

# **The Artists Training and Career Project: Actors**

Report Prepared for  
The Research Center for Arts and Culture  
Columbia University

Editors:

Joan Jeffri  
Robert Greenblatt  
Catherine Sessions

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# Acknowledgment

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Joan Jeffri, Director  
Catherine Sessions, Project Coordinator  
Dr. Robert Greenblatt, Computer Consultant  
Toby Boshak, Project Assistant



## INTRODUCTION

"In theatre's mirror, civilization comes to know itself... The marketplace needs to expand so we can know ourselves better, the problems in society will be addressed more thoroughly."

"Acting is not a 'career' or 'work'; it's a permanent joy."

"What do you do?"

"I'm an actor."

"Oh, what restaurant do you work in?"

"You're torn. You yearn for the work -- we all were in this to do the work -- but we have to eat. You just can't afford to do theatre sometimes."

"I think it's very important for actors not to give up the dream, even though I don't think it's important to attain it."

. . . observations during the study, 1992

THE ARTISTS TRAINING AND CAREER PROJECT (ATC) is a study of the training, career choices and patterns of actors, craftspeople and painters; the final phase of the project focuses on actors. Artists themselves are at the heart of this study, for they have been asked to describe, in systematic ways, the impact of these choices on their work, their requirements for doing their work over time, and their career development and satisfaction. This study examines actors' responses to institutions, society and culture by using two distinct and complementary methodologies---first, a series of personal narrative interviews with thirty-five actors and fifteen "related experts" in each field, followed by a national survey of a sampling of artists in each discipline. The areas of investigation have been developed through the creation of a seven-stage "validation sequence" from early childhood through mature careers.

By eliciting information about the kinds of validations as well as the kinds of resistances the artist meets, the Research Center for Arts and Culture (RCAC) will be able to begin to describe the training and career development of actors, craftspeople and painters; it will also contribute to a growing literature on careers that includes research in the scientific, legal, medical, and police professions, and is sadly lacking in the arts. It will provide important information for advocates and funders, and will give training institutions a better idea of the points of greatest need for training, and arts service organizations information about appropriate assistance for artists and when such assistance is most helpful. Finally, it will document the position of the artist as an integral member of society.

## BACKGROUND

In order to develop an analytic model of the training and career development of artists that was comparable to that of other professions and which simultaneously would have relevance for those involved in the artist's world, the Research Center conducted a literature review, developed a working bibliography of sources, studied interview literature and technique, and did substantial research on the sociology of work.

The Center also broke out relevant data concerning artists from its previous study, INFORMATION ON ARTISTS (IOA), which explored the work-related human and social service needs of artists in ten United States locations: Boston, Cape Cod, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and western Massachusetts. Information on training and career development, income, and art-related expenditures of craftspeople and painters was broken out for further comparison with the current study. The information on actors was analyzed as a separate study, thanks to the cooperation of Actors' Equity Association.<sup>1</sup>

During this time, the Research Center also commissioned three separate essays on the history and development of the actor, craftsperson and the painter in the United States, from colonial times to the present day. These essays provided an important context for our work, and a common reference point for the artists and related experts who offered advice and help through various forums sponsored by the Research Center during the formative stages of this study. Finally, these essays will serve as the introduction to a volume of artist interviews in each of the fields.

### PERSONAL NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

A list of approximately 300 actors and 100 related experts (people whose work deals closely with the work of actors, but who are not necessarily actors themselves) was created through personal knowledge of the Research Center staff, discussions and "think tanks" with actors and related experts, including theatre directors, producers, managers, teachers, writers, and others.

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<sup>1</sup> The INFORMATION ON ARTISTS PROJECT was a 1989 Research Center survey that was sent to 10,000 artists (visual, performing, and literary), covering work-related, human, and social service needs in areas of health, pensions, legal, financial, and space requirements. Important demographic information was included as well as the beginning of our exploration into issues of professionalism. Further information is available from the Research Center.

Additional research was carried out by reviewing theatre publications, magazines and journals, the oral history interviews of the Oral History Collection at Columbia University, and Actors' Equity Association - a national actors' union. We chose 35 actors and 15 "related experts" to interview. (See Appendix 1 for list of people interviewed.)

Medium: Throughout the study, both for the personal narrative interviews and the survey, actors who were trained and work primarily in the theatre were targeted.

Demographic balance: For the all personal narratives, attempts were made to insure geographic representation from around the country, ethnic diversity, different ages, males and females, and people who were trained in a variety of ways.

Career stages: Three broad career stages were chosen to categorize artists--emerging, established, and mature. This was not a distinction defined by age, but by recognition, years of serious work in the field, and the body of work accomplished. Related experts were chosen to deepen the profile of artists; while we were interested in their career stages, we were also very interested in their intersection with actors' lives both at the time of the interview and throughout their careers.

## THINK TANKS

As we developed lines of inquiry according to the seven-stage career model we had created, we asked the field to assist us in making certain the investigation was relevant to the real, working lives of actors, and that they would help us communicate the importance of our work and disseminate the results of our findings to the acting community. To these ends, we invited a group of three related expert advisers to meet with us after they had read the proposed work plan and the essay on the history of the actor in the United States. In October 1991, Research Center staff met with the founder/director of a New York theatre, executive director of a regional theatre, and an actor/playwright.

We discussed the project and its components and also raised questions about finding actors outside the mainstream, non-union and emerging, as well as criteria for choosing actors and related experts for the personal narratives, how to target lists of actors for the 6,000-person survey, and ideas for dissemination of the personal narratives (in book form) and the survey results.

Throughout the life of the project we kept these advisers involved, including asking their help in market-testing the questionnaire during the survey phase, and sending them updates on our progress.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A complete set of interview questions was compiled, one for actors and one for related experts; interview procedures were shaped with the help of staff of the Oral History Collection. The seven-stage career model was the basis; the Oral History staff helped us to learn how to ask questions and to get the most out of the subject of the interview.

## SELECTION OF INTERVIEWS FOR PUBLICATION

All fifty interviews were taped; the budget allowed for twenty-five of them to be transcribed. Interviewees were sent release forms for the tapes and transcripts to be housed at the Oral History Collection, and for possible publication. In 1994, The Actor Speaks, a volume of ten-to-twelve of our actor interviews will be published to accompany The Craftsperson Speaks (Greenwood Press, 1992) and The Painter Speaks (forthcoming 1993). Each interview will be accompanied by brief biographical information and acting experience, our history of the actor in the United States, and a brief bibliography.

## IDENTIFYING ACTORS FOR THE SURVEY

Two-thirds of our sample of actors was provided through Actors' Equity Association, which selected a random sample from its national membership list. For the other third, however, the Research Center sought non-union, non-Equity actors. To obtain these names and addresses, Research Center staff compiled a list inventory of non-union organizations around the country with actor-members. These ranged from highly visible community theatres, to local arts organizations, to ethnically focused theatres. Again, the RCAC sought to identify lists that would cover a wide geographic dispersion, profit as well as non-profit organizations, and ethnic variety, until an appropriate "list inventory" was developed.

The RCAC contacted each organization on the list to determine:

- \* name of organization, address, phone number
- \* person to contact
- \* kind of organization: service, membership, theatre, school, arts council, publication, etc.
- \* theatre discipline represented
- \* national, regional, state, local members
- \* number of people on list, number of union and non-union actors on list, and whether they could be separated
- \* list currency, date last cleaned
- \* requirements for getting included on list
- \* form of list: computer disc, labels, etc.

- \* permission to use list
- \* cost of list

### PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN COLLECTING LISTS OF ACTORS

While the random sample picked by Actors' Equity Association was a fairly clean, up-to-date list, one minor problem was the inclusion of stage managers as well as actors, as well as the odd dancer and opera singer. Many of the stage managers sent their questionnaires back blank, thanking us, but saying the survey didn't apply to them.

Aside from the normal and always frustrating problems of initial and follow-up phone calls, different time zones and telephone tag, as well as the need on the part of the responding organization to trust the Research Center's assurance of anonymity for all survey respondents, and our commitment to use the list only to send the original questionnaire and a reminder post-card, there were other difficulties in getting some organizations to participate. Reasons included:

- \* Some organizations never sell or give their lists out, no matter what the reason or how worthy the cause.

- \* Some organizations have not cleaned their lists in such a long a period of time, or have organized or recorded their lists in such a way that they were not usable by the Research Center. In many instances, we paid to have the names and addresses entered on a format compatible with our computer system.

- \* Some organizations had no listed phone number.

- \* Some organizations had disbanded.

- \* Some were in the process of putting their lists on computer, and no total usable list was ready in time for our own deadlines.

- \* Stipulations that the questionnaire be mailed through an organizations's own mailing house could not be accommodated, as duplications might occur, thereby compromising the total sample picked.

A problem which we were able to turn to our advantage was the need by many organizations for information about the project in writing before they would agree to even discuss their lists. This need for more information was less a result of suspicion and more a desire on the part of the

organizations a) to understand the project, and b) to have some appropriate information for their boards of directors, since many needed board approval. There were consistently interested responses to the project, pleasure that we were doing this much needed research, and inquiries as to how to find out about the results.

## QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

During the entire first part of the project, the questionnaire that would go to approximately 6,000 actors was being developed. Advice that emerged from think tanks, from informal discussions with members of the field, and from our research, allowed us to continue to refine the survey instrument over a period of six months. Our basic schema for investigation was a seven-stage career model which had been created after in-depth research into sociological career models and, in the arts, an investigation of the few models that existed in other arts careers, such as orchestra musicians. A pilot study had also been conducted for the Music Assistance Fund, which entailed doing personal narratives of black symphony orchestra musicians across the United States, focusing on training and career development.

The seven stages are: Initial Influences; Training and Preparation; Professional Institutions; Peer Influences; Marketplace Judgments; Critical Evaluation, and Late Careers.

The questionnaire went through several modifications and was then market-tested. After this test, the questionnaire was finalized and included the following sections:

- \* Important Background Information
- \* Initial Influences
- \* Education, Training and Preparation
- \* Career Entry
- \* Peers and Colleagues
- \* Marketplace Judgments
- \* Critical Evaluation and Public Response
- \* Career Satisfaction and Maturity
- \* Current Activity
- \* Comments

A cover letter was written to accompany this 151-question questionnaire which assured the respondent anonymity, and gave a list of theatres and organizations that had helped us in the study. A postage-paid return envelope was also included. A reminder postcard was sent ten days after the

questionnaire, to increase the rate of response. All name and address lists held by the Research Center were then destroyed.

### SAMPLE SELECTION

Our intention was to have a very broad spectrum from which to choose a sample, using lists that a) were geographically different, covering all parts of the country; b) had different constituencies: national, regional, state, and local; c) covered union and non-union actors; d) were from different types of organizations: performing arts centers, membership organizations, community theatres, arts councils, schools, and e) covered different ages, gender, and ethnic background.

There were 7,333 names submitted to us; they broke down the following way:

<b>Equity:</b>	4,133
<b>Non-Equity:</b>	3,200
<b>TOTAL:</b>	7,333

It should be noted, however, that no formal membership organizations at the national, regional, or local level could be found for non-Equity Members.

Equity's 4,133 names were chosen by them as a random sample, following our instructions, from their total membership of approximately 40,000. Of the 3,200 non-Equity names, we reduced the sample to 2,000, establishing the size of the sample in relation to those cities where we could obtain names. After these names were merged and purged to avoid duplicates, Equity's random sample of 4,133 was added to the 2,000 non-Equity names. After labels were printed, a second check was done by hand to remove duplicates, business or organizational listings, and incomplete addresses. Adjustments were made, and in October 1991, 6,133 questionnaires were mailed; postcards reminding actors to fill out the survey were sent approximately ten days later.

### RESPONSE

There was a total average return rate of 30%, (31% from the Equity sample; 26% from the non-Equity); an additional 5% of the Equity returns were bad addresses, the same rate found on the INFORMATION

ON ARTISTS PROJECT, our last national survey. (For the non-Equity sample, however, the rate of bad addresses escalated to 15%.)

30% is a very high rate of return, especially for a questionnaire as long and detailed as this one, requiring well over 30 minutes of time and a high degree of reflective thought and response. In

addition, over half (54% Equity and 57% non-Equity) of the respondents provided additional commentary concerning issues of particular concern to them, issues they felt to be insufficiently dealt with in the questionnaire, and other matters under the final "Comments" section.<sup>2</sup>

## **GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS**

The median age of respondents was 35, and the mean age was 38, with the oldest respondent age 87. Of the Equity Members, 47% are female, and 53% are male.<sup>3</sup> Non-Equity Members are 55% female and 45% male. 41% Equity and 18% non-Equity respondents are married, 40% Equity and 69% non-Equity are single; with the remaining 79% Equity and 13% non-Equity divorced, widowed, or other. This compares with the 1988 general population figures of 68% married, 22% single, and 15% other. The median number of dependents for respondents is 1.

This population is slightly younger than the respondents for our previous study, INFORMATION ON ARTISTS: ACTORS EQUITY. There, the median age was 37, and the mean age 40; 50% of the respondents were female, 50% male. 37% were married, 47% were single, and 16% "other." The largest percentage (61%) had only a single dependent, counting themselves, 26% had 2 dependents, and 12% 3-4 dependents.

Geographic distribution: All but three states (North and South Dakota, and Wyoming) were represented. (See Appendix 2)

The respondents are predominantly of white, non-Hispanic background, (87% Equity and 85% non-Equity). 2% Equity and 6% non-Equity indicated "Hispanic" 2% Equity and less than 1% non-Equity selected "Asian," under 1% of each group indicated "American Indian/Alaskan Native," 5%

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<sup>2</sup> Of the 1915 questionnaires that were entered, 16 indicated that the actor got duplicate questionnaires, representing seven people; five of these were returned blank, reducing the number to 1910. (Based on the questionnaire's length and intricacy, we are assuming that no one would want to fill it in twice.) Of this new total number, 84 people gave no answer to the first question which asked if they received a duplicate of the questionnaire. We counted these as legitimate responses, again based on the above assumption.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are generally rounded to the nearest number, which may result in totals exceeding 100%. Percentages may also add up to more than 100%, since some questions asked for an answer that included as many choices as applied; occasionally people answered with several choices per question, even when instructed otherwise. The margin for error is plus or minus 3%, and in certain selected questions, plus or minus .5%.

Equity and 3% non-Equity indicated "Black," 2% Equity and 1% non-Equity selected "other," and 3% Equity and 4% non-Equity selected "specify further" as their response.

This compares to the ethnic breakdown found in the INFORMATION ON ARTISTS PROJECT, done 3 years before this one, which included visual, literary, and performing artists, which was: 89% white non-Hispanic, 4% black or African-American, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian or Pacific Islanders, 1% other, and less than 1% American Indian or Alaskan native. Also compared is the Equity data from the IOA project.

	White	Amer Ind	Asian	Black	Hispanic	other/ specify
ATC-Equity	87%	<1%	1%	5%	2%	2%/3%
Non-Equity	85%	<1%	<1%	3%	6%	1%/4%
IOA	89%	<1%	2%	4%	2%	1%
IOA:Equity	91%	<1%	<1%	4%	2%	<1%

ATC: ARTIST TRAINING AND CAREER PROJECT  
 IOA: INFORMATION ON ARTISTS PROJECT, general  
 IOA: INFORMATION ON ARTIST PROJECT: ACTORS' EQUITY  
 Actor data only <sup>4</sup>

The extremely low percentages of actors of color is a matter of some concern which Actors' Equity, through its efforts towards non-traditional casting, is trying to address.

It is also possible that the current acting organizations that are serving the needs of people of color are not easily identified by these kinds of research methods. Too, people of color may have been unaware of the existence of such organizations or felt that organizations' concerns have not responded to the needs of artists of color; they also may not have chosen to remain members once they joined. In our accompanying narrative interview project several actors expressed substantial discomfort with organizations in the field, including the actors' unions.

While Equity can give us the universe of unionized stage actors, there is no source that can give us the universe of actors or the percentages of actors represented in each medium. Nevertheless, the breakdowns of our respondents are very telling:

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<sup>4</sup> For comparative purposes, throughout this report we make reference to the results of our previous study, INFORMATION ON ARTISTS with its separate sample in ten U.S. locations of Actors' Equity actors.

Area of major acting work	thtr	film	TV	radio	other	
ATC-Equity	71%	7%	17%	1%	4%	
Non-Equity	91%	3%	5%	<1%	1%	

## **PROFESSIONALISM**

The issue of professionalism has provided an ongoing area of inquiry for the Research Center throughout its studies of artists, and is especially relevant for actors, as 95% of the Equity and 77% of the non-Equity respondents consider themselves to be professionals. Although the word professionalism has various meanings, it seems that several separate and distinct definitions are constantly being meshed, confused, or used interchangeably.

First, a common definition of professionalism relies on standard occupational measures such as hours per week worked and major income derived; it is quite common in the arts that artists' major work, their art, is not their major source of income, nor necessarily what they spend the largest percentage of their time doing for payment. Second, there is a definition of professionalism that relies on official credentialing as a result of examination--attorneys take the state bar exam, for example. Finally, when people use the word "professional" as a descriptor they often refer to the quality of the work and of production, rather than the credentials of the producer. Rather than create yet another definition which we feel would be neither better nor worse than existing ones, the Research Center is constantly asking artists themselves to define professionalism.

These overlapping and confusing concepts of professionalism affect the actor in several ways. First, one of the issues mentioned frequently by actors is that they, and their work, like the work of many other visual and performing artists, are insufficiently appreciated by society. This may be due in part to the fact that actors often consider themselves artists because they define themselves as such, not because they fulfill the measurable characteristics found in other fields. Second, acting is the major source of income for 47% for Equity actors and 26% for non-Equity, but less than 35% Equity and 13% of non-Equity support themselves entirely from their acting work, so they fail one of the standard marketplace criteria.

Third, their work is often identified with that of the avocational learner or hobbyist, which may contribute an aura of recreational intent or lack of seriousness to those who do it professionally.

### Definitions: self

If we look at the respondents' own views as to how they define "professional actor," we gain some clues as to how these respondents defined "professional" both for themselves and for others.

The respondents were asked to indicate their first three choices of definition, out of 13 possible choices, which included marketplace definitions (earning or intending to earn money as an actor), definition by education or association, and self definition.

Highest ranking for the first choices were "making a living as an actor" (32% Equity and 15% non-Equity), "receives some income as an actor" (13% Equity and 20% non-Equity), "I consider myself to be an actor" (13% Equity and non-Equity), and "an inner drive to act" (11% Equity and 17% non-Equity).

"Union Membership" ranked highest for Equity respondents' second choices (18%), with "peer recognition" (13%) and having been "formally educated in acting" (12%). Non-Equity respondents chose "formally educated in acting" (15%), "receives some income from acting" (13%) and "I consider myself to be an actor" (11%).

The third choices for Equity respondents were "union membership" (16%), "peer recognition" (15%) and "formally educated in acting" (11%). Non-Equity third choices were "peer recognition" (13%), "intends to make living as an actor" (12%) and "formally educated in acting" (12%).

#### Definitions: someone else

The respondents were also asked what three factors they considered most important in defining someone else as a professional.

Again, the highest ranking for the first choice was "making a living as an actor" (38% Equity and 28% non-Equity), a marketplace definition. Among the first choices were also "receives some income from acting" (10% Equity and 14% non-Equity), and "an inner drive to act" (11% Equity and 16% non-Equity).

"Union membership" ranked highest for Equity respondents' second choices (15%), with "peer recognition" (14%) and "receives some income from acting" (14%). Non-Equity respondents chose "receives some income from acting" (15%), "peer recognition" (12%) and "substantial amount of time spent on acting" (11%).

The third choices for Equity respondents were "peer recognition" (14%), "union membership" (13%), and "substantial amount of time spent on acting" (12%). Non-Equity third choices were "formal education in acting" (12%), "peer recognition" (12%) and again, "substantial amount of time spent on acting" (11%).

Similarly, highest ranking first choice for actors in the IOA PROJECT: ACTORS' EQUITY indicated making a living as an actor to be most important both for themselves and others.

## Occupation

It should be noted here that respondents seem to have differing perceptions of their "occupations" versus their "careers." This was first brought to our attention in the advisory meetings with both actors and related experts. While this survey cannot detail the nature of these perceptions, it was noted that, in the world of the arts at least, the concept of a "career," along with the concept of professionalism as applied to artists, may be a relatively recent phenomenon, occurring within the last few decades.

95% of the respondents felt that their acting or acting-related occupation was the most important occupation to them, whether or not it was their primary source of income. While we have not investigated whether these respondents are the same as the 90% who responded that they considered themselves to be professional actors (95% Equity and 77% non-Equity), the two figures are close enough, and each include such a large number of the respondents, it is likely that there is substantial crossover. Only 75%, however, chose the word "actor" to describe their career.

It is also interesting to compare these figures with those of the IOA study, in which 83% of all respondents, and 81% of the actor respondents, considered their career as an artist to be most important to them, and 92% of all respondents, and 96% of actor respondents considered themselves "professional artists."

## Acting Earnings

Earning major income from one's work is one of several indications of professionalism. 93% of the Equity Members and 81% of the non-Equity Members indicated that they did earn money from their acting; and for 69% Equity and 45% non-Equity respondents, this money covered their acting-related costs. However, in answering whether the respondent was supported entirely from his acting, only 35% Equity and 13% non-Equity indicated that they supported themselves entirely from their acting.

47% of the Equity (26% non-Equity) respondents earned their major income from their work as an actor, and 21% Equity (14% non-Equity) earned theirs from various acting related occupations (from teaching acting, and from an assortment of other occupations such as directing or arts administration or management.)

In the IOA study, 94% of the Equity actor respondents earned money from their art, and in comparison, only 50% earned their major income from their work as actors.

## Time spent on acting

25% of the Equity Members and 22% of the non-Equity spent 31 or more hours on their acting or acting-related activities; and for 13% of each group, over 40 hours were spent.

### Relationship to Other Employment

18% of the Equity Members and 12% non-Equity spent no time on other employment; while 60% Equity and 75% non-Equity spend more than 21 hours per week at other employment. When asked to define the relationship between their acting work and their other employment, 25% Equity and 14% non-Equity felt that their other employment reinforces their acting work; and 32% Equity and 51% non-Equity felt that their other employment pays to support their acting. 18% Equity and 10% non-Equity felt the two kinds of work were intertwined; and 25% Equity and 26% non-Equity felt that their other employment bore no relation to their acting work.

### Life and Art

In response to a question concerning the relationship between their art work and their lives, rather than their acting and non-related acting employment, 73% of the respondents indicated that their acting work and life are intertwined, while only 23% indicated that they clearly separate the two.

### Years spent as an actor

When asked "How long have you been an actor?" 28% answered "more than 20 years," and 35% answered for 11-20 years. 24% had been at it between 5-10 years, leaving only a small per cent (12%) who had been involved less than 5 years.

While the respondents have been serious about their work, in seeing acting as their primary career, the differences between Equity and non-Equity responses here are very interesting.

For 15% Equity and 52% non-Equity, acting had been their primary career all their lives, and an additional 38% Equity and 20% non-Equity have considered it their primary career for over 11 years. For 27% Equity and 9% non-Equity, acting has been a primary career for 6-10 years.

### Five Year Goals

Another way of looking at the actor's idea of professionalism is to look at his or her goals for the next five years, as goal setting indicates a certain dedication and sense of purpose. Despite the fact that 57% Equity and 59% non-Equity respondents said they had not previously set professional benchmarks during their careers, most respondents indicated that they did in fact have goals.

The first choice for 36% Equity and 32% non-Equity was to "increase the number of performing jobs", followed by the desire to "reach higher level of artistic expression/achievement" (31% Equity and 23% non-Equity). The second choice for 24% Equity and 25% non-Equity was the exact same number of jobs goal. The third choice for 19% Equity was to "participate in a major production" and for 19% non-Equity to "reach higher level of artistic expression/achievement".

## MARKETPLACE

We must recognize that the nonprofit world is as much of marketplace as the profit sector. Thus, in discussing marketplace issues, we need to look at the kind of work produced, the income and costs related to the production of the work, the venues for its distribution, the business activities and practices that provide a context for its production, and the grants and awards systems as they are available to and used by actors.

In dealing with the issues of how the actor relates to the marketplace, it should be mentioned that that marketplace has greatly expanded in terms of opportunity in the last half-century with the growth of movies, television, and the new technologies. The marketplace has also continued opportunities in educational theatre and the areas of social services---through hospitals, community centers, rehabilitation institutes. Theatre on a community level continues across the country, with a whole network of regional theatres now in place. At the same time, even with the advent of off-off-Broadway and its clones (off-Loop in Chicago, waiver theatres on the West Coast), along with off-Broadway and Broadway, and a quasi-revival of "the road" with some of the major productions, the "legitimate stage" seems in greater and greater peril. Since we kept the focus of our study on those actors whose primary commitment is to the stage, we kept getting information to support this. Actors' relationships to the marketplace also depend on their career stage although, possibly because their ability to work is often based on other people's decisions ("getting cast"), there seems to some ambivalence between controlling one's destiny by making decisions about the choices/roles one is offered, and steering the progression of one's career.

### The Work

37% Equity and 29% non-Equity respondents indicated that they often adapt their acting to meet the demands of the market; 50% Equity and 54% non-Equity sometimes adapt their acting to the market; and 13% Equity and 16% non-Equity never adapt their acting.

78% Equity and 54% non-Equity respondents indicated that they had received money for their acting work from both the profit and nonprofit worlds; 13% Equity and 29% non-Equity indicated that they had not; 10% Equity and 17% non-Equity did not know.

### Income

While 90% of the respondents indicated that they earned money from their acting, and 63% of those indicated that their earnings covered their acting-related costs, there was a big split on the gross individual income levels produced by acting work:

<u>EQUITY</u>	<u>NON-EQTY</u>	
48	83	% earned \$7,000 or less,
10	8	% earned between \$7,001-12,000,
<u>13</u>	<u>6</u>	% earned between \$12,001-20,000,
<u>71</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>total % earning less than \$20,000.</u>
16	2	% earned between \$20,001-\$40,000, and
12	<1	% earned over \$40,000.

**GROSS INDIVIDUAL INCOME FROM ACTING:**

Gross Indiv Income	\$1-500	\$501-3000	\$3001-7000	\$7001-12000	\$12001-20000	\$20001-40000	40000+
ATC EQUITY	14%	18%	16%	10%	13%	16%	12%
NON-EQ	35%	33%	15%	8%	6%	2%	<1%
IOA EQUITY	13%	20%	19%	15%	18%	17%	9%

Gross income for individual actors, including all sources:

<u>EQUITY</u>	<u>NON-EQTY</u>	
13	38	% had incomes of less than \$10,000,
28	33	% had incomes between \$10,001-\$20,000,
23	18	% had incomes between \$20,001-\$30,000,
16	5	% had incomes between \$30,001-\$40,000, and
21	6	% had incomes of over \$40,000.

As the national average for disposable personal income per capita in 1987 was \$14,107,<sup>5</sup> it sounds favorable at first glance that 60% Equity and 29% Non-Equity respondents made \$20,000 or above.

It must be noted, however, that a large part of the working population receives income as salary, and does not take the expense of running a business out of that salary. These figures would look quite different if cross-tabulated with expenses, resulting in a net amount for living expenses similar to those covered by a regular salary; we suspect that for many individual actors "disposable" income is less than for other segments of the population.

While we chose different income categories than those used by the Bureau of Labor, we can make a few comparisons of a general nature. 12% of the respondents had income from their acting over \$40,000, and 17% had individual gross income over \$40,000, while only 20% of the general working population had individual income over \$35,000.

In looking at total gross household income:

<u>EQUITY</u>	<u>NON-EQTY</u>	
6	25	% had incomes of less than \$10,000,
18	27	% had incomes between \$10,001-\$20,000,
19	19	% had incomes between \$20,001-\$30,000,
16	10	% had incomes between \$30,001-\$40,000, and
40	20	% had incomes over \$40,000.

Total - ATC Gross Income	\$0- 5000	5001- 10000	10001- 20000	20001- 30000	30001- 40000	40001- 60000	60000+
ACTORS' total <u>indiv</u> income 1991	8%	11%	29%	21%	13%	10%	7%

<sup>5</sup> The figures for the population at large are from the National Data Book: Statistical Abstract of the United States, US Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census, 1990, Charts 716, 726, and 734.

ACTORS' total household 1991	4%	7%	20%	19%	14%	17%	17%
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34% of the respondents had gross household income over \$40,000, while only 36% of the general population had gross household income over \$35,000.

Costs: The largest percentage (30% Equity and 35% non-Equity) had acting-related costs between \$500-\$2500, 65% Equity and 76% non-Equity had costs of under \$5000. Only 4% Equity and 3% non-Equity had costs over \$20,000. In all categories: publicity, performance materials, marketing and audition costs, travel and other, the majority of respondents said costs had increased since their early careers. The cost of travel has taken the biggest jump, seconded by the increased cost of marketing and auditions, which may be attributable to the increased marketing practices which have developed in the last twenty years, as much as the increased cost of the marketing itself.

#### Venues of representation

One of the major issues for many actors is that of representation. Working alone in a studio, or in a class, is consonant with the inner drive to make art, and implies devotion to the process of creating, but answers neither the need for income nor the need for recognition from the outside world. The issues of employment and performance opportunities present different challenges, complicated by the fact that an actor, by his very nature is always in the process of creating and finding his own work: there is rarely a regular call for a specific actor until that actor has been made public enough for demand to develop.

In response to "Who represents you?" 44% of the respondents represented themselves, and 64% were represented by an agent.

(It would appear that in some cases, respondents chose both of these answers.)

#### Age first represented

The respondents got started in the marketplace relatively early: the largest percentage (59% Equity and 51% non-Equity) indicated that they were first represented in the market between the ages of 18-25, and 19% Equity and 20% non-Equity indicated they were younger than 18. The third largest group (18% Equity and 14% non-Equity) entered the marketplace between the ages of 26-35.

#### Business practices

Looking at the business practices in which they engage also helps us get a picture of their relation to the marketplace. 51% Equity and 59% non-Equity respondents got involved in the business side of

acting between the ages of 18-25. 30% Equity and 21% non-Equity got involved between the ages of 26-35; and 4% Equity and 11% non-Equity have never been involved in the business side of acting.

19% Equity and 34% non-Equity respondents indicated that they have been involved in negotiating contracts their entire career in acting; and 18% Equity and 11% non-Equity indicated that it had been for almost their entire career. 23% Equity and 38% non-Equity have never negotiated their own contracts.

### Grants and Awards

One of the major marketplace issues for actors is that of grants, as an additional source of income to support their acting, or to enable them to spend time doing exploration and research.

32% Equity and 21% non-Equity respondents indicated they had received art-related grants. 46% Equity and 40% non-Equity receiving grants had only received one, 45% Equity and 56% non-Equity had received grants from 2 to 4 times, and 10% Equity and 5% non-Equity had received 5 or more such grants.

Although in the above question, only 550 respondents said they had received art-related grants, when asked if the number of grants received had increased or decreased with the progression of their career, only 271 responded. 31% Equity and 36% non-Equity received an increased number of grants, 28% Equity and 36% non-Equity received the same number, and 41% Equity and 28% non-Equity have received fewer grants.

When asked if the financial amount of individual grants or fellowship awards changed with the progression of their career, 35% of 178 Equity respondents and 45% of 51 non-Equity respondents said that the amount of grants had increased, 31% Equity and 33% non-Equity said they had stayed the same, and 34% Equity and 22% non-Equity said the amounts had decreased.

When asked for the sources of the grants, of the Equity respondents, 62% had received grants from educational institutions, 20% from state agencies, 18% from theatre companies and 17% from foundations. For the non-Equity respondents 59% had received grants from educational institutions 16% from state agencies, and 15% each from foundations and local agencies.

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

In looking at the educational training that actors have received we began with an examination of the initial influences of childhood, continued with elementary and high school preparation, college, graduate work and other continuing education programs.

## INITIAL INFLUENCES

### Home, Parents, Acting

It is interesting that, unlike visual artists we have studied, 78% of these respondents participated in their first art experiences at school, followed by 40% at community theatre, and 26% at home. (Respondents were asked to circle as many answers as applied for this question, so percentages add up to more than 100%.)

Half of both the Equity and non-Equity respondents indicated that the members of the household in which they grew up were supportive of their explorations in acting, one third indicated "yes and no," and 16% Equity and 13% non-Equity indicated that there was no support.

This seems to be in line with the finding that mothers were selected as the most supportive (over half the respondents chose mother, mother and father or parents), although we have no information on a particular period of time during which mothers were most supportive. This is consonant with research done in other art forms, most notably the work of Donald Shetler of the Eastman School of Music, who carried out a study of symphony orchestra musicians in the late 1970s, and found a high incidence of support from the mother (63%).

One half of both Equity and non-Equity respondents grew up in households where some form of art was important or very important.

A surprising 65% of the respondents indicated that no one worked in theatre or other arts at home, 14% indicated that the mother had done such work, 11% that the father had done so, and the final 10% indicated that other friends or relatives within the household had done so.

### Family

#### Father's primary occupation:

Of the occupations written in by the respondents, half fell into the first category of the Standard Occupational Codes listed by the Bureau of Labor, that of Executive, Administrative, and Managerial occupations. The two most surprising occupations listed were Bank Robber and Con Artist-No Joke. It should be noted that some of the listings were difficult or impossible to categorize from the one or two word description, so the figures should be viewed with caution.

#### Mother's primary occupation:

Half listed their mother's primary occupation as centered in the home (Mother, Housewife, Homemaker, Parent, Mom, Domestic Engineer, Wife, Raising Children). 6% of the mothers were teachers, followed by secretaries (5%).

## EARLY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### Elementary school

For the Equity respondents:

76% said that they had exposure to theatre up to high school age through seeing movies; 61% through watching television; 68% through being involved with school plays and 56% through reading stories and plays. Only 5% said they had no exposure to theatre at all.

For non-Equity respondents:

78% had exposure up to high school through seeing movies; 72% through watching television; 72% through being involved in school plays and 61% through reading stories and plays. Again, 5% said they had no exposure to theatre at all up to high school.

### High School

By high school the percentages rose for Equity respondents: 81% were involved in school plays; 77% were exposed to theatre through seeing movies. Percentages stayed about the same for seeing movies (77%) and TV watching (61%).

By high school, for non-Equity respondents, 81% were involved in school plays; 75% gained exposure to theatre through seeing movies; 71% through reading stories or plays; and 69% through watching television.

### Early Validation

Respondents answered a question asking what educational experiences had provided "early validation." There was no further clarification of "early," which could be interpreted as either youth or early career.

The choices of validation offered fell into two groups: validation from a specific person or persons, and validation by some form of public acclaim, either performance opportunities or awards. While it could be argued that performance opportunities are not "educational experiences," they are clear indications of approbation, and they do provide knowledge not available in other ways. It is possible that the validation from people rather than public acclaim could be interpreted to be more relevant to accomplishments during youth, while the latter might be perceived as being more relevant at beginning career stages.

Equity and non-Equity responses were very similar here, but with interesting slight distinctions. Although both groups ranked validation from teachers and audience approval as their most important early validators, the percentages were reversed: for teachers, 69% Equity and 66% non-Equity; for audience approval, 69% non-Equity and 67% Equity.

### Early Resistances

Respondents also addressed early educational experiences that had provided resistance. Again, it could be argued that the following choices are not all specific educational experiences, but they are included here in order to group and compare early negative experiences. Generally the lower response indicates a positive rather than negative attitude, which was supported by remarks added in the "Comments" section, in which the positive far outweighed the negative. Both Equity and non-Equity respondents (28% and 26%) cited lack of or negative family attention followed by no acting work (21% Equity; 24% non-Equity).

### Peers

Given the importance of peers in providing validation, we should note who they were. 75% indicated that their peers in high school were friends, 17% indicated "others outside school," and 20% indicated actors.

### LATER TRAINING

Actors in our survey began acting training in their early teens, the median age being 12, the mean age, 13; the median age was 15 for actors in the IOA study, and the mean age 15. Consistent with other profiles of actors, they have a high degree of formal education, 46% Equity and 55% non-Equity have college degrees, compared with 42% for actors in the IOA study, and another 26% Equity and 14% non-Equity have graduate degrees, compared with 38% for IOA.

In addition to the above statistics on formal degrees, we found that 52% Equity and 47% non-Equity indicated that they had a formal degree in the arts, 58% had studied with one or more private teachers, 40% Equity and 25% non-Equity had studied at a conservatory or professional school. Some respondents had received training in all these areas.

Other educational experiences respondents had in preparation for their work in acting included the following:

<u>EQUITY</u>	<u>NON-EQTY</u>
63%	46% went to acting school
60%	48% had experience with a mentor or Master Teacher
52%	49% had summer theatre experience

46%            55% were self-taught  
40%            55% had community-based arts experience

44% Equity respondents and 43% non-Equity respondents felt that university or college was the most important post-high school theatre training that they received, followed by acting schools for Equity respondents (28%) and summer stock for non-Equity respondents (19%).

A very high (85%) of Equity and non-Equity respondents had been exposed to professional actors in their training.

The "Comments" section at the end of the survey elicited comments about the need for greater education in the business area of an acting career, particularly important to the transition from school to the professional world.

Virtually all respondents selected one or more reasons why their educational training did not adequately prepare them for a career as an actor.

The most important failing for both 62% Equity and 42% non-Equity was "little or no preparation for the real world". Non-Equity respondents added "too little advisement", and "not enough emotional support".

Many received additional preparation outside the formal system:

<u>EQUITY</u>	<u>NON-EQTY</u>
44%	38% from summer stock
62%	51% from the "school of hard knocks"
26%	21% from a mentor
41%	35% from an acting coach
39%	43% from friend(s)
45%	45% from peer(s)
13%	16% from parent(s)
16%	9% from an agent or representative

43% of the Equity and 60% non-Equity respondents indicated that they actively continued outside training in their artistic discipline, for half on a weekly basis for more than 12 weeks a year. 63% Equity and 83% non-Equity respondents indicated that they planned to seek additional training in acting or acting-related disciplines.

### Apprenticeships

Approximately 78% (of 472 Equity respondents) and 22% (of 135 non-Equity respondents) had served as apprentices, most for periods of two years or less; at a mean and median age of 21. For those who did work as apprentices, two-thirds worked more than 30 hours per week.

36% Equity and 32% non-Equity respondents who had apprenticeships felt that the most valuable aspect of their apprenticeship was technical knowledge, 24% Equity and 35% non-Equity felt professional contacts formed the most valuable aspect, and 20% Equity and 11% non-Equity felt that it was the opportunity to work with a master.

## **CAREER**

### Career Entry

While a number of actors have remarked that "career" is a very modern notion when applied to artists, respondents were asked to identify both the step marking their career entry, and their first professional recognition. While these two are very similar, the former is a specific event, while the latter implies a perception of acceptance that may or may not be accompanied by one specific action. For the step marking career entry for Equity actors, 46% identified their first acting job, 41% as getting paid for acting, and 22% as joining an acting union. Smaller numbers indicated a change in attitude such as taking their work seriously, or critical review. For non-Equity actors getting paid for acting (38%) took precedence over getting an acting job (32%) and ending formal educational training (10%).

The venue of their first professional recognition was identified as follows:

<u>EQUITY</u>	<u>NON-EQTY</u>		
53%	49%	identified their first professional recognition	as
getting paid to act			
21%	16%	identified it as acting in first production	
11%	12%	award or honor	

The mean age at which actors began their professional careers was 23, and the median age was 22. When asked when they became actors, the mean age was 18; the median, 17.

In identifying a specific person who had been most helpful during the career entry period, both Equity and non-Equity first chose a teacher (49%; 48%), followed by their mothers (Equity 33%; non-Equity 36%), followed by friends and other actors. Both Equity and non-Equity respondents answered a question about people barring their way to a career, and of those, 47% Equity and 41% non-Equity stated that no one had barred the way.

### Competitions

839 respondents entered competitions, at a median age of 16; 785 respondents first won competitions at a median age of 16.

### Peers

About 1700 Equity and non-Equity respondents answered questions concerning peers. As noted earlier, during high school, peers were 75% friends, and 17% others outside school. During their early careers, 79% Equity and 81% non-Equity respondents found their peers very important or somewhat important. After high school age, peers served functions of friendship for 75% of the respondents, information exchange and as support group for about half the respondents. The function of healthy criticism and "career advice/help" was true for a third.

### Job other than acting, early career

85% of all respondents said they had held a job other than acting to support their art, and 58% Equity and 54% non-Equity respondents indicated that their other employment paid to support their acting. There seems to be a difference between actors and the other kinds of artists we have studied in the same way (craftspeople and painters) for whom other employment either reinforces their artistic work or intertwines with it.

54% Equity and 60% non-Equity respondents did not teach acting at the beginning of their artistic careers. Of the percentage that did, the major motivation for the Equity actors was money (15%).

## CURRENT CAREER

### Peers

76% of the respondents describe their current peer group as actors, 60% of the Equity respondents and 50% of the non-Equity respondents as friends from adulthood, and 54% Equity and 47% non-Equity as people outside the acting world. 42% of Equity actors then defined their colleagues as peers, while 36% of non-Equity actors selected family.

Although only 45% Equity and 56% non-Equity rely on their peers for validation of their work, 54% Equity and 67% non-Equity rely on them for critical review. Equity respondents saw their current peer group as national (39%) and local (29%); non-Equity respondents reversed order with 36% defining their peer group as local and 30% as national.

### The Public

While the general public has been the most involved audience for our respondents, both in their early and current careers, when evaluating critical review, 29% Equity and 21% non-Equity chose themselves as their most important critics, followed by producers/directors. Even though the subject of reviews is often "loaded" for actors, 81% Equity and 87% non-Equity of those who had some kind of critical review felt that it had helped their work.

Career Satisfaction

For the Equity respondents, 75% used the word "actor" to describe their career; only 6% described themselves as teachers. For the non-Equity respondents, a surprisingly high 70% ALSO chose the word "actor" to describe their career; another 6% of these had acting-related occupations and only 3% were teachers. Only 10% of the non-Equity respondents chose "non-acting related occupation".

The most important quality needed for pursuing acting is "talent" (28%). A substantial percentage chose "other" which revealed an interesting group of additional factors including commitment, contacts, guts, emotional stamina, money, patience, perseverance, persistence, self-confidence, tenacity, time and drive.

39% Equity and 43% non-Equity said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their careers, 38% Equity and non-Equity were not very satisfied or dissatisfied, and 23% Equity and 20% non-Equity were ambivalent about their careers. 88% Equity and 90% non-Equity said they would choose the same career if they had it to do over again.

The following table gives a range of satisfactions and dissatisfactions about different aspects of our respondents in relation to their careers:

	v. satis. AEA NON	med.satisAE A NON	med.dissatAEA NON	v.dissat. AEA NON
critical review	33% 24%	40% 49%	19% 23%	9% 5%
doing the work	43% 36%	32% 42%	15% 13%	9% 8%
money	11% 5%	24% 17%	32% 35%	34% 43%

part. audiences	19% 15%	44% 51%	29% 28%	9% 6%
personal satis. with work	35% 32%	41% 46%	18% 16%	7% 5%
public recogn	17% 15%	37% 42%	32% 32%	15% 12%
status/prestige	14% 10%	36% 38%	32% 38%	18% 14%

### Satisfactions and Disappointments

The last two questions on the questionnaire asked respondents to describe the moment of greatest disappointment and the moment of greatest satisfaction in their careers. It was interesting to see these written replies alongside those questions asking them to indicate career satisfaction at this point in their lives.

Clearly, the source of both the greatest disappointment and the greatest satisfaction centered on work--both Equity and non-Equity actors topped the list of disappointments with job rejection. And, although money is a pressing reality, it did not appear as an issue until fifth on the list for Equity actors, and did not appear to be the source of major disappointments for the majority of non-Equity respondents.

For Equity actors, missing the "big break", being fired, having a contract withdrawn, having a show close, and losing a role to another actor were the prime sources of disappointment. Underlying all of these is the tremendous compulsion to work at one's craft.

For non-Equity actors disappointments seemed to center more on the entry levels to work--bad auditions, rejection from educational, MFA and other programs.

Satisfaction centered, for both groups of respondents, on the opportunity to use one's talent and the audience's reaction to that. The greatest satisfaction was audience approval, followed by playing a major role. For Equity actors, the concept of "work" was interwoven with approval throughout their satisfactions: self-approval; Broadway work, getting a job; critical approval, working; other artistic pursuits, good work experience.

For non-Equity actors, the themes were similar, but satisfactions seemed to be at a more simplistic level: first professional job; self-approval; tv/film work, critical approval.

### COMMENTS

The COMMENTS section provided some important insights for us, especially since a staggering 54% Equity and 57% non-Equity respondents added comments after completing a 151-question, eight-page questionnaire!

Of course, along with their comments, some respondents sent pictures and resumes (even though our cover letter asked them not to), books of poetry, art work, audiotapes, and reviews. Asking for better business training, expressing concerns about financial support at the government as well as the family level, worrying about the economy, some were both eloquent and deeply saddened by the marketplace for WORK as well as for training, and their synergy:

Engaging in the performing arts--particularly in the live theater--has changed drastically in the past twenty years. Work venues simply do not exist anymore. And this adds greatly to an already frustrating and highly competitive industry. Training, therefore, regardless from whence it is derived, is of little consequence if there are not work places.

A 36-year old male actor remarked:

Six theatres listed on my resume no longer exist due to financial difficulty...The professional schools are more than ever at the service of the marketplace, rather than the Muse.

Trying to balance the need for better business skills in a very competitive market, some respondents struggled to serve the Muse first, and dance to the music after. One four-page letter ended:

I propose that meaningful and substantial success as an actor is bound inextricably to the tension between art and show business, and that theater can succeed only when the artistic considerations guide the commerce, not the other way around.

Actors also brought up the concern of other artistic pursuits, and other art forms not addressed by this questionnaire--musical theatre, dance, etc.

While non-Equity respondents circled around issues of beginning careers, definitions of "professional", student concerns, and second career pursuits, Equity actors had a lot to say about discrimination--racial, sexual, against age and handicaps. Articulate comments were attached about minimum wage laws, arbitration, eligibility for benefits, "blacklisting", and serious questions about the actors' unions.

Frustration, disappointment and anger with training and education appeared; people who were opting out for "alternative careers" wrote us, people expressing a combination of disbelief at the odds and personal solutions to tackle the problem reached us, like this comment:

I have often wondered as to the IQ of actors. Would a bright person be in an industry where 85% are doomed to failure? For 35 years I have succeeded where many (most?) have failed because I manufacture my own 'breaks' and never allow the exigencies of life to prevent me from 'having my cuts!' (baseball term) when I do find myself 'at the plate'!

The possibilities of success are far greater in just about any other profession...Feeling good about yourself comes from within--NOT from Hollywood or Broadway success. My best productions are on the family page! After 34 years my wife has had enough coffee and Scotch so that her time with me does not show on her face!!

Other people's agendas reached us in the form of questions they would have liked to see included in the questionnaire:

Which is more important--doing the work or getting the job?

Assuming all people who work pretty consistently are talented, what is the most important element in having a successful career:

- 1) luck
- 2) aggressive pursuit of opportunities
- 3) contacts (YES to all of the above!)

What do you want to accomplish by acting?

- a) Change people's lives
- b) Change cultural structure
- c) Infuse our society with good
- d) Say something that is not being said.

Do you consider artists to be society's truth-tellers?

(YES)

It should also be added that actors went to great lengths to answer us. Although we extended our expected return time because actors are so often on the road, we got post cards from all over the country acknowledging receipt and hoping it wasn't too late to

reply. People telephoned from California (and didn't reverse the charges), and one envelope to an actress in Wisconsin came back, empty, with handwriting across the front that said:

Sorry to inform you that XXXX had a near fatal accident and is still in intensive care away from home. Nobody knows if or when she'll return.

Responses like that acknowledge, for us, that we are communicating even though, as one respondent wrote:

Actors are particularly difficult people to pigeon-hole, especially those who constantly challenge their intellect and imagination.