not an organic process. So you find it in your own way. The worst thing a director can do is try to push something on you at the beginning, because that is going to cloud everything.

Other actors discussed this idea of having a process that was either open, organic or their own:

There is sometimes a bit of a trap of watching the movie, in watching somebody else's performance because if you watch it too much you can get locked in to trying to copy that. And that won't really help you find your way to it. You always have to find the character within yourself. (Sheila)

Be open. That is probably the best advice I can give to anyone - to be open to possibilities. Be open to the 360° of interpretation, of the analysis, of inter personal relationships. Pay attention to what is going on. (Sheila)

It is doing a little homework, but not having so many preconceptions. I mean, you can have some but really allowing the process to be more organic. (Daniel)

That is part of the challenge, again, finding the work as you are doing it. You cannot prepare for that. So part of the preparation is to be open. (Ben)

It does require openness. It does require an understanding that there will be epiphanies, like punches in the stomach or to your head. Surprises...but there will have been and I will be ready when they are, that is the only preparation I think you need. (Stan)

Use of intuition in making choices.

Preparation involves a personal open minded (yet not overly influenced) exploration and understanding. But how do the actors make specific choices about their character? All 12 actors interviewed either had difficulty describing this or attributed it to various subconscious terms, of which some called “intuition”. The actors found that the choices they made about their character (i.e. how to say a line, how to enter the stage) came to them and they went with whichever one felt best to them. This use of intuition or going with their gut feelings was imperative for the actors to have what some of them called an ‘organic process’ in character preparation. The actors’ best production runs came when they trusted their intuition in the character choices they made.

To be good is to understand the meaning of what you are saying or doing. If it rings true in your own mind, call it intuition...call it what ever you want, your own

intelligence will tell you if it is true or not. Once you have discovered without question, the meaning of the line and delivered it enough times that it resonates correctly to your ear, then you are there. And you can't make it any better. That gives you that little bit of an extra jolt of adrenaline or emotional energy where you deliver that line, whether it is loud or quietly, but just that much more conviction. And in that conviction is the line. At that moment when you were doing it, you know you are doing it right. (Stan)

You know, a lot of what I try to do is...I don't even know how to describe it, which is not helpful to you. It is like how you are going to use your personal process, how you're going to be open to that and to what is happening in that. Both in what you are bringing to it and what the other people are bringing in. I don't know, it is hard to explain. I guess the reason it is hard to explain is because it is not an entirely cognitive process. (Cathy)

To me, for the most part it is really an unconscious effort that I make in terms of acting. I know what I need to do and I just do it. I don't know what I would call it, instinct maybe, and common sense. It sounds metaphysical or something, but as it comes into me, as I start to find the voice, the posture, and the emotional life of the character, then it starts to take over. It starts to become something other than I thought it would be when I started. (Sheila)

Relating to the character.

In terms of exploring and understanding their character, some actors explicitly discussed how they would relate their character to themselves. They found this was an easy and realistic way of understanding the person they were portraying. This is similar to

method acting which is a technique where the actor relies on their own experiences or their imagination for the body to respond (Krasner, 2000). The actors described it as relating the character to themselves or to relating to certain situations/emotions.

The only hands that can make it better are the mental hands that speak to comprehension, understanding, and profound feeling. If you want to describe it in a breakthrough way, we all understand certain things from the neck up, intellectually. But to render it as though it is coming from your heart, your guts, your heart, your soul - that is different. And what is that difference? Well, maybe, you have to experience it. (Stan)

Fortunately, I was playing an old cop, retiring, really run down tired beat up guy. And there is no subtlety of it. Most of it was me. (Ben)

So in terms of character, it was much more as if it were just me. In film and television, the shorthand is much more of what I do in this situation versus putting myself in the shoes of another person, because that compels me to be as honest as possible, and it also gives me much more latitude in terms of what I can do. (Gary)

And I have to be just enjoying it, watching this person die. And that is where you kind of transpose situations. That is not like me, I'm not evil. But there are aspects of one person's personality that one can access. It is all about pretending. (Lyle)

Falling in love with the character.

Lastly, in terms of internal preparation, some actors noted how they thought it was essential to enjoy the character they were playing. Stan gave an example of the famous actor Lawrence Olivier who called it 'falling in love with your character'. Even if they did not fall in love with their character, these actors noted that it was at the very least

imperative to appreciate their character and to not negatively judge them. In the absence of appreciation, they found they could not fully embrace the character and thus never be fully comfortable with the person they were acting. These actors felt they had to explore and understand their character enough to come to a point where they found their character was valid and could be loved.

So that is a vital element too - to love, embrace or feel that the character has validity. (Stan)

For this character it is about finding the whimsy and the joy of him. (Michael)

I think you should like your character. And really know what is going on in the character's head. It gives you all sorts of motivation and subtext that you might not have otherwise. (Tara)

External Exploring and Understanding of the Character

The second area of character preparation was through external exploring and understanding, including: (a) investigation of their character and their character's motives, (b) background research on the character or time period, (c) creating a character history, and (d) allowing the script to inform their exploration.

Investigating and asking questions.

Most actors noted that in preparing for their character they would ask themselves questions revolving around who, what, where, when, why, and how in terms of the character and their motives. The actors discussed different ways of doing this. Essentially they were asking as many relevant questions as they could about their character to further explore and understand the person they were portraying. The following quotes illustrate their investigative approach:

It is all about investigative work. Why is the character not walking off and going on with their lives? What keeps them in the story? What do they want ultimately? So it is called their spine - their main objective. Every little moment in the play is like their vertebra, so many small and short term goals that are ultimately leading to one thing. (Lyle)

I did a movie where my role was a bank guard and within the first few minutes I get shot and died. I thought 'That is really cool. I could just be in the moment. I can be the best bank guard I can be.' What does a bank guard do when he is closing up at night? How does he feel? How does he walk? How does he handle his keys?

How does he talk to people when he is in the bank? (Ben)

I think the challenge of good acting is to continue to feed into different parts of the character. Meaning, you sort of get something about somebody, but to keep going. (Cathy)

It gives you a solid technique so that you are able to do it every time, like it is supposed to be done. That is also the difference between being a professional and an amateur. (Daniel – when asked what investigative work does for him)

Background research.

Another method that some of the actors used to explore and understand their character was research about the person/type of character they were playing or the time period/event the story took place during. Some actors, including Ben, Lyle, and Michael emphasized this more while others, such as Cathy and David said that they did not need to do such research because the text usually informed them enough. Thus, the choice to do background research was a personal one. Ben, for instance, went so far as to track

down a historical Canadian figure he was portraying and interviewed him. When asked if that helped his performance, he responded, “It textures and colors it. It gives me the back story and the subtext of it. I had a sense of how I related.” Much of the actors’ background research was through reading, use of the internet and watching films.

My hardest work happens in the first and second week of rehearsal. That is when I work the hardest because I'm scrambling, I'm always thinking about it, I'm constantly taking notes, watching stuff, researching, after the rehearsal going to the library or a video store getting old documentary on World War I, or going to the library and getting a book. (Lyle)

If it has a historical background in terms of Shakespeare, like the Richards and the Henry's, I look at who the actual true character was in terms of historical truth, that might not always be in terms of the playing of it, but it certainly helps. (Henry)

Character's history.

Similar to background research, some actors also enjoyed creating a ‘character history’. Often plays and film scripts do not offer information about the character prior to when the story began. Thus actors like to create a first meeting with a love interest or the first time they met a good friend. Some actors noted they used imagery in this creation; this will be further discussed in the imagery section of this chapter. The following are quotes depicting the creation of a character’s history:

If it is not a well written script, the text in it may not tell you what you need to know. So you take the text for as much as it can give you and then you have to begin to fill it, because that is not an interesting character. (Christine)

We did some of this exploration in rehearsal... his family life, what he had been doing, how long he had been pursuing his career... so there was some meat to put on these bones. (Gary)

Similar to background research, some actors felt like they needed this extra understanding while others felt that the script offered them enough information. Cathy is one of these actors, she said “I know some people do and I respect that but I don't do work like figuring out people's back story and who they are. I don't find that particularly helpful to me”.

Text informs actor about character.

Some actors emphasized how reading the text over and over gave them insight into their character. The more the actors felt they understood the text, the further they felt they understood their character. Cathy noted that “the process of really understanding your text is undervalued in this country. The words this person is speaking - do you know what you are talking about? I think it is extremely important.” The following quotes show how other actors also used this technique to further understand their character.

Generally if you read the text over and over again, and read it out loud, the character will begin to surface, to take some kind of control. The text will take you there. I'm talking now about well written scripts. You will begin to discover things about the character and what other characters say about the character and how that character responds to other characters. You may find the voice. (Christine)

Part of the preparation is really reading the script over and over, looking for cues. It is almost like a puzzle. A good play is like that. And every day, you discover...it is

like, where is Waldo. Every day you discover another Waldo, it is like being an investigator. (Sheila)

The text was also important to Henry in terms of understanding the words used by the playwright, particularly when discussing Shakespeare. He would often use an Oxford dictionary or Shakespeare lexicon to understand the meaning of the words he is speaking.

Over Preparation

As with athletes who over train, there is the possibility of actors over preparing or over researching. Some actors noted that finding a balance in preparation was essential to a good performance and over preparing did not make the performance feel like their own.

There is a danger in over preparing and overanalyzing, as you start to play your research and not be the guy. My advice to people, do all that work, but leave it somewhere else. Don't try to play it. Don't try to be the guy that grew up in the ghetto and pulled himself out by the bootstraps...just play the guy. Just be there. (Ben)

So that is always that strange tight rope that you are walking of preparation, of homework, of work, and then letting the work go. Because the minute you try to make it happen, nothing happens. It is like saying, I am going to fall in love this week, you know? (Sheila)

But you can make the wrong choices... you can over prepare. (David)

Focus While Performing

Focus is where one becomes totally immersed in the moment and the performer and performance become one (Orlick, 2000). Attention is defined as:

“(...) the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, and consciousness are of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others” (James, 1890, as cited in Abernethy, 2001, p.53).

Thus the terms focus and attention are similar. For the purpose of reflecting the language used by the participants, I have used the term focus. David noted, “As an actor you are only remembered for what happens after ‘Action!’”, thus the focus an actor has while performing in front of the camera or on stage is vitally important to their success. The importance of focus was discussed by every actor. Optimal focus on set/stage occurred for the actors when they focused on one or both of the following – on the other actor(s) or on the process of acting. These two areas will now be discussed in further detail, outlining the specific focusing strategies and techniques of the actors.

Focus While Performing – On Other Actor

Each actor noted optimal focus while performing occurred when they focused on the other actor(s) they were interacting with on set/stage. Ben summed it up clearly by saying, “The focus that works in any scene, unless you are in it alone, and even then there might be some unseen person there that you are dealing with, is on the other person.” He noted that this made the experience more real for him because he was able to focus on what the other person was going through and then his “emotion will be exactly what it is supposed to be”. When asked where his focus was after ‘Action!’ David said, “It is completely on the other person that I'm acting with”. The following quotes emphasize the

importance the actors discussed in focusing on the other actors they were performing with:

I think it has to do with focusing, in a funny way, on the other characters in the play or movie. (Cathy)

The emphasis is on the opponent or the scene partner. And so any time you are being really successful in Shakespeare it is because you're putting all of your emphasis on your arguments and the scene partner. (Michael)

I would tell them to put all their focus on somebody else. (Michael – advice to actor who was struggling to focus on stage)

Focus on the other actors, they are playing with. (Daniel – advice to actor who was struggling to focus on stage)

It is less about you and more about thinking with the other players, with the other characters in this scene. (Stan)

I think your focus has to be very much on the other actors. (Christine)

So I guess your focus should be on the other character or characters out there.
(Tara)

If I felt myself becoming stale, the way to get back in was to always reconnect with the other person on stage. To really focus on what they were saying. It was less about what I did, and more about what the other person did that made the difference. (Gary)

The best performances are also where you are most connected to the other actors.
(Sheila)

The actors discussed three methods of specifically focusing on the other actor(s) – (a) focus on listening (receiving message); (b) focus on speaking (delivering message); and (c) the combination of both (the process in between).

Focus on listening (receiving message from other actor).

Several actors specifically discussed listening as the key to focusing on the other actor(s) and to making their performances feel as real as possible. David noted “I have to be talking to you and I need to be listening to what you are saying in order to stay with that conversation.” When asked how important listening was to him in the scene he replied “Completely. That is acting”. The following are quotes that highlight the importance of listening when performing:

The big key, and that is the word, is listening. They always say acting is reacting and acting is listening. (Sheila)

To really listen to what is being said to you is what makes it improvisational every night and makes it alive and real. You really play the scene and have that interaction – new things happen. (Sheila)

Listening forces you to be very attentive and that is what gives good acting. (Lyle)

The most important thing to do is to listen to what the other person is telling you. (Michael)

Listening is terrifically important because somebody is going to give you something different every night. (Christine)

Focus on communicating (delivering message).

Another component of focusing on the other actor is communicating a message.

While most actors defined acting as listening, Gary had a different approach. He noted:

Entirely, it is all about, what you are trying to convey to the other person. That is really Acting 101. Why is it urgent that you say what you are trying to say? Why do they need to understand you? It is 'I want you to hear what I have to say, because I need something from you'...the focus is conveying information through the filter of the character that I'm playing. Whatever it is that makes it for that character to express themselves in this urgent way to one particular person.

Gary's focus was still on the other actor, but for him the best focus was in terms of communicating to the other actor and getting something in return. Other actors also noted the significance of focusing on communicating to the other actor or the audience. Michael, where in a play where he was a narrator, noted: "Because all of your focus is on the audience and telling the story, you need to be in the moment and aware of what you are saying". Cathy and Sheila also emphasized the notion of 'telling the story'. When asked where her focus was when she was on the film set, Cathy said, "On Jennifer [her scene partner] or the story I was telling". Sheila also noted:

You can just be in it and you can tell the story. That is something we always talk about, tell a story, tell the story... and it is true. Just tell the story, live in the story. Communicate with the other actor. Really have a scene where you are talking to each other. That is thrilling.

Process in between listening and speaking.

Some actors focused on the connection between listening and communicating. For Gary, it was important to focus on the “in-between” moments, the cognitive process where he was making a connection between what he heard and what he wanted to say. The following are quotes from Gary and two other actors regarding this interaction:

It is interesting to replay that nightly, to have part of your acting to be thinking, not just the lines you are saying and sometimes it is the same thought process every night. So in other words, somebody will say something which spurs an idea, there is a connection between what they say and what you will say – a train of logic.

What they say reminds me of a story and then I have to remember this. So I have to think that in my head - what they said just reminds me of a story and then you launch into the story, there is like a clicking mechanism. Sometimes I would have inspiration on the spot, but often times I would have to literally think about it and really work it out. I had to create the bridge between somebody else's dialogue and my response. So why I was saying what I was saying made sense. (Gary)

You have to be able to listen and react accordingly, otherwise you are not going to be in the same play, and you're not going to be on the same page. (Henry)

You are listening to them and then hopefully, if you react in accordance to what ever they said or did, you will be doing what is correct for the piece and for the character. (Tara)

Focus While Performing – On the Process of Acting

Actors also mentioned that their focus was on the ‘process of acting’. They felt it was linked to believing in and connecting to what they were portraying – essentially

making it feel real. David spoke of 14 months where he experienced extreme anxiety when performing which often included getting the ‘shakes’ in his hands and legs. He spent time reflecting on why this was happening. One day he realized where the problem was. He stated:

It became so painfully obvious to me – if I would just believe in what I'm doing.

Because as kids we were always taught that acting is just believing. It's true, in its simplest form that is exactly what it is.

David's anxiety subsided and his performance improved when he focused on believing in what he was doing. Henry noted this notion of believing as well. He said that when entering a scene he pretends that it is the first time it is happening. When asked how he does that he replied, “It is just a matter of believing it in your own mind.” As film actors, Lyle and Ben emphasized focusing on the process and not the outcome. Film actors have no influence on the outcome or final product that viewers will see because several camera shots of the same scene are taken. The final decisions are made by the director and editor. Lyle stated, “It is all about the process, so as I am getting more experienced I'm learning about how the process is so much more important than the results”. Ben discussed this theme as well, he said, “I never focus on the product, I don't care what they do with the performance after I am done with it because I can't influence it.”

The theme of ‘focusing on the process’ includes four techniques of focus – (a) on being in the moment; (b) on letting go/being open; (c) on the circumstances of the scene; or (d) on the character they were portraying.

Focus on being in the moment of the performance.

Some actors discussed their approach to focusing on the process of acting as simply consciously focusing on being in the moment while they performed:

I think there is a degree of being there. Actors talk about being in the moment and all that - it is being present. You allow yourself to be there, with everything you have. You are not holding back some other thoughts that you are having about something else. If you allow yourself to be completely present, you will be impacted. (Cathy)

It is making your response to them, either more vivid or more real. You are literally...being in the moment. It is clear to me what that means, it means you are listening to everybody else. It is as though you are doing this scene for the first time, and you are waiting to hear it differently. (Stan)

'Letting go' and being open while performing.

Some actors spoke of trying to 'let go' or 'be open' to what was happening on set/stage while they were performing. They felt this type of focus helped them give a more realistic performance.

One of my teachers told me, the train is going to leave the station. It is going to happen, so you have to get on that train, and once you get on the train, you just let go. You sit down and it goes for itself. That is what you want; you don't want to have to labor. You don't want to have to drive the train; the train drives you once you get on it. And once you get on it, you just let go and it takes care of itself. So once the scene starts, you just sort of sit back and relax and enjoy the ride. (Henry)

If another way of saying free is to be open, not blinkered, that is vital. Perhaps, not saying I don't want to be thinking about that, because I have got to focus on this.

That to me is blinkers, those are blindfolds. What you have got to be is absolutely open to everything. Not just so much for the thrill of the surprises, but somebody is going to give you a line one night that you will hear and know is different. (Stan)

Focus on circumstance of scene.

Some actors noted that they focused either on the task or the circumstance of the scene. David said, "The focus on the task at hand is almost a distraction from the technical things going on around you". The following are short quotes from various actors describing how they focus on the circumstances of the scene:

Focusing on what the task is for each scene. (Tara)

Just focusing on the activity of whatever you are doing on stage. (Gary)

Invest in the circumstances of the scene, put yourself in those circumstances.

(Sheila)

Focus on the clarity and the focus of what you are doing at that moment. (Daniel)

Focus on their character.

Some actors noted that during their stage performances they focused on who the character was that they were playing. They focused on being exactly who they were and how they should act, which helped them make their performance more real.

If you are doing, for instance, something like a Queen, you have to be focused all the time on who you are and on your son or daughter...because you are an intense person and you have to find that emotion, so that is where your focus is. (Christine)

While I was engrossed in the activity of playing this person it felt effortless and fun.

(Gary)

Distraction Control

Orlick (2000) defines distractions as internal thoughts or external circumstances that pull someone out of their best focus. This following section briefly discusses various distractions the actors faced and the various distraction control techniques they used, including preparation, helping other actors and focusing in the moment.

The major distraction for actors in this study were negative self-talk and focusing on evaluating themselves instead of focusing on the process of acting. The following are quotes from actors highlighting these personal distractions:

If you focus on yourself, you are focusing on the wrong part of the scene. (Ben)

The self-conscious part takes over and you start second guessing yourself.

(Sheila, when discussing poor performances).

I think I tend to 'watch' myself too much, which can take me out of the moment. (Tara)

Lastly, Gary noted a sort of 'out-of-body' experience where he would be beside himself, critically analyzing himself.

I've literally had moments, particularly in long runs where it is almost like I'm next to myself, nudging myself saying 'Do you know it, do you know it?' I literally have to tell myself in the back of my head 'Shut up, just open your mouth!' It is almost like a metaphorical closing your eyes and falling back and knowing you will catch yourself. Too much of performance is based on fear of failure which is self fulfilling and distracting. It is what prevents people from doing good work. (Gary)

Actors also experienced external distractions such as their scene partner not knowing their lines, people in the audience talking, and film set distractions (camera and boom mic). The actors talked about different techniques to control distractions and to refocus, including: the importance of preparation, helping the other actor, immediately dealing with the distraction and focusing on the moment.

Importance of preparation.

The most important distraction control technique for the actors in this study was being well-prepared, specifically in terms of understanding their character and knowing their lines. For stage actors, when dealing with other actors forgetting their lines or audience distractions, preparation was an effective strategy. Henry said:

You would be amazed. If you do the preparation, if you know everything you need to know about your character and the situation you can paraphrase even with Shakespeare. You know what you need to say and what you want from the other person, whether it comes out the same or whether it is not exactly the same words.

Film actors also noted that knowing their lines was extremely important.

You have to know your lines so well, because there are endless distractions as well, they will pick up in the middle of the scene so you have to pick up your line right where you left off. (Ben)

Helping their fellow actor.

In the case of a scene partner not knowing their lines, two actors used the technique of supporting their fellow actor to help them remember their lines. David noted:

You try to step up and help the actor without stepping on their toes and you try to stay focused within yourself to make sure that they are not having a negative impact on you. (David)

Another actor discussed a similar strategy when they faced with the same situation. For the purpose of anonymity they have not been identified. They said, “I just decided to be unbelievably giving and supportive to him. I would just be there for him whenever and however he needed.” Both David and the other actor decided to be positive in the face of distraction and to support their acting partner.

Immediately dealing with distraction.

Some actors spoke of removing external distractions. For example, on a film set Ben stopped and asked the Assistant Director to move an external object that was distracting him. Henry spoke of stopping to fix a chain watch that kept coming out of its buttonhole during a performance.

I feel like, if it comes out of the buttonhole, everybody can see it and most of the time they probably don't, but it makes a difference. I find I have to fix it immediately. Otherwise it totally throws me off. Little things can throw you off very easily...it is best to get rid of it as soon you can.

Deciding to keep going and focusing in the moment.

Other techniques used by actors to refocus included deciding to keep going and focusing in the moment.

When I did this play, this guy stood up in the audience and he fainted. It was a really small theater and I could see everybody. It was like, ‘Okay I guess I'm just

going to keep on going'. He was being attended to, and at that point I said, 'You know what...you keep doing this until someone says stop doing it.' (Cathy)

In a funny way, I made a decision that I wasn't going to pay attention to any of the distractions on a film set. It was only after I did a take that somebody would say 'We have got to do it again, because you were not in the whole shot'. I didn't even know where the camera was. I made the decision that I didn't even know it was a close-up or if I was in the shot, I didn't care, I was just going to do the job. (Cathy)

So the focus on the task at hand is almost a distraction from the technical things going on around you. On the set 25 people are running around and you are in this one little corner on a nice little soundstage. It is completely unreal and every sincere bone in your body is saying this is not real. You have to get past that. (David)

You have to put up the mental blinders of 'I'm going to focus on what the task is at hand' but when there is an instance that throws you off, you have to put it out of your mind and focus on what is at hand, and put the mental blinders on. (Henry)

I'm a very good improviser and I've gotten a lot better in the past couple of years, in dealing with that. I think if you're really in the moment of the play, you have to deal with what happens. (Daniel)

Pre-performance Routine

The actors also discussed their routines and approaches prior to performing. They essentially discussed two sub-strategies, first their focus shifted towards becoming their character and secondly their routine(s) generally readied them physically and mentally to perform. As well, the issue of 'keeping character' was discussed regarding some actors' film experiences.

Pre-performance Routine - Focus on Becoming the Character

The actors did not feel they could fully become their character until they had done the preparation needed, but once that was in place, they used three main techniques to focus themselves on becoming the character prior to performing including (a) focusing on their costume and make-up; (b) running lines; and (c) focusing on their character's nuances.

Focus on character's costume and make-up.

In discussing when the actors "become the character" during the time before a performance, after character preparation, actors discussed their costume and make-up as being the most important:

The makeup artist thought that she was a little bit daffy so he did some eyeliner that made my eyes look just a little bit off. It helped, it wasn't really caricaturey, or crazy like a lunatic, but it was something to make me look/be/feel less smart. Look/be/feel that is an interesting transition. But again, the outside in. There's something about looking at myself with the eyebrows...everything that just made her in that period of the forties and not too together. And the hair, sort of flat and up on the side, very forties. The whole putting on of the stuff is what puts you there. (Sheila)

When you come into the dressing room you are you and then you start to become whoever it is. Obviously, you are always you... but I sit down at the mirror and I put myself in the mindset of the character. I am gradually becoming that character for the hours ahead. I am always me, knowing that I am doing that. But I really try to immerse myself in who I am going to be in the next however many hours. I did my hair a different way to look very period. What epitomized that character to me

was that I wore bright red nail polish and lipstick that looked very kind of period.

Doing my nails and putting on that lipstick was where I really became her. It gave me that character. (Tara)

So in terms of the focus, that is the first step, if I start to look different, I'm putting on different clothes, and the clothes actually do make you move differently. As soon as you start to tap into those things, whether it is putting on the facial hair or the costume you're getting transformed into another time and another person.

You're getting rid of what you did that day, of what happens in your own mind. (Henry)

The first thing I do when I get in, even before a look at my notes, is get into my costume right away, just to get into my character. (Lyle)

On the other hand, Gary noted how he did not really have to become his character because it was always there with him:

There was no building myself into it every night and I know there are some actors who do that. But I did not have to do that. I knew him well enough. He was just there. That was one of the things that were so enjoyable about it. I didn't have to work myself up into some sort of frenzy. He came naturally. (Gary)

Running lines.

The actors also discussed running lines prior to performing. The following quotes highlight the use of this technique by the actors to focus on becoming their character:

I always read through the whole script in that hour before the show. I read through my lines from top to bottom and mentally went through everything. Usually at the end I would go back and do the first scene again. My mind is empty, it is zero. That

is all I really want in it - the journey of the play. Then I go back to the beginning again, because the beginning is really all I should have in my active memory, because I don't know what is going to happen in the play theoretically. (Daniel)

Waiting to go on the set...it is the lines, completely. I will run my lines. I will sit down and just write out my lines the way I have memorized them. I will write them out and say them out loud so that again I am using so many different senses. I am writing it down, so physically I am involved in touching the words, I am hearing it, I'm saying it, and I'm seeing it – so then hopefully it becomes very natural. So that is my biggest focus. (David)

Focus on character's physical nuances.

Although actors spoke about a general focus on their character, Henry was the only actor who spoke directly about focusing on specific character nuances. For one play, he would begin speaking in his English accent when he was in his dressing room.

So even if I am backstage, it sounds pretentious, I speak to them in my accent because I don't want it to be forced. If I can get my muscle memory working the minute that I walk in there – the sooner I can start the better because I don't feel it is forced. I feel I can walk on stage and I am relaxed. (Henry)

Henry also discussed how he would attempt to enter the world of the character he was playing.

I go into that world. I mean this is the Victorian age. I have to physically carry myself differently. I have to sit, speak, and greet people differently. My world picture is very different from what I have now in terms of etiquette. All of those

things are so different. For me to go from the world of 2003 back to the 19th century, anything I can do to help me tap into that makes it easier. (Henry)

Pre-performance Routine – Readiness to Perform

The actors' pre-performance routine was also one that readied them physically and mentally to perform. Strategies and techniques included: (a) a physical and vocal warm-up; (b) relaxing and being alone; (c) general focus on upcoming performance; (d) following the same routine; (e) time of arrival; and (f) preparation during the day.

Engaging in a physical and/or vocal warm-up.

Most actors would use their warm-up prior to performance as a chance to relax and to 'clear their mind'. Michael discussed how important it was for him to forget about his life, friends, and family. He said, "You have to shut that out, because the audience does not want to know about that." He would attempt to clear the 'life stuff' from his mind during his physical warm-up as did others:

At the same time it relaxes you. It is about the nervous energy too and getting calm. So I do that for about a half-hour before anything else. It is basically time to shut out the world. I start lying on the floor and concentrate on breathing for a while, that shuts out...if I've had a fight with my girlfriend or something has happened in my day, pay bills. (Michael)

In a way what you want to do is say, 'I am starting a new thing now.' And I personally find, for me, that physical warm-up helps to do that. It just changes the dynamic of what you are doing. (Cathy)

I always do a vocal warm-up. It is about that vocal awareness. That is a very technical thing that has to happen. Then I would do a physical warm-up. Maybe I

will do yoga or Pilates, something that gets your body going, because even in a play you can injure yourself if you are not physically warmed up, and it also gets you agile emotionally, somehow to be agile physically. (Sheila)

In terms of doing a physical warm-up, I go into a rehearsal hall and do stretches to limber up the body, and then I do a vocal preparation, working the articulators and the resonators. Just making sure that when I speak it is clear and precise and everyone can hear me. So that usually takes anywhere from half an hour to an hour. (Henry)

Focusing on upcoming performance.

Similar to the purpose of Michael and Cathy's warm-up, to shut out the outside world, other actors spoke of how they mentally focused on their performance. Daniel used a mantra before every performance.

I would lie on the floor and say, 'Let it go now, let it go now, let everything go now, let everything go. There is no place else, you can be, there's nothing else you can be doing, just think about the show, and have a good time.' It is very simple, but it is very freeing.

Stan's technique was one of emptying his mind.

If you would like me to say how I get there all I can say is, that it is a process of me eliminating, getting rid of, and stripping down – so there is nothing on my mind.

Now how do I do it? I have no ritual for doing that, simply over the years that is what I have done for myself.

Stan also attempted to get ready by asking himself, "Where will the surprise be tonight?"

Henry noted, "The time that I spend in the dressing room is very important to me. I have

to be focused mentally on what I'm doing and where I'm going". Michael noted that as the time got closer and closer to the show, his focus "had to be about concentrating on the show" and in the few minutes before the show began, he said, "I would go alone to the rehearsal hall and focus on what I have to do and get prepared to tell the story and meet my acting partners." Henry described it as putting his focus on being open for his performance and related it to a football player's stance:

When you see an athlete, there is a way to stand in terms of a football player when they are on the line. They are standing in a certain way so that they can go in any direction at any time. I think as an actor we have to do that mentally. I have to prepare myself that way backstage, so I can go in any direction.

On the other hand, Gary said that once he knew his character very well, he did not feel a need to get ready, because his character was always there.

In terms of preparation, I really didn't think about that character. I mean, I really just thought about technical things, there really is a sense (and this I've always marveled at) when you know a character well, that it is just a matter of threshold. The threshold, when you walk through the door on to the stage, you are instantly in character.

Relaxing and being alone.

Apart from warm-ups as a form of relaxation, some actors also found it relaxing to find isolation before a show. Michael found it relaxing to go off on his own to prepare prior to going on stage. Lyle relaxed alone in the few minutes before going on stage and also become self aware, he said: "I would ask myself, 'What am I like today? What was my day like today?' I ask myself, because that is important. You have to always be

aware of yourself'. The actors also liked to do small things to be alone by themselves and to stay busy. Daniel worked on crosswords, Lyle played on his PocketPC, and Gary played Solitaire. Gary said "I would have a cup of tea and just be very restful. Sometimes I would play solitaire. I would have a deck of cards, and I would just do something to clear my mind."

Following the same routine when arriving at stage/set.

Some actors discussed doing the same routine when they arrived at the theatre and prepared to perform for each production run:

Really, for every show I create a routine, because I like routines. For that one play I would put on my makeup, then I would walk through, and then I would go get dressed – every night. (Cathy)

I always put my body make-up exactly the same way. I started at the top of the head. I don't know why, I never really planned to do it that way. But I know that I didn't want to change how I did it. I wouldn't say that I am superstitious. It is a way of not changing what I do. I know a lot of people do that in sports – they may always put on one piece of equipment first or sit in the same spot or whatever. So I always have my same spot in the dressing room, I always start and then the make-up assistant starts after I've started. It is like painting basically, it is putting on another layer of the character. So I take my time doing that and making sure that is right. (Michael)

I do follow a pattern when I come into a theater. I have to sign in, I go to my dressing room, get my bottle water and get all that ready. (Henry)

Arriving early to theatre/set.

Some actors discussed how they preferred to arrive early to a performance so they could fully prepare and be alone, while other actors noted that at times they preferred to show up as late as possible. Each individual actor had to find their own balance throughout the production run.

I get to the theater early, I clear my mind, I do my makeup, I do a lot of physical warm-up. I build it and then I am ready, I am there. (Cathy)

Part of the problem when you do a show, is that you often don't get a chance to be on stage when you are not performing. So sometimes I would get there early and I would go on stage and work out something, a bit of business that I never got a chance to work it out with all the props in place. And sometimes to just feel the stage, to get a sense of this is my home, this is where I live, this is my character's space - to be as comfortable as possible. (Gary)

I always come to the theater early, no matter what the part is. It takes an hour for me to get ready just because I want to start from zero. (Daniel)

If you have a larger role, particularly at the beginning of the run, you have to really give yourself much more time than that. The best and the only way that I know of is to go to the theater really early and be there by myself. (Christine)

Christine also spoke about finding a balance in the amount of time she's given herself when arriving at the theatre, she said, "I actually think that if you have too much time it would be scary. It is if you have too much time before you take a dive." Meanwhile, Lyle noted that sometimes he would purposely arrive late and not prepare himself prior to performing to keep his performances fresh and real.

Yeah, you purposely drop everything and then you're like 'Oh, I'm on stage right now.' And then you have to get into the groove of what you worked on without really preparing for it specifically. You're ready, but you just haven't thought about it all day. It challenges you. It forces you to be very attentive and that is what gives good acting. You know, people just playing beats, you can tell when people know the line is coming, they are just going through the lines. But it is about the spontaneity of it. I don't know what you are going to say next. So I find that just by dropping everything it can create really interesting stuff.

Lastly, this balance of pre-performance preparation varied depending on the character played and how far into a production run an actor was.

The preparation varies depending on the demands of the piece, the personal demands on the person as a performer and how long you have been doing it. If you've been doing it for a long time you get really efficient at it. You know exactly how much energy you have to expend and so you know how to pace yourself, you know what you are capable of doing. (Gary)

I think my routine at the beginning of the season and at the end of the season is different. We have a long season. Once you've done the work, you can fall back on it much easier than at the beginning of the season. My mental preparation is much more in-depth then it is now because I've done that work. It is much easier for me to tap into it. (Henry)

Preparing during the day of a performance.

Some actors discussed their preparation during the day, prior to arriving to the stage/set, which included being alone and resting.

I guess if I think about it, I usually say to everybody in the house ‘I’m going to the theater in an hour’ and that is my way of putting myself into the place, I never thought about it before. So I probably do spend about an hour. I may have a nap. I often lie down and just think. And I guess that somehow works. If you are doing a big role, walking to work is terrific because it can get you oxygenated and focused. (Christine)

But the preparations for the day of a performance were always rest and ease – try and be as unstressed as possible. I would take lots of naps and I would drink a lot of water. But it all depends on the performance. (Gary)

If I have the luxury I will take a nap in the afternoon. (Daniel)

Focus In Between Performances – Keeping Character

The idea of “keeping a character” came through some interviews where actors discussed film experiences. The need for film actors to ‘keep their character’ arises due to their work schedule. As discussed before, they may have 10-16 hour days where they could be required to act for a few minutes or several hours with long breaks in between. The schedule is not always set or predictable. Most often they never know exactly when they may be called to set. Cathy discussed this topic thoroughly. For her it was important to be as involved in the filming process as she could. If her scene partner was doing a scene where only he/she was on camera and Cathy was off camera, she would be given the option of reading the lines or taking a break. Cathy would always read her lines to her scene partner. She did this for two reasons. First it kept her focused on her character and secondly it made the scene more realistic for her scene partner.

I didn't feel the need to stay completely in character the whole time, but I didn't feel like I could ever let go of her throughout the day because that was what it took to be that concentrated...it is like staying in your place. (Cathy)

David and Christine also discussed the importance of reading with their scene partner when they were off-camera.

Another challenge for film actors in terms of keeping their character was when they were on camera. Their scene may be shot once but then time is taken to adjust the lights and cameras to re shoot the scene – resulting in delays. Cathy noted during these instances, it was important for her to ‘keep’ her character nearby.

It is like this stillness. It is like you try to keep it. Partly what I had to do was stay very quiet and acknowledge what was happening. ‘Oh, I am feeling upset, from this scene before, which I'm now going to do again, everybody is ignoring me, that kind of makes me feel upset. Which is good, I'm glad that is helping, that will help me to do this again.’ And then you are also being self-reflexive. ‘Oh, I liked that last take. It was more hysterical, and I think that is right. Okay, take a note of that.’ You are just waiting for somebody to say action, and then you do it again.

Cathy used self-talk and acknowledgement of the situation she was in, during these minutes of waiting to shoot the scene again.

Imagery

Imagery is defined by Vealey and Greenleaf (2001) as “using all the senses to re-create or create an experience in the mind” (p.248). Actors used the terms imagery and imagination in similar meanings. For the purpose of this paper the term imagery has been

used. Imagery was employed by most actors at different times and domains of their performance: (a) for character preparation, (b) in the few seconds/minutes before entering a scene, (c) technical preparation, and (d) other uses.

Used In Preparation

Some actors created a character history or background that prepared them for their role. Most of these actors used imagery to create this background story about their character. For example, they would create and imagine their first meeting with their lover, a first kiss, or an important conversation with another character to build this 'history' of their character. This creation would either be done through imagery or would be physically acted out. Once this initial creation was made, they would constantly use imagery to recall this creation. Henry and Tara each used imagery to further their character's history and improve their preparation. Henry used imagery extensively to create a character history in one production. He described his use of imagery as "memories" that he had created with another female character.

As an actor, you have to be able to not only look at stuff on the surface, but look at the things that are underneath. So I was trying to tap into things that were underneath. That is how I use the memories, just to tap into that.

In this particular play Henry played a man who was returning to see a woman he once loved and who he had not seen in years. While they are dancing, he mentions to her that the song playing was the same song that was playing when he proposed to her years back. Henry and his female co-actor decided to recreate this marriage proposal during rehearsal because it was not in the script. Henry then used imagery to recreate this marriage proposal every night he danced on stage with her during the play. Imagery gave Henry a

character background that he used in developing his character and when he was performing on stage. Tara also used imagery to deepen her character preparation. She stated:

For my own personal preparation, I guess I build stories, a history, an autobiography about my character because if somebody asked me something about the life that she led before this time on stage, I think I would be able to have a pretty good answer because I think I should know. I am that person, so I should be able to tell you that stuff. I don't write it all down, I just imagine in my head how she grew up, and how many brothers and sisters she had and all of that kind of autobiographical information. (Tara)

Imagery also aided actors in developing a mental picture of how their character moved, and spoke. Gary found that he used imagery to find not only the movement of his character but also the voice of his character, thus he used both audio and visual imagery.

And some of the sources I can't even tell you. I can't tell you why I heard Jerry's voice, the way he talked, or the way he moved. Some of it was just images, sort of bear like, sort of hunched shoulders and predatory but lumbering.

Used When Entering a Scene

Next to imagery being used in preparation, it was most often and importantly used by actors to focus when entering a scene. Actors would imagine where they were coming from and the events that led them to enter the scene. This imagery was used for two reasons. First, it put the actor in the context of the play and made them more focused on listening. Secondly, it gave them the urgency to communicate the circumstances that brought them into the scene. Henry gave a vivid example of this use of imagery. He

engaged in imagery while he was backstage during Scene 2 of an act. He was on stage for Scene 1 and it ended with him and others going off to a battle. He then was offstage for Scene 2 and returned to the stage after the battle had finished for Scene 3. The battle was discussed on stage during Scene 2, but never took place in front of the audience. The following quote demonstrates how during every show he would re-enact and imagine the battle that took place when he was backstage during Scene 2:

So you have to sort of put yourself in that situation. Backstage there was this one part where I went through the same thing every night. I physically and mentally went through what happened in the battle. I was backstage sort of in my own slow motion, going through with thrusts and cuts that I would do in battle. It was during the show, just before the scene where we found out our dad was dead. I would do that every show.

Henry used this extensive imagery to re-create the battle that had transpired. He used this technique to make his entrance for Scene 3 as realistic and as urgent as possible. Henry also used imagery before entering the scene mentioned earlier, when he was seeing a woman he had proposed to years before. He replayed the moment in his head each night he entered the scene where he saw her again.

So I almost play that little movie in my mind of what that was and remembering it. It is kind of neat. When I'm standing in the doorway backstage, there is sort of a mental preparation that I go through as the character. I kind of think about where I've been, where I am now, and where I'm going in terms of what I want.

Daniel noted that for one play where he was a doctor, in the minutes before the play began, he often imagined himself walking through the hallways of the hospital.

I would stand there with my eyes closed and I would visualize myself going through the hospital. Again, a lot of it is almost catching what ever the flavor of the pace and the world is. Yeah, that's what it is... it is capturing that because when you come on, the first few seconds are incredibly important, the audience sort of takes a picture of it. The first image is a big deal. (Daniel)

He used imagery to get himself focused on who he was portraying and he believed it allowed him to effectively portray himself as a doctor so the audience would find him realistic.

Sheila discussed mentally running through her mind what she was doing before entering a scene.

In the wings, I'm literally going, 'Okay, okay, I am late and I was at the movies with this boyfriend and I was supposed to be getting milk, and I have been gone for 12 hours and people are going to be really scared of where I am. Okay so I'm going to make like nothing happened and everything is going to be okay when I knock on the door.' You have to fill yourself up with what is going on. 'What am I doing? I am covering, I lied and I don't want them to know. I just got lost for a few hours.' And then 'Okay, hi everybody!' If I don't do that work coming in, then I'm just going to come in and say 'Hi everybody' and it is going to stink. So you have to invest in the moment before, with every character you play before you enter that scene - What was I doing? Who am I? What is at stake when I enter the room?

Used in Technical Preparation

Some actors noted how imagery was used in technical preparation, such as blocking, which is the movement and placement of an actor on set or stage.

But I still make decisions in my head, OK. I'm saying this line and as I'm delivering that I'm walking down the bar. When I deliver that line I know he will come around the other side of me and I know we have to end up at the kitchen, when is that going to happen? I just go through it mentally and picture that. (David)

I say the lines with the right timing. I just do it very easy, to get the feeling of it. Sometimes, I visualize. I go through the order in my head of the scenes just to get ready. "Okay, when I get off stage here, do I have 30 seconds to get back on stage? Do I have a quick change?" I have to be ready. (Lyle)

Every night before the show when I did this very long monologue, I would not only read my lines, but I would walk it. I would not do it with any kind of thing. I would just walk to where I went...muscle memory, because it is almost like a dance. (Cathy)

Other Uses

Imagery was also used by the actors in other domains such as performance evaluation, confidence, and focus while on stage. The following is a selection of quotes highlighting these other areas where imagery is used.

I might think why a night did or did not go so well. I might think about how I would like to make it better. 'I want this scene to be more confrontational, more aggressive'...and I would sometimes have notes that I would get from the director the day before and I would try to work through my mind how to make something work. (Gary – Performance evaluation)

What are you doing on stage all the time when you are not speaking? What you do in life. When you are walking around watching stuff, you are not just watching a

person speak all the time, or if you are, what are you thinking of that person? Not just what they say in the moment but all the other things that were said. So I think you do build in the imaginatives. You know, like I had lunch with X once a week. I never really wrote that down. But I do think about it. (Daniel – Focus on stage)

I visualize in snapshots. Images, like I see myself on stage doing that. I think it just gives me confidence and focus because it reinforces that, the notion that oh yeah, I know what I'm doing, I'm doing a good job or at least I'm prepared for this. (Lyle – Confidence and focus)

Confidence

Confidence is an important aspect in performance. The following quotes indicate what confidence means to some of the actors interviewed:

The longer I'm in this business, the more important I think that element is. I think the quality of confidence in a person is very appealing, so for an actor, being able to project that is very important. A sense of confidence communicates itself to the audience and lets them feel comfortable watching the performer. (Tara)

Confidence is everything to me. (David)

Confidence is very important because you have to be confident in your own abilities as an actor. (Henry)

The actors used various strategies to increase confidence, including: strong character preparation, self-talk, and acting confident. Most actors felt that their confidence came from their own character preparation. David noted, “The preparation is so important because it gives you the confidence to be able to act on set.” The following reflect the relationship between confidence and character preparation:

I don't mean this harshly but a lot of times your confidence is low because you haven't done enough work. Enough work on anything. Maybe you feel like you don't quite have the character. Well, you have to work on that, you have to do whatever it takes to do your work. You feel confident when you know you are going into a part having done your best. Your best everything. (Cathy)

So the confidence, for me, first comes from doing the homework and knowing I know everything about the character and I know the play very well. That provides confidence because no matter what they throw out there I will be able to answer it at the best of my ability. (Michael)

That is really what preparation is all about, so I don't have to do that much before I hit the stage. I don't have to run my lines. I don't have to do endless preparations on who my character is. It is there, I have already done all the work. I trust that it is there. (Gary)

Feeling prepared helps an actor to feel confident. (Tara)

David and Henry used self-talk to ask themselves if they were prepared before they performed. By doing this, they felt more confident and focused to perform.

I will always ask myself even before going on set, are you prepared? OK, if I am prepared then I can start listening, and if I am listening then I am going to be able to honestly react in any situation. (David)

You should think this is the best theater you're going to see and that starts with am I prepared to do this? (Henry)

David also would often ask himself "Am I confident?" If his answer was no, he said he would:

Get up and walk away, and I don't mean leave, I mean get up. Walk away and talk yourself through it. I would say, 'That is not the focus of why you are here. You are here to act and to react on a personal emotional level to somebody else. Prove that you can act. You have got it in you, so it is time to show off, it is show time.'

(David)

Other quotes include:

I don't really have a problem not being confident on stage. I am more confident on stage than I am in real life, absolutely. Maybe this is just years of telling myself that. I feel that I am a good actor and just in the back of my head, I am like 'You are a good actor. You'll be fine out there.' I just feel like it will go well. (Tara)

All of a sudden in this play, I was hired and that is what they are asking me to do - huge dance scenes. And I was like 'I can do this, I can do this' ... and I did it. I was terrified that I was going to forget the steps every night. It was terrifying for me but I had to do it, and I had to be brave about that too, and say, 'I can do that.' (Sheila)

I do kind of have to give myself a pep talk sometimes. I have to say 'Okay, you can do it.' Sometimes you have to do that. (Henry)

The actors also discussed improving their confidence by acting confident.

Actors have to be high on themselves, even if they are not like that. It is important to pretend self confidence problems don't exist when you are acting because people see that. You have to pretend, 'I'm on top of the world', kind of like, 'I'm living the type of life that people want to have' because people want to see that. (Lyle)

If you're confident enough in yourself then what ever you present on stage is only a variation of that, which is all you can produce. (Michael)

Whether you feel it or not, an actor has to come across as confident. (Tara)

For David and Christine, a source of confidence was to know that it was already there. David used an interesting technique where he would simply remind himself that his confidence would be there at the film set, he said, “My confidence was already there because I left my confidence there the day before.” Christine explained it as, “The knowledge that you have the confidence and the ability to get the job done properly. It is not messed up with a lot of self-doubt and that particular destructive vulnerability.”

Optimal energy level to Perform

Multiple definitions and synonyms of ‘optimal energy level’ exist including optimal arousal, optimal activation, being ‘psyched up’ and motivated (Zaichowsky & Baltzwell, 2001). The choice to use the term ‘energy level’ was made to best reflect the language used by the actors. Some of the actors discussed various strategies and techniques they used to attain an optimal energy level to perform. Michael gave an interesting example of how he creates positive energy when performing. He used an expression from his father, called ‘Flying his butterflies in circles’.

Basically, it is about focusing that nervous energy so it is not all over the place, it is exactly where you want to go. It is to take advantage of that energy and to use that to create that explosion of energy.

Lyle’s approach was much more geared towards self-talk to manage his butterflies that resulted from nervous energy:

I try to reason butterflies through reassuring myself that I’m a good person and that I’ve done what I was supposed to do. Of course if I’ve been slacking, then I get more butterflies that are harder to control. I alleviate pressure by saying, ‘You did

what you could do. You did everything you should be doing for this.' So you have given yourself the best chance of succeeding, and if you don't, you have to recognize so many external factors that you have no control over. (Lyle)

When Tara responded to the initial 'Results' section during the member checking procedure, she noted how closely related optimal energy level and preparation.

If "optimal energy level" means "being in the zone where you perform best" then it sounds like preparation to me. Getting to that place is what preparation is about.

David, Michael, and Cathy also discussed the use of self-talk for attaining an optimal energy level prior to a performance. David said that he often reminds himself, "Make it all real. Swing for the fence...this is not a rehearsal anymore. Give it everything you've got." Others noted the following:

It is to get at that excitement of - you are really going to like this. 'I have a surprise for you and you are going to love it'. That is the way I am playing the character this year. It is getting that energy and that anticipation into my body and into my fingertips so soon as I come onto the stage, I have got this electricity. (Michael)

I think that is one of the neat things about being an actor. If you are going to perform there is a certain point at which you can feel like crap and you can feel like you look like crap, but you have to say to yourself, 'I have to do something else and it is I have to give this performance to the people. And I have to want to do that.'

The interesting thing about that is of course by doing that you actually do feel better. (Cathy)

But if I'm on in five minutes then I get myself up and I start pacing around a bit, without getting nervous... and saying, 'These people came here to see this show, they paid to see this show.' (Lyle)

Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation was a strategy discussed by Orlick (2000) as part of his Wheel of Excellence. He defined it as constructive evaluation or ongoing learning evaluation. In his research he found that the best performers looked for areas in their performance where they could improve and looked to take every mistake not as a negative but as a lesson learned. Nearly every actor discussed some form of performance evaluation. In general several techniques and themes were discussed – (a) it was a constant process; (b) it involved questioning performance; (c) method of evaluation; (d) critics; and (e) the purpose for evaluation. Actors who discussed stage performances found it much easier and meaningful to reflect upon their performance because they would be doing the same performance day in and day out. On the other hand, the actors who discussed performance evaluation for their film performances noted it was difficult because as soon as one scene was finished another scene would be shot. Thus performance evaluation appeared much more prevalent for stage performances.

Constant Evaluation of Performance

Most actors noted that as an actor, they are constantly evaluating their performance. The actors discussed how evaluation was just part of what they did after a show. It wasn't always deliberate or chosen – most of the time it was automatic.

I think maybe we do it without even realizing that we do it. (Christine)

There is always constant assessing. I will go to sleep at night and I'll be thinking about this scene or thinking about that scene. (Sheila)

Performance evaluation happens automatically, for me at least. You can't help but analyze what happened in performance and it can be very helpful for subsequent performances. (Tara)

Yeah, you are constantly going, what did I do that night? (Michael)

Evaluation Involved Questioning Performance

Another common theme for the actors interviewed was their questioning of how their performance went, how it could be improved, and what did not go well.

Yeah, after the performance, how did that work? Did I get the response? Did I take the note (from the director) that I was given? Did it work? Was the director right, did the scene work better because I took her adjustment? Or did that have repercussions that screwed up something else down the line? (Gary)

Let's put it that way, in the positive as opposed to saying that was wrong. Saying, what else can I do? How can I spin this further? (Sheila)

If a show that did not come off that well, I would ask, 'What is different about this night, that was different from the first night? Did I not prepare the same way? Did I give up halfway through? Was it not as precise?' Once I realize what I did on opening night, then it is more of what did I not do to match that? (Michael)

Method of Evaluation

Actors had different approaches as to when they would evaluate their performance. Most actors noted that they would do it after every performance but others noted that if the performance went poorly then they would spend more time evaluating

how it went. Michael commented, “I do it more consciously after shows that are not that successful” while Tara said “If it went well, it is just like ‘That was great, let’s go have a drink!’ If it went badly you spend more time thinking about it, but hopefully, you don’t dwell on it all day.” Daniel said that right after a show if something did not go well, he would physically go over the scene to improve it, while he would take notes of the positive aspects of his performance. Gary said, “After every show, I would definitely reflect on the performance.”

Daniel, Michael, and Gary discussed how they went about tracking their evaluation; Daniel appeared to be the most diligent:

It is generally technical things about diction or gestures, or if I discover the right place to turn my back to the audience, or words that I might have a diction problem with – those kinds of notes. Phrases that need a little more legato, taking a pause at certain places, I might make those notations, I make a lot during rehearsals of course, but after a performance, yes. (Daniel)

Michael discussed how he used to keep physical notes similar to Daniel but now his notes are mental.

I used to keep a journal but it was not so much to keep a track record of what I had done but to force myself to think about it. Once you get into that habit of forcing yourself to think about it, you do not need the journal anymore. It served its purpose and now I can just do it mentally.

Gary’s process was less formal as well. He noted, “I don’t think I ever sat down formally and take notes. It was an informal process where after a performance I would evaluate.

Critics Role in Performance Evaluation

Every actor who discussed the topic of critics noted that they read their own reviews. The actors used different mental strategies when reading them. The most beneficial seemed to be one of perspective and taking them for what they are worth.

So I read them more for the show's sake, than my sake, because the review is just one person's opinion, and 1800 people come and see the show every night.

Unfortunately, if you believe in the good stuff that you read then you have to believe the bad stuff that is written about you. (Michael)

I mean, there is no question that getting a good review is a wonderful thing but I have to assume the risk when I get a bad one, and I will certainly get some bad reviews. (Gary)

I try to think if it is earned, if I am deserving of it. (Gary)

I read my reviews and tried not to let them mean too much (good or bad) because I didn't want that to color my performance. (Tara)

Purpose for Evaluation

Gary and Sheila discussed why they engaged in performance evaluation; both noted it was to improve their performance.

Because there is this famous quote from Martha Graham saying 'There is this dissatisfaction, all artists have this divine dissatisfaction'. It seems you are never satisfied with your work and that is what keeps propelling you forward; if you were satisfied you probably would not be all that good. There is always this need to go 'What else can I do that can make that work better, deeper, funnier, truer, etc?' You are never done! (Sheila)

It was to improve, it really was. (Gary)

Elements of Career Success

Elements of career success resulted mainly from the first introductory question and from one of the last questions asked during each interview, “What do you think, either mentally or otherwise, enabled you to become and remain a successful professional actor for X number of years?” The actors discussed numerous issues; the most important were (a) keeping perspective; (b) enjoyment/belief in what they were doing; (c) group support; (d) acknowledgement of abilities; (e) commitment to profession; (f) having a wide range of abilities; and (g) self-awareness.

Keeping Perspective

The acting industry is one of uncertainty. Until actors gain a strong reputation, (which can take years or decades) most go from contract to contract, uncertain where their next line of professional work will come from. Perspective appears to have helped most of the actors interviewed in remaining successful in this difficult industry. Perspective has been defined as a person respecting several elements of their life, of which they have assigned meaning and value (Botterill & Patrick, 2003). For the actors in this study, perspective included looking long term, appreciating family and viewing acting simply as a job/profession.

Even now I would not say I’m an accomplished actor because I think the more you do, the more you realize how much there is to learn. I find it encouraging how much I’ve achieved at a certain level of acting with what I’ve done thus far. But the way I’m looking at it so far is, I’m not trying to peak with my acting in my 20’s – that is not going to happen. I’ve received encouragement from people I look up to but I

don't expect to really be a good actor until I'm in my 50's. That is when you really mature and you learn so much. (Lyle)

Taking a longer view of things and not being so intense about the business. That really has been the main thing. (Daniel)

Now I have another focus in my life, I have my family. It is the biggest thing, versus my career, which had been the biggest thing to me. And to keep not being where you want to be in your career when that is the biggest thing, really wears you down. But when the family is the biggest thing and maybe your career is not where you want it to be it doesn't matter as much because it is not the main thing. So I can let it go a lot more. (Tara)

I'm less likely to take heart of that kind of rejection and you know in an odd way, having children has improved that, because it has given me perspective. I've learned that this stuff is important, but it's not that important, it is a job, and having that other life to pull from in terms of experience and perspective has been very helpful to me as a performer. (Gary)

When you're on stage, be an actor, when you're home be a family man. You don't have to be an actor 24-7. A lot of people do, and I think it is dangerous. It disconnects you from reality. It makes it harder to play a role because your life experience is limited. I'm a dad, I'm a grandfather, I'm a husband, and a brother. I have a life. (Ben)

Now I'm mentally healthy – less concerned with things that are not important in life. (Cathy)

You have to at some point have the slings and arrows and the being crushed like a bug happen to you. You have to get the bad reviews, slaked over the coals and feel that you have lost rank. And then you get reborn again, it is good for you. That is really good for your acting and it is good for your relationships with other people, because you have been there and you can have compassion. (Christine)

Believing in and Enjoying Production

The element of enjoying the process of preparation and performance was a factor for success as discussed by most actors.

The sense of joy in doing it, if you have that, if you love doing it, even material that is stinky feels good. You have to love performing out there. You have to have the joy of doing it. I think the day I cease to have that I would stop, because there is an awful lot to go through to get on the stage that would not be worth it if I didn't still love doing it. (Sheila)

I am very lucky. I never take for granted I'm able to do this and get paid for it.
(Stan)

I find it intellectually stimulating and in a lot of ways it is satisfying. It goes back to why I wanted to become a psychologist, because I am interested in why people do the things they do. And this gives me that outlet. (Gary)

I think I have been in it so long because of the fun and the play aspect of it; those are the two things that make it really work for me. (Daniel)

That is the other thing about performing - the play, the play - the people that see that you are playing. That is the best type of performance. You really do have that

freedom to play. It is such a joy to be in acting, because you are playing for fun.

(Daniel)

One of the reasons I love theater, when you do it well...for the hour before and the two-hours during the show that is all you are thinking about, if you are doing a good job. That is what I love about it, there are so few activities in life where we allow ourselves to say 'I am only doing this, I am in this now.' (Sheila)

For Cathy, believing in the work she was doing was an effective way for her to continue enjoying acting.

I'm very lucky, because I work on things that I believe in very strongly. I don't work on projects just to make money, and I think that it enables me to take tremendous joy from, with, and in the process of being a performer. A lot of what helps me to be a better actor - a focused and a giving actor is that I really believe in the projects I work on. I can't imagine having that level of passion for doing it if I thought it was a terrible play. You want to give this to people, you want them to see it, and you think it is an important thing in the world. (Cathy)

Most actors expressed their passion for acting as reasons why they entered it in their opening explanation of how they got into acting. Cathy stated "It was just something that I wanted to do. I loved it tremendously". She loved it so much, that it wasn't until recently that she thought everyone wanted to act. She said, "I really genuinely thought that everybody in the world wanted to be an actor. They just decided that they did not want to be. It just did not occur to me that you would not want to do this thing." Michael discussed his choice to study it in university. He said, "It started out as 'Okay I have to do something in school' and then I just went with what I love doing." Tara, Henry and

Sheila told stories about how they performed in front of classmates, parents, and neighbours when they were young – they had always enjoyed it. For Ben, it was not something he stumbled upon until he was in his twenties. He learned he enjoyed it and realized he would rather make a living doing something he like than “sitting behind a desk”.

Having and Providing Group Support

Most actors noted that their enjoyment, best performances, and career success came when there was a sense of support, teamwork, and connection amongst the cast and crew. For the purpose of using a term used by the actors, ‘group support’ was chosen to encompass these ideas of group cohesion and connection. Henry compared the experience of the actor working with the crew and cast to a pit crew in auto racing.

You have to help each other out, just like a pit crew for racecar driving. There is this whole support team behind this one guy in a car. If something breaks down on the machine there is a whole crew of people that will help this person to get it going. You get so close to these people, because you have to trust them – if you don't trust 100% then you are going to be a nervous wreck. You have to entirely put yourself in everybody's hands and inevitably they will come through for you if something does go wrong.

The following quote from Sheila indicates how important group connection was to her performance:

You rarely have a night, where you say ‘That went great’ and the other actors say ‘That sucked’. If it is a good show, everybody is pretty much having a good show.

The best performances are also where you are most connected to the other actors. It is a huge thing.

Some actors discussed how important it was to be working with actors who worked well together, who were dedicated, and who did not bring egos to the production. Different actors described different aspects of group support. When discussing the rehearsal process, Stan emphasized the importance of trust and working together:

The rehearsal process is one help, it slowly melds and builds the company, which is vital. It builds working relationships in which you can feel safe, accepted, secure, encouraged and that you can trust them.

Tara, Daniel, and Michael discussed the role of enjoyment in working with the other actors and the impact of cohesion on performances:

I think you just enjoy going out there and it is fun. It is like you get a chance to play with all of your friends. You just have a great time together and hopefully the audience has a great time with you. (Tara)

I think it is really the fellow actors. When you really love the ensemble and really want to be there. That makes you more open to being spontaneous, because you know they have got your back... that is not what you have when you work with actors who are iffy for whatever reason, because of inexperience, lack of talent or ego... you don't have that freedom as much all the time. (Daniel)

In one of my best performances, it just worked out that we were able to come together as a company and tell the story together. Everyone was moving along the same pace and telling the story, and just moving at the right tempo. And there were no egos. (Michael)

Some actors also mentioned how they make an effort during their productions to get to know the crew as much as possible.

It is important to value everybody's job. You have to consider yourself part of a team and that everybody's job is just as important. The best collaborative processes give the best art. I believe that energy flows through the set and influences the quality of the production. Behind the scenes has a great impression in front of the scenes. (Lyle)

David gave an example of his first morning on a film set when he showed up with coffee and donuts for the crew. He wanted to make sure he got along with everybody. When asked if support amongst the cast and crew was important to him, he replied "Yes, because I want to be happy and I want to be comfortable. On the set I want people to be happy. On the good sets, you are able to enjoy the people that are around you, know that you are working for a common goal and that you are able to enjoy that time." On the film set of a production, Cathy made an attempt to learn everybody's name and to socialize with them. The sense of group support and connectedness gave actors confidence and made their job enjoyable, both of which helped them succeed in their careers.

Acknowledging Abilities

Most actors also discussed how the confidence and trust in their ability helped them to remain in the industry:

I think it is acknowledging that I'm good at what I do. I'm very skillful at being a performer, but I am also very gifted and experienced. I think I actually have something that can not be taught, I have stage presence, and I have a desire to perform. (Gary)

I have an innate ability, thanks to my genes and my culture. You are not there to learn what the sentence meant, that is what you bring. So that is the only talent with clear eyes and a smile on my face that I can say I do well, better than most. And it is not a matter of vanity. It is just a fact. (Stan)

It is no longer arrogance, but it becomes confidence when you're older. And you lose some of the vulnerability. (Christine)

I just know that I'm really good. Yeah, I do. I have a record of success now that I can point to. I have a lot more widely divergent experiences than I used to. So it is hard to say, and not feel immodest but truthfully, I know that I'm really good.

(Daniel)

It is not conceited because I think it is sometimes crazy that I do this. But sometimes I think that I am brave about just bringing out there. I don't know that I am always 100% at what I do, but I think I am brave to just toss it out there, and I think I've always had that because if I didn't then I think I would have stopped a long time ago. Because again, I think what we do is nuts - to put yourself out in front of people, wearing somebody else's skin and trying to remember all this stuff is a brave and somewhat insane thing to do. So you have got to have that in place or don't do it. (Sheila)

Commitment To and Respect for Profession

Some of the actors discussed the commitment that they put into their work and how much they respected the art. This approach gave them motivation and focus to continue on and to do good work.

When the stage lights hit you, it is an extraordinary experience to have an audience in front of you. It is a very sobering moment. And so it hits you for the lack of a better word. 'I have a job to do. It is my responsibility, it is personal.' (Gary)

I don't know, just sheer not giving up-ness because a lot of people have maybe said, 'This is not happening as fast as I want' or 'This is not happening the way I want.'

But I am still today, not ready to stop. So that stubbornness, that is what it is. (Tara)

There is a certain amount of discipline involved. (Christine)

You need to value what you do. The craft is something to value. (Daniel)

I think you have to respect the idea that it is not so much that the audience will kill you, if you don't do well, but that they deserve it, as does the venue and as does the text. (Stan)

Being Versatile and Having a Wide Range of Experience

Some actors discussed how their ability to be versatile, work in various areas in the industry and to grow as an actor, through playing different roles, helped with their career success.

My main thrust has always been theater, but there is some TV in there, concert work, writing, and teaching. It has taken some umbrellas off the main thing and we talk about this a lot, in this business, you wind up divorcifying. The more skills you have, you wind up sort of stretching and exploring all of them. In the effort to make a living you find that you need every skill that you have. (Sheila)

(...) setting a ladder of goals as opposed to the ultimate goals of getting the job.

Saying, 'As long as I'm accomplishing this, I'm succeeding because I'm growing as an actor empowers me to keep control of the artistic side of my career. Last year I

did a tragic part. This year I did more of a narrator, sort of a neutral part, and next year I want to do comedy. So I keep challenging myself. As long as I am challenged I will grow as an actor. (Michael)

You say 'I want to be part of this because I will learn something.' (Stan)

Sometimes I think it is because each new role is a challenge. (Christine)

I think one of my goals is to gain experience from new events in my life. An artist has to continually grow. If he or she stays at the same level then I think the art goes dead. You have to continually challenge yourself. You have to fail and you have to succeed, in order to achieve that growth, so that you can learn from your mistakes.

(Henry)

Being Self-Aware

Henry and Michael discussed how knowing their capabilities helped them throughout their young careers.

It goes back to knowing yourself and knowing that I'm doing the best I can with the goals that I'm setting and they are realistic. Just know yourself. Find that out first and then you will find all of the characters easy enough. Shakespeare says that over and over again in Hamlet, 'To thyself know it be true.' He is constantly reminding his characters – just know who you are as a person and no one else can do you wrong. I am this specific type of person; I can still play this person or this person over here, but don't ask me to try to play this person way over here. (Michael)

I would just say to the actor, do what ever you need to do, don't let other people tell you what you need to do. If it is better for you to go for a walk and read a book

before a show, then great, if that makes you feel relaxed then great. There is no right or wrong way. (Henry)

Other Considerations

To conclude this section, I wanted to briefly disclose three other issues that arose through analysis. These include: the ability for younger actors to better describe their techniques and strategies, revelations made by the actors during the interviews, and differences between strategies for film and stage performances. The purpose of the research did not include the exploration of these issues, therefore they will not be analyzed, yet they will be briefly discussed to add further context.

It was found that the younger actors tended to be more specific in expressing the techniques for their mental strategies, while at times some of the more experienced actors found it difficult to fully explain their strategies and techniques. Most of the actors in this study had over 20 years of professional experience, while most traditional sport psychology research involves athletes with less. It is possible that over time the techniques that the older actors used became a part of them and thus more difficult to explain, while the younger actors were still learning techniques and were more aware of which ones benefited their performance.

It was also found that some of the actors noted during the interviews that they made realizations about their techniques that they had never made before:

On the days I had downtime a lot of what I had to do was be by myself, because unfortunately which I didn't really realize until now, a lot of times in preparing for a play, I can't handle the talking of the dressing room. (Cathy)

I realize this now as we are talking, that a lot of what helps me to be a better focused and giving actor, is that I really believe in the projects I work on. (Cathy)

Part of the process is discovery as opposed to preparation. I never really thought about that until now, but it is very true. Part of the preparation is saying 'Okay, now I will throw out all that and be open to what I get from another actor, what I get from the environment' (Sheila)

You don't really know how much you know about yourself until you talk about it, because we don't really get to do this very often, I mean not at all. Even if you are talking to your buddies you do not talk in-depth, it is really quite introspective, it is really quite interesting. (Henry)

Henry explained it quite well – perhaps the actors made these realizations because they had never thought about or had been asked about these strategies before. Either way, the interviews proved successful in allowing some of the actors to make realizations they had not made before.

Lastly, although it was not a focus, the differences between film and stage strategies were discussed by some actors. These included: film actors need to obtain a quicker focus to reach an emotional peak while stage allow them to ride the arc of the character to its peak; actors felt they had more control of the finished product of a stage production rather than film; preparation time for film is much shorter; a different focus is required in film because of the stopping and starting while stage performances are uninterrupted; and films are often shot out of order which demands a different focus.

Chapter V: Discussion and Future Directions

There were two major research objectives for this study of professional North American actors – first, to explore their mental strategies and, second, to understand the specific details of these strategies. Researchers (e.g. Gould, 2002) have emphasized the need for further research into the understanding of non-athletic performance domains. My research, although exploratory and preliminary, offers strong insights into specific mental strategies used by a small group of professional North American actors to perform. Through this research, seven major mental strategies and elements of career success were found to be of importance to the actors.

Overall, the findings from this research support prior sport psychology mental strategy research of professional athletes and Olympians (e.g., Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992; Orlick & Partington, 1988.) The actors used strong preparation, focusing strategies, routines prior to performing, imagery, confidence building activities, strategies to attain optimal energy level, and ongoing performance evaluation. This research uncovered how this unique group of performers used mental strategies to perform closer to their capacity.

The process each actor followed in applying mental strategies to their performance domain appears to be a personal one and strategies amongst the actors varied greatly. As one actor noted, there are several ways in approaching acting and each actor thinks their way is the best for them. In the end, what appears important is that each actor believes in their strategies/techniques and they feel they have done everything that they could to perform at their best.

Hannah et al. (1994) described character preparation as a “rigorous process of exploration that is akin to the self-examinatory journey taken by the psychotherapy

patient (...) it is the ability to take on another's view of reality that is central to effective acting" (pp.278-279), while Noice (1992) found that professional actors "(...) tried to discover the personality of the character they were portraying" (p.420). Similar to the findings above, all 12 actors discussed character preparation thoroughly and found it to be extremely important. The actors felt that thorough character preparation (which involved a deep understanding, exploration, and appreciation of the character) improved confidence, helped with distraction control, improved focus while performing, enhanced imagery, and helped them achieve an optimal energy level to perform. Each actor's preparation in this study was unique and personal. They found their own balance of researching the character, discovering it from within and finally making it their own. The actors also noted that preparation preceded the next area of discussion, focus while performing.

Each actor noted that optimal focus on set or stage existed only when they felt they had achieved sufficient character preparation. Once that was in place, the actor's optimal focus was one of connecting (focusing on the other actor) and making it feel real (focusing on the process of acting). When actors experienced their best performances, it was when they achieved this focus. Preparation and these two sub-strategies of focus helped the actors to refocus in the face of distractions. As was the case for preparation, the actor's focus while performing was a personal approach. Attentive listening to the other actor(s) and focusing on the message were the most used techniques for focusing on the other actors. Several techniques were used by the actors to focus on the process of acting, all of which they used to achieve an experience a performance that felt real.

Each actor also discussed their routines prior to performing. Essentially they served two purposes – to help them focus on becoming their character and to ready them to perform. Actors discussed running lines and self-talk, as part of their pre-performance routine, both of which were found as coping mechanisms for stage fright among university actors by Steptoe et al. (1995). Warming up, arriving early and generally focusing to perform were other strategies and focusing on becoming their character were other techniques used prior to performance.

Maintaining and/or strengthening confidence was another key mental strategy used by the actors. Some actors viewed confidence as being extremely important. Confidence was strongly inter-related with other mental strategies. For example, it was influenced by character preparation which supports the research of Vealey et al. (1998), who cited preparation as one of the nine sources of sport confidence. A lack of confidence and/or negative self-talk was viewed as major distractions and inhibitor for achieving optimal focus while performing.

Some actors spoke about how relaxation and finding isolation before a show was important to them. This further emphasized how personal the process of acting can be, from character preparation during rehearsal, to finding personal space in readying for performance, to ‘becoming’ the character. However, the discussion of group support shows that acting, although an individual and personal profession, is influenced by the people who the actor is performing and working with.

In comparison to sport psychology research with athletes, goal setting was not a major strategy discussed by the actors. This may be because they do not use it or because it was not directly addressed, as it has been in sport psychology research. Long-term goal

setting was only discussed by two participants in terms of their career. When compared to athletes their career goals were vague and were centred on 'growing' or 'expanding' as an actor. The most apparent form of goal setting for the actors was very short term process goals. For example, "I want to really listen to him tonight" or "I try to focus on the moment of the play" or "I try to convey my message". These process-type goals were centred on focusing while performing and making the performance more real. For this reason, these examples were discussed under 'focus while performing'. This 'growing' and 'expanding' orientation was further supported through their performance evaluation – a process which most described as continuously improving their performance to make it feel real through small changes. These findings are similar to the study of Talbot-Honeck (1994) who found musicians constantly seeking to do justice to their music.

Similarities and differences exist when comparing the results of this research with prior 'peak performance' and mental strategies research. On the whole, the seven major strategies used by the actors are major strategies found to be used by elite athletes. Differences and new areas of exploration also surfaced when discussing the actor's specific strategies and techniques.

Most of the components of Orlick's (2000) Wheel of Excellence were specifically discussed by the actors including: focused connection, distraction control, confidence, ongoing learning, and performance evaluation. The element of 'commitment' in Orlick's model was discussed briefly by the actors and outlined as an element career success. The actors discussed their commitment as 'approaching acting as a profession'. Orlick's model included the element of 'positive imagery'; while the actors discussed imagery and using their imagination, they did not describe it as imagining positive outcomes. Orlick's

element of 'mental readiness' was exemplified by the actors in terms of their pre-performance routines.

The results of this study regarding focus while performing, and best single show performances, relate strongly to the findings of Ravizza (1977) concerning peak performance. Ravizza discussed individuals having a narrow focus while performing. The actors in this study discussed focusing on the other actors with whom they were performing. Ravizza also outlined the individual's total immersion in the activity during peak performance. This was reiterated by several actors. Cathy noted that she experienced her best film projects as "I'm here".

Elements of Privette's (1981) peak performance research were also supported by these actors. A clear focus was the key factor of peak performance and was normally on the self or an object. When discussing a clear focus, Privette noted that "another person is involved only when that person is the primary object of clear focus", which clearly was the case for the actors interviewed. Privette also noted that a peak performance was "an expression of the self" (p.63), which was reiterated by actors who noted how important it was to identify with their character. The actors in this study noted that focus on stage or on set could not be obtained until they had explored and understood their character, in other words, until they felt prepared. Privette's research did not explore the relationship between clear focus and preparation for the individuals.

This research has shed light on possible contributions that the mental strategies of actors could have on performance and sport domains. These contributions come from some of the specific strategies and techniques used by the actors that current sport and performance psychology research has not addressed. These include: the importance of

their costume and make-up, becoming a character (or something) that one may not be, falling in love with your character, listening and focusing on teammates, and believing in the project and the work one is doing.

Several actors discussed how important their costume and make-up was in becoming ready to perform and becoming their character. Similarities exist with athletes and their equipment. One actor gave the example of how he always put his make-up on the same way and noted that several athletes follow the same routine in sport. It would be interesting to study why athletes feel a need to put their equipment on the same way and how they identify themselves differently when wearing their equipment. Do athletes 'become' ready to perform when they put on their equipment? Do they 'become' something else, perhaps a different character when they put on their uniform and equipment, as do actors? The importance of equipment and 'costume' could also be related to other performance professions such as policing, surgeons, and astronauts.

The issue of becoming a character is applicable to both the performing arts domain and to artistic sports. In the case of performing arts, several pop singers today do not write their own music; rather they sing songs written by other people. Similarly, figure skaters and synchronized swimmers perform to music that they did not write and often times may perform routines that they did not create. In either case, the singer or athlete may find it beneficial to become the character the song or music portrays. The actors interviewed in this study found that to 'become' a character they had to explore and understand the person they were portraying. Do singers explore the character their song is portraying? Is a figure skaters performance impacted by how much they identify with the character they are portraying on the ice? How important is an association with

the character they are portraying while skating? Are their ways to enhance how figure skaters and synchronized swimmers identify with the music and routine they are performing to?

The issue of 'falling in love' with a character may be applicable to the sporting domain in the case of national teams. It could be applied to professional sports or amateur and youth team sport such as ice hockey, soccer and basketball. In assembling national teams, very often team leaders from club teams must assume new roles on their national team. In the case of ice hockey, a team's leading scorer may have to assume the role of playing on a checking line, while in soccer a goal-scoring striker for his club team may have to play mid-field or may be relegated as a substitute. These elite players are being asked to take on roles or 'characters' for the betterment of the team, that they may not be accustomed to playing. Current research regarding role players is limited. A study by Newburg and Perrin (1996) concerned the mental strategies of two basketball players regarding reduced playing time. The athletes coped by accepting and understanding their role and seeking personal growth. Research on role players could be further extended to not only study players adjustments to reduction in playing time but also in assuming 'new' roles, as in the case of an elite club team player taking on a different role with a national team. How important is it for national team players to find validity in their new 'role' when compared to actors finding validity in their role? How is the athletes' play impacted when they can not accept their new role and demands? What if they never 'fall in love' with the role they have been assigned? How can national team players go about finding validity in their role? How have past players found ways of accepting their new roles? These are all questions that research with actors has shed light on. In terms of the

actors interviewed, they felt they could never fully perform until they embraced their character, identified with them and found validity in whom that character was. Perhaps these could be stepping stones for national team role players in accepting the roles they have been assigned.

The major focus of the actors while performing was not on themselves or their performance, but rather on the other actors they were performing with, mainly in terms of listening. Current sport psychology research regarding focus and attention has not addressed this issue in team sports. Focusing on team mates in sport, and in other performance domains, exists but it would be interesting to research which specific type of focus is most beneficial in different team sports and performance domains. For instance, in terms of policing, focus on other officers during raids is important, but what are they focusing on? What type of focus do athletes on team sports, such as basketball, hockey, and soccer use? Sport psychology research has been most concerned about the individual's attention on themselves and their performance, perhaps performance in team settings could be improved if the area of focus on teammates was explored further.

Some actors discussed believing in the project they were working on as an element for career success. They phrased it as wanting people to see the performance and believing in the message of the play or movie. The idea of 'believing' in the material one is presenting could be important to teachers and people who engage in public speaking. In either situation, a person is presenting a topic/idea to an audience. How important is it to present a topic that one believes in? How does this belief affect their performance in front of the audience and the audience's reception to the topic? The actors in this study have

demonstrated the importance of believing in what they are presenting to an audience. It would be interesting to see how this applies to other domains, such as teaching.

Believing in what one is doing or presenting could also be transferred to the coaching/athlete domain. Athletes place a lot of trust in their coaches for outlining a training program, a game plan and performance advice. In this relationship, situations may arise when a coach presents an athlete or a team with instructions (i.e. last-second play that is drawn up in overtime) that the athlete(s) may not believe in. How does the athlete's lack of belief in what the coach demands of them, affect their performance on the playing field? What happens if an athlete can not identify with the coach's choice? In the actors' case, their performance would suffer. They noted that they could not fully connect to the moment or to their performance because they did not believe in what they were presenting. This was also paralleled by actors who discussed director's imposing character's choices on them before they had a chance to explore the choice on their own. The actors felt it was best to make these explorations first without interference from outside sources (the directors, another actor, and other actors who had portrayed the same character). Similar situations arise in sport and coaching, where coaches make choices for athletes that they may not feel are the best for them, or that they were not ready to make. Black and Deci (2000), among others, have found that autonomous decision making in the teaching setting is beneficial to the student in terms of performance and enjoyment. The discussion of the actors is consistent with those of Black and Deci; the actors feel they perform better when a director allows them to make decisions for themselves. The research of Frederick and Morrison (1999) used the self-determination theory to determine the motivational and decision making styles of college coaches. They found

these coaches did engage in more autonomous decision making styles, which allowed their athletes to be involved. It would be interesting to explore the collegiate athletes' feelings and performance under an autonomous decision-making coaching style. This knowledge could be transferred to the military domain where soldiers often do what they are told, without questioning authority (Berton, 1986) and autonomous decision making is not as common. How important is it for soldiers to believe in the commands of authority? How beneficial is it for them to identify and find value in what they are being asked to do? How do they resolve issues where they can not find validity?

This study provided a preliminary look at how professional actors use mental strategies to enhance performance. It may be of value to other professional and amateur actors who are interested in reflecting on how they can further improve their performance and find further enjoyment in acting. The results and findings from the actors' interviews not only provide valuable information for actors but also shed light on the potential transfer of this knowledge to numerous other performance and sport domains. Clearly, much can be learned and gained from the mental strategies used in the professional acting domain.

Future Research Considerations

Apart from this preliminary research, studies exploring the mental strategies of professional actors are virtually non-existent. Consequently, there are numerous avenues for future research in this area. The area of auditioning was briefly mentioned in some interviews but was not the purpose of this research. Ben, described auditions as a job interview, stating, "Where most people have five or six in a lifetime, I may have that many a month". The nature of the business – very competitive, short contracts – implies

that auditions can be very stressful and important events. Further research and application of positive coping skills for professional actors at various stages of their career would no doubt prove to be of relevance and of value to actors and the performance enhancement field.

Due to time and money constraints of Masters level research, this study was not nearly as in-depth as it could be. A researcher could conduct multiple interviews and follow a few actors from the moment they receive the script, through preparation, and performances to the end of the production. This would include more in-depth interviews, observation and the gathering of data that may not necessarily be communicated through a single topical interview. This constructivist approach would also allow the individual actor's reality be represented to a truer extent and would allow for further discussion of the inter-relatedness of the various mental strategies.

A comparative study of film and stage actors or of professional and amateur actors would also allow for further understanding of different techniques used by different types of actors. Finally, the end result of most research is for everyday application, thus an intervention study among actors which involved implementing mental strategies to improve performance and enjoyment could prove beneficial to actors as well.

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Appendix A

Actor's Interview Guide

The following is a list of the main questions of the interview followed by possible probing questions

1. First, can you tell me a little bit about yourself... where you are from, how you got into acting, how long you have been acting professionally for?

Probe for: character preparation, rehearsals, focus while performing, pre-performance routine, performance evaluation, distractions, examples of imagery
3. Can you walk me through a typical day on set/stage?

Probe for: pre-performance routine, focus in dressing room/trailer, focus just before they perform, performance evaluation
4. Can you tell me what you experience and feel when you give a best performance on stage/set?

Probe for: focus while performing – as specific as possible, why it was a best performance, any other explanations
5. What do you think, either mentally or otherwise, enabled you to become and remain a successful professional actor for X number of years?

Probe for: mental strategies, perspectives, beliefs, outside factors
6. What advice would you give to a young actor who was not feeling confident/could not focus/was distracted? Do you follow your advice?