Fiction's Truth: The Consequence of Representing Human Suffering, Distress, and Violence in Performance

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Fiction's Truth explores professional actors' lived experiences of representing human suffering, distress, and violence. The book analyses the struggles, issues, and transformations professional actors face when dealing with these portrayals of human life; the personal and interpersonal consequences; both taxing and rewarding; they experience while undertaking these representations; and the forms of attention and care they use to limit the costs and maximize the rewards of their work. The author also includes new key terminology, proposing the term dolesse to capture the experiences of representing human suffering, distress, and violence. Written for entertainment professionals, acting students, and scholars with an interest in acting, theatre, film, and television, Fiction's Truth addresses the challenges of representing dolesse on stage and in front of the camera, acknowledges the importance of health and wellness in the entertainment industry, and helps remove the stigma that surrounds the consequences these representations often have for actors.

Danielle I. Szlawieniec-Haw is an award-winning actor, screenwriter, producer, and acting consultant. She has appeared on stage and on-screen, written feature films as well as hours of television for networks such as A & E, W, CBC, and Discovery ID; and developed projects for production companies throughout Canada and the US. She holds a PhD in Theatre Studies from York University. Fiction's Truth The Consequence of Representing Human Suffering, Distress, and Violence in Performance Danielle I. Szlawieniec-Haw First published 2020 by Routledge 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017 and by Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business; 2020 Danielle I. Szlawieniec-Haw The right of Danielle I. Szlawieniec-Haw to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers. Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data A catalog record for this book has been requested ISBN: 978-1-138-59344-2 (hbk) ISBN: 978-1-138-59354-1 (pbk) ISBN: 978-0-429-48764-4 (ebk) Typeset in Sabon by Apex CoVantage, LLC Fiction's Truth is dedicated to the actors who participated in the study outlined in this book. Thank you all for your bravery, vulnerability, and trust.

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1 Introduction
2 The Study
Danielle I. Szwajnieniec-Haw  On a hot August night, during my theatre school years, I was up late, watching television. I flipped through the channels, noticing that *American Psycho* was airing. When the film was first released, my parents had declared me too young to watch it; but, many times over the years, I had heard them discussing how it was based on a book considered the “blueprint for [serial killer Paul] Bernardo’s behavior and crimes”. That had made me curious about the film. Even though it was partway through, I decided to watch it. I selected the channel, and – seconds later – Patrick Bateman popped up, running around his apartment with a chainsaw and hacking a woman to pieces. While I watched the scene, I was overcome with feelings of sadness, horror, fear, and disgust. I even found myself becoming nauseated. My reaction surprised me as I had seen films with more graphic violence in the past. Soon, however, I recognized that my response was tied to my inability to separate the story from its links to Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. I began to wonder whether Christian Bale, who portrayed Patrick Bateman, had known about this connection when he worked on *American Psycho* and, if he did, whether it had altered his experience of shooting the film. From there, my thoughts expanded. I questioned what other actors could be experiencing when representing characters like Patrick Bateman, who perpetrate acts of suffering, distress, and/or violence. I also considered what actors playing victims of or witnesses to such acts could be experiencing. My interest in actors’ lived experiences of representing suffering, distress, and/or violence only expanded when I was cast as Marjorie in William Mastrosimone’s *Extremities* for my thesis project in performance. In *Extremities*’ opening scene, Raul breaks into Marjorie’s home and sexually assaults her. During a scuffle that follows, Marjorie takes Raul hostage, torturing him for what he’s done to her. The remainder of the play revolves around a debate between Marjorie and her two female roommates about whether they should call the police or kill Raul as punishment for his crimes. Throughout this debate, Raul struggles to convince Marjorie’s roommates that he’s an innocent man and Marjorie is insane. Only during the show’s climax, when Marjorie blinds Raul, does he confess that he not only tried to rape her but planned to kill her as well. By the time I was cast, I had already trained in a variety of psychological, physical, and improv-based acting techniques, as well as several forms of political theatre. The director of *Extremities*, however, did not employ a
singular technique, instead encouraging cast members to take an eclectic approach to our work. While rehearsing for and performing in the show, I encountered several unexpected experiences, including stress, nightmares, anxiety, and feelings of agitation. Everyday situations, like walking to my car at night, all of a sudden felt terrifying and unsafe. I was afraid that someone could attack me at any moment. My fear became so intense that I would ask someone to escort me if I had to go anywhere after dark. Even during the day, if I was alone, I would consistently check over my shoulder, worried someone might sneak up on me. My relationships with my castmates also transformed. Prior to starting the Extremities production process, the actor who was cast as Raul and I were close friends. In fact, when I learned this actor would be my co-star, I was excited at the prospect of working with him. Over the course of the rehearsal process, however, our dynamic shifted. He became awkward around me, while I became less comfortable with him. By the halfway point in our rehearsals, I found myself getting anxious whenever I was in his presence. Although my experiences during Extremities were powerful, I told myself they were due to the fact that I was not yet a professional actor and was still developing my craft. I believed I simply lacked the experience necessary to handle representing such an intense level of suffering, distress, and violence. I was certain that, once I was a professional, everything would be different. After graduating from theatre school, I launched into my professional career, working in film, television, and theatre under the stage name Danielle Cole. I gained work experience, established a deeper understanding of myself, and built strong personal and interpersonal support systems. I also further developed my craft, studying several acting approaches in greater depth, including Viewpoints, the Suzuki method, and the Alexander Technique, as well as techniques emerging from Stanislavsky's system. With my personal and professional growth came a new sense of confidence in myself and my work. Then I went through a period where, almost every time I was cast, it was as a victim of extreme violence or an individual who suffered powerful loss. Again, I encountered personal and interpersonal costs related to my work. While I can now see that I also encountered personal and interpersonal rewards, I wasn't able to identify these at the time. Concerned and judging myself, I returned to my earlier questions about what other actors were experiencing when representing suffering, distress, and/or violence. I was hesitant to speak with fellow performers at first, worried that they would criticize me just as I was criticizing myself. When I finally did open up, however, I was shocked to discover that the vast majority of actors I spoke with were not surprised by or judgemental about my experiences. In fact, many of them shared their own similar stories in return. Although my fellow performers were candid with me, most made it clear that they were speaking in confidence as they felt that the assumptions in the entertainment industry were that actors who encountered costs while representing suffering, distress, and/or violence that did not mirror events they had dealt with in their personal lives were not properly trained, couldn't handle the demands of their profession, or had psychological issues that needed to be addressed. I began digging into these assumptions, discussing them with non-actor entertainment professionals working in film, television, and theatre. Many of these professionals even those who didn't subscribe to them agreed that these assumptions were widely held in the entertainment industry. Several other professionals dismissed my questions, denying that representing suffering, distress, and/or violence could possibly carry consequences for actors. The remainder of the non-actor entertainment professionals I spoke with believed the assumptions, arguing them back to me. Several even said that producers should take down the names of actors who admit to encountering costs while representing suffering, distress, and/or violence in order to avoid hiring them again. It was clear to me that my and other actors' concerns around speaking up about our lived experiences of representing suffering, distress, and/or violence were more than justified. Next, I turned to academia in hopes of discovering research that could help me understand what myself and others were encountering. The material I found was extremely limited, mostly revolving around theories about what actors often in non-professional settings could be experiencing while representing trauma. None of these theories, however, was based on research studies conducted with professional actors, non-professional actors, or acting students. To me, this was a
significant gap in scholarship. How could anyone hope to understand or address actors’ lived experiences with these representations without first establishing what those lived experiences are? The closest studies I located were based in vicarious trauma research and compassion research conducted with non-arts professionals, such as nurses, therapists, and police officers. Though these studies confirmed that professionals can encounter consequences related to working with suffering, distress, and violence, they didn’t tell me about the experience of representing suffering, distress, and/or violence. Nursing and health scholar, Gail J. Mitchell encouraged me to conduct primary research to establish the nature of this latter experience. Acknowledging the significant differences between acting as a career, as a hobby, and as a course of study, I decided to focus on professional actors. With Dr. Mitchell’s extensive support, I designed and conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study exploring professional actors’ lived experiences of representing suffering, distress, and/or violence. Since finishing the study, I have shared its findings nationally and internationally, contributing to a growing interest in actors’ health and wellness and inspiring similar studies to be conducted in Australia and the UK. Now, I hope this book will connect with others, allowing developments in the entertainment industry, scholarship, and beyond.

Who, What, Why
While conducting and sharing my research, I encountered many people with expectations about it. Therefore, I want to be clear and upfront about what this book is and is not. This is not solely – or even primarily – an academic book. My research has always straddled the worlds of scholarship and practice. Having completed my PhD, I have spent extensive time in the academic realm. As a full-time actor and screenwriter, though, I am imbedded in the entertainment industry. I have always intended for Fiction’s Truth to serve both spheres and have striven for it to be relevant for both artists and academics. Given this, I balance the theoretical and the practical throughout this book, with early chapters leaning more toward the former and later chapters trending toward the latter. Although I have faced some pressure from various sources to provide solutions; to the problem; of costs related to representing suffering, distress, and/or violence, I deliberately do not do this for two reasons. First, the base assumption underlying this request is that costs are problems and, as such, need to be solved. Costs are not inherently problems. Positioning them as such is a reductive way of approaching not just actors and their work, but also human experience as a whole. It also runs the risk of suggesting the costs of representing suffering, distress, or violence are abnormal or unhealthy, stigmatizing those who encounter them. Second, even if I did see costs as problems (though, again, I do not), there are no simple solutions. After all, you cannot solve human experience. Even if you could, there would not be one solution appropriate for every workplace or desired by every actor. The entertainment industry is wide, containing actors with vastly different experiences, needs, and wants, as well as workplaces with individual circumstances and production demands. Rather than framing costs as problems or offering singular, prescriptive notions regarding navigating them, I explore their intricacies and the complex relationships my participants had with them. I also address forms of attention and care that had assisted my participants in the past, as well as those they believed would help them in the future while representing suffering, distress, or violence. Finally, I address larger questions of how we approach actors, their work, and their health and wellness, as well as how we approach suffering, distress, and violence in both the North American entertainment industry and society. I have faced pressure to identify who’s to blame for costs related to representing suffering, distress, and/or violence. Again, you won’t find blame here. That simply is not what this book is about. Representing suffering, distress, and/or violence is complicated, with a lot of factors contributing to actors’ lived experiences in relation to it. Assigning blame would dismiss these complexities. I also find the idea that human experience should be blamed on anyone problematic, counter-productive, and highly reductive. I, instead, focus on sharing what professional actors’ lived experiences of representing suffering, distress, and/or violence are in a contemporary North American context. I have recently been asked if this is just sharing raw data. The raw data in my study is the complete interviews with participants, which I cannot and do not share in this book. What I do include,
however, is an exploration of a multi-layered lived experience in order to allow actors, other entertainment professionals, scholars, and others to more thoroughly understand it. This understanding can help support a variety of individuals, including actors who wish to take more agency in relation to their health and wellness; other entertainment professionals and acting instructors looking to better understand or support actors; health and wellness, particularly in relation to representing suffering, distress, and/or violence; entertainment professionals and scholars who are in the process of challenging the way the industry approaches actors; health and wellness or representing suffering, distress, and/or violence. Language Throughout this book, I engage with professional actors' lived experiences of representing suffering, distress, and/or violence. In the past, I have used this whole phrasing when discussing my research. For ease of reading, however, I take a new approach in this book, dubbing the grouping of suffering, distress, and/or violence dolesse. This term is derived from the Latin for pain, suffering, sorrow, and grief (dolor) and essence (esse). Why not use a term already in place? The answer to this is quite simple; I didn't feel any of the terms already on offer effectively captured the grouping of suffering, distress, and/or violence without bringing a specific framing and an extensive history to the table. By using a new term, I could ensure the full grouping of suffering, distress, and/or violence was covered, while avoiding unintended framings or histories. Most other terminology in need of description will be dealt with as it arises in the book. I have, however, already used the terms costs and rewards in relation to my and other professional actors' experiences of representing dolesse. Given this, I want to take a moment to define the meaning of these two terms in this context. Both emerged from my study and are in line with common terminology employed in human science research. A cost refers to a price paid for undertaking an endeavour; in this case, representing dolesse. Costs should not be read as negative. In many cases, my participants expressed complicated feelings about one or more of the costs they identified in their interviews. Rewards, on the other hand, are the benefits received from undertaking an endeavour. Considering an unrelated example, I could say a cost of writing this book has been having less time to spend with loved ones, but a reward has been feeling that the book could assist others. In order for it to do that, though, we need to continue on into the meat of the material. Having introduced myself, this book, and key terminology in this chapter, I outline my study in the next. Then, once that groundwork has been laid, the remainder of the book explores my research findings, as well as associated topics. I draw on other relevant scholarship and practice to fully discuss these findings and associated topics.

Note 1. Kamalipour & Rampal 63 Works Cited
Kamalipour, Yahya R., and Kuldip R. Rampal, editors. Media, Sex, Violence, Drugs in the Global Village. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001. Print. Chapter 2 The Study Danielle I. Szlawieniec-Haw The objective of my study was to describe professional actors' lived experiences of representing dolesse, as well as to explore what personal, interpersonal, and structural factors can have an impact on these experiences. I chose to conduct a phenomenological, interview-based study as it helped me to thoughtfully reflect on actors' lived experiences and allowed for enhanced understandings of the relevance of representations of dolesse to the actors performing them. For those not familiar with phenomenology, it focuses on individuals' subjective experiences of thinking, feeling, and encountering through their body/minds, as well as the intersubjective relationship between the self and the world. In this case, the world encapsulates anything that is not self, including other people. Based in exploring the way we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life, phenomenological research often focuses on the ephemeral. For example, a phenomenologist may consider this question: What is the lived experience of falling in love? In this case, the researcher is not looking at the biological processes in the body/mind, but rather what an individual thinks, feels, and encounters as they fall in love. The goal is to thoroughly describe the experience under consideration, not to explain the physiological
reasons behind it. To draw out a full interpretive description of the phenomenon under consideration, phenomenological researchers often conduct interviews, remaining aware of the fact that "lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal." These interviews become the data under consideration. As the intention of phenomenological research is to understand an aspect of lived life, interviews are about quality not quantity. Sample sizes are kept small, but interviews are extensive, in the case of my study often lasting several hours. The ultimate goal is to reach a saturation of themes, which means there is no longer new data emerging.

**Sampling and Recruitment**

To gather interviewees for my study, I created an e-mail invitation to participate, using four avenues to disburse it to actors. First, I contacted professional Canadian entertainment companies, asking them to forward the invitation to actors they had worked with in the past or were currently working with. Second, I sent the invitation to Canadian Actors' Equity Association and ACTRA, the two unions that oversee professional English language actors' work in Canada. I requested that the unions forward the invitation to their members. Third, I sent the invitation to Canadian post-secondary institutions that provide actor training, requesting that they pass the invitation on to their graduates, as well as to current students with professional acting experience. Finally, I provided invitations to professional actors I had worked with in the past or knew personally. I also asked these individuals to forward the invitation to any fellow actors they thought might be interested and eligible for the study. To qualify for inclusion in the study, individuals had to be located in Canada and be eighteen years of age or older at the time of the interview. All participants were required to have worked as professional actors for at least three years. For the purpose of the study, a professional actor was defined as an actor who had consistently received wages (not honorariums) for their work. Finally, participants needed to have experience representing dolesse in professional acting environments.

**Data Gathering**

Participants in the study engaged in a phenomenological interview with me as the primary researcher. At the start of each session, the participant was asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire, which addressed age, gender, training, union status, and any specific acting technique(s) they employed in their work. When this questionnaire was complete, the interview proper began. I opened each interview with the question, "Could you please describe your experiences of representing human suffering, distress, and/or violence?" The participant was then given an opportunity to speak to this open-ended question for as long as they wished to. When each participant had fully answered this question, I would then ask follow-up questions to encourage a deeper, thoughtful description of relevant material. The follow-up questions were also open-ended. They focused on subjective experience and encouraged participants to speak freely. I listened carefully to each answer, allowing it to guide me to my next question. At the end of every interview, the participant was asked if there was anything else they wanted to add. While I initially intended to focus on theatre solely, participants spoke about their experiences across theatre, film, and television. The study consisted of twenty interviews; which, in consultation with other human science researchers, was deemed enough to have reached a saturation of themes. Although twenty participants were ultimately included in the study, I conducted a total of twenty-two interviews. One participant's interview was removed for not meeting the study's criteria for inclusion. In our preliminary e-mail interactions, this participant had self-identified as a professional actor based on the criteria I laid out above. At the interview, however, the participant confessed that they had only acted in unpaid work. Given this, the interview was removed from my study and the participant was replaced. Another participant was interviewed twice. During the first interview, this participant - who worked as both an actor and director - mainly spoke about their directing experiences. Therefore, a second interview was conducted to focus exclusively on the participant's acting experiences. The two interviews were then combined and, from that point on, were treated as a single interview. With the one interview removed and the two interviews with the same participant merged, I entered the data analysis phase of my study with twenty interviews.

**Participants**

Of the twenty participants in the study, half identified as women and half as men at the time. Since then, one participant has come out as non-binary. To be inclusive of all participants throughout the book, I
refer to individual participants as *they* instead of using *she/he*. All participants lived and worked primarily in North America. Participants brought a range of experience. At the time of their interviews, two participants were in the early stages of their careers, having worked professionally for three to five years. Five reported acting in the entertainment industry for five to ten years. The final group of thirteen had professional acting careers spanning over ten years, with a number having worked for multiple decades. Participants brought experience in theatre, film, and television, with a number commenting that actors generally cannot afford to work only in certain mediums. While union membership was not a requirement for inclusion in the study, all but three participants belonged to ACTRA and/or CAEA, with many also maintaining membership in the American-based SAG-AFTRA and other international unions, such as the American-based SAG-AFTRA. Participants ranged from working actors to performers who have been publicly identified as celebrities. All of the participants in my study had studied a variety of acting techniques. When asked what particular technique or techniques they employed, all but three participants identified themselves as using no specific technique, an eclectic combination of techniques, or shifting techniques depending on the needs of various productions. Techniques were often compared to tools, with participants describing the importance of choosing the right one for the job. The remaining three participants employed techniques pioneered by Stanislavsky and/or his protégés. Even these participants reported their techniques being preferences and said they would shift to others if these seemed more helpful in the moment. While a number of participants had trained in Viewpoints, improvisation-based approaches, and/or clown, they identified that these techniques can be difficult to incorporate in most professional settings, as much of the North American entertainment industry is dominated by scripted projects demanding realistic or semi-realistic acting styles. As scripted content made up the bulk of my participants' work, it will be my focus from this point forward, unless otherwise stated.

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Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity - Digital Education - Such an effect has the true poetry of nature, of Job as an impious tragic figure whose mode of suffering resembles that of. vides a coherent representation of God as torturer and argues that the Book of. Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance. Trans.... Rather than violence to humans being an unavoidable. Encore -- theater general - experiences of representing human suffering, distress, and/or violence entail; how these.. reveal hidden emotional truths (Artaud 85-86; Grotowski 210). Although audience members and each performance's narrative, so viewers both think and feel... the actor can communicate the fiction without becoming lost in it. Personal Development - Leading Blog: A Leadership Blog - The Consequence of Representing Human Suffering, Distress, and Violence in Performance Danielle Szlawieniec-Haw. Fiction's. Truth. Fiction's Truth explores professional actors' lived experiences of representing human suffering. The book analyses the struggles, issues, and transformations professional actors face when telepathy real - us today, framing our understanding of war, conflict, and suffering. In this way, the to the study of war represented by series such as Studies in the Social and Cultural. standing' war and its human consequences is the way forward, albeit... of fiction, putting to one side the fact that a book is a printed medium. In order to Fiction's Truth: The Consequence of Representing Human - Violence and female subjectivity in the hard-boiled detective novel 142. 11 Sally Munt, Murder By the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel (London: Routledge, 1994), equation femininity comes to represent a weakness, a counter to masculine power... In effect this is a literature that encourages women writers totalk. Joaquin Phoenix on the Joker Controversy, Rooney Mara, and - Scheer, Anna Teresa, author. Printed Book Fact or fiction? - Mental Health Foundation - This volume holds all of the fiction that Kafka committed to publication during When I say that those five books and the short story can stand, I do not mean. The terrible but terribly human tale ends with Crete's own metamorphosis, into... suffers in person from their evil consequences, which he can no longer trace back Abstracts - Memory Studies Association - Horror stories, from any medium A subgenre of Speculative Fiction as many hint at universal fears and anxieties that bind humans on a primal level. It uses various Horror Tropes to cause these effect; however, partly due to the the IBG trope; the book version of Pet Sematary (1983), Any movie with an visual theaters of suffering constituting the western - Helda - This study also seeks to demonstrate that trauma in literature is represented, acted out, and... the â€œcrisis of truth,â€• which trauma entails, is tied
to literary language and to wit... In her book Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction... to traumatic memory and suffering with gendered implications: the violent scene. Is telepathy real - our consumers the most effective books like Fiction S Truth The. Consequence Of Representing. Human Suffering Distress And. Violence In Performance free of. Chouliaraki, Lilie (2008) - The Spectatorship of Suffering.pdf - The impact of eugenic thought on research into human behaviour .... legal and social implications raised by research in behavioural genetics.... for example using gene therapy, is still in the realms of science fiction (Box 13.2).... representation of the fact that all these tests correlate with one another: it does not prove.

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