

Burnout in Arts Workers: an investigation

A thesis presented
by

Abe L. Watson

[756897]

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Supervisor: Dr. Guy Morrow

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ABSTRACT

The mental health crisis in the arts and cultural sector is alarming. A 2016 survey uncovered startling statistics: of entertainment industry workers surveyed, 15.2% experienced symptoms of moderate to severe depression, and 44% experienced symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety (Van den Eynde et al., 2016). It is no wonder, given the unstable nature of work, that professionals in this industry are burning out. The industry feels like it stands at a precipice, with some academics openly questioning the sustainability of creative labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010), with sustained government funding cuts contributing to industry instability. With the industry already at the “mother-of-all-dead-ends” (Meyrick, 2019), the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fragilities of creative labour.

Based on a review of historical literature surrounding mental illness and history’s creative geniuses, as well as contemporary literature around burnout and creative labour, surveys and interviews were undertaken to gain a more holistic understanding of the effect of burnout in the creative and cultural sector. Analysis of responses, guided by an autoethnographic approach (including observations and reflective analysis), demonstrated significant drivers at the government, industry, and individual level, which may lead to burnout. The results indicate that significant changes are required at all levels to reduce the risk of burnout in the sector; furthermore, that industry can only achieve so much progress without significant high-level government policy reform. Changes proposed in this research are intended to spur further conversation and research; I have not sought to undertake serious policy review or critique, as the format of this research does not allow for such in-depth analysis. Rather, it is proposed that further research is required to inform, shape, and build policy which significantly improves the sustainability of creative work in Australia.

Declarations

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. The work herein is entirely my own, except where acknowledged. Ethics approval has been obtained for this research. Ethics ID: 1955930.1

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Finally, a dedication. 2020 has been a tough year for everyone, but it has been particularly tough for those working in the performing arts. Our work brings people together, and normally, that is something to be celebrated. COVID-19 has placed an inordinate amount of stress upon an industry which already lacks government support in key areas. I have been amazed at the perseverance and strength our industry has displayed in turbulent waters; it is a testament to the incredible people who make up this workforce. I am

grateful, every single day, to be part of such an incredible community of brilliant people who amaze and inspire me. So, I dedicate this thesis to each and every one of you. Thank you for giving people a reason to smile even in the darkest of times. And please, when we reopen (and we will), please ensure that you are taking care of yourselves and your colleagues. We know this work can be challenging — and there are factors which are outside of our control — but opening honest conversations in your workplaces, looking after your mental health and helping colleagues to do the same, is a powerful (and simple) way to affect positive change.

INTRODUCTION

“Burnout is an occupational hazard in the arts” says Australian playwright, poet, and librettist, Alison Croggon (Dore, 2015); the emotional and mental strain of working in the arts is often attributed to higher rates of mental health issues and other disorders. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of literature on the topic. The industry knows it is a problem; arts and entertainment-specific mental health organisations are more commonplace, working hard to tackle the problem, find mitigation strategies, and remove the stigma. The work that they do in management is excellent — it is integral. However, where is the literature into why high levels of mental illness and burnout occur in the sector? People working in the industry are often expected to work long hours for a low salary; a large proportion of the creative workforce is freelance, meaning that work is sporadic as they move from contract to contract: there is no superannuation, no sick leave, and ultimately no employment protection (something which has been laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic). The sector relies so heavily on unpaid work that emerging professionals are working full-time, studying full-time, and undertaking a large amount of voluntary work because it is so standard in terms of career development. The industry feels like it stands at a precipice; some academics have questioned the sustainability of creative labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010). Through analysis of current and historical literature, as well as primary research data, this thesis examines the phenomenon of burnout in core creative arts workers, attempting to answer four distinct research questions: Why do workers in the arts and cultural sector have such a high propensity for burnout? What causes and exacerbates burnout in creative workplaces? How do we identify burnout earlier, and take a more proactive approach to its management in creative workplaces? What are the changes required at the government, industry, and individual level to reduce the risk of burnout?

METHODS

This research study will collect both quantitative and qualitative data to attempt to gain a more holistic view of the research questions. The very notion of 'measuring' burnout, however, is subjective. This study will therefore predominately be guided by a qualitative autoethnographic approach; an approach which seeks to systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience — a combination of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2010).

I have come to this research, and this degree, with an established career in arts and culture spanning a decade, working in private, not-for-profit, and government arts and cultural organisations, as well as peer observation of many more. Due to this involvement, I have had the opportunity to participate in forums and to become enmeshed in networks in Melbourne and Regional Victoria; I am acutely aware of the industry discourse around mental health and wellbeing, in particular through the work of Arts Centre Melbourne's *Arts Wellbeing Collective*.

The research will begin with a survey, followed by individual interviews. Quantitative analysis of survey responses will be compared to established burnout measures to gain an overview of the sample's burnout level. Thematic analysis of survey responses and transcripts will attempt to provide a unique perspective on the phenomenon of burnout in arts and cultural workplaces, focusing on causative factors, and suggested changes.

Research Participants

In order to narrow the scope without compromising the research, it was necessary to define “arts workers” for the purposes of this thesis. Internationally renowned cultural economist, David Throsby contends that all cultural content springs from the processes of artistic creativity and the core creative arts (Throsby, 2008), which is why these forms lie at the centre of his concentric circles model, with other industries diffusing outwards. As such, this research will only focus on workers in the core creative arts:

- literature;
- music;
- performing arts; and,
- visual arts.

Survey

The first stage of the research was an online survey which used a mixed method of data collection to ensure a larger statistic sample and more detailed reporting. Separated into three sections, the survey first asked questions about the individual’s role in the industry as well as demographic questions to help break down the data into meaningful groups of respondents. Demographic data collected included employment status, age, gender, level of education and level of income. Part two included questions about participants’ individual experiences of burnout using a Likert scale. Part three asked more open-ended questions about creativity and burnout, providing the participants with the opportunity to share examples, insights and opinions. In this short survey, the mixed method of data collection was advantageous, providing both the efficiency of analysis offered by closed-ended questions (Seliger et al., 1989) as well as the “greater level of discovery” possible through open-ended questions (Gillham, 2008, p. 5). The survey received 72 responses, including varying levels of detail in the qualitative questions section; some providing a paragraph or two (the usual), some providing six or seven (the extreme).

Interviews

Thematic coding from the survey responses enabled the generation of a list of more detailed questions which were posed during individual interviews. A small number of interviews were conducted, targeting managers in the core creative arts. The interviews were more 'solutions-focused'. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding factors which cause burnout, and changes that are required at a governmental level, industry level, and individual level. Due to the small sample size, and to protect the anonymity of those interviewed, the exact number of interviews undertaken will not be noted in this research.

Limitations

This study has potential limitations which should be noted. Firstly, although Throsby's concentric circles model is used to define "arts workers", the respondents to both the survey and those interviewed were predominately performing arts workers. I disseminated survey information, and made contact with many arts organisations through various platforms; however, it seemed that those working in the performing arts were most willing to be involved. Due to this, I expected an element of voluntary response bias, as those who were most willing to involve themselves in the research, likely, have experienced burnout and are passionate about the topic.

Secondly, this research paper is a minor thesis, and as such, the sample size is limited. While this research will still provide balanced analysis and generalisable conclusions, further (more long term, and larger scale) research would be needed to ensure that these conclusions are generalisable to the wider artistic community. Finally, the required changes suggested in this research are drawn directly from thematic coding of the survey responses and built upon in interviews. A number of these changes, by their nature, involve high-level government policy reform. However, I have not sought to undertake serious policy review or critique, as the format of this research does not allow for such in-depth analysis.

COVID-19

It is important to acknowledge the events taking place at the time of writing this thesis; that is, extraneous or other variables — not intentionally studied — which may have impacted the data. At the time of writing, the 2019 novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), having spread to many countries and territories (UNICEF, 2020); as at July 24th 2020, there are were 15,660,554 cases worldwide, and the number of deaths totalled 636,600 (Statista, 2020).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the core creative arts has been one of unprecedented destruction, creating insolvency and forcing the closure of many arts organisations. Public programmes, festivals, exhibitions and theatre productions have been cancelled; some programmes have been jeopardised indefinitely. In many cases, a 100% reduction in revenue has seen businesses stand down permanent staff; those working to future contracts face unprecedented income losses.

It is difficult to clearly assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research. It is my view that the impact will affect the data set on both extremes: those working on contracts, and in the casual workforce, may be feeling at the peak of burnout; yet, those in permanent, long-term, stable employment, are most likely being forced to reduce leave accruals, and take long periods of paid leave. For these individuals, they may be feeling the less burnout than they have in years. The generalisations and conclusions drawn from this research will remain applicable to the wider community. That is, while the COVID-19 situation may be exacerbating burnout in some, and reducing the phenomenon in others, the research will still provide balanced analysis and generalisable conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review Introduction

This thesis topic finds itself at the intersection of many disciplines, and subsequently, an abundance of literature exists, covering a wide variety of theories and concepts. As such, this literature review will focus on four key topics to provide context for my research: first, I will analyse the intersectionality of mental illness and arts, focussing on analyses of history's 'tortured geniuses'. Second, I will address creativity more broadly, and discuss psychopathological theories which attempt to explain it. Third, I will analyse more modern literature which focusses on the notion of 'creative labour' and the unique challenges faced by this workforce. Finally, competing theories on the definition and measurement of burnout will be discussed, which will inform the analysis of my research data set.

Intersectionality of Creativity and Mental Illness

"Oh! How near are genius and madness! Men imprison them and chain them, or raise statues to them." — Denis Diderot (circa 1750)

It does not take a complicated historical exploration to find myriad examples of 'tortured geniuses' throughout the ages: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Michelangelo, Mozart, Van Gogh, Beethoven, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemmingway, Sylvia Plath. These individuals are lauded for their artistic achievements and often used as exemplars in drawing a link between creativity and mental illness (Arnold, 2004; Caramagno, 1996; Jamison, 1995; Kaufman, 2001). Analysis of these cases, often conducted posthumously, indicates examples of their struggles with major depressive disorders, bipolar disorders, anxiety, and psychosis (ibid). Indeed, this conceptual link between mental illness and creativity — researched, debated and discussed for centuries (Sussman, 2007; Waddell, 1998; Wolman, 1967) — continues to permeate the modern discourse. In the present day, our contemporary (and far superior) understanding of mental health issues notwithstanding, we continue to observe suggestions that mental

instability may simply be — in fact — the necessary burden of an artistic mind; a glorified and romanticised — yet enduring — stereotype. And so the cycle repeats. Amy Winehouse, Robin Williams, Sinéad O'Connor, Michael Huthence, Avicii. A linkage between mental illness and artistic creativity does exist. It is important to analyse this as part of the research question, but it is essential to firmly delineate the difference between a linkage, and a romanticisation. In this thesis, I argue that the romanticisation of a codependent relationship between mental illness and creativity is not helpful; indeed, it is part of the problem.

The paradigm of high intelligence and mental illness in history's 'tortured geniuses' has often led researchers to the conclusion that creativity and psychopathology may be one in the same¹. Intrigued by this, in *Creativity and Madness: New Findings and Old Stereotypes*, Rothenberg (1990) researched how psychosis and creativity could coexist in individuals. Rothenberg's 1990 work is regularly cited today, particularly his analysis of case studies including Sylvia Plath, Eugene O'Neil, Emily Dickinson and August Strindberg. Rothenberg conducted psychological experiments with over 1000 subjects, as well as over 2000 hours of psychometric interviews with contemporary artistic creatives. He concluded that high-level creativity has the power to transcend logical thought, which may — at times — be perceived as resembling psychosis. Rothenberg (1990) contended that there is "nothing pathological in creativity" (ibid: p. 12), although it may coexist with psychosis. Far from romanticising the notion, Rothenberg asserted that mental health problems were not the source — or price — of creativity; and that they are, in fact, a hindrance to the creative process.²

¹ Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso believed genius and madness were inextricably linked. His 1889 book *The Man of Genius* contended that artistic genius was a hereditary form of insanity. Although his work is generally refuted today as 'outdated', it did inspire later writers including German psychologist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn. Lombroso, well known for his 1880 article which isolated thirteen ostensible features of "the art of the insane" (Mazzarello, 2011).

² "Emotional and mental illness is a decided hindrance to creativity for persons working in artistic, scientific, and other conventionally designated creative fields. It impedes Janusian and homospatial processes and other creative operations and functions. For any persons in these fields, including those particular ones who have been accepted by society as outstanding, good psychotherapy should both alleviate any illness and enhance their creativity" (Rothenberg, 1990).

Particularly strong links have been identified between mood disorders and creativity. *Touched with fire: Manic-depressive illness and the artistic temperament* by Kay Redfield Jamison in 1993, made a scientific argument for a “compelling association between two temperaments — the artistic and the manic depressive — and their relationship to the rhythms... of the natural world” (Jamison, 1993). She also provided a list, as an appendix to the book, including the names of more than 200 writers, composers and artists with probable cyclothymia, major depression or manic-depressive illness (now called bipolar disorder) including Virginia Woolf (suicided by drowning when she felt a depressive episode coming on), Robert Schumann (died in a Prussian mental asylum) and Ernest Hemmingway (suicided by gunshot after electroconvulsive treatment). Jamison’s work, particularly her 1990 book *Manic-Depressive Illness* is considered a classic textbook on bipolar disorder (Hankir et al., 2013). In a similar vein, Louis Sass and David Schuldberg’s 2001 research attempted to reposition and re-examine the relationship between creativity and disorders on the schizophrenia spectrum. After having collected a number of commentaries and articles, their conclusion was that further research and theoretical work concerning the relationship between the creative process and psychopathology must be undertaken (Sass and Schuldberg, 2001; Jung and Vartanian, 2018)

Some literature contends that specific subsets of artists are more likely to experience mental health issues than others. An exemplar of this is American Psychologist, James C. Kaufman’s work on what he describes as the ‘Sylvia Plath Effect’ (Kaufman, 2001). The concept’s namesake, Sylvia Plath³, suicided at age 30 after suffering clinical depression for most of her life and is often used as a textbook example to draw a link between mental illness and creativity. Several earlier (and regularly cited) studies (Andreasen, 1987; Jamison, 1989; Ludwig, 1995) have indicated that writers are prone to mental health problems; however, Kauffman’s research takes this further, contending that poets — female poets in particular — are more susceptible to mental illness and suicidal ideation than other creative writers (Kaufman, 2001).

³ Credited with advancing the genre of ‘confessional poetry’, Sylvia Plath is widely regarded as one of the 20th century’s most admired and prolific poets. She won a posthumous Pulitzer Prize for *The Collected Poems*.

It is undeniable that a correlation exists between certain mental health problems and creative thought. Categorically, research has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate this point. So, why is it that this seems to be an existential proposition? Why does this correlation occur, and in which order? Creativity is often touted as being beneficial, and even essential, for good mental health. Herein lies the dichotomy: how can something — in seemingly equal measure — be so beneficial and so detrimental? Are artists driven to mental illness by their art, or does art attract those with a predisposition to mental health problems? This is not a simple question, and seems to have as much to do with psychopathology, as it does with the notion of ‘creative labour’.

Psychoanalysis of Creativity

“Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence — whether much that is glorious — whether all that is profound — does not spring from disease of thought — from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect” — Edgar Allan Poe (circa 1830)

Defining Creativity

According to the Collins Dictionary, the definition of *creativity* is “the state or quality of being creative” (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). So much for dictionaries. It is possible that *creativity* may be simply defined as the process of transforming imaginative concepts into reality. Even in the academic realm, definitions of *creativity* are wide-ranging. More than 60 definitions exist in psychology and literature — not one of them has uniform acceptance (Reddy et al., 2018); furthermore, little is known (or has been written) about the mechanisms which underlie creative thought. Dietrich (2004) contends there are four distinct types of creativity, which relate to different brain activities:

- Deliberate and Emotional: a personal crisis acts as a catalyst for self-reflection, and what decisions an individual has made to contribute to a problem (e.g. job loss, relationship breakup) is an example of deliberate and emotional creativity (Dietrich, 2004: p. 1018).

- Deliberate and Cognitive: this is the creativity which is the result of long-term work within a domain. The renowned story about Thomas Edison’s trial and error before the creation of the light bulb is an example of deliberate and cognitive creativity (ibid: pp. 1018-1019).
- Spontaneous and Emotional: this is the kind of creativity which is often attributed to great artists and musicians, who seem capable of producing great works of art quickly, and ‘out of nowhere’ (ibid: p. 1019).
- Spontaneous and Cognitive: a sudden realisation after great consideration — an exemplar of spontaneous and cognitive creativity is the discovery of gravity by Isaac Newton after an apple fell on his head (ibid: p. 1019-1020).

Psychopathology of Creativity

Harking back to Rothenberg (1990), there is further research which indicates high-level creativity may resemble psychosis. Schulberg (1990) contends that creativity is greater in schizotypal⁴ individuals. Further research into this by Folley and Park (2005) asserts that this is most likely because the brain activity caused by schizotypal personality disorder is similar to that of divergent thinking which is reflected by bilateral activation of the prefrontal cortex. Patients with schizotypal personality disorder were found to have stronger activation in the *right* prefrontal cortex, which led researchers to conclude that these individuals are better at accessing both hemispheres, “allowing them to make novel associations at a faster rate” (Folley and Park, 2005). French theatremaker and founder of *Theatre of Cruelty*⁵, Antonin Artaud was well known for his schizophrenic and schizotypal personality. It has also been argued that defining features of modern art — including defiance of authority, fragmentation and multiple viewpoints — also happen to be common traits of schizophrenic personality disorders (Sass, 2017). Similarly,

⁴ Schizotypal personality disorder is a mental disorder which causes thought disorder, paranoid ideation, transient psychosis, social anxiety and unconventional beliefs. It differs from schizophrenia insofar as sufferers of schizotypal personality disorder are open to the concept that their perceptions may be distorted, whereas people with schizophrenia generally do not possess this insight (Rosell et al., 2014).

⁵ Artaud’s *Theatre of Cruelty* is a non-naturalistic theatre style which is designed to shock the audience through violent imagery, gesture, sound, lighting, and other special effects.

bipolar disorder (usually type II⁶) is one of the psychological problems most often attributed to creativity, due to the hypomania period which is characterised by “pronounced increases in enthusiasm, energy, self-confidence, speed of mental association, fluency of thought and elevated mood” (Jamison, 1993).

Scientific evidence which links creativity and psychopathology comes from three types of research: historiometric studies of past creators and artists; psychiatric studies of current creators based on clinical diagnoses; and psychometric studies of modern creators using established assessment methods (Reddy et al., 2018). Historiometric research studies have shown that the intensity and rate of psychopathological symptoms is higher among prominent creators when compared to the general population (Ellis, 1904; Raskin, 1936); Ludwig (1995) also suggested a positive correlation with regards to ‘eminence’, that is, the more eminent the creator, the higher their expected rate and intensity of psychopathological symptoms. Psychiatric research has reinforced this contention, demonstrating higher rates and intensity of psychopathological symptoms among distinguished (eminent) creators (Andreasen and Canter, 1974; Jamison, 1989).

Psychometric testing has provided further reinforcement for these theories; however, they have also demonstrated another notable correlation. Barron (2012) and Cattell & Butcher (1968) have demonstrated that creative individuals often score higher on a number of characteristics, particularly ego-strength and self-sufficiency, which may, in fact, inhibit the effects of psychopathological symptoms. They are also able to “exert metacognitive control over their psychopathological symptoms, taking advantage of bizarre thoughts to create rather than having the bizarre thoughts take advantage of them” (Reddy et al., 2018). This is supportive of the ‘threshold hypothesis’ which supposes that above-average intelligence is necessary to produce high levels of creativity (Neubauer et al., 2014).

⁶ Bipolar II Disorder is characterised by more mild periods of hypomania where thought processes feel faster (Parker, 2012).

Lack of research

What is clear is that creative thinking brings about new things. It drives innovation, and our world has been shaped by creative thought: music, poetry, innovation, art, politics. What is perhaps unclear, is why — given its importance — prior to the 2000s creative thinking had not received the full attention of psychologists (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999), and similarly, there is still scarce research into the genesis of creative thought. Maybe this is due to the fact that, historically, creativity was thought to be a gift from the gods⁷; simply the result of a supernatural force which enables people to ‘think outside the box’. The reality, as indicated above, is that this view of creativity is far too simplistic.

As noted in Weisberg (2010), creative thinking is incremental; “we should not expect a bolt of lightning to produce an instantaneous leap to the solution of a problem” (Weisberg, 2010). We, in fact, need to ensure that creative work is sustainable if we want to see continued innovation. People are more creative and produce higher-quality work when they are in a positive mood, over 25 years of mood-creativity research demonstrates this (Baas et al., 2008; Davis, 2009). Intellectual, psychological and emotional support systems need to be researched and established in order to ensure sustainable creativity. This thesis calls upon psychological researchers to focus greater critical attention to both the genesis of creative thought and development of support methods to ensure its continued innovation; supported correctly, everyone is capable of creative thought. The sooner that is appreciated, the sooner we will see transformation. Policy implications from such research would be widespread.

⁷ This concept of creativity as a god-given gift dates back to Ancient Greece. The Greeks believed that the Muses — the nine daughters of Zeus — were the personification of the arts and sciences. “*Calliope*, the Muse of epic poetry; *Clio*, the Muse of history; *Erato*, the Muse of lyric poetry; *Euterpe*, the Muse of music; *Melpomene*, the Muse of tragedy; *Polyhymnia*, the Muse of sacred poetry; *Terpsichore*, the Muse of dance and chorus; *Thalia*, the Muse of comedy and idyllic poetry; *Urania*, the Muse of astrology” (OldWolf, n.d.).

Creative Labour

Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) described the conditions and experiences of labour in the creative and cultural industries as “a very complicated version of freedom” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: p.4). Referencing studies of artistic labour (Menger, 2006; Towse, 1992), they claimed that:

- “artists tend to hold multiple jobs;
- the sector is widely dominated by self-employed or freelance workers;
- there is little job protection, with short term contracts and irregular work patterns;
- career prospects are uncertain;
- earnings are very unequal;
- artists are younger than other workers; and,
- the workforce appears to be growing.”

(Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010)

Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) then built upon their previous work by addressing the question: “can creative labour be good work?” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). In their book, they focused on the notion of creative labour to address the chasm between the positive characteristics of creative labour (flexibility, intrinsic interest, autonomy), and the more concerning traits (high levels of insecurity, the notion of the gig economy and casualisation, and long working hours) (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: pp. 5-6).

In their analysis, Hesmondhalgh and Baker drew attention to a fact that “until recently, only a very small proportion of these studies of cultural production focussed on the creative labour that is fundamental to that production” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Citing Maxwell (2001), they contended that there is a tendency to ignore or forget labour in the cultural industries because there is a glamorous ‘enchantment’ about cultural products that encourages us to, leading to a devaluation of work in the sector (Maxwell, 2001). Furthermore, through digitalisation, the proliferation of new forms of

amateur production and 'produsage'⁸, "the very distinction between production and consumption is becoming outmoded" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: p. 56).

Hesmondhalgh and Baker discussed topics such as passion, self-exploitation, and the 'value' of the arts, which will be addressed in this thesis through qualitative analysis of survey and interview responses. Coming to the conclusion that "the quality of life in this growing sector may not be as good as many would hope" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: p. 18), they also provided a clear warning for policy-makers: "policies that argue for the radical expansion of these industries under present conditions, as 'creative industry policies' do, without attention to the conditions of creative labour, risk generating labour markets marked by irregular, insecure and unprotected work" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: p. 5). While, intrinsically, there is a benefit in studying the quality of the working life in these sectors, it is clear there is also a policy reason to do so. This thesis calls upon policy-oriented researchers to focus greater critical attention to the labour process in the cultural field.

Defining and Diagnosing Burnout

The relationship that individuals have with their work, and problems which occur when that relationship becomes strained, has long been recognised "as a significant phenomenon of the modern age" (Maslach, 2001). Maslach (2001) also noted that "the importance of burnout... was identified both by practitioners and social commentators long before it became a focus of systematic study by researchers" (ibid: p. 1416). The term 'burnout', relating to psychology and mental health, was first used in a journal article published by German-American Psychologist Freudenberger (1974). Freudenberger's (1974) conceptualisation of burnout was developed through his own

⁸ 'Produsage' is a term coined by Axel Bruns, an Australian/German media scholar. Combining the terms 'production' and 'usage', produsage blurs the boundaries between passive consumption and active production, that is, that users play the role of producers whether or not they are aware of this fact (Bruns, 2007).

experience during his work in free clinics. He defined burnout as “a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one’s professional life”, as well as naming a number of key symptoms: quickness to anger, closed thinking, sleeplessness and headaches (Freudenberger, 1974). When the phenomenon was first defined, it was controversial and derided as “non-scholarly pop psychology” (Maslach, 2001). There were disagreements about whether or not burnout was a distinctly different phenomenon for an ‘already known state’ like “old wine in a new bottle” (Maslach and Leiter, 2016: p. 107). Yet, there was also disagreement about what precisely the ‘already known state’ was, hypotheses included anxiety, anger, depression, job stress, or a combination (Firth et al., 1987; Meier, 1984; Morgan and Krehbiel, 1985). The results of many subsequent studies have established that burnout is a “distinct construct” (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998 cited in Maslach and Leiter, 2016: p. 107).

Building upon Freudenberger’s earlier work, American social psychologist Christine Maslach (arguably the pioneer of burnout research) added to the definition of burnout. She contended that burnout was a form of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation⁹, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment in the workplace (Maslach et al., 1997). Going a step further, Maslach (1981) published the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which became the first widely-used tool for assessing organisational burnout. Contradictory to most workplace research of the time which used a top-down approach rooted in scholarly theory, Maslach’s research used a “bottom-up or ‘grass roots’ approach derived from people’s workplace experiences” (Maslach, 2001). The notion of emotional exhaustion is a key principle in both Maslach and Freudenberger’s definitions of burnout, and there is considerable contemporary evidence to suggest that burnout manifests as a depressive condition (Bianchi et al., 2020; Verkuilen et al., 2020).

With regards to classification, burnout is not identified as a distinct disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, rather as a “factor influencing health status or contact with health services” (World Health Organisation, 2019: np). However — adopting a definition

⁹ Maslach referred to ‘depersonalisation’ as a cold and distant attitude towards colleagues, students and/or clients (Maslach et al., 1997). Later, this became referred to as ‘cynicism’ (Maslach and Leiter, 2016).

consistent with Maslach's — it has been included in the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD)* since 1994 as part of ICD-10. In 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) published ICD-11, and updated its definition of burnout as follows:

“Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

1. feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
2. increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
3. reduced professional efficacy.

Burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life”

(ICD-11, World Health Organisation, 2019: np)

There are a number of different theories of, and instruments for, measuring burnout, including the Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure¹⁰, the Oldenberg Burnout Inventory¹¹, the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, the Hamburg Burnout Inventory and Malach-Pines's Burnout Measure¹². However, the most widely-used, expansive and reliable measure, which has been tailored for different groups, professions and settings is the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Maslach contends that burnout impairs both personal and social functioning. Burnout may manifest itself as mood or behavioural changes, or a decline in mental and physical health. On impacts to the workplace, Maslach noted: “some people may quit their job as a result of burnout, others will stay on, but will only do the bare minimum rather than their very best” (Maslach, 2001: p. 1415). Maslach & Leiter (2001) contended that burnout predominately occurs when there is a mismatch or disconnection between the individual and their organisation, and that this disconnect usually is in regard to six distinct areas of work life: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values

¹⁰ Developed by Arie Shirom and Samuel Melamed, this measurement device focuses on burnout as physical exhaustion, cognitive weariness, and emotional exhaustion (Shirom and Melamed, 2006).

¹¹ Developed by Evangelia Demerouti and Arnold B. Bakker, this inventory conceptualises burnout in terms of disengagement and exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2003).

¹² This measure and theory differed from the rest insofar as it contended that burnout can occur in non-work roles, such as that of parent, or spouse (Pines, 1996).

(Maslach and Leiter, 2001: p. 105). Primary antecedents are work overload, and personal conflict at work; Maslach also notes that a lack of resources to manage job demands also contributes to burnout (Maslach, 2001: p. 1417).

BURNOUT DIMENSIONS & PROFILES

Overview

The second qualitative question in the survey asked participants about specific examples of burnout in themselves or their colleagues. Largely, responses demonstrated characterisations of burnout consistent with the ICD-11 definition. Furthermore, some research indicated that burnout is associated with feelings of helplessness and trouble sleeping (Brotheridge, 1996); decline in physical and mental health (Toker et al., 2012; Verkuilen et al., 2020); and behavioural or mood changes (Bianchi et al., 2020). Maslach and Leiter (1997) conceptualise burnout and work engagement as being each other's opposite.

Leiter and Maslach (2016) published a paper entitled *Latent burnout profiles: A new approach to understanding the burnout experience*. In this paper, latent data profile analysis was used to identify person-centred profiles across the burnout — engagement continuum, as assessed by the MBI (exhaustion, inefficacy, cynicism). They contended that five individual profiles emerged from the analysis:

- Burnout (high on all three dimensions);
- Engagement (low on all three dimensions);
- Overextended (high on exhaustion only);
- Disengaged (high on cynicism only); and,
- Ineffective (high on inefficacy only).

Leiter and Maslach, 2016: p. 89).

This research provided evidence that enabled them to argue against the use of exhaustion alone as a proxy for burnout, by demonstrating that, in fact, the Disengaged profile was more negative than the Overextended. It also has important implications for research and interventions. Solid understanding of this research allows for tailored measures to address the specific challenges for each profile, and may help to stop fully-fledged burnout, by early and targeted intervention. However, the three dimensions (cynicism, inefficacy and exhaustion) do not move in lock-step, and there are several patterns which could be shown by people in various times. Survey and interview responses regarding the effect of burnout seem consistent with results previously

published research, particularly Maslach's five profiles. This section of the research, based around quotes from participants, will demonstrate the impact of burnout on arts workers — based around Maslach's profiles — and provide some suggested early intervention strategies.

Disengaged (high on cynicism)

"I hesitate to say it, but I think I hate the industry" — Aaron, Designer & Production Manager (Survey Respondent).

A Disengaged profile scores higher on the cynicism dimension than on exhaustion or inefficacy. Maslach et al. (1997) originally called this dimension 'depersonalisation' due to the nature of human services occupations (her original research); however, it was later renamed 'cynicism', in order to broaden the term and make it more applicable to other industries; in this way, cynicism is defined as a negative attachment to work (Leiter and Maslach, 2016). While the exhaustion dimension is often touted as the main feature of burnout, more recent research has suggested that cynicism may, in fact, be more of a core part of burnout than exhaustion (Leiter and Maslach, 2016). Leiter and Maslach (2016) suggested that "cynicism is more clearly linked to the job environment, in terms of the poor quality of social relationships at work and the lack of critical resources, and will lead to reduced job satisfaction and poor job performance (ibid: p. 98)". In this way, we see a suggestion at the progression from Disengaged to Ineffective.

Patterns in responses from my research participants indicate that growing cynicism leaves people feeling 'helpless', and wanting to leave the industry because the strain becomes too much.

My burnout has had profound and life changing consequences. I have now withdrawn almost fully from a highly successful design practice which — after ten years of working hard — was on the brink of being balanced and sustainable. I don't know if I can go back to it; it's irreparably tainted for me. I hesitate to say it, but I think I hate the industry — Aaron, Designer & Production Manager (Survey Respondent).

Stephanie, a director in the performing arts provided this insight in response to one of the survey questions:

In the end, I think it's about not having hope anymore. No hope that the situation will ever change. Actually, it will probably get worse.

The heartbreak of falling out of love with your passion is one that those working in the arts and cultural sector know all too well. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) noted, current systems and support structures are not conducive to maintaining a positive relationship with the job. For those displaying a Disengaged profile, reductions in workload are unlikely to ameliorate the problem; their focus is mostly on lack of critical resources or poor social relationships within the workplace. Interventions would need to be targeted to these areas. Leiter et al., 2011 provided an example of an intervention (in a health care context) which improved workplace civility and relations. This intervention demonstrated that cynicism “declined as a function of improved civility, and that this change was sustained at a one-year follow-up assessment” (Leiter et al., 2011, 2012: np).

Ineffective (high on inefficacy)

“it feels like a fog” — Kerry, Artistic Associate (Survey Respondent).

An Ineffective profile scores higher on the inefficacy dimension than on exhaustion or cynicism. Maslach’s original research called this dimension ‘reduced personal accomplishment’, it was also described as reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope (Leiter and Maslach, 2016). With regards to workplace relationships, studies have confirmed that relationships with supervisors and colleagues are arguably more relevant than workload and other stressors, with regards to one’s propensity for burnout (Leiter et al., 2015). Negative social interactions distance people from their work, which has a deleterious effect on their professional efficacy. Similarly, lack of recognition and reward is linked with reduced motivation and professional efficacy (Danish and Usman, 2010). Inadequate recognition and reward (social, financial, promotion opportunities, praise) can increase one’s susceptibility to burnout, as it

“devalues both the work and the worker, and is closely linked with feelings of inefficacy” (Maslach and Leiter, 2016: p. 105).

Participants in both survey and interviews provided first-hand examples of how inefficacy manifests in the workplace, demonstrating its presence as a dimension of burnout. Recurring themes were that participants felt less productive, inclined to procrastination, and a reduced ability to communicate with colleagues effectively.

Responding to the survey, an early-career performing arts professional offered this insight:

It feels like a fog. I am unable to be clear and decisive in my work so my confidence takes a hit. Everything takes longer and is more arduous. I am afraid of getting it wrong and so don't take risks. In the end I make compromised choices. I cannot see the big picture. I don't have energy to push through difficulty after a certain point. I've also seen people avoid difficult tasks entirely because of burnout — Kerry, Artistic Associate.

While in another survey response, Daniel, an operations manager in the performing arts, provided his thoughts:

Personally, I see the onset of burnout when the quality of my work degrades to the minimum standard. I and many other colleagues go into a mentality of "here for the pay-check" which leads to sloppy work and mistakes. It can also mean a lack of thoroughness which would otherwise lead to catching things before they become problems. While this helps to insulate me personally from burnout, it does create a downward spiral where workload increases because my output has decreased and thus stress piles up which leads to less output and thus more workload etc.

Other participants discussed a combination of cynicism and reduced efficacy, discussing their lack of ability to manage recurring issues, and a sense of 'groundhog day', that no matter how much one says or does to change a problem, things seem to play out “as they always do” (Emma, Stage Manager).

This exemplifies a lack of motivation caused by inadequate recognition in the workplace.

The sense of ‘decision paralysis’ was also a recurring theme:

I can become distracted and procrastinate when there are too many tasks, and ill defined ways to prioritise tasks. I can rush work to complete an excess of tasks in limited time, and the work can suffer as a result — Stephen, Artistic Director (Survey Respondent).

Arguably, the most effective way to combat inefficacy in the workplace is sufficient levels of recognition and reward from colleagues and managers. Alternatively, ‘job crafting’¹³ and other such alterations in the way work is performed by individuals may also reduce one’s propensity for burnout (Leiter and Maslach, 2016).

Overextended (high on exhaustion)

‘I’m exhausted a lot of the time’ — Alison, Executive Producer (Survey Respondent).

An Overextended profile scores higher on the exhaustion dimension than on cynicism or inefficacy. This dimension has also been described as wearing out, depletion, debilitation, loss of energy, and fatigue (Maslach and Leiter (2016). This profile is more closely linked to workload than any of the other profiles. Survey and interview participants described examples of mental and physical fatigue; almost every respondent used the word ‘fatigue’ or ‘exhaustion’ to describe burnout in the workplace.

One established executive producer, Alison, offered her insight as part of her survey response:

¹³ “Job crafting captures what employees do to redesign their own jobs in ways that can foster job satisfaction ... engagement, and resilience” (Berg et al., 2008).

I'm exhausted a lot of the time and I feel I'm doing enough or I'm not good enough at my job. My private and social life is impacted as I don't have any energy left over for anything except sleep. I tend to get frustrated easier and small annoyances really irk me.

A particularly interesting, and relevant comparison is between the Burnout profile, and the Overextended Profile, as exhaustion is often touted as the epicentre of burnout. Leiter and Maslach (2016) demonstrated that these two profiles are in fact quite distinct in terms of their experience of the workplace (ibid). In this way, an Overextended profile is not a proxy for burnout.

For those displaying an Overextended profile, conversations about workload are important; reductions in workload or reprioritisation of tasks may help to ameliorate the issue, and prevent the worker from progressing towards fully-developed burnout.

Engagement — Burnout Trajectory: A Phase Model of Burnout

During the history of burnout research, several conceptual models have been developed, attempting to explain the progression of burnout and its impact on individuals. Research focused around the dimensions and sometimes described them in sequential stages. As Maslach and Leiter (2016) outlined: “exhaustion was assumed to develop first, in response to high demands and overload, and then this would precipitate detachment and negative reactions to people and the job (cynicism). If this continued, then the next stage would be feelings of inadequacy and failure (inefficacy)” (ibid: p. 104). Conversely, Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1990) proposed a phase model which hypothesised that cynicism was the first phase of burnout, followed by inefficacy, and then exhaustion.

No study has concluded, definitively, the trajectory which burnout follows — indeed, there are so many variables, and while it may be possible to prove a ‘standard’ progression, there will always be variances by virtue of the fact that every workplace is different, and individuals’ methods of coping with stressors vary. Maslach and Leiter’s (2016) research is important, as it draws

attention to the identification of people suffering one of the dimensions, rather than all of them. Perhaps, most importantly, it goes some way to providing tailored mitigation strategies for the profiles, acknowledging that everyone's experience of burnout will be different. While exhaustion has long been considered the epicentre of burnout, Maslach and Leiter (2016) argue that this alone is not a proxy for burnout: "instead, the profile that comes closer to the negative endpoint of Burnout is that of the cynicism-only one (Disengaged profile), which suggests that the experience of cynicism may be more of a core part of burnout than exhaustion" (ibid: p. 109).

Profiles and Patterns in Quantitative Survey Data

Analysis of survey data demonstrated that participants are, to varying degrees, experiencing burnout in their workplaces. The following questions gained the highest average results on the standard five-point Likert scale:

- *I feel under pressure to deliver projects successfully with minimal resources* (4.18)
- *I feel there is more work to do than I have time to complete it* (4.07)
- *I feel that I am under pressure and stress in my job* (3.97)
- *I feel unable to 'switch off' from work* (3.76)
- *I feel tired at work* (3.69)

Emerging Profiles

Following Leiter & Maslach's (2016) latent profile model, the quantitative Likert data was analysed, using responses to six questions, intended to replicate the profiles:

- Overextended (questions 1 and 18)
- Disengaged (questions 2 and 13)
- Ineffective (questions 5 and 6)

While the results were spread, taking the highest aggregated score from each participant across the question groups, the following profiles emerged: Overextended (32); Disengaged (4); Ineffective (17). Hybrid profiles also emerged — Leiter and Maslach (2016) suggested this was possible —

Disengaged-Ineffective (1); Overextended-Disengaged (5); Overextended-Ineffective (6). Seven individual participants emerged with high levels across all three profiles, indicative of significant burnout.

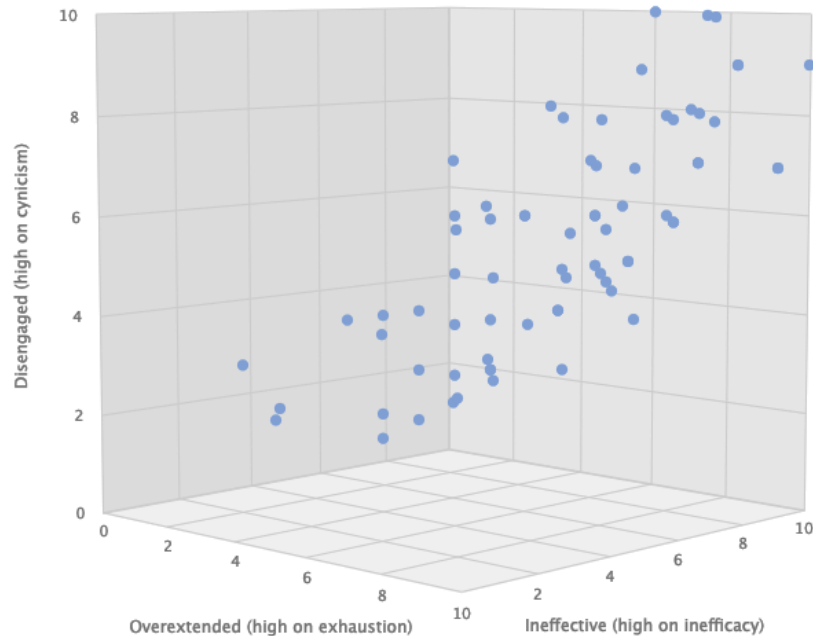


Fig. 1 — latent profiles in data set

It is worth noting that these scores were derived solely from aggregated Likert data; it was not compared to the participants' qualitative responses, nor were the responses standardised in any way due to the self-reporting nature of surveys. I wish to, therefore, propose this numerical data is included for anecdotal purposes, only. It does not prove, or disprove, any phase model or trajectory pattern of burnout (nor does it intend to). Instead — in agreement with Leiter and Maslach's 2016 research — it proposes the following: first, it challenges the idea that exhaustion is all there is to burnout. Second, it provides examples of intermediate states, each requiring their own treatment within workplaces. Third, it suggests the need for more tailored approaches to the treatment of burnout in the workplace — as Leiter and Maslach (2016) suggest "one size does not fit all, and future solutions for burnout may need to take in to account what are the key underlying problems for different groups of people" (ibid: p. 99). In summary, further research is needed into the notion of burnout 'profiles', and the new opportunities this provides for burnout intervention and mitigation.

FACTORS LEADING TO BURNOUT

Overview

Thematic analysis of both survey data and interview transcripts revealed consistent themes, patterns, and concerns with regards to the causation of burnout within the arts and cultural sector. It is contended that these factors, or causes, exist at both the government level, as well as the industry level. That is, legislation and national policy have a trickle-down effect, which causes problems at the industry level and within organisations. The fact that patterns emerged across the industry, from participants working in many different companies, in varied roles, and in different states, leads me to believe that change needs to be affected at the higher level (government) first, in order to ameliorate the issues within the industry; accordingly, problems at the industry level are primarily symptomatic of deeper, underlying issues, at a policy or legislative level. Nevertheless, and despite burnout causes which exist at government and industry level, there are also many personal factors which may increase the propensity for burnout in individuals.

Questioning the Value of the Arts

Arguably, the root of a number of problems relating to burnout and health in the industry is the flow-on effect from years of parochialism, on the part of governments, with regards to arts and culture. This parochialism has real effects on those individuals working in the industry. Those working in the arts and cultural sector whom I interviewed argued that they seem to spend a great deal of time simply justifying their existence, or, why their work is important. They felt that there is no acceptance at a federal level, that the arts is a public good. As Jude, an artistic director, discussed in the research, this leads to unsupportive processes, and contexts for producing work which are “skewed against” those trying to create. Survey respondent, Marcella, an executive director in the performing arts, discussed the time consumed by ‘justifying’:

Creative people and arts organisations have to constantly justify their right to exist and be supported in the same way that many other sectors are. It's tiring and diverts time from actually making art. The arts is not highly valued by government or the general population in Australian culture and we constantly have to "make do" with inadequate resources.

In the past decade, we have seen a large number of government cuts to the Australian arts and cultural sector; a sector which already arguably runs lean, and yet contributes \$14.7 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Browne, 2020). Particularly, since the election of the Abbott Coalition Government in 2013, the Australian arts and cultural sector has experienced a period of significant disruption and contraction; these 'culture wars', as they have been described, have threatened the future viability of the sector (Caust, 2019). Particularly damaging was the government's flawed National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) and Catalyst Fund which demonstrated direct ministerial interference in arts funding practices, and destabilised the Australia Council for the Arts, by removing \$104.7 million of their forward budget (McKenzie-Murray, 2015). Towards the end of 2019, dozens of small-to-medium arts and culture organisations lost their funding, in what Alison Croggon described as a "desertification" of the sector (Croggon, 2019). This is not a new trend, in fact, data from the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission demonstrates a decline in funding in "key" companies:

Stand-out examples include Footscray Community Arts Centre: with a decline from \$347,925 in 2014, to \$4,045 in 2018; La Boite: from \$406,475 to \$165,932; Brink Productions: from \$206,469 to \$96,910; and Art Monthly: from \$36,509 to \$7,110). Ausdance National is closing its doors and the future of Playwriting Australia is uncertain (Meyrick, 2019: n.p).

Even large companies are now running down reserves they had worked incredibly hard to build over the last few decades. At the end of 2019, Meyrick (2019) warned "any further reduction of federal support and the sector will lurch from crisis to catastrophe" (ibid). In December 2019, Prime Minister Scott Morrison's decision to axe the Federal Ministry for the Arts left the sector

“reeling” (Baker, 2019), and exacerbated this concerning state of affairs. Many arts and cultural workers now feel they are facing an existential proposition, and the question to which any number of my participants alluded was “how did we get here?”. It is clear that the answer to this question is not simple, reflected in a concerning statement in Croggon (2019)’s article:

[It’s] difficult to identify the initial conditions that spawned the current critical situation. By the time the effects became noticeable, the causes were lost in confusion (ibid).

As Meyrick (2019) asks: “how is it possible for the sector to arrive at the mother-of-all-dead-ends with no idea how it got there? What does that say about how it advocates and presents itself?” (ibid). The sector has provided more than enough quantitative evidence of its economic impact, and yet, it isn’t enough:

It’s all about economic structures: the arts might contribute far more to the Australian economy than, say, the aviation industry in any given year, but it’s not regarded by governments and much of the public in the same way, which manifests in funding cuts and sneering in discourse — Benjamin L, Writer (Survey Respondent).

As we enter a second wave of COVID-19, with Melbourne returning to Stage 3 restrictions amidst some of the highest daily case numbers recorded in Australia, support for Australian arts and culture is more important than ever. After Finance Minister Mathias Cormann’s erroneous claim that the creative sector had perhaps not demonstrated a significant decrease in revenue (Manning, 2020), the Morrison Government has unveiled a \$250 million ‘rescue package’ for the sector (Macmillan, 2020), almost half the amount the government has used to stimulate the construction industry (Packham, 2020). \$90 million of this ‘rescue package’ takes the form of government loans which will need to be repaid by the sector, meaning the ‘real’ stimulus amount is closer to \$160 million. This does not go far enough. Morrison’s ‘rescue package’ is insignificant in comparison to similar packages in other nations. Even conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has pledged £1.5 billion —

approximately \$2.7 billion AUD equivalent — to “keep the UK’s arts sector afloat” (Brown, 2020). Culture forms part of our daily lives, and through this COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian government has continuously reaffirmed its view of arts and culture as ‘nice to have’, but not ‘essential’; yet, as “Australia’s flailing cultural sector slips ever closer to the abyss, [it] prepares to take a significant chunk of Australia’s GDP with it” (Meyrick, 2020). The undervaluing of the arts at a federal level directly causes resourcing issues and shortfalls in even the country’s largest companies, contributing directly to sector instability, unstable employment and low income. Creative workers are victims of this ideological crossfire; the forgotten casualties of a war on the arts, driven by government inaction and parochialism.

Inadequate Resourcing

The flow-on effects from under-resourcing at a government and industry level are many and varied; every participant in my research discussed this topic; their responses demonstrated a number of significant issues which occur when an organisation is under-resourced.

Daniel, an operations manager, discussed the normality in the sector of running projects to impossible budgets or deadlines, and how in other sectors when “there isn’t time or budget to achieve something, the project would halt until a solution [is] found”. He continued, to discuss our damaging ‘the show must go on’ maxim, and how this usually means longer working days to make the impossible possible. Granted, in many businesses and organisations, similar experiences occur, and certain projects require creative problem-solving and serious effort to execute when proper resources are not available. However, in the arts and cultural sector, this is the norm, not the extreme, and it takes a toll on those working in the sector. Daniel added that when this “is culturally set up as an expectation, it can be incredibly damaging”. This sentiment was echoed by another research participant, Jai, a theatre technician: “increasing demand for productivity in an industry that already has high productivity, whilst paying low wages and expecting long hours, is a recipe for burnout”.

A recurring theme in my research was the notion of arts professionals wearing ‘multiple hats’. While this is, understandably, more common in smaller organisations, it also takes place in larger companies. Production Manager Simon G, commented that the performing arts tend to run very lean with regards to staffing levels, and that “we often have to be a master of many roles in order to get the job done”, adding that “there is not sufficient budget to employ people to do all the tasks required”. Simon G’s comments are consistent with insights offered by Felicity, a general manager in the performing arts, who offered this insight in a survey response:

Most people working in the arts wear multiple ‘hats’ in their day-to-day roles. For example, within my role I need to be an expert in operations management, finance management, human resources management, marketing and communications, and producing. For other industries this is not the case — there would be departments looking after each of these aspects.

This is particularly problematic for those operating in top-level management positions. The need to wear multiple hats, and perpetual prioritisation of ‘urgent’ work, leaves less time for these leaders to lead their organisations, or to become strong advocates for the sector.

Low Income and Unstable Employment

Every participant in my research discussed the notion of unstable employment and low wages being a key contributor to burnout on an industry and government level. Even the largest companies run to break-even budgets with insufficient government support; it is unsurprising, then, that wages in music and performing arts — in particular — “aggregate below national averages” (Cunningham, 2011). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: p. 116) also discuss this issue: “works are not getting paid commensurate to the hours actually worked; and, workers [are] having to take on second jobs to make ends meet” (ibid). It is interesting, however, that despite the lack of financial

reward, those in the field continue to work passionately. Taylor and Littleton (2016) suggest that this may be “associated with freedom, difference or specialness, and with work that is personal” (ibid: p. 135). Cunningham (2011) contends that creative workers, by their very nature “demonstrate a drive and passion that may be likened to the most brilliant commercial entrepreneurs, but generally without the associated financial reward”. Harking back to the stereotype of the starving artist, it seems there is still something noble about making personal sacrifices for your artform.

The question is, why do creative workers accept such low wages? One participant, Jonathan, described arts workers as “victims of our own wonderfulness”, in accepting low wages due to their passion for the work, and that this has taken place across all art forms, in all roles for decades (perhaps even centuries); this means it has evolved into some sort of ‘norm’ for the industry. He also discussed the notion that some people in the industry rely on overtime pay, as they simply cannot afford to live on their base wage alone. This is compounded by the fact that people are often working on multiple projects, and the effects of the ‘gig economy’.

One participant, Christian, spoke to the notion of sector instability and the effect this has on workers and jobs, as part of his survey responses:

There [has been] a ‘hollowing out’ of the industry since I’ve been involved, which means that artists often feel that every job could be their last. Running in ‘survival mode’ is extremely tiring.

It seems that a supply-demand imbalance in the sector provides a perfect environment for employee exploitation, and that this begins to occur as graduates enter the workforce. One survey respondent, Daniel, an operations manager, spoke to the sustainability of labour in the sector, and the exploitation of graduates:

The culture within the performing arts industry, while changing for the better, is still not conducive to maintaining a long term healthy relationship with the job. This means there is little support for new entries into the industry to gain

an understanding of a reasonable workload and a healthy work-life balance. Too often, graduates are told that if they don't work hard enough, they'll never get a job in this industry again and pressure is placed on them to exploit extra hours of work at the expense of that graduate's wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the unstable and insecure nature of employment in Australian arts and culture. The Morrison Government's \$70 billion *JobKeeper* package failed to protect workers in the sector, due to the 'gig economy' nature of the industry (Morrow and Long, 2020). Federal Labor MP Tony Burke was a strong advocate for changes to *JobKeeper* to ensure that workers in the arts and cultural sector did not "fall through the cracks", however, his proposed amendments failed (Simpson, 2019).

24/7 Nature of Work

One of the most-referenced factors, when discussing the propensity for burnout in the creative industries, is the demanding nature of the work. While, arguably, there have been some shifts within the industry over the last few decades, it still seems that creative labour is almost not sustainable, and is certainly not conducive to maintaining a long term positive relationship with the job (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Recurring patterns in the data set demonstrated that psychological impact of the 24/7 nature of the industry. Due to low income and unstable employment, there seems to be a 'feast or famine' approach to artistic work, particularly for those individuals who predominately work on short-term contracts or freelance. Consequently, creatives become suffocated under mountains of work, accepting too many projects, for fear of 'losing it all'. Even for those who are fortunate enough to work in a full-time permanent role, the work hours are demanding, particularly for production staff.

Forty-one survey respondents cited the 24/7 work cycle of the industry as one key factor contributing to burnout. Passion pushes them to do 'whatever

it takes' to get the job done. Long hours are simply an expectation of the job; similarly, at times, an appetite for overtime may also develop due to inadequate wage levels. The research data, however, indicated that even more robustly funded organisations are relying on significant amounts of unpaid work by staff members to prop up events. While governments regularly call out employers and corporations who exploit unpaid workers, it seems that little attention is being paid to the enormous amount of unpaid overtime taking place in arts and cultural organisations around the world (Atkinson-Lord, 2015).

Particularly working in the performing arts, where a large proportion of the work takes place outside of business hours, professionals — especially those in middle management positions — find it difficult to 'switch off', as their teams are working in the evening without them. Out of hours phone calls are not uncommon, nor are late trips to the office or the theatre — not to mention responding to emails late at night, reading and responding to show reports — the list goes on. Many research participants commented that the nature of their work has actually damaged their personal relationships with their families, spouses and children; a recurring theme was that the industry's "the show must go on" maxim is incredibly damaging to their mental and physical health.

Pressure: "the show must go on"

"The show must go on" is a phrase which has been used in theatre since the 19th century (Rogers, 1985). This maxim speaks to the passion and commitment of the creative workforce which is, simultaneously, the industry's greatest asset, and greatest liability. There is evidence to suggest that the phrase finds its origins in circus; that if a performer became injured, or an animal was let loose, the ringmaster and the band would keep the show moving so the audience would not panic (Rogers, 1985) because "it is a point of honour not to let the other players down by deserting them when no understudy is available" (Partridge, 2003). While the phrase's intended use

speaks to the idea that the performance must continue regardless of cast illness or problems specifically while a production is actually in the process of being performed, it has taken on a broader meaning.

It now seems that “the show must go on” conveys the idea that the arts must persevere despite problems or difficulties in the business itself, its resources, or its funding. In the face of government cuts, and reductions in support for the arts, it has been used as a war cry of sorts, that the arts will survive despite the hostile environment which characterises the sector. It is admirable. But it needs to stop. The unintended consequences of this maxim are too great, and it is placing inordinate pressure on individuals within the industry to create the extraordinary with inadequate resources. Consistent themes in the responses demonstrated that creative workers feel trapped in an existential bind; there is an extreme imbalance in *risk vs reward* in our industry. We are working huge hours, missing important family events; we cannot come close to a healthy work-life balance, and we do it all for such little reward that we are burning out, and it is making us sick.

We need to be realistic about the situation in which we find ourselves. We need to make sustaining our ability to make art our top priority; we need to protect every incredible individual who works in our sector. We need to seriously reconsider our willingness to work for free; this will not be easy, but it is necessary. For too long “the show must go on” has been used to defend hundreds of unpaid overtime hours to mitigate against government cuts. While the sector continues to demonstrate its ability to withstand any amount of funding cuts, the government will only find more reason to continue to cut. Showing the government the damage created by years of cuts is a risky strategy. However, until politicians “truly understand the value of our cultural landscape, they will never seek to protect it” (Atkinson-Lord, 2015: np).

Passion

Most people I know who get burnt out are actually really passionate and super good at their job — Julia, Artistic Director (Survey Respondent).

A recurring theme in the research was the inability to separate oneself from their work. Forty-five respondents believed that passion, emotional investment and the personal-professional link were key factors in the high rates of burnout in the arts and cultural sector. This is not surprising given the type of people attracted to working in creative roles, many of whom are predominately motivated intrinsically, rather than extrinsically (Santilan and Schreiber, 2018: p. 52). Workers in the arts and cultural sector are passionate about what they do. One survey respondent, Mitchell, who works in performing arts marketing, offered this insight:

People tend to enter a career in the arts largely because they have a passion for the area. The passion means people are personally invested in their jobs, and the separation between the professional and the personal is often muddled and imbalanced as they strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for them and their work. This coupled with limited resources, extended work hours beyond the usual '9 to 5', a 'show must go on' attitude, and often, the pressure of the public and critical opinion can lead to eventual burnout.

The passion exhibited by those working in the arts and cultural sector is the industry's greatest asset and, simultaneously, its greatest liability. Passion in workplaces is good; however, the level to which creative individuals engage with their work leads to an inextricable personal-professional link, which — if not managed correctly — can have severe consequences for the individual and the industry.

It has to do with how we give ourselves to our jobs. They become a part of our identities and we find fulfilment through doing a good job. Therefore issues at work affect us in our day to day lives and we find it hard to separate the two — Emma, Stage Manager (Survey Respondent).

For some creative people there is an inability to separate themselves from the job, working long irregular hours, and having their job title make up a core part of who they feel they are — Sophie, Major Gifts Manager (Survey Respondent).

We have a personal connection to the work that we are doing... in situations where time and resources are tight, we are willing to sacrifice our personal wellbeing before sacrificing the scope of the project we are working on. In other industries where the work is separated from the individual to some extent — Daniel, Operations Manager (Survey Respondent).

Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) talk to the notion of creatives “defining [themselves] too much through creative work”; they contend that the possibilities of self-actualisation are, in fact, limited due to career uncertainty and the fact that “creative labour seems to demand a high degree of personal, emotional investment on the part of workers” (ibid: pp. 148–149). They believe this to be the case because artistic products are so closely associated to particular individuals, and yet, so public. My research supported this notion. One research participant described a severe anxiety attack — where they were unable to read or make sense of what was around them — brought on by public criticism. Jonathan, established in his career, worries about the effect on younger people entering the industry: “if a three-star review throws me, what that does to a 19-year-old, I don’t know!”. Jonathan spoke about the increase in criticism, spurred by digital proliferation:

When I began in the arts, our work would be reviewed on literally three platforms, only, maybe four. That was [in Sydney] The Sydney Morning Herald, Daily Telegraph, The Australian and maybe one radio show. Now, I think we’re up to between 30 and 40 separate platforms where people’s work is judged. I think that with that comes a greater propensity to have people being brought down by criticism and by the general world’s view of them and their work. I think it’s hugely damaging [to their self-esteem] and challenging.

There is a strong tendency towards self-exploitation in the creative and cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: p.9). Why then, given all this information, do young people continue to enter these industries, despite poor working conditions and challenges? Passion, and the notion of “a labour of love” is certainly a driving force. Menger (1999: p. 554). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) also suggest the following: that the work is pleasurable, ‘glamorous’ and desired by others, which may act as “compensation” for the troubling aspects of creative work; that workers find substantial reward in the complexity and challenge of their work; that they may experience a higher degree of autonomy than workers in other fields; and the notion of ‘pleasurable absorption’ of their work, rather than “the alienated clock-watching that many of us dread in labour”, as they generally find the product of the work enjoyable (ibid: pp. 124–132)

MOVING FORWARD

Suggested Changes

There is no denying, this is not a simple problem with a simple solution. The phenomenon of burnout in arts workers is layered, complex, and sensitive. Honestly, it was difficult to research and write about, as this is very personal to me, and to those I care about. I love this industry, and it is painful to see the devastating impact the nature of creative labour is having on passionate people's lives. Though not the original purpose of the research, I wanted to be able to provide some constructive suggestions and solutions. I am not naïve enough to assume these solutions are simple to implement — they are not — but I hope that they may act as a starting point for serious conversations, at levels where people can make positive change. Participants pointed to hundreds of particular or specific issues in their workplaces which — they contend — contribute to their burnout. I contend that these issues are symptoms of deeper, more systemic problems. When analysing responses, several solutions-based patterns emerged, which I have grouped into five separate areas (again, using the government, industry, individual model used in the previous chapter). Accordingly, this trickles down, and significant changes must take place at the government level before the industry is able to make positive change.

More Skilled Arts Managers and Stronger Governance

Perhaps one of the more interesting statistics from my research was that 35 survey responses indicated that arts and cultural organisations need clearer organisational hierarchies, more robust governance, and more skilled arts managers. Granted, mastering management in the creative and cultural sector is not a simple task, “keeping your employees on task is especially challenging in an industry that is experiencing constant flux and restructuring” (Santilan and Schreiber, 2018). Equally, there are some unique management challenges which affect this sector more than others: uncertainty of demand and elevated

risk; creativity versus commerce; creative autonomy; subjectivity; managing criticism; high production costs, and low reproduction costs; semi-public goods; higher marketing costs; and, the increasing expense of live entertainment (Santilan and Schreiber, 2018: pp. 5-8). The truth is, it takes a unique set of skills to manage an arts and cultural organisation; a great number of them are considered 'soft skills'. A CEO in an arts organisation needs to be able to speak to an accountant, or auditor about objective, fiscal realities with the same level of understanding and interest, as they can to artists about the subjective nature of their work.

Great arts managers understand that they work in a sector where values and motivational factors are innately conflicted. A semblance of dichotomy will always exist between intrinsically-motivated creatives, and administration staff who are arguably more affected by extrinsic motivational factors (such as deadlines and budgets). Intrinsic versus extrinsic, divergent versus convergent, whichever way it is labelled, there will always be tensions between those 'creating' the work, and those 'producing' it, because, there is a disparity between notions of 'success'. Arts managers arguably need much higher levels of empathy and EQ than managers in more 'traditional' sectors. Interviewed Artistic Director, Jonathan, agrees with the notion that a "raised level of empathy" is necessary for arts management roles, but admits "I don't know how you learn that, or how you are trained for it".

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the sector lacks strong arts and cultural managers, those with the multitude of 'hard' and 'soft' skills required for organisational success. If this statement is taken as fact, one may argue this is due to the under-resourcing of the industry. The 1999 'Major Performing Arts Inquiry' conducted by Helen Nugent (known as the Nugent Report) discussed this dilemma:

To meet the artistic, marketing and financial goals which underpin success, the companies need highly skilled staff and an effective board. But in a financially pressured environment, there is an expectation that administration costs, including management salaries, will be minimised, and since the companies are not-for-profit organisations, board members receive no remuneration. These circumstances constrain the companies' capacity to compete for quality

staff and to secure the required balance of skills on their boards (Australia Major Performing Arts Inquiry and Nugent, 1999)

In defence of arts managers, however, they do not have the time. In many companies (particularly in the small-medium sector), the CEO is too busy being the operations manager, finance manager, HR manager and PR manager, that they do not have the time to ‘lead’ as much as they would like. Perhaps, in a world where arts organisations were better resourced, we would not be at the “mother-of-all-dead-ends” (Meyrick, 2019), and we would instead have stronger inter-organisational networks with more consistent information and resource sharing; better advocacy; and respected arts managers with more time to make our case to governments.

Stable Employment, Higher Wages, Overtime Caps

Overwhelmingly, research participants indicated that fundamental shifts in the conditions under which creative workers are employed would positively impact the mental health of the sector. Increases in wage levels would reduce “the excessive hours that people do to make a living” (Christine, Stage Manager, Survey Respondent). Largely, research participants felt that the casualisation of labour and ‘gig economy’ adds a considerable amount of stress to workers who are already under immense stress. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the fragility in the industry’s employment practices, leaving a large proportion of the industry unprotected. As Morrow and Long (2020) noted, 81 per cent of artists are self-employed or work as freelancers, 43 per cent rely on contracts. COVID-19 has highlighted a scary reality for many artists, with six participants indicating they are seriously considering work in another sector.

Continuously we see the ‘show must go on’ maxim permeate the industry and the deleterious effect this has on workers. Many workers in the arts and cultural sector routinely contribute large amounts of unpaid overtime to ensure the success of their project or organisation. Often this is with little to no recognition of the fact, no recompense, and — sometimes — external pressure

to do so. Harking back to research participant Jonathan's comments, arts workers are "victims of our own wonderfulness":

I think organisations should reduce their expectations of practitioners to work outside of their scheduled hours. It is often reinforced that employees should log all of their worked hours without incurring overtime when often the workload requires additional hours and employees feel [the] obligation to hide additional hours they work to fulfil a task — Brittany, Stage Manager (Survey Respondent).

Arts managers need to take a realistic approach to the hours required to complete a task and budget accordingly. Hiding overtime creates false expectations and can be harmful to the organisation as a whole and creates an unfair strain on workers, particularly new employees entering established roles. Rebecca, an events coordinator, discussed the importance of time off in lieu (TOIL) in her workplace as part of her survey responses:

Fortunately, I have a manager who takes this seriously and actively encourages me to take time off in lieu when I've worked extra hours. I have previously worked in an environment where I was not supported in this way, and I experienced serious burnout leading me to change my entire career.

Industry-wide flexible work strategies should be implemented, ones that are understanding of the natural peaks and troughs in workload, which are a feature of events-based work.

Flexible Working Arrangements, Beneficial Rest

From my experience in the arts, there's a sense of guilt that is attached with taking time off. However, I think time away from your job is key to combat, and to properly disconnect when doing so — Mitchell, Marketing Manager (Survey Respondent).

Given the passion that employees in the sector have for their work, combined with other factors (including under-resourcing of organisations), it is unsurprising that arts and cultural workers feel guilty — or even fearful —

of taking leave. It is important that workplace environments are established which support and encourage arts and cultural workers to take periods of meaningful rest: flex days, TOIL, mental health days, and planned beneficial rest might go some way to combat burnout in the workplace, particularly for staff displaying an Overextended profile.

The standard 9-5 notion of work widely does not apply to workers in the arts and cultural sector. A considerable amount of work takes place in the evening, and, while some workers may have regular set evening hours, a great deal more (particularly those in management roles) may attend functions out of hours, yet still be expected to be in the office at 8:30 the next morning. Functions, openings, closings, networking events, can blur the lines between pleasure and work; it is crucial to recognise that — for most managerial roles — these are essential parts of the job, and special arrangements need to take this into account. Flexible working policies are becoming more commonplace in organisations (Hokke et al., 2020). These may include flexible work hours (around other commitments), time-in-lieu (recompense for hours worked outside of standard), and work from home arrangements. Flexible working is clearly linked to increases in organisational productivity, better employee retention, improved employee wellbeing, a higher level of women in leadership roles, and future-proofing the workplace (Australian Government: Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018).

Events-based work, intrinsically, has periods of intense work in the lead up to the event. As Stage Manager, Christine, notes “it is important to take proper breaks in between projects, so as to recharge”; this is often only possible when underpinned by workforce planning which prioritises beneficial rest for staff. Contemporary dance company, Dancenorth, based in Townsville has taken up this challenge, stating “deliberate, beneficial rest is a powerful component in supporting our best work” (Dancenorth Australia, 2020). Dancenorth has acknowledged that mental health issues and burnout are a serious problem in the sector; focusing on employee wellbeing, they have developed a raft of work practices, including: daily meditation, fortnightly mental health checks, rigorous annual review process for staff, and scheduled (daily) 30-minute beneficial rest periods (ibid). They have also implemented ‘beneficial rest

days', and all full-time staff are given permission to self-select one day off per quarter based on their own workloads and overall company schedule. No one is forced to take this leave, and it is not accrued. Company Manager Eloise explains that a beneficial rest day is "not just an extra day off"; rather, Dancenorth hopes that they will be "used to pursue something personally nourishing and replenishing". Some consideration given to workforce planning at the beginning of the year, allowing for staff to take beneficial time off, may go a long way to reducing burnout in individual organisations.

Individual Responsibilities

As has been established in this research, governmental under-appreciation of the arts leads to industry under-resourcing, which — in turn — increases the propensity of burnout. While it may be easy to sit back and shift all responsibility, workers in the arts and cultural sector need to understand that they do have the power to reduce the risk of burnout in themselves, and in their colleagues; as Aaron (Designer and Production Manager) argues, "the buck stops with each and every one of us. We need to start being better. It starts with educating ourselves and others. It needs a major cultural shift in individuals". Part of this involves workers actively taking responsibility for their own mental health:

The employer is responsible for developing a workplace which encourages equity and wellbeing through reasonable workloads and expectations, but an individual is responsible for highlighting the need for assistance when required to address mental health issues — Peter, Director of People and Culture (Survey Respondent).

As Peter states, there is certainly an expectation upon organisations to provide supportive environments for staff, but individuals need to acknowledge the power they have to influence their own mental health, inside, and outside, of the workplace. Inside the workplace, this may take the form of open and honest conversations with managers about workloads and stressors. It is important to form a positive relationship and frame a constructive

discourse around these matters. Organisations with good support cultures genuinely do want what is best for their staff, but it is an unrealistic expectation for staff to assume that managers (or, indeed, HR departments) are intimately aware of everything happening in the life of each individual staff member. It is two-way traffic, it is okay to ask for help, and it is important that employees work with organisations, constructively and collegiately, to improve workplace culture and operations, with an acute focus on burnout reduction.

Outside of the workplace, individual actions to reduce burnout propensity (taken from research participants) include making time for exercising and eating properly; committing to a healthy sleep schedule; socialising; finding hobbies (outside of the arts); living a healthy distance from the workplace; saying 'no' to projects; getting some perspective (more often than not, the stressors are not a matter of life or death); and working to untangle the personal-professional link so common in arts workers, to more effectively develop a delineation between home and work. Part of this includes establishing firm boundaries and finding strategies to 'switch off' out of hours. Artistic Associate, Kerry (Survey Respondent), says that burnout-reduction strategies she has found to be effective involve knowing your limits, saying no, taking a step back, and creating space for yourself. However, she speaks to the notion of a double-edged sword, in that, people taking these measures, on occasion, see their career suffer:

Unfortunately, when I have seen colleagues take these measures, I have sometimes also seen their career suffer. There is a perception that we should suffer for the art and if you don't, 'you don't want it enough'. Sometimes boundaries look and feel like resistance or laziness".

As workers in this sector, we need to reframe this. We know the challenges of the industry, and we need to work together to protect each other. It is also important to be upfront about our reasoning, so "no", is not misconstrued as laziness. We need to talk about self-care more openly and encourage others to do the same.

Government Responsibilities, National Cultural Policy, Ministry

Something has gone disastrously wrong in relations between Australian arts and culture, and the Australian Government. Meyrick (2020) says that it is vital to acknowledge this, because how we bring the sector ‘back on track’ is a larger question about the value which the sector provides to society: “now is the moment to reconsider the whole case of arts and culture, their place in Australian life” (ibid). We need to begin an inclusive, and expansive, conversation about the nature and role of Australian arts and culture. Now, more than ever, we need the government to take a stand and commit to serious arts and cultural policy reform.

Firstly, the government must undertake better consultation with the sector about its needs and its pressures. Secondly, we need greater financial investment. Thirdly, the government needs to reinstate a Ministry for the Arts, and commit to a national cultural policy. Fourthly, we need a severe bolstering of peak arts bodies, and a review of federal funding mechanisms.

Sector Consultation

The arts is unique in its metrics and measurements. Government KPIs and funding agreements need to have “a real understanding of the labour required to execute the work” — Sam (Survey Respondent). Production Manager, Jem argues that it all comes down to value, and there is little support because the arts is not seen as ‘useful’. Jem argues that this viewpoint needs to pivot, “to see the work as practical, and a real profession, understanding the effort required and undertaken to bring an event to fruition”. The sector is unique in many ways; the only way the government will be able to gain insight is with serious consultation.

Greater Financial Investment

As my research indicated, low wages and resources is a large contributor to burnout. Serious investment is needed for “a sector that has suffered

decades of austerity measures, putting downward pressure on the small to medium sector and its individual constituents” (Sonya, Artistic Director, Survey Respondent). Equally, however, throwing money at the problem is not enough, and may, in fact, further exacerbate the issue. As Aaron states, “if the arts sector gets more funding, we’ll just have more people doing shows under exactly the same conditions”; this is supported by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010), who argued that rapid expansion without serious attention to the conditions of creative labour, risks “generating markets marked by irregular, insecure and unprotected work” (ibid: p. 5). Financial investment must, therefore, move in lock-step with serious policy and industry reform.

Ministry for the Arts, National Cultural Policy

“Policy narratives determine the interpretation of data, not the other way around. It is on the level of story, not just the level of numbers, that the battle for hearts and minds must be fought” (Meyrick, 2019). We can spout economic impact data (we have plenty), we can create new and innovative ways to measure cultural impact (and we should), but ultimately it is meaningless without a national cultural policy. We need a credible consensus of belief — a vote of confidence in, and support for, the sector — to make action possible, and metrics usable. We need a Ministry for the Arts, with a minister who understands the sector, or, will at the very least, listen.

Bolstering Peak Bodies, Review of Funding Mechanisms

Peak bodies need support, and permission to help make change. The Australia Council for the Arts was not established to be simply a large money-filtering-system. They are a peak advisory body, and yet, have seemingly remained silent on a number of issues affecting the arts community over the last decade. Arguably, the Australia Council’s agency and authority has not recovered from their silence over the 2015/16 NPEA/Catalyst political assault. They were accused then of being “out of touch with the arts sector and rolling over [to the government]” (Belot, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has provided another blow for the Australia Council, with them being accused of

being “out of touch with the people it is supposed to support”, and “morally bankrupt” (Pledger, 2020). The Government needs to review its relationship with — and support of — The Australia Council for the Arts. If they are to continue as our peak body, they need to be given the money (and political distance) to do their job. The Australia Council needs to be a strong advocate for the sector. It must use its position to better support the industry — perhaps, the development of inter-organisational networks to exert pressure, manage up, and keep the government accountable for sensible cultural policy.

Understanding Value

Underpinning all of this, is the need for the government to understand the value of arts and culture; as performer Marianna asks: “why are we always on the bottom of the pay list when we bring so much to a city?”. I understand that it takes time to reap the (significant) rewards of strong arts policies; I understand that it is not conducive to the cut-and-thrust of the three-year policy cycle, but we need to reframe this, refocus, reprioritise, and remember what we are talking about. As Meyrick (2020) puts it:

What keeps democracies together? As America burns, Brazilians die and Europe braces for another wave of the coronavirus, the question assumes an alarming immediacy. If the answer is complicated in one way, it is simple in another: what we have in common, what we share, and what we value as a result.

We know that the arts brings people together, and we need that now, more than ever. We need the government to acknowledge it also, to help protect the people who provide us all with that critical light in the dark.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to identify the factors leading to burnout in the arts and cultural sector, and mitigation strategies to improve creative labour. Based on quantitative, qualitative, thematic and autoethnographic analyses of literature and primary research data, it can be concluded that burnout does pose a significant threat to the health of the industry and professionals within the sector. However, it also demonstrates that governments, organisations, and individuals possess the ability to make positive change. Based on these conclusions, government may consider better consultation with the sector and peak bodies, stronger financial investment, and commitment to a national cultural policy. Further research is required to determine whether or not a phase model of burnout exists in order to better recognise the phenomenon; similarly, greater critical attention should be focused on the development of support methods in order to improve the sustainability of creative labour, and ultimately, the health of workers in the core creative arts. For too long, creative workers have been victims of ideological crossfire – the forgotten casualties of a war on the arts driven by government parochialism. We need the arts to bring people together, now more than ever, and we need the government's help to do so.

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PARTICIPANT LIST

Name	Job Title	Core Creative Art
Petra	Associate Director	Performing Arts
Sonya	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Benjamin L	Writer	Literature
Amanda*	Executive Director	Performing Arts
Mark*	Lighting Designer	Performing Arts
Kyra	Lighting Designer / Stage Manager	Performing Arts
Terry*	Mechanist	Performing Arts
Julie*	Director	Performing Arts
Molly	Actor	Performing Arts
Gayle	Costume Cutter / Maker	Performing Arts
Ali	Creative Director	Performing Arts
Eloise	Company Manager	Performing Arts
Deborah*	Arts & Culture Coordinator	Visual Arts
Eric*	Sound Designer & Composer	Performing Arts
Olivia*	Business and Systems Manager	Performing Arts
Glenn	Performance Artist	Performing Arts
Jem	Production Manager	Performing Arts
Emma	Stage Manager	Performing Arts
Michelle*	Deputy Head of Properties	Performing Arts
Kristin*	Artist Manager	Performing Arts
Denise*	Voice Coach	Performing Arts
James*	Lighting Manager	Performing Arts
Benjamin V	Production Manager	Performing Arts
Stephanie*	Director	Performing Arts

Jude	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Christian	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Haley*	Operations Manager	Performing Arts
Simon T	Stage Manager	Performing Arts
Julia*	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Susan*	Executive Director	Performing Arts
Sophie	Major Gifts Manager	Performing Arts
Daniel*	Operations Manager	Performing Arts
Peter	Director of People and Culture	Performing Arts
Dylan*	Festival Administrator	Performing Arts
Ruby*	Administration Officer	Visual Arts
Joshua*	Program Manager	Performing Arts
Taylor*	Curatorial Manager	Visual Arts
Jamee	Training Centre Director	Performing Arts
Aaron*	Designer & Production Manager	Performing Arts
Sam*	Venue Services Manager	Performing Arts
Jai*	Technician	Performing Arts
Mitchell*	Marketing Manager	Performing Arts
Liz	Health and Safety Coordinator	Performing Arts
Noah*	Technician	Performing Arts
Kelsey*	Singer	Performing Arts
Anni	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Jonathan*	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Rebecca*	Events Coordinator	Performing Arts
Nicole*	Marketing Coordinator	Performing Arts
Grace*	Ticketing Manager	Performing Arts
Laura*	Actor	Performing Arts

Cynthia*	Administrator	Performing Arts
Marcella*	Executive Director	Performing Arts
Alexandra	Musician	Music
Felicity*	General Manager	Performing Arts
Marianna	Circus Performer	Performing Arts
Ashley*	Company Administrator	Performing Arts
Ken*	General Manager	Performing Arts
Marissa	Musician	Music
Kerry*	Artistic Associate	Performing Arts
Jess	Stage Manager	Performing Arts
Brittany	Stage Manager	Performing Arts
Christine	Stage Manager	Performing Arts
George*	Theatre Manager	Performing Arts
Dean	Director	Performing Arts
Simon G	Production Manager	Performing Arts
Alison*	Executive Producer	Performing Arts
Elizabeth*	Executive Assistant	Performing Arts
Jeremy	Head of Education	Performing Arts
Stephen*	Artistic Director	Performing Arts
Donna*	Producer	Performing Arts
Linda*	Program Manager	Performing Arts

**Denotes pseudonym*