

The impact of gender and age on actors' employment in Europe

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Abstract: Findings from an EU-funded survey of professional actors in Europe indicate differentiated effects of age on access to work, pay and career longevity, depending on the performer's gender. This is despite the status of performing work as a long-established gender-integrated occupation.

The International Federation of Actors (FIA) commissioned an online questionnaire to survey performers in Europe on their perceptions of the effects of social identities (principally gender and age) on a range of areas including access to work, pay, content of work and career longevity, and in relation to sector (principally film, television, theatre, radio). This project was funded within the Social Dialogue strand of European Commission work.

The EU's Roadmap for Equality between women and men 2006-2010 highlights six priority areas for action on gender equality, one of which is 'Elimination of gender stereotypes'. Gender stereotypes are seen as centrally implicated in the existence and persistence of unequal outcomes in terms of employment and pay. Further, the declining birthrate and shrinking workforce in Europe has contributed to a focus on age-related discrimination in employment. Perceptions of age are bound up with gender, and research shows that women are affected more as a group by negative perceptions of ageing, in particular regarding rates of employment and pay.

One of the primary explanations offered for gendered disparities in pay and career progression is occupational segregation, which is still a dominant feature of contemporary labour markets worldwide. However, professional acting has been a formally gender-integrated occupation in Europe for several hundred years. Acting requires exercise of the same skills, in the same workplaces, by both men and women at the same time. Therefore it is a particularly useful area of employment to explore in considering systemic patterns in relation to gender and age.

Response rates and representativeness

There were 2174 respondents to the questionnaire: women 54%, men 46%. The overall response rate was low (average of the 21 countries responding, 5%), and no claims to statistical representativeness of all performers in Europe are made. However, the largest union in EuroFIA is Equity in the UK (47% of affiliate membership) and Equity members comprised 48% of the total number of responses. Further, membership of Equity is 50:50 male: female (similar to the majority of EuroFIA unions), and so the 46% male response rate to this survey indicates a significant level of representativeness. Therefore, it is possible that the findings are generalisable to the wider performer population.

Career longevity

Men as a group are spread more evenly than women as a group across ages, career categories, length of time as a professional performer and income categories. Women are more concentrated in the younger age groups (20-35, where they comprise two-thirds of the total) and over a fifth more indicate that they are in the career category labelled 'work infrequently with little choice of employment opportunities' (61% of women as against 39% of men). The concentration of genders in particular age groups and 'length of time as professional performer' categories indicates that in general men have longer careers as performers than women. The largest percentage in any length of time performing category is 20% for both women and men. However, that 20% of women is in the 7-10 years category and the 20% of men is in the 30 years+ category.

Pay

Income is a key indicator of gender equality and respondents were asked about their financial income from performing (before tax) for the last financial year (2006 - 2007). The largest percentages of performers are in one of the two lowest income categories (under £6,000/€7,499 and up to 11,999/€7,500-15,499 category). This confirms previous International Labour Organisation, European Commission and nationally-based research on the generally low levels of income from performing.

So most performers earn very little from their work (and 5% of both genders earned nothing from performing in 2006-7); however there is a smaller proportion of men in the lowest income group (14 percentage points fewer than women) and a larger proportion in the highest income group (4 percentage points more than women, who comprise 0.4% of performers earning £60,000/€75,000+).

Further, women as a group do not earn as much or as consistently as men across age categories: 26% of men see ageing as an *advantage* in relation to pay, 9% of men see it as a *disadvantage*. In contrast, only 3% of women see ageing as an *advantage* in relation to pay, 49% of women see it as a *disadvantage*.

Access to work

One of the clearest findings was that women saw their gender as disadvantageous to them along every dimension, including in particular: potential number and variety of roles, pay, and ageing ('ageing' here referring to changing opportunities from approximate age 40 on). In contrast, men performers saw their gender either clearly as an advantage or else as not either an advantage or disadvantage. There was a large difference in perception of lack of employment opportunity as mainly due to *gender*: women 57%; men 6%. Perception of lack of employment opportunity as because of *age* was much closer, though still clearly differentiated: women 56%; men 28%

The responses of minority ethnic women performers on the key dimensions are closer to majority ethnic women than to minority ethnic men, indicating that they experience both

multiple and intersectional disadvantage (perceptions of ethnicity compounded by ‘aged’ perceptions of gender).

Age and gender are relevant to the younger performer: the survey’s finding of greater concentration of women in the younger age categories indicates disproportionate labour market competition for women. Previous UK research highlighted the ‘colonisation’ of the smaller number of roles for women over 40 by already well-known performers and, in conjunction with the statistics on age concentration and disparity in number of available roles for women and men, this suggests younger women performers are under greater pressure than their male peers to achieve recognition earlier, in order to sustain a career long-term.

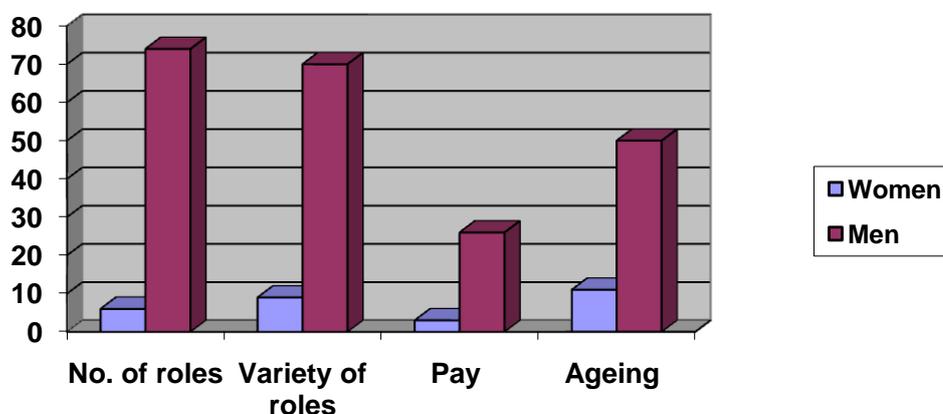
Conclusions

In response to the key project question ‘Does ageing affect access to jobs, pay and career longevity differently depending on a performer’s gender?’, the simple answer is ‘*In general, yes*’.

A recurring theme emerged. European actors work within the same broad ‘rules’ of perceptions of age, appearance and talent. They *matter for all performers* in terms of employment opportunity. However, the way these rules are understood and applied is broadly different according to gender, resulting in different labour market outcomes in a formally gender-integrated occupation.

Performers are paid to represent us to ourselves. The impact of age and gender on their employment, pay and career longevity gives us insight into the position of women and men more widely.

Performers’ perceptions of advantage of gender in employment opportunity (percentage response by dimension)



Performers' perceptions of disadvantage of gender in employment opportunity
(percentage response by dimension)

