

**Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**Actresses**  
**Inequalities of success and career in provincial stone**  
**theatres**

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*The aim of the thesis* is to answer how gender inequalities appear in the work organisation of provincial stone theatres, what influences gender differences in careers and life paths, and how actors and actresses define career and success.

There have been many definitions of social stratification, Vanfossen (quoted in Farkas 2018) defines social inequalities as differences between individuals and groups that are considered valuable in a given culture, Grabb (quoted in Farkas 2018) defines it as differences between people that affect their lives, in particular their rights, obligations, privileges and rewards being understood as such. According to Blau, social inequalities are differences between people that represent differences in resources and ranked status. While Hradil says "*By social inequalities we mean those socially created and relatively enduring conditions of action that make the achievement of generally accepted life goals possible to a greater extent for some members of society and to a lesser extent for others*" (quoted in Farkas 2018:469).

My analysis aims to contribute to the interpretation of the social inequalities between women and men, one of the issues of gender, but it does so through the study of the theatre world outside the capital and of women actors.

I consider the social situation of actresses to be special because they represent the characteristics of the gender problem in a "condensed" or "essential" way, since the personality, aesthetic role, public appearance and ambitions of actresses summarise gender issues for society. The status of an actress provides a condensed, essential representation of the complexity of the women's issues and their contradictions. On the one hand, because theatres from antiquity to the present day have typically worked with plays from an andocentric perspective, in which the image of women in the male-centred patriarchal world is represented in dramatic literature in the roles of mother, wife, lover, sex symbol, for example. On the other hand, the actress is also a symbol of an independent, autonomous social status, going her own way, leaving traditional gender roles and being separable from marriage. I will briefly refer to the complexity and contradictions of the actress/womanhood as "the condensed woman" and my research is about the analysis of her social position and her relationship system.

Among other sources, we know from Szécsi and Géra's description of women's history (Szécsi-Géra 2016) that performing arts required the presence of women as well as men from

the very beginning. In a formal sense, it gave women the opportunity to build a career similar to that of men, to gain prestige, influence and to enjoy popularity. Howe, in his study of the first English actresses, states that from the Restoration era, i. e. from the 1660s onwards, gender performativity, "cross-dressing" (dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex on stage), and trouser roles written for women, subverted the nature of traditional roles. Cross-dressing represented a rebellion against traditional stage and social norms (Szilágyi-Palkó 2016).

I see the actress as a working woman (not a member of the cultural elite) who has similar career development opportunities in the theatre arts as their actor colleagues, i.e. from a formal perspective, actresses and actors are similarly emancipated. My approach is based on Hradil's notion of social inequality (Farkas 2018), so that the differences between the situation of actresses and actors are created in the possibilities of realizing life goals along socially determined conditions of action. I see the exploration of life goals in terms of understanding their definitions of success and career, i.e. I examine the differences at a micro level.

In my analysis, I sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. How do gender inequalities appear and what types of gender inequalities can be detected among prose actresses and actors working in the working structure of provincial stone theatres?
2. What influences gender based differences in career paths, opportunities and careers in the work organisation of provincial stone theatres?
3. How are gender inequalities reflected in the way actors and actresses define their careers and success? When and why are they satisfied with their success and career?

Some analyses of gender inequalities describe the differences between women and men in terms of the gender pay gap or women's limited access to higher status (under-representation in politics and leadership positions). I investigate the inequalities between actresses and actors in the work organisation of stone theatres at the micro level by introducing subjective variables (key concepts of success and career) which I base on the analyses of Deaton and Kahnemann. Additionally, I draw mainly on Katalin Koncz's descriptions of careers, Beáta Nagy's descriptions of gender and organisations, Bourdieu's field theory, and, relating to gender stereotypes, I draw on Christopher Lasch's ideas of social narcissism and the representation of the body. In my analysis, I add to this the social history of the status of the actress, the representation of the actress's body (her age and youth), her life and pastimes

outside the theatre, and the disadvantages of women as described in feminist literature, which I supplement with "advantages for women" (Lasch 1996).

Describing the inequalities among actresses and actors in the provincial stone theatre workplace is a scarcely researched topic. There is little literature and empirical support available.

I used two different methods of data collection in my research, on the one hand document analysis and on the other hand semi-structured interviews. For the description of the theatres' organisational functioning, I drew my sources from publicly available organisational documents (organisational and operational regulations, founding documents, organisational charts, their online theatre platforms: website, facebook).

The micro-level social medium that creates and preserves gender differences is the provincial stone theatre. I will analyse the gender characteristics of its organisation and functional characteristics as a social subsystem and "theatre field". I investigated stone theatres in Eastern Hungary and asked the members of the theatre companies to be interviewed on the basis of personal approaches. The criteria for being included in the sample was to have at least 1 season of experience at that theatre and to be a member of the company, so that at the time of the interview, a provincial theatre was the employing theatre. The institution of a theatre is a closed community, so I had contacted the artistic directors and directors of the theatres prior to sampling. It was them who granted me permission to conduct semi-structured, anonymous interviews with actors and actresses working in the theatre. I conducted anonymous interviews recorded on dictaphone with 34 people, 21 of whom were women (actress, director, dramaturg, press officer) and 13 of whom were men (actor, director, director). The men were included in the analysis as a control group.

The research venue was provided by two provincial repertory theatres in Hungary. By provincial theatre, I understand stone theatre institutions outside the theatre world of the capital. I did not include alternative, independent theatres in my research, focusing instead analysis on the classically appearing, formally regulated stone theatres. These are multi-genre repertory theatres with a prose and opera section, presenting works by classical and contemporary authors, performing prose, music and dance productions alike. The performances of the theatre seasons are presented on three stages: the main stage, the chamber stage and the studio stage. The repertoire of theatres includes both adult and youth pieces. The

theatres in the survey are budget institutions, and the vast majority of their available resources come from public funds, from the local government, and from the revenue from tickets and season tickets sold. They operate as a "folk theatres", serving the needs of a wide range of local audiences. I focused the semi-structured interview on 4 dimensions. In the first dimension, I measured the career socialisation of the interviewees. To this end, I asked them about their childhood, their career choices, their parents' support for their choices, i.e. how they had made their way to acting. Along this line, the demographic situation of the actresses and actors, the social status of their parents, their cultural and relational capital, their general relationship and connection to the theatre and the arts were summarised. To map out a career path, it is necessary to know these starting conditions. In the second dimension, I asked them about their current family life, their marital status and their circle of friends. This dimension was intrinsically linked to the previous one. Here the aim was to find out about the current relationship and family status of the interviewees. Among other things, it became clearly visible what proportion of the respondents were married or in partnerships or friendships with professionals and civilian people. We can also get an idea of how closed a field the theatre is, how decisive a role it plays in shaping their social relationships that acting is their profession. How much it determines their daily rhythm, the harmony of reconciling family and work. Thus the first two dimensions measured the demographic and individual characteristics of the subjects.

The *third dimension* of the interview structure measured their general social stereotypes concerning actors and actresses and their profession. We started with general stereotypes and prejudices applied to women and men, and then we explored the subjective perceptions of the artists interviewed about the feedback they receive about their profession. It was at this point that the social gender inequality analysis aspects of the thesis emerged.

The *fourth dimension* of the interviews asked the interviewees about theatre as a workplace and about success and career. The purpose of this was to assess how the theatre as a workplace differs from other institutions, how it is different, and how the context of the study works.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

*How do gender inequalities appear and what types of gender inequalities can be detected among prose actresses and actors working in the working structure of provincial stone theatres?*

### ***The middle-aged actress's handicap***

All interviewees spoke about the disadvantage that actresses face when they change in their age. It is a present, contemporary problem. In practice, it means that there is a predominance of roles written for young actresses and older, mature actresses, and that middle-aged actresses with considerable experience and established characters are disadvantaged. The roles available for that age group may be limited, with few opportunities to offer them, especially if they are of a certain type and age and find it difficult to adapt to other character roles. This can create a definite career crisis in their professional lives. It is at this stage that they could make the best use of their skills, talents and experience, and their financial options may also become more limited. The roles written for men are just the opposite: young men's roles are less important, and as they progress in age, their professional opportunities and challenges increase in proportion. Drawing on Lasch's theory, it is true that the convergence of age and gender roles can be seen in the crisis of the actress's changing age. It is at this point that major tensions arise in the role possibilities of actresses and actors. For actresses, these legacies can lead to a definite career break, while for men, the opportunities tend to increase and become more significant at that stage of life. This fact is a social, theatrical legacy, an established set of expectations and norms of theatre functioning, for which there is no, or at least no significant contemporary response.

### ***The historical legacies of drama***

Closely related to the crisis of the changing age, or more precisely, its source is the dramatic heritage, which differentiates between the possibilities of actors and actresses in terms of role possibilities. This presumably dates back to the period of traditional gender inequality, when the vast majority of dramatists were men and therefore the focus was on masculinist heroes, protagonists or social events. For women, roles relating to their own oppression, love crises and private conflicts predominate. There is no contemporary social reflection to resolve this, even though gender roles have changed and have been expanded to include various roles, and the dramatic literature is lagging behind somewhat in this respect, not adapting to contemporary social changes. Historically inherited dramatic handicaps are reproduced due to a lack of contemporary reflection.

### ***The female director's handicap***

The disadvantage of female directors reflects significant gender differences, and I point this out despite the fact that I cannot give a complete picture, and to go into this topic in depth would stretch the analytical framework of this thesis. However, as an indicator, it does point to one of the major inequalities in the world of theatre that makes it difficult to progress in the occupational hierarchy of the theatre. Recruitment is not done in equal proportions and a contemporary female director herself stated in a Budapest theatre roundtable discussion that she perceived a double standard, a pressure to perform resulting from a male normative system. It can also increase competition between women directors, not to mention the fact that women who reach such high positions, identifying with masculine norms, can mistreat the actresses working under them. Here, the 'queen bee syndrome' described by Nagy can be detected (Nagy 2014).

*What influences gender differences in career paths, role opportunities and careers in the work organisation of provincial stone theatres?*

- Dramatic heritage: andocentric perspective and dramaturgy of texts, few contemporary reflections, few financial resources for new dramatic approaches or publications

- Mechanisms of provincial stone theatre structure as historical legacies: overly bureaucratic, hierarchical structure, traditional managerial attitudes that permeate the internal rules and norms (illusion and habit of belonging to the theatre) of actors and actresses. There is no developed actor/actress career model that would take into account the actress as a working woman, as a mother. This is where the dual expectations towards actresses appear, for which I have drawn on Bourdieu's field theory.

- The actress as a mother

The conflict between the roles of actress and mother is real and arises from outdated, rigid organisational practices that do not take into account the changing gender roles of the globalised world, the working woman who, in addition to building an 'external career', can also take on the role of mother and fulfil both her role aspirations. There are few significant solutions to reconcile these two roles in theatre practice itself. The theatre recognises the actor and the actress, but gives less equal weight to the actor and the actress as father and mother. This duality of roles is not supported, as can be seen in the work of Nagy (2014) and Koncz (2008; 2013) on the difficulties of women choosing a dual career. Actresses do not ground

their prenatal exit and then return (time, method, appropriate role), there is no elaborate model for them to feel secure.

*How are gender inequalities reflected in the way actors and actresses define their careers and success? When and what makes them satisfied with their success and career?*

*"A career is the total sequence of all the work experiences that an individual accumulates during his or her career, and the subjective interpretation of these achievements in the form of individual aspirations, needs and feelings" (quoted in Koncz 2013:86).*

A career can therefore also be understood for actresses as well, not only within the theatre field. A career outside the theatrical field also includes aspects of private or civil life: actresses as mothers, actresses' friendships and partnerships, work outside the theatrical field and a variety of everyday leisure activities.

Among the respondents, teaching, charitable activities, other artistic pursuits, self-seeking and spiritual development are common to both women and men. It can be seen that "there is life outside the theatre, too". According to many actresses, they are happy with this sideline and are satisfied with the situation.

Both genders approach the definition of success from three perspectives: internal benchmark, the profession, the public's judgement. Furthermore, for both sexes, it can be argued, as Deaton and Kahnemann state, that satisfaction is worth examining in relation to subjective variables because it provides a subtle picture that is more difficult to justify with objective variables alone. The responses of the vast majority of actresses and actors show an increased appreciation of subjective satisfaction.

*How do the concepts (success, career) differ for actors and actresses?*

There are some "compensatory" explanations for external success in the responses of actresses and actors, but the direction of these explanations is divergent. Both genders have some conflict with the notion of an external career. They tend to attach a negative connotation to it, which is typical of everyday language. Some of the actresses interviewed express openly that they can identify more easily with the concept of success than with career, the latter being perceived as artificial and is negatively interpreted by them. Certain actresses are at a career disadvantage, and to compensate for this, subjectively defined success can be a stronger point of identification for them. They include as subjective their commitment to the theatre, their

habitus, their sense of usefulness. They also say that art cannot be measured objectively, so that the impulses and successes coming from outside are less important. They also link the age factor to this, that feelings of success change with age. Objective factors, external recognition and success are devalued. This is exacerbated by the current political division of the theatre and the lack of transparency in the distribution of merits. In the case of actresses, success related to inner satisfaction is highly valued, and therefore they consider the impact of their art as the most important factor in work. The majority of them interpret external success negatively, they don't relate to it well, they don't know what to do with it. Compared to men, women explain their lack of external success by factors within their personality or more abstract concepts. Actresses' definitions of success-career can be coupled with novel organisational career concepts (lifelong learning, striving for external and internal balance) (Koncz 2008).

Men do not mention family or age in connection with these two concepts. Men also talk more openly, more courageously, about the desire for an objective-momentary career. Several actresses indicate that they prefer to distance themselves from the artificial notion of an external career, success being more tangible for them. Some of the men also mention these, there is a gender similarity here, too, they are not separated by a sharp contrast, but they do not say they feel it is artificial, the external career concept is less conflicting for actors than for actresses. Men's definition of a successful career is more closely related to traditional concepts, work organisation, and is akin to the classical organisational concept of a career. They explain this, and the lack or low level of external success, in terms of differences in career opportunities between provincial and metropolitan areas, and issues of theatre management, marketability and consumerism. Women explain it by internal reasons, while men explain it by external reasons.

### **An emancipated balance of actresses' advantages and disadvantages**

The advantage of a career as an actress is that they do not have a narrowing of their life space because of their attachments outside the theatre, they cannot define their identity solely through the theatre, but if they have a career crisis, they can cling to one of these. Here it is worth thinking of mental and existential 'safeguards' that can compensate them for the uncertainties of the theatre. It is therefore also possible for them to create somewhat "private identities", showing that they have a life outside the theatre, too. Although it is a borderline phenomenon, I would rather count as an advantage the 'condensed femininity' described

above, whereby they have the opportunity to experience both their feminine and masculine qualities. In practice, this means that through their acting, through the unfolding of their femininity, they resemble an archaic image of femininity (a hotbed of misunderstanding, envy and social stereotypes), while on the other hand, in the masculine theatre field, they are present as modern working women who can in many cases pursue a career as first actresses, prima donnas. Balancing in this duality, or rather standing on more than one foot, can result in their emotional resistance being increased, they can become more resilient.

Their disadvantage is manifested in their careers within the theatre, where they encounter a number of career obstacles that, while not contemporary in origin, still lack its reflection. These include gender role imbalances in dramatic literature, which generate a crisis of change for the actress. The normative system of the theatrical field, considered masculine, declares the subordination of women to this system, and it is in this context that the anxiety of the actress's physical beauty and age become absolutist. To borrow Koncz's phrase, the statement that the female (actor) still does not fit into the image of the ideal worker is also true in the theatre field. For the functioning of the structure, the actress is a more abstract concept and cannot react flexibly enough to the questions that arise.

In the provincial stone theatre field, a new type of inequalities between actors and actresses can be revealed using subjective variables. The total sum of the advantages and disadvantages of actresses in the theatre field can be used to describe their success and career. Actresses are at a disadvantage in the masculine normative theatre field, so their aspirations and plans do not really translate into their theatre-related sense of vocation and habitus. For actresses, their theatre-related habitus is a larger aggregate than that of their colleagues; for them, the definition of success is inferred from the conflation of items inside and outside the theatre. Looking separately at the 'items' of their careers within the theatre, there are inequalities arising from dramatic literature, the crisis of the changing times, the gender imbalance of roles, the theatre structure. Due to the legacies of the theatre field, their theatre careers have to be complemented by careers outside the theatre with other activities and the positives of their private lives, due to the obstacles they face, in order to have satisfaction as measured by subjective variables. In this way they are emancipated in the same way as their fellow actors. The actresses are emancipated on a par with their actor colleagues in terms of their reported life chances, their satisfaction with their lives, their happiness at the moment (introduced subjective variables). Thus, the emancipation of actresses is the sum total of many other items of the "accounting balance". The empirical explanation of the situation of the condensed

woman (i.e. provincial actresses who represent gender issues and problems in a concentrated way) involves the relationship between the genders and their subjective well-being. Both national and international results show that women's and men's satisfaction with life is almost equal, not significantly so, but sometimes women's satisfaction is slightly higher. This is largely explained by the fact that women and men measure their satisfaction with almost the same dimensions, such as work, personal relationships and material goods, but that the personal sphere is of outstanding importance for women.

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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

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