The Lifeworld of Millennial Stage Actors in Metro Manila: A Schutzian Phenomenological Study

Jalaine Joyce V. Malabanan[1]*, Jose Mari A. Carpena[2,3] and Feorillo Petronilo A. Demeterio III[3]
[1]*Department of Humanities and Philosophy, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila 1016, PHILIPPINES*
[2]*Faculty of Education, University of the Philippines Open University, Los Baños, Laguna 4031, PHILIPPINES*
[3]*Filipino Department, De La Salle University, Manila 1004, PHILIPPINES*
*Corresponding author: jjvmalabanan@pup.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Using the phenomenological method developed by the Austrian-American philosopher and social theorist Alfred Schutz, this article studied the lifeworld of millennial stage actors in Metro Manila, Philippines. Lifeworld is the meaning-giving sphere of common sense that is shared by individuals from a given social group. Using the data gathered from key informant interviews with 12 professional actors and five consociates from the said locale, we investigated how these millennial actors started their careers in the theatre industry, how they perceived theatre in general and Philippine theatre in particular, how they experienced the challenges and difficulties in their careers, how they were motivated to persevere, and how they envisioned their long-term future in the same industry. This article contributes to the sparse literature on the lives of contemporary professional stage actors in general, and to the almost non-existent literature on Filipino professional stage actors in particular. Understanding the status and problems of the lives of professional stage actors should be the first step in further improving their plight and in appreciating more their central role in the continued existence of theatre as a cultural practice.

Keywords: *stage actors, lifeworld, Metro Manila, Schutzian phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

Before the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, the theatre industry in Metro Manila, the capital region of the Philippines, manifested signs of growth and robustness (Iglesias 2018; Ordinario 2020). There are at least 11 professional theatre companies in the said metropolis (Ang), and about 2,000 mostly freelance professional actors and stage crew members (Gotinga 2020). Blogs and newspaper articles sporadically mention some general and superficial comments about the plight of these professional theatre actors, or feature in more depth this or that big names within this professional group. But, as far as the scholarly literature is concerned, the professional theatre actors in Metro Manila, who stand as the backbone of this supposedly growing industry, had never been given substantial attention at all (Serquiña 2019, 197).

This gap in literature can be partly explained by the dominance of Nicanor Tiongson's (1983) *What is Philippine drama* in the study of and research on Philippine theatre. Tiongson's canonical work attempted to map out the defining characteristics of Philippine theatre by valorising the folk and the rural performances, and consequently marginalising the modern, contemporary, and urban theatrical productions (Tiatco 2011, 132). As a result, the meagre literature (Serquiña 2019, 196) on localised Philippine theatre focused on the supposedly more authentically Filipino performances at the peripheries and neglected the much bigger players at the urban centres that were seen as colonial derivatives and therefore impure (Tiatco 2011, 132).

International literature on professional stage actors only has a handful of published research works. Martin and Battaglini (2019) focused on the psycho-physical health of these professionals, while Blix (2007), Orzechowicz (2008), and Martin and Cutler (2010) examined the dynamics of emotions involved in this kind of work. Closer to the concerns of this present study are Martin and Cutler's (2010) use of flow to partly explain the emotional rewards of professional acting; Leidner's (2016) discussion on how professional stage actors cope up with the financial challenges of freelance work; and Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey's (2020) mention of some narrative themes that professional actors use in justifying their perseverance in such a financially difficult career.

This study attempts to fill in the identified gap in Philippine theatre scholarship, as well as contribute to the meagre international literature on the plight of professional theatre actors, by exploring the lifeworld of millennial professional stage actors in Metro Manila.

Statement of the Problem

Using the phenomenological method developed by Schutz (1899–1959), we studied the lifeworld of these millennial professional stage actors and analysed how they started their careers in the theatre industry, how they perceived theatre in general and Philippine theatre in particular, how they experienced challenges and difficulties in their chosen careers, how they are motivated to persevere, and how they envisioned their long-term future in the same industry.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to understand the lifeworld of the millennial professional stage actors in Metro Manila. By using the phenomenological method of Schutz, we aimed to know how these stage actors create meaning out of the theatre, Philippine theatre, and their careers. After delving into their lifeworld, this article aimed to lay down some recommendations that may hopefully contribute to the improvement of such lifeworld as well as to the further growth of modern Philippine theatre after the pandemic lockdowns.

Significance

This article contributes to the sparse literature on the lives of contemporary professional stage actors in general, and the non-existent literature on Filipino professional stage actors in particular. We aim to bring about a different approach of tapping on the lived experiences of the professional stage actors based on their oral accounts. Theatre audiences are used to looking at the performances of these actors, but this article allows us to see the theatre, with the actors and audiences included, from the point of view of this research's respondent actors and their consociates. Understanding the status and problems of the lives of professional stage actors should be the first step in further improving their plight and appreciating more their efforts and sacrifices.

METHODOLOGY

As the first scholarly research on contemporary Philippine stage actors and following the majority of the handful international literature on the same social group, this article was produced under the general design of qualitative research.

Locale of the Study

The locale of this study is Metro Manila, just slightly smaller than the whole of Singapore. Metro Manila stands as the political, financial, and cultural centre of the Philippines. It is also the centre of contemporary Philippine theatrical productions, with at least 11 professional theatre companies, and several university-based theatre groups.

Data Gathering and Respondents

Semi-structured key informant interview was the data gathering strategy used in this research. The initial questions were designed by the co-authors based on the rather sparse literature, on the initial virtual fieldwork

done by the main author for a research workshop in April 2020, and a series of brainstorming on the outline of this journal publication. These initial questions were intended to be followed with appropriate probe questions.

We interviewed a total of 17 key informants, all of them millennials and involved with the theatre industry in Metro Manila. The millennials are persons who were born from 1981 to 1995 and who reached young adulthood in the early years of the 21st century (Stewart et al. 2017, 46). Twelve of these key informants are professional stage actors, who are referred to in this article by their code names OE, SN, SX, ST, OA, ZO, OJ, SK, NE, EV, EL, and SS; while five are their consociates, who are referred to in this article by their code names DM, OI, ZE, OK, and E. Of the 17, 9 are female and 6 are male. These 17 key informants were and are connected, with 5 of the at least 11 professional theatre companies in Metro Manila. All of the 11 professional theatre companies in Metro Manila are private endeavours, except for Tanghalang Pilipino which is a resident company of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Hence, only the actors who are part of the stable of Tanghalang Pilipino are lucky to be regularly employed as professional theatre actors, while the rest are working as freelance stage actors. All of the 17 key informants are college graduates.

Since the research was done during the pandemic lockdowns of 2020, the interviews were conducted through audio-video conferencing applications. All of the respondents opted to have audio recordings only. Their informed consents for this research and publication project were done orally before the actual interviews, and are kept as audio records by the researchers. The interviews were conducted using alternately English and Filipino languages. Due to the same pandemic lockdowns, the ethnographic component of Schutzian phenomenology could not be pursued. Such shortcoming was compensated by the primary and secondary authors' long involvement with theatrical productions, as the primary author works in a cultural affairs office in her university, while the secondary author is a freelance actor and educator at the same time.

Theoretical Framework

Schutzian phenomenology is one of the most known sociological appropriations of Husserlian philosophical method (Dreher 2011, 489). To bring down Husserl's phenomenology to the level of the social sciences, Schutz had to temper it with the Verstehen sociology of the German political scientist, sociologist, and philosopher Max Weber (1864–1920) (Dreher 2011, 489).

Central to the phenomenological sociology of Schutz is the study and the subsequent reconstruction/interpretation/report of the subjects' lifeworld (Schutz 1962, 232). As already mentioned, the lifeworld is the shared world of common sense among the subjects of a particular investigation. The lifeworld is formed through the interchange of types, models, constructs, and language among the subjects (Schutz 1962, 13–14). The lifeworld is a socially constructed reality that: the subjects share with their consociates, and at least some of their contemporaries; the subjects inherited from their predecessors, and is, therefore, something that is pre-given; the subjects may alter and modify; and the subjects may pass on to their successors (Schutz 1962, 15–16). In this research, the subjects are the 12 selected millennial professional stage actors in Metro Manila; the consociates are their five friends and co-workers; the contemporaries are the subjects' commentators who wrote blogs and newspaper articles about contemporary Philippine theatre, as well as the researchers who also stand as phenomenological sociologists/investigators.

Different people have different access/knowledge to a given lifeworld (Schutz 1962, 16). Thus, the phenomenological sociologists/investigators should as much as possible observe and interview the subjects and their consociates to be able to penetrate the desired lifeworld. Hence, the key informants of this research are the subjects and their consociates themselves. The phenomenological sociologists/investigators should also know the views of the eyewitnesses and commentators, as well as other analysts. In this research, the group of eyewitnesses and commentators is composed of the authors who wrote blogs and news articles about contemporary Philippine theatre, as well as the researchers themselves. No interviews were conducted on this group of eyewitnesses and commentators. Instead, the writings of the authors of the said blogs and news articles were analysed, and the experiences and recollections of the researchers were revisited and reflected upon. We were not able to seek other analysts, as we were not able to locate authors of scholarly publications on the plight of contemporary professional actors in Metro Manila.

To assure that the reconstructed lifeworld, as a second level construct, is a faithful textualisation of the subject's lifeworld, the analyst may use these three postulates to test his/her reconstruction: logical consistency, that emphasises that the elements of the reconstructed lifeworld must violate the logic of common sense; subjective interpretation, that emphasises that the reconstructed lifeworld must be able to explain the sense of the various actions happening within the investigated lifeworld; and adequacy, that emphasises that the

reconstructed lifeworld must be understandable/acceptable to the individuals within the investigated lifeworld (Dreher 2011, 504).

This paper's use of Schutzian phenomenology is something new as far as the literature on professional stage actors is concerned. This deviated from the usual approaches of performance studies and focused on motives and meanings instead of ritualised behaviour and interactions. This deviated as well to the ethnographic and psychological approaches, although phenomenology as such is not contradictory to these approaches, in the sense that Schutzian phenomenology can be undertaken in a shorter period and without the clinical and highly theoretical baggage. Schutzian phenomenology studied the professional stage actors in the very context of their work, career, struggles, interaction with their audiences, aspirations, the Philippine theatre, and theatre in general.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Utilising Schutzian Phenomenology, the data analysis conducted emphasised the importance of the theatre actor's lifeworld through a detailed analysis of the subject's various forms of individual and shared experience. The analysis included an iterative process of multiple reading of transcripts, bracketing, and paying attention to the commentators' and consociates' consonance with the theatre actors' experiences. From these connections, the following themes were identified:

Pathway towards the Theatre

The majority of the subjects did not dream of becoming theatre actors. Some have not even thought of acting as a professional career. But despite their aspirations to pursue careers in medicine (subjects OJ, SK, and OE thought of becoming doctors), communication (subjects SX and EV thought of pursuing degrees in communication), and business (subject SN wanted to become a business owner after getting a degree in business management), the majority of the subjects narrated an "encounter" with theatre during their high school or college years that left them desiring to pursue a new career path. Some even find their current job with the theatre as a responsibility, and not as a burden, which makes it hard for them to abandon. Time and circumstances might vary, but it was that "encounter" and awestruck wonder of witnessing a theatre production that made an impact and greatly influenced their resolve to pursue an acting career. Notwithstanding all the hardships they have gone through, their passion and love for this career remain unrelenting. Similar to Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey's (2020) religious narrative theme, actors do not sacrifice just for the sake of sacrificing but out of a sense of duty toward the "other" as they pursue goals with higher ethical purposes than those who live mundane lives.

Actors' Perceptions on Theatre and Philippine Theatre

Theatre is not just a hobby but an occupation

It is not new for people to think that theatre is not a professional job. In Schutz's terms, this appears to be "experientially given." The majority of the subjects and consociates noticed that in terms of the recognition the society gives, people are more inclined to look at the theatre as a hobby and not as a form of work. They see theatre as something one does for fun, and not a type of job one will pursue and hold on to.

Like these people, some subjects and consociates also had that same misconception, until they found themselves being part of the industry. Witnessing first-hand what happens day in and day out in theatre, their mindsets changed and they saw how professional the job is and how much professionalism is required to be able to fulfil their job obligations. From a Schutzian perspective, this greater understanding and alteration/ modification of misconception of viewing theatre as a hobby transpired through the manifestation of theatre actors' relevant and shared lifeworld experience in the field. Consistent with Robin Leidner's (2016) study, actors do not concede to either the absence of steady employment and the expected potentially hurtful responses when they say they are actors but struggle to maintain their self-identification as actors, present that identity as plausible to others, and cope with the challenges their preferred identity or career brings.

Theatre is an at-the-moment experience

The very recent pandemic has brought havoc to the majority working in the art industry. Lockdowns and social distancing policies have made it impossible theatre companies to be in business-as-usual mode. They may have been able to perform again, but their new terrain is limited and restricted, and their new platform is different, as they are now operating online.

While there are many other modern technologies and platforms of art, as old as gags and skits we can watch on televisions, to the recent online platform of our era, the actors believe that there is no replacement for live, face-to-face, theatre. This modality is always special for them, as its at-the-moment experience is supposed to be irreplicable. Live performances, according to some subjects, captivate and change the audience's moment and experience. They are unique each time, and it involves all the senses. Actor-audience exchanges are powerful, and the "encounter" is once in a lifetime. For the subjects and consociates, theatre is interactive, and it opens a space for communal experience between the actors and the audience.

Theater is a place for healing

Theatre enables people suffering from traumatic experiences to use their bodies to cope and express themselves. Not only has theatre permeated the lives of the workshop recipients, but it also has been the "home" and a "responsibility" for the actors. For the subjects and consociates, theatre's goal is to serve the community and/or society. As subject EV recalls his art therapy sessions with the victims of Typhoon Haiyan, he realised how powerful theatre is, "Theatre is no longer just acting, it is also self-enriching."

Similar to Faigin and Stein's (2010) assertion of the power of theatre, actors were able to realise how theatre functions as a way to explore and process traumatic events. Not only that the actors found purpose in helping others through community workshops and art therapies, but they realised, just as Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey's (2020) therapeutic narrative suggest, theatre is a form of self-care that enables actors to remain authentic within an inauthentic capitalistic society.

Theatre plays a crucial role in politics and society at large

Theatre serves the community. It gives great emphasis to the social and political aspects of life. Its pragmatic function extends to moving people to an understanding of what problems are prevalent and seeks, at the very least, to respond to these problems creatively—i.e., through the craft. The subjects relayed the various workshops they are committed to offering to the community, which they have encountered and brought about their change of hearts and their gratitude for being a part of the theatre industry.

Some subjects also talked about their exposure trips to their workshops, some in partnership with local government units. They described how these workshops served as their avenues for introducing politics to their participants, especially those who are well off. The participants identically realised how these workshops allow their participants to be partakers of the "lived-experiences" of a wide range of people—specifically the poor, the voiceless, and those who need help.

Cultural campaigns, some subjects mentioned, are also used to surface the truth about the situation of our country and why it is necessary to talk about it. Theatre companies organise these campaigns through advocacy plays and community workshops and even encourage the government to contribute to the process by crafting appropriate laws or policies.

The majority of the subjects and consociates strongly believe acting is done for a cause. Because theatre is a reflection of society, it is a crucible of truth, life, and hope. It is a means of reaching out to the people. It serves as the voice of the voiceless and makes the unseen seen. More than its political nature, its social function extends to a kind of compassion that allows one to become more aware of the current situation of his/her people and seek to alleviate their suffering.

This socio-political function rectifies a constructed reality inherited from their predecessors (an important aspect in Schutz's lifeworld reality) given that in identifying the richness of the political and social functions of theatre, the subjects and consociates resonate with Maria Delimata's (2013) assertion that the most significant changes in contemporary art are the intellectual inspiration, in the new way of thinking about theatre as an important tool in the fight for political and social changes. Not just as a result of staging particular plays, but the effect of a long-time process of adaptation, reinterpretation, and application of foreign theatre concepts in the field of local theatre causing significant social and political changes. As Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey's (2020) political narrative articulate, actors engaging in theatre work promote increasing awareness of

the political significance of theatre as an ethical project and create a "deep necessity" to change the status quo of society. And that in maintaining their calling, actors took political action by showing that achieving material stability is secondary to the responsibility of emancipating society.

Theatre involves learning about Philippine cultural heritage

Some subjects and consociates affirmed that their work not only allows them to experience giving more esteem and value to art, but also reinforced their sense of national identity. They began to be more mindful of one's own culture and preserve it, specifically its nature and significance. This knowledge for them is not something that should remain on the shelves, but one that should be imparted to others, especially the younger generations, so that they will be reminded of their origins.

The Kamalayang Pilipino (Filipino consciousness) Workshop in the Arts (KAPWA), a workshop some subjects and consociates have gone through, is something that offers not only acting principles but also a greater understanding of one's own cultural identity. It seeks to bring to light the origin and the richness of the Filipino culture. Being a part not only of the workshop but also as a theatre actor trained to be socially responsible, immensely transformed their vision of what and how a theatre should be perceived. Rather than immersing in Western theatre principles and ideals, these subjects and consociates learned that theatre is an avenue to love, appreciate and be proud of the numerous creative cultural expressions that the country has. They asserted how theatre has always been, and will always be a part of their lives as Filipinos.

The subjects and consociates' experiences in community tours also exposed them to the varieties of art forms in the different places the country has. They accepted that learning about them may not be easy and could take time, but these made them appreciate art, including their own lives dedicated to theatre, and their roots even more.

Furthermore, the subjects and consociates realised amidst the richness of Philippine culture that one should not be intrusive and impose Western theatrical principles and ideals on various Philippine localities. Different regions have their own cultures, they have their way of doing art, and they have their theatrical expressions. Thus, some subjects and consociates voiced out their call for respecting these diverse cultural expressions and dialoguing with them. This characteristic of Philippine theatre is new in the literature. This could have emerged from the fact that the dominant theatre groups in the Philippines are from the national capital region, steeped in Western theatrical principles and ideals, and were recently allowed to explore the rich cultural heritage of the regions.

Theatre is not dictating but collaborating

Some of the subjects and consociates firmly believe that theatre is a place where collaboration happens. Members are treated fairly, and everyone is treated with respect. While positions are well recognised, members are also given avenues to express their thoughts and ideas.

While they are prepared to see directors manning and nitpicking everything, they see how directors foster democratic cooperation. The director, whom they thought could be a dictator, permits suggestions from his actors and empowers them by giving them the freedom to explore their characters. Communicating their views felt like emboldening them, as everyone is treated with the utmost respect. In Philippine theatre, no one should feel superior to the other. This characteristic of Philippine theatre is also something new in the literature. This could have emerged from the highly social and communitarian mindset of the Filipinos as well as their preference for smooth interpersonal relationships even in the workplace.

Theatre is a bundle of expressions and experiences

Theatre, for the actors, is a bundle of expressions and experiences. The definition of theatre is something that is not monolithic and cannot be boxed into a reductionist concept. Its multiplicity expresses the richness and vastness of the subjects and consociates' actual experiences and subjective interpretation. Consociates DM and OK, and subjects OA, SN, SX, and SS assert that theatre is not only about knowing how to cry and/or entertain but also about communicating a story in various ways, about educating and informing people. Subject OE states that theatre is a common space to experience emotions that are not ordinarily experienced in everyday life.

Challenges Experienced in the Pursuit of the Stage Acting Career

Financial challenges

It is no longer a surprise for us to learn that theatre acting is not always a high-paying job. In Schutz's language, this is an objective reality for the subjects and the consociates—for both agree that the small income that full-time theatre actors get is an almost universal challenge in the world of professional theatre. The subjects stressed that the income they get is only enough for a single person, and that what you earn is almost just like an allowance. Subject OA states, "Our income is really small… We earn not even as much as a minimum wage earner would… We survive by doing other jobs."

In terms of the benefits they get as a working individual, there is no medical insurance. With the small amount that they have in their hands, one would inevitably resort to cutting down living expenses. Living in a dormitory could be an option for them, given their salary won't be enough to get an apartment. Some productions are not paying much, and oftentimes the salary will only be enough for commuting fare expenses for the rehearsals and the production proper. This affirms Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey's (2020) narrative that in theatre work, "material hardships" are associated with low salaries, discontinuity in work practices, and a lack of clear work regulations and that actors are likely to experience a sense of anxiety and frustration connected to their struggles around financial compensation and work continuity.

Intrapersonal challenge

There are situations, according to subject SN, where actors will constantly doubt whether they have chosen the right career. They will experience working with difficult people who will challenge their patience and sanity, and some will even resort to asking whether the career they have chosen is meant for them. With great desire to continue their work and calling as a theatre actor, emotional turmoil happens when they have to choose between their job and their need to support their families, a very hard decision for them to make.

Given their very demanding job, theatre actors resort to isolating themselves from persons with toxic nature. Subject SX mentions that this is an option to keep one's sanity, as meeting a lot of people can already be psychologically and emotionally draining. This affirms Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey's (2020) narrative that in theatre work, existential hardships are associated mainly with the struggle for social visibility and recognition. Actors feel rejected by others in society and tend to distinguish "us" (actors/artists) from "them" (non-actors/artists), claiming that society treats them "just as folk attractions." But despite these hardships, actors were well aware of this incongruence and are unwilling to quit because acting is a "deep necessity of the self," or a personal calling.

Psycho-social challenges

Because theatre engagements are sporadic and come project per project, subjects survive by doing other work. Their efforts exerted are often not given their commensurate professional fees. Theatre work is very demanding, some subjects articulate that there are times when rehearsals and/or production preparations would require them to spend 12 hours and beyond for their work. Family gatherings and time with friends are set aside, as weekends are workdays for the subjects and consociates.

Theatre actors are also given little recognition in terms of their rights. They have no labour unions, and the work conditions can be horrible, as emphasised by consociate ZE. Some subjects and consociates think that there are only a few Filipinos who truly support the theatre, as it is perceived by many as an elite cultural expression that remains inaccessible to ordinary Filipinos.

Congruent with Robin Leidner's (2016) study, there is little to no support from the government. In his study, the only form of government support that his actors/respondents get is unemployment insurance, in which those who earned enough money to meet the eligibility thresholds are not entitled to any benefits. But zeroing in, this minimal mechanism is not even present in the Philippines. This goes to show that there is indeed a need for the government to support professional theatre.

Benefits from the Stage Acting Career and Reasons for Persevering

Validation from the audience

Some of the subjects admitted that one of the advantages of being a stage actor is the affirmation they receive from the audience, a fact corroborated by the consociates. Consociate ZE claims, "they're the ones who face the audience, so they're the ones who get recognised." Subject SN likewise mentions that some of the motivating factors that keep her in the acting industry are the appreciation and the affirmation she receives from the audience. Similarly, subject ST says that, "he is grateful for all the praises." Subject NE also acknowledges the appreciation their group gets from providing workshops.

Indeed, appreciation is one of the most fundamental rewards an individual can receive in a professional context (Van Vegchel et al. 2002). Receiving appreciation from individuals in a workplace setting is beneficial to the employee, as it is related to the development of self-esteem (Leary 1999). Moreover, being appreciated at work has been observed to "buffer" the effects of high working hours on job satisfaction (Stocker et al. 2010). In the context of the theatre, appreciation for the actor comes in many ways. In covert sense, appreciation may come in the form of "good manners" during a performance, to show "respect" for the artists' labour (Sedgman 2018). Overtly, appreciation usually comes in the form of applause and standing ovations by the audience (Heim 2015). Appreciation is a most profound way of showing appreciation for the performance, as Kershaw (2001, 135) would expound, "Applause thus celebrates the loss—the lack—that it tries, impossibly, to mark; for it can never, of course, recover the events it appreciates, except perhaps as an encore that itself intensifies…" As it could be seen from this study's results, appreciation validates the effort from the audience and the community members whom they serve.

Personal development

Subjects see their theatre career as beneficial to their personal development as well. Subjects claim that theatre made them more empathetic, more open to others' perspectives, and became "more human." These happen, as explained by some subjects, as soon as one "steps into the shoes" of other personalities while they build their on-stage character. Subject OJ narrates, "It's filled with so much empathy, passion, and the fervour for doing is there."

This theme coincides with the results of Silva et al. (2017), which revealed that theatre actors who had more experience in the professional theatre industry had more psychological and socio-cognitive development compared to those in amateur and academic contexts.

Professional development and career advancement

The subjects noted that their experiences in theatre built their sense of professionalism. In particular, they became more responsible, disciplined, and resourceful workers. These skills they develop not only benefit them within the theatrical profession, but outside as well. Subject SX expresses that his work as a professional stage actor improved his speaking and presentation skills. Moreover, since theatre roles are primarily attained via auditions, he states that the process of auditioning may help individuals gain confidence for traditional job applications as well as cope with the possible rejections.

Moreover, some subjects also noted that their engagement in theatre benefits them as they explore the other sectors of the entertainment industry. Filipino television and film directors, casters, and producers have a preference for those who have professional experience in theatre. This inclination for hiring actors with a theatre background was also seen in the emergence of sound technology in films, as greater emphasis is placed on the skills of acting and dialogue delivery compared to that of physical appearance (Cardullo 2012). This preference theatre actors is beneficial, even if Babson (1989) found out that while theatre actors see theatre as more artistically fulfilling, the same actors rated film and television acting to be more financially sustainable. A theatre actor might get paid PHP500.00 (approximately USD10.00) a day as a rehearsal allowance/fee, but a bit role/part in a television episode might pay PHP3,000.00 (approximately USD60.00) to PHP5,000.00 (approximately USD100.00) a day.

The ability to support the community

Many of the subjects and consociates view their employment in the theatre industry as a venue wherein they can advocate for what they believe in, similar to that of the results of Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey (2020), wherein participants justified working in a near-poverty state by citing their socio-political responsibility as citizens. These advocacies include addressing political issues present in Philippine society, community health issues such as HIV/AIDS, and issues such as those being faced by minority groups like the LGBT community. Those who hold this view also use plays and their community workshops as pedagogical tools—places wherein the art form of theatre could be used to elucidate and make aware the social realities the audience might not be aware of, but live with nonetheless.

Strengthening of national identity and national pride

Some subjects and consociates claim that their work in theatre heightened their sense of being a Filipino. To clarify, national identity goes beyond identifying oneself with where one is born or resides, as it also involves social identification, adherence to social norms, acknowledging being seen in a certain way by others, and shared values (Weinstein 1957; Henderson and McEwen 2005). The relationship between theatre and national identity has been widely covered by scholars, albeit from a very macro perspective. For example, the construction of Singapore's National Theatre was seen as an attempt by the government to shape Singapore's national identity (Quek 2012). Regarding the contents of plays themselves, Sierz (2011) argues that some plays written in recent British history contain themes revolving around national identity, eventually concluding that British theatre currently serves as a reflection of how British identity is now diverse and multicultural. Indeed, theatre is a political tool that has been and is used to sculpt national identity (Ravengai 2010; Holdsworth 2014; D'Monte 2015). However, to the authors' knowledge at least, there has been no research documenting how theatre affected the actors' and performers' sense of national identity themselves.

Long-Term Expectations

Staying on stage

Some subjects and consociates view their current career in theatre as the only career in which they can see themselves engaging in. Two subjects specifically mentioned that the ongoing pandemic had made them reflect on the financial unsustainability of the theatre profession, as many theatre productions were cancelled due to the lockdowns and ban on mass gatherings imposed by the government. Despite this, they concluded that they would prefer to stay in theatre. For example, subject ZO sees himself working in a directorial function in the future. This is similar to the results of Leidner's (2016) study, wherein many of the actor-participants claimed that they could not see themselves working in another industry besides theatre.

Shifting to related fields

On the other hand, some subjects claim that while theatre is their passion, they do understand the financial limitations associated with their current careers as theatre actors. This eventual realisation is similar to that of the realisation Leidner's (2016) participants had, in which they concluded that while they do have the passion for theatre, they concede that they need to supplement this with a more permanent and substantial occupation. Thus, they are open to pursuing other related professions, especially teaching, potentially becoming second-career teachers. Acting has been long argued as a concordant field to teaching. Sarason (1999), for example, draws many parallels between performers' and teachers' professions, including the fact that they both must gain the attention and engagement of the "audience," or in the teachers' case, their students. Moreover, Griggs (2001) argues that many acting techniques and training activities can be possibly utilised in teacher preparation. Theatre training and education in itself can allow an educator to reflect on their teaching practices as well, as Gregory (2006) elaborates in his documentation of when he once attended an undergraduate acting class. Given these arguments, it is not surprising as to why some participants wish to shift to a teaching career.

While others see themselves becoming teachers, others claim that they wish to join the family business or create a business themselves. While a little is less lateral to the field of theatre than that of education, some studies show the connection between theatre techniques and activities, and business management. For example,

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individuals' theatre activities have been documented to teach business lessons regarding leadership (Huffaker and West 2005), marketing concepts (Aylesworth 2008), and sales (Rocco and Whalen 2014).

Letting their children decide on their own

When asked about their future families, the subjects mention that they would introduce their children to theatre but would not force them to choose theatre as a career. The career choice of individuals in the Philippines is highly regulated by families, especially given the fact that many families in the Philippines hope that the future career of their offspring would help with their financial matters (Salazar-Clemeña 2002). This introduction to the theatre resembles one of the categories of parental intentions in influencing their children with regards to their future careers, labelled "skill acquisition" (Young and Friesen 1992).

CONCLUSION

Summation and Conclusion

The results of this study are consistent with the published researches. Most participants reported data strands showing meaning-units related to experiencing financial struggles associated with the profession, a commonly reported reality by professional theatre actors (e.g., Leidner 2016). As such, some participants are looking for other careers related to theatre, or at least work in professional theatre in a smaller capacity. On the other hand, some participants were still motivated to pursue a career in theatre due in part to numerous factors, similar to previous research (Cinque, Nyberg, and Starkey 2020). These include being able to engage in political discourse and being able to foster social change. Moreover, participants mentioned experiences involving the concept of flow, which has been observed in previous studies as well (Martin and Cutler 2010). Additionally, the study adds to the body of knowledge regarding professional theatre.

First, our study describes the "encounters" wherein millennial theatre actors were first exposed to the possibility of theatre as a professional career. As stated by the participants, while they initially did not see theatre as their "dream jobs," these encounters were significant enough for them to consider being professional theatre actors.

Likewise, our participants expressed that they consider theatre to be a collaborative process, rather than being a dictatorial process wherein the director or manager has absolute control. This could be indicative of a changing landscape of the professional theatre world, possibly due to the increasingly liberal and collaborative nature of millennials (Balda and Mora 2011). Furthermore, it was observed that theatre actors' engagement in the industry reinforced their sense of national identity. To the authors' knowledge, this is a unique finding as previous studies have discussed the connection of national identity and theatre from a macro perspective, as discussed earlier.

Relevant to the current situation amid the pandemic, some participants acknowledged how the quarantines and lockdowns affected the theatre industry. Likewise, this affected their profession. As such, some have looked for opportunities elsewhere, such as being tutors. Some have adapted their theatre practice and enjoined other performers in online performances. Related to their concerns regarding their careers, participants also mentioned the career choice/s of their future children. While the participants are passionate about their occupation as theatre actors, they claim that they will not force their children to take up the same, but will at least introduce them to the world of theatre.

Lastly, perhaps it was the theme of "validation from the audience" that was the most unique result this study was able to produce. While it may seem "obvious" that subjects would appreciate and gain something from the validation they receive from the audience, it begs the question as to why this fact has never been investigated in terms of actors' motivation.

The choice of using Schutzian phenomenology enabled the authors to study these stage actors in the very context of their work, career, struggles, interaction with their audiences, aspirations, the Philippine theatre, and theatre in general, without being hindered by too many concerns for ritualised behaviour and interactions of performance studies, or by a protracted time frame of ethnography, or by the clinical and highly theoretical concerns of other psychological approaches.

Policy Recommendations

Given these results, the authors present the following policy recommendations: First, school-based theatre organisations must include in their training menu the preparation of their student members for the challenges that professional theatre actors face in the real world. This may be in the form of financial literacy, orientations on investments, and having self-paid medical insurance, as well as ways of coping with the pressures and anxieties of the job.

Aside from having student theatre organisations, schools, especially high schools, senior high schools, and colleges and universities, must support professional theatre productions by encouraging their students to watch their performances. This effort will not only help the financial plight of theatre actors, but also provide opportunities for that "encounter" that leads to the recruitment of young talents to the career of professional acting. Schools also must welcome theatre actors who wish to apply for part-time teaching. This will not only help the financial plight of the theatre actors, but also take full advantage of their emotional management skills and knowledge on culture and nationalist sentiments for the benefit of education. After all, the skills involved in professional acting are congruent to the skills involved in teaching.

Considering that theatre actors contribute to nation-building and the propagation of cultural literacy, the national government and the various local government units should support qualified private theatre companies. This can be done in the form of subsidies or commissioned productions. The current grants from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts are simply too small and too difficult to grab.

Lastly, considering again that theatre actors contribute to nation-building and the propagation of cultural literacy, supporting qualified private theatre companies could be part of the corporate social responsibility programs of private companies.

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APPENDIX

Clusters of Initial Interview Questions

Clusters	Initial Questions	Respondents
Pathway towards the theatre	How you started?	Subjects
	Circumstances that influenced you?	
	Was acting a dream job?	
	What made you pursue acting as a career?	
Perception on theatre	What is theatre?	Subjects and consociates
	What are the characteristics of Philippine theatre?	
	What is the purpose of theatre?	
	What is the relationship among self, theatre and society?	
	Why do people at present times continue to watch theatre?	
Challenges in a stage actor's life	Financial, psychological, social, and spiritual difficulties?	Subjects and consociates
	Pressure from friends and family to look for another career?	
	How did you address these difficulties and pressures?	
Rewards in a stage actor's life	Advantages?	Subjects and consociates
	Most rewarding part of the job?	
	What have you gained?	
Reasons for perseverance in the career	Contributions of theatre to the community?	Subjects and consociates
	How theatre helped you as a person?	
	Benefits of being a professional actor?	
Long-term expectations	How do you see yourself in the next ten years?	Subjects and consociates
	Will you opt to pursue another career if given a chance?	
	Will you consciously bring up your children to become theater actors?	