Why Are Voice Actors Becoming Scarcer Today?

by

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Introduction

Although voiceover opportunities are on the rise, people who are looking into voiceover work have to put up with quite a bit of obstacles, whether by financial, technological or electrical, industrial, and/or reputational or moral means. With this in mind, voice actors are becoming less frequent in the entertainment industry, when they instead should become more invested in these possible opportunities to have a better likelihood of getting casted into acting gigs, whether from the phone or in person, and being featured on more works; they can immerse themselves in more possibilities this way, and therefore become a quicker success.

To name a few of these opportunities, Rebecca Strassberg, who writes for the website *Back Stage*, goes a great mile to list plenty forms of voiceover that can be found today, as an attempt to give voice actors the opportunity to find their own niche. From Strassberg's findings, voiceover work can appear in the shape of, "Commercials… Animation… Audiobooks… Video Games… GPS + Virtual Assistants… Corporate + Educational Videos… Health + Wellness… Documentaries… Announcing," (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), and while this article alone has listed about nine different types of voiceover work, not including the few grouped together, there are plenty more to mention as well that haven't been listed. Earlier I've referenced that voiceover jobs might be less frequent despite all the opportunities listed above, but for many reasons, voice actors choose not to take these opportunities for a number of reasons; this could include heavy competition, over-saturation with auditions, wanting to be able to make a living off of voiceover work, as well as the rise of artificial intelligence, which as a result steals actors' voices.

Before progressing any further, the goal I hope to accomplish by the conclusion of my project is to not just find more opportunities in the future for my own sake, but for anyone else's sake. Not to mention, I find this to be a very crucial topic because voiceover is

currently being seen in many different forms, and fixing the problems about to be listed at hand, or monitoring these problems at the very least, can help aspiring voiceover artists to be able to comfortably begin their career. Generally speaking, it would be really amazing for voice actors to take smaller steps on developing their career by taking the opportunities that are right in front of them, rather than waiting for the next big, animated hit only to not be chosen as part of this creation's cast; this can be seen as a familiar voice being heard in a commercial that you might have recognized from a feature film/TV show.

Basics to Voice Acting

Author James R. Alburger released his book *The Art of Voice Acting: The Craft and Business of Performing for Voice-Over*, as a means to help aspiring voice actors know everything there is to their craft. Also, despite the fact that aspiring voice actors could very well look up this type of information on their own accord, it would be easier for them to relay information this way in one piece rather than through hours of Google searches, so that way they'll have some background for them to get started; in other words, it would be beneficial to provide and teach future voiceover artists these basics as a guideline to prepare them for what to expect in the industry. In Alburger's words, a voice actor "[plays] a very important role in sales, marketing, and delivery of information," (Alburger, page 1), basically explaining that their job is to simply play the role that is on the script, as directed by casting members. Regarding this definition, he goes to also define voiceover, rather as "any recording or performance of one or more unseen voices for the purpose of communicating a message," (Alburger, page 2), listing that you'll recognize it in commercials, broadcasts, or other announcements, but cannot "see" the voice.

Many voice actors in the industry are known for their impression work, or doing certain or signature voices from already popularized content; most of these people are seen doing impressions of Disney characters, and sometimes even video game franchises such as

Super Mario Bros., or Pokémon; however, many people assume voiceover work is only prone to these impressions, as well as sounding like you're about to make an announcement. These are both false, considering that they're "the greatest misconceptions… [you] need a voice that is easily understood. If your voice has a unique quality or sound, you can use that to your advantage… but a unique voice quality can also become a limitation if that is the only thing you do," (Alburger, page 5), or in other words, voiceover work does not just focus on the uniqueness of someone's voice, but they are more focused on how you perform the voice, or the "acting" aspect. By "performing the voice," actors take into account the dialect, mannerisms, exclamations, and/or the emotions or behaviors of the character being voiced among other aspects, along with giving actors the room to express different ways a sentence can be phrased in scripts; in other words, it's as if you're genuinely acting out the lines being given to you, as if there isn't a script in front of you.

Voice acting might not be what you think it is, and although presumably many people would like the pros that come with it, such as receiving the same attention as a mainstream celebrity without anyone having to recognize you from miles away, as well as earning heaps of money without having to do much work, there are also some things to look out for before entering the voiceover scene. This wording does seem off, and to give credit, voiceover actors do just as much work as any non-voiceover actor; though, despite voiceover actors being involved in multiple sets at a time, along with being just as prone to traveling as non-voiceover actors, they aren't required to remember scripts handed to them, or generally have to do any physical work that a non-voiceover actor would be required to do, like theater performers and general actors. One important con which should be talked about is how the career itself is, in some cases, a walking contradiction. Alburger makes a point that "voice acting is a hurry-up-and-wait kind of business… You will spend a lot of time waiting… Then once you are in the studio, things happen very fast… and you need to be able to adapt

quickly," (Alburger, page 8), basically stating that you might be waiting for your audition time to come up on one end of the spectrum, while also proving to your producer/director that you can quickly adapt to a new script your producer made, which shows professionalism as well as proving that you know what you signed up for, and this is what most producers or directors want.

Another point Alburger makes in his book is experience being a very important factor to becoming a voiceover performer, since experience could take someone a long way. Experience is a very useful tool to getting a career, since one's experience could validify one's knowledge, or on a higher level, one's expertise on a certain thing. Some ways you can earn experience in order to become a better candidate for future auditioning, as well as potentially giving yourself a new skill for voice acting even, are to "take classes in acting, voice over, and marketing. [Read] stories out loud… to your children… to your spouse. Practice telling stories with lots of variety in your voice. Analyze the characters in the stories you read… Ask the basic… who, what, when, where, and why… You can't take enough classes," (Alburger 16), specifically highlighting that taking classes, as well as giving yourself time to read anything and try your luck with a certain voice, can add onto the experience of becoming a great voice actor.

Decrease in Payment

Let's take a minute to look into the pay rate that voice actors are provided, for example, in the scenario where they're working for a video game development company. Todd C. Frankel, along with other contributing editors or authors for *The Washington Post* pointed out how "actors earn a flat fee [in video games]… the game companies agreed to a 3 percent raise for the guild's minimum wage… But almost no voice actor can survive on video game work alone. It just doesn't pay well enough," (Frankel et al., *The Washington Post*), mentioning details regarding how much a voice actor is being paid per session, as well as

how much money is maxed out depending on the number of sessions. Further clarifying this statement, and given an example extracted from the same article, video game voice actors would be paid $850 for a session which lasts about four hours, and then receive a bonus schedule based on the amount of sessions, though the maximum pay would be $2,100. This means despite the number of sessions a voice actor would have, they might not be paid for every single session.

Another voice actor, Phil LaMarr, has even gone to say that he's made more money from voicing a number of characters within two episodes of a kid's cartoon, *Pound Puppies* (2013), than while voicing a supporting antagonist for one of the top grossing video games, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001), presumably during the time the article was released. Another voice actor, Ashly Burch, best known for her role as a main tritagonist in *OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes* (2017), includes how they're paid less than live action actors or musicians in this same article while she describes her everyday life in this career path. Along with this information, according to Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management associate professor of economics David Smith, the tentative contract has affected voice actors in the guild negatively, but has definitely moved forward in the likes of companies or industries controlling them. Further speculating, Frankel continues with how "The principle of paying union actors residuals is something they are fundamentally against… I think they see it as a slippery slope… If they give an inch on this concept of royalties, it's a first step for [game developers] to ask for them," (Frankel et al., *The Washington Post*), overall proving that developers can absolutely take advantage of their employees and steal the money from their filling pockets.

According to another article posted by a website *Gravy for the Brain*, it's argued that voiceover pay rates are at an all-time low because of Pay-To-Play websites, or generally subscription sites. Pay-to-Play websites, for lack of better word, have been the catalyst in

voiceover rates plummeting to the ground, and therefore causing degradation; in other words, these websites are de-professionalizing the art of voiceover, leading many voice actors to not be able to afford making a living from just their voice. The author of this particular article, Hugh Edwards, lists a few reasons why these websites are a problem with these voiceover rates, “The P2P sites have actively encouraged [voiceover artists] to engage in a ‘bidding process’ [motivating them to bid lower to] get the work. [The sites] are heavily weighted in [favor] of the hirer… offering end-to-end-services [to manage the work without involving the hirer] and therefore taking a much larger portion of the hirer’s budget [than what] is paid to the voice artist,” (Edwards, *Gravy for the Brain*), meaning they are not only taking advantage of the voiceover actors, but also the hirers who involve said voice actors in these sites to begin with. Another reason why these sites are a big issue is due to the lack of education regarding the average pay rates when utilizing their services, and not only are the hirers not being relayed this information, but also more importantly the voice actors themselves. To explain a phrase in the quotation, an end-to-end service is a process in which a singular party takes a service from start to finish; in the context of this article, end-to-end services could be chalked up as P2P sites basically doing the work for hirers, and therefore depriving them of the promised budget due to little suspicion. However, pay rates could be decreased for any reason besides those already stated, and rates are especially dependent on the condition of our economy. P2P sites would be responsible for educating employers in some way, as well as their employees on these rates, and the reason is pretty self-explanatory; as a service which people can subscribe to, they should be able to let their consumers know what they’d expect by subscribing to their site.

Edwards then rebuts his statement, since apparently these sites are not fully to blame, and he also believes they should not be fully in charge of educating these people. He lists a couple other factors that could play into the degradation of these voiceover pay rates, “there

is an ever-increasing demand for [voiceover content]… Newer voiceover artists [undercut prices] of established and seasoned VO's because they don't feel that they are good enough to charge those [higher] rates," (Edwards, *Gravy for the Brain*), taking into account that the internet is evolving one second at a time, as well as lack of education to new voiceover artists. Edwards also explains that unions, specifying the UK's Equity, don't have as much control to display to the industry these voiceover rates, and also points out the increasing demand of companies for permanent ownership of assets on a global scale, noting the lack of education about copyrights or licensing of performances. Overall, he believes the lack of education on both sides has also resulted in terrible voiceover rates, whether these sites should be held accountable for not previously educating their consumers, or the blame should ultimately shift on the consumers since they should know what they're getting themselves into.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is definitely on the rise and has been for the past decade, at least when the majority started to notice. Although there is plenty of wonder and bewilderment upon the future of technology, this could also lead to art not being as creative as before; this is especially prevalent in voiceover art. A reason that artificial intelligence is mostly hated, and rightfully so, is due to the fact that it is known for stealing original ideas of artists and turning them into concepts; in other words, it's a much lazier alternative than just simply doing the art themselves. One heavily crucial reason why artificial intelligence is a problem in the voiceover industry is because they take recordings and/or the sounds and vocals of certain voice actors, without consent or beforehand authority to do so. Tracy Davenport, another writer for Back Stage, interviews Remie Michelle Clarke, a voice actor with firsthand experience from artificial intelligence. Clarke starts her story off with a memory, "a sound engineer I'd worked with for many years called and asked me if I'd had a good experience

joining an AI voice site… I'd never heard of the site, and had never authorized them directly to use my voice… it came down to a contract [I] signed a few years earlier," (Davenport, *Back Stage*), before she recommends aspiring voice actors, specifying this awareness to those looking to take in AI-generated work, to consult a higher-up such as an attorney or lawyer, and ends her statement with a warning for these voice actors to be more careful when signing contracts and to look at what will go through. Nevertheless, the people who created artificial intelligence should be the majority to blame in this scenario, since they're the ones trying to leech on unsuspecting aspiring talents.

Rather than leeching off those who work for them, companies should tell their employees in full exactly what they plan on doing with the content they are sent to work with, rather than taking matters into their own hands and proceeding to use it without a heads up. On a further note, big brands that involve artificial intelligence are infamous for exploiting those who have signed any contract by putting them through many unaccounted-for loopholes that could overall royally screw them over in the end. Davenport is also seen interviewing a CEO of a website which supports the work and rise of artificial intelligence. Miles Chicoine, CEO of Voquent, one of the sites which displays voice recordings, states that "being hyper aware of the role AI may play in your voice work is not about being paranoid or even selfish. It's about protecting your right to fair compensation… Unfortunately, some of the world's biggest brands have a history of exploiting loose interpretations or simple lack of any agreed limitations at all," (Davenport, *Backstage*), recommending that voice actors read and enter themselves in these contracts with the most caution and conscience, to ultimately avoid as much damage to their career as possible to predatory brands. As a result, to fully avoid being exploited by big companies, aspiring voiceover artists should try and pay the closest attention to what they're getting themselves into before signing the bottom, since it could lead to loopholes and experiences like what Clarke had on her plate.

To further talk about artificial intelligence, the history of it is very slim, given how recently it has surfaced in any means, at least from what was assumed. However, its striking recognition before being applied to e-learning, call center operators, digital assistants and video game characters, was for more time-wasting or annoying reasons, for a lack of better word. Artificial intelligence, as a result, became publicly recognized for its roots with a rather malicious introduction, referring to an article published by the MIT Technology Review. Karen Hao reflects on the frequent past, explaining how "deepfake voices had something of a lousy reputation for their use in scam calls or internet trickery," (Hao, *MIT Technology Review*), though the reason these deepfakes started gaining more traction could be chalked up to their since improved quality, which could go either way depending on how someone looks at the growth of this newfound technology. Later into the article, Hao made an indication that artificial intelligence could be used without the original user's consent, in the case that while also being cautious of their voices becoming automated due to artificial intelligence, "[actors are also] worried about being compensated unfairly or losing control over their voices… a lawsuit against TikTok [was] brought by the Canadian voice actor Bev Standing, who alleges that the app's built-in voice-over feature uses a synthetic copy of her voice without her permission," (Hao, *MIT Technology Review*), reflecting on a similar instance to the well-known voice behind Siri, Susan Bennet, who discusses being paid for initial demos, but has stopped receiving payment despite the overt-usage of her voice on millions of Apple products.

Despite what was already learned as of recently, artificial intelligence's initial beginning was actually done with good intentions, whether the majority of people knew or not. Surprising enough though, artificial intelligence actually dates back to the 1770s when a Russian professor named Kratzenstein "created a machine that made vowel sounds. A few years later, a mechanical speech machine was created that could make multiple noise types,

including full words," (Matinée Multilingual), noting how these two machines shared the similarity of replicating the vocal structures of other people. Then later, in the 1930s, amidst WWI, Homer Dudley took it upon himself to create an electronic speech machine which he called the Voder. The technology behind this was ground-breaking, as it had the ability "to speak without human input initially, [though] It was shown at the World Fair, but never developed further than a prototype," (Matinée Multilingual), and though this might have been a discouragement to Dudley, the history of artificial intelligence does not stop there. Within the 60s, machines made for public use started to be ridden with artificial intelligence, and this started to take into effect when typewriters were modified in this way, and furthermore, to vocal systems that were able to be controlled with small but identifiable motion, using eye movement as an example. The most well-known invention in the history of artificial intelligence took storm after Stephen Hawking lost his voice in 1985, and as a result, a synthetic voice system was specifically designed for him. The voice behind Hawking is known as Dennis Klatt, who "was a pioneer in computer-generated speech algorithms [who worked at] MIT," (Matinée Multilingual), who then recorded and utilized his voice so that Stephen Hawking could be able to speak again. Along with this, recent emergence of artificial intelligence is currently utilized in personal assistants, such as Siri from Apple, Bixby from Samsung, Alexa from Amazon, as well as the "Ok Google" assistant.

The Disloyalty of Industries

Most industries aren't innocent, and are infamous for following their own judgement well over that of their workers, overall making their own decisions, disregarding how (un)fair they might be. Not shockingly, it hasn't been any different in the past few decades, prior to the release of a small abstract from weekly journal *Campaign*. The name of this abstract, 'Silence from the agencies as voiceovers shout to be heard,' is perfect, considering these agencies have since not been true to their word, and still aren't today. Author John Tylee

reflects back on “[a conflict] between the UK advertising industry and Equity [caused by unfair] payment for voiceovers… artists should receive similar payment to actors who actually appear on screen [though] opposed by [the advertising industry],” (Tylee, *Campaign*), ultimately believing that voice actors should be given the same respect as live action actors, or those in similar fields that get paid more than voiceovers, despite the fact that the work of these actors are weighed; though voice actors don’t move around or aren’t required to memorize scripts, they still have to practice the lines given to them, as well as put in the work to differentiate the way a phrase or sentence is being said, based on mood or demeanor.

Competition is fairly common, and everyone in the industry is trying to become the best thing since satellite radio; this is already proven as there is an attempt to add new faces. Process of elimination is a common practice in these industries to create competition and stress; another Back Stage writer Simi Horwitz took notice that “for any one advertising spot, they wanted to see a large pool of voice-over talent from which to make their selection,” (Horwitz, *Back Stage West*), having seen the voiceover business change from most advertising agencies having casting departments, to the rise of more independent casting directors, after complaints from clients having to pay huge sums of money. As a result, these multiplying indie businesses became less notable and had more people involved, which were further led by bigger corporations wanting to place premium blocks on still existing advertising agencies. This is a problem, since the skyrocketing of these indie businesses has increased the likelihood of competition in the voiceover game, as well as risen the price of producing an advertisement. Another way that competition is created is by replacing their voice actors based on demographic, given an interview Horowitz created with a voice actor that’s done work for thirty years. The actor expressed wanting to remain anonymous, in fear he would be dated. He goes on to say that “[older demographics should forget advertising]…

The real issue is that producers and directors [refuse] to work with people their parents' age," (Horwitz, *Back Stage West*), stating that industries are more concerned with younger folks, probably and presumably as a means that they can be easier to manipulate or prey on than older voiceover artists.

Within the entertainment industry, another issue voiceover artists may face is how many A-list actors are stealing the roles that voice actors need for their career to thrive. Regarding this, Sara Stewart from *New York Post* has logged onto this issue back in 2018. Sara, who has likely asked non-famous voice actors about this issue, was given a response in the form of a rant, from someone who chose to go anonymous, '"It's star f—kery… I cannot do voice-over full time right now, it's not enough to pay the bills… none of those guys [need] the work,"' (Stewart, *New York Post*), rightfully bashing the A-list actors who have been featured in countless advertisements and movies alone that are taking the spotlight from the voice actors, most of which who can't afford to live on their own, so the celebrities earn easy money. Another way that A-list actors might get an advantage from non-famous voice actors is something the same anonymous actor from earlier calls the *Shrek* factor. For example, "former voice actor Dominic Armato [says] 'Not long after I moved to LA was when 'Aladdin' dropped, with Robin Williams. That was the moment everyone went, 'Oh, we can cast celebrities in these roles and get huge amounts of attention,'" (Stewart, *New York Post*). The reason why the anonymous actor called situations like this the *Shrek* factor could be due to it being the first movie in his head, where the performer's names were positioned above the movie title, which kickstarted every studio to follow the same trend, though *Aladdin* presumably did it first. The reason why this is a problem for non-famous voice actors is due to how these studios proceed to give larger roles to A-list actors rather than, once again, giving non-famous voice actors the time for their career to shine, resulting in companies

garnering more box office revenue. As a result, the A-list actors remain relevant while discouraging voice actors to continue their careers.

Sabotaged Reputation

There are a few bad apples within the entertainment industry, one being very well-known as, who else but Seth MacFarlane. He is infamous for writing and producing, as well as providing his voice for multiple hit TV shows, mostly known for *Family Guy* (1999-2003, 2005-present), *American Dad* (2005-present), as well as *The Cleveland Show* (2009-2013); MacFarlane is also rightfully recognized as one of the most controversial faces in voice acting, and is also well-known for being a comedian; his comedy is almost exclusively recognized in *Family Guy*, along with his other feature TV shows. His take on comedy can greatly be seen as dark humor, digging deep into people no matter the race, gender, (dis)ability, or lifestyle; he's going for everyone's throats and has no restrictions. This led many other celebrities, including other voice actors, to have an overall mixed opinion on him. Authors Michael Cieply and Brooks Barnes, both from the New York Times, have a few stern words to give to MacFarlane, especially considering the offensive undertones found in plenty of MacFarlane's works, let alone his speech for the Oscars. Although the general consensus might have thought the show went well, many discussed feeling unease over MacFarlane's offensively targeted spews, initially towards LGBTQ+. Deeper into the awards show, his jokes have gotten worse and began targeting more minorities, to the point a Rabbi felt the necessity to comment about how a certain scene was "'offensive, even though comedians have great latitude, [seconding] an opinion offered earlier in a statement by Abraham H. Foxman, [who] was particularly troubled by the 'duration and intensity' of a skit," (Cieply & Barnes, *The New York Times*), the scene in which details anti-Semitic stereotypes toward those who have watched the Oscars worldwide at the time. To use another example that could arguably affect a larger demographic, MacFarlane has also been discussed making racially

motivated jokes later in the awards show, one of which starting with how “he pretends to mix up Eddie Murphy and Denzel Washington,” (Cieply & Barnes, *The New York Times*), both names in which are heavily well-known black male actors. Given this tidbit of context, it can only be assumed how distasteful this certain joke genuinely might have been to a number of viewers, whether in or outside the recorded audience. Using MacFarlane as a great example, the reputation of a firm, or industry, can evidently affect the success of one’s career. Darryl B. Rice, along with other authors from *Journals of Business Ethics* which contributed their words, who believe that signaling theory could be a reason that a firm’s reputation could impact the success and attitude of their employees, explains that “a firm’s ethical reputation sends a signal to employees that the organization cares about the career success of its employees, [that] ethical organizations are concerned about their employees,” (Rice et al., *Journal of Business Ethics*), putting into perspective that besides profit, company success also ideally means companies have empathy, as well as the ability to adhere and listen to their employees’ needs. This ultimately means that industries have the power to ruin their own reputation by ignoring the autonomy of their employees, and putting themselves above those who have sacrificed their voice for the works of the industry, in this case. Given the few examples of how MacFarlane has expressed his dark humor, as well as that a firm’s reputation relies on consideration of their employees, it can be assumed that MacFarlane might not appear to be empathetic to the majority of viewers to some degree, despite the fact that he definitely might have an audience who find his jokes witty. Furthermore, there is not really a “firm” in this scenario, but in the perspective of MacFarlane and his audience, a talent’s reputation technically relies on the consideration of their audience, as well as the people being joked about in this case.

While those like MacFarlane have tarnished their name with just their way of humor, there are plenty others who are put in deep water for more serious reasons. Someone who has

had said serious allegations is Vic Mignogna, a name that could be very familiar to anime fans between the 2000s-2010s. Many people recognize him for his iconic voice from the classic *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006-2006), as well as from *Soul Eater* (2008-2009). He is also well-known for his voices in bigger grossed anime like the *Dragon Ball* series (1980s-present) as Broly, as well as in the *Fullmetal Alchemist* franchise (2003-2010) as Edward Elric. Back in the first few weeks into 2019, a user on X (Twitter) posted a thread, accusing Mignogna of "making unwanted physical advances on female con-goers, [later blowing up with] 4,000 retweets… and over 400 comments, many relaying their own negative experiences, including unwanted and unsolicited physical affection," (Loveridge, *Anime News Network*), which was his most concerning allegation, as compared to rude behavior and homophobic remarks. There is a certain story pasted onto the article, which was shared by an underage con-attendee who visited New York Comic-Con at the time; though, out of respect, as well as due to the graphic nature of the story, the offenses Mignogna has performed against said con-attendee will not be disclosed. However, aside from this incident, many other attendees related to the story, and have gone through similar experiences as the attendee. Typically, when encountering Mignogna, "small talk [was made] before he would ask the attendee if they wanted a photo… [then found him] kissing their cheek or pulling them in for a tight hug… the physical affection happened without their consent and made them uncomfortable," (Loveridge, *Anime News Network*), and this supposedly occurred more than once a year, in many other cons besides New York; by this point, he definitely knew what he was doing, and it's disgusting how he took advantage of his fans in this way while they possibly only wanted to take photos with someone they looked up to. Though, once he was asked about these allegations in a way where the one asking wasn't quite accusing him, but wondered who to believe in this case, this is what Mignogna had to say: "'I am SO FAR from perfect. I've made many mistakes and will make many more… But all I can ask is that

you decide for yourself by coming and meeting me in person, and form your own opinion on facts, not rumors… many people can have many reasons to make up garbage and slander others,'" (Loveridge, *Anime News Network*), ultimately downplaying his wrongdoings to a near manipulative level, and solely chalking them up to be simple "mistakes." Reflecting onto the reputation aspect, actions have consequences, and as an example, "'when [a firm is] seen as responsible for [causation, and as a result, has] acted with disregard in the events leading up to, during, and after the event, the firm's public reputation may be seriously and adversely impacted,'" (Rice et al., *Journal of Business Ethics*), further extending this example to what might happen if word reaches the news outlines, as well as taking note the further scrutiny faced when said firm reacts uselessly, defends what they've been scrutinized for, or simply not even react at all. Many of us have made mistakes in our lifetime, but hugging and kissing your fans in a photo, whether you knew they were underage or not, should definitely not count as a mistake, and he should take better accountability of his actions, because denying and lying about them will only make him look even worse as a role model.

Despite the fact that reputations can be tarnished through horrible and/or impulsive actions, either through acting creepy with fans or offending fans in minority groups with jokes, sometimes reputations can be ruined by metaphorically using their voice towards political or moral talking points. In this case, Tara Strong, a veteran voice actor who has voiced over 500 roles, has been under fire for, unironically speaking, voicing her opinions in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The spew of controversial tweets started on October 8, 2023, when Strong shared a photo which "seemingly called out those who stood in support of Palestine, almost as if she was grouping Palestinians and the Hamas terrorist organization," (Johnson, *The Direct*), and this could absolutely be further from the truth. When it comes to the firm's reputation, a company might also take into account ethical values in a person; the

best way to describe this is in the effect that “corporate ethical values are related to justice and fairness perceptions and that these perceptions are associated with increased commitment,” (Rice et al., *Journal of Business Ethics*), taking into account Strong’s heavily political tweets. In this case, Strong is seen as incredibly committed to the Jewish demographic, given that she has professed containing Jewish heritage. The company behind animated TV show *Boxtown*, which she was currently earning revenue from, caught wind of her thread of tweets, and this resulted in her going under fire; later, she responds on X (Twitter) with, “‘Just found out on twitter… Fired for being Jewish. Glad I helped you get your kickstarter money. Please lose my email address & pray for my family in Israel and in Gaza,’” (Johnson, *The Direct*), which resulted in fans bringing up past quotations highlighting her Islamophobia, as well as how she has approved of a theory going around that conspires Islam’s desire to rule the world. Later, she has reinforced being against Hamas as a terrorist group, and not Islam as a religion. Along with speaking about this 76-year-long genocide, she has also received controversy for professing her initially negative views on artificial intelligence, only to be called a hypocrite. She made this tweet while the topic was a buzzword within the entertainment industry as a whole, “‘I’m honestly not sure how to combat all the AI companies stealing our voices, but this should be a concern for all people, not just actors. Also…if a company asks you to teach an AI how to say anything & everything in YOUR voice, say NO,’” (Johnson, *The Direct*), initially providing an excellent point to the artificial intelligence takeover. Though, immediately after the post was made, fans have reported calling her out, having referenced multiple shared images on her page of artwork made with AI, supposedly not just on X (Twitter), but on other social media platforms. Along with this, fans have chalked her up to only caring about how harmful artificial intelligence is when it only harms her work as an artist, having called a piece of AI art “cute.” Reflecting back to the quotation about corporate ethical values, it seems in this case the values which

only matter to her are when it comes to her work; in other words, she doesn't seem to care about any other form of art besides voiceover art.

History of Voiceover Work

Many people assume they'd be right to believe that the man behind one of the largest and most common entertainment industries, Walt Disney, has created the first voiceover ever recorded, but someone beat him to it over twenty years earlier. One man named Reginald Fessenden started his career in 1906, dubbed as "radio's first ever voice, although six years earlier, he had successfully reported on the weather during a test whilst working for the United States Weather Bureau," (Matinée Multilingual). Further on with the vast assumption of Walt Disney, some would come to think of it due to the fact he was probably most known for his voice for Mickey Mouse. Many people have remembered this due to Disney's release of Steamboat Willie in 1928. Similarly to Disney making its first few steps into beloved entertainment classics, Warner Bros. also makes a drastic boost to the entertainment industry by releasing *Looney Tunes* (1930-present).

With the introduction of this new series, this era was also identified as the beginning of stardom for another beloved voice actor, Mel Blanc, aliased as The Man of a Thousand Voices. Before he started his work on Looney Tunes, he was also a radio personality, having joined Leon Shlesinger Productions back in 1936. Blanc was "accepted by many as the first outstanding voice actor who set the bar at an incredibly high level for others to follow in his footsteps over the forthcoming years," (Matinée Multilingual), reflecting that he has voiced a long list of the characters, and somehow had quite a vocal range given this list. The characters he was most well-known for were Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote, Marvin the Martian, along with many, many others. Along with the introduction to radio personas, as well as entertainment faces, there is another voice actor which helped boost the awareness of voiceover work being prevalent in commercials. Don LaFontaine started his

stardom by recording his first commercial in 1962, in which the recording was used in a trailer for the movie *Gunfighters of Casa Grande* (1964). Over his career, "[LaFontaine] has voiced hundreds of thousands of commercials… it was [his] work [that has] changed how trailers and promos were not only voiced but how they were written," (Matinée Multilingual); LaFontaine was proudly recognized as the designated voice of movie trailers for decades, up until his passing in 2008.

While credit was given where it was due for the origin of voiceover work as a whole, there should also be some credit to give to the first known female voiceover actor. This actress was known as Adriana Caselotti, who played the voice of the princess herself in the beloved Disney animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1934). Supposedly, Caselotti was not just the first onymous voice actress in all of history, but she also took the crown for the first ever Disney Legend, and furthermore was the final member alive among the cast of the movie. Before Adriana started up her vocal work, her father, music teacher and vocal coach Guido Caselotti was asked by a casting member "if he knew anyone who could fulfill the role of Snow White. [His daughter] was on the other line of the phone and immediately jumped into the conversation asking if she could do it," (Ball, *The Disney Classics*), only for her to victor the role out of 150+ other auditioners after the production was announced to begin. Though this information could be relevant to some, she was only 18 at the time she auditioned for the role.

Despite her rapid stardom and the historic milestones that she made by simply being a prevalent voice, her voiceover experience was perhaps short-lived. It supposedly took her only a couple days to record demos of all her songs and scenes, with a daily $20 pay. As a result, this daily income transitioned into "a total of $970 (equivalent to $17,000 today)," (Ball, *The Disney Classics*), this is comparably quite a fortune to make simply doing voiceover work at her time. Initially however, she did all this work under the impression that

her vocals would be utilized in a short-film; imagine her surprise when she instead discovered that her voice would be on the noted first feature film Disney has ever made. Speaking further on her short-lived stardom, the film was the foundation and destruction of her career, and her career initially started crumbling when Walt Disney himself decided to "make sure his audiences were not drawn out of the fantasy that his films [endorsed] by [no longer] crediting the voice actors in the film," (Ball, *The Disney Classics*), and this persisted until 1943. This meant in her case, Disney ceased to credit her in promotions, as well as the home video release of the movie, let alone the movie premiere. To make matters even worse, she supposedly "signed a contract with Disney saying she would not work with any other studios, and would only work on Disney projects she was asked to be on," (Ball, *The Disney Classics*), but the kicker is that she was never casted another singular role under the guise of Disney.

Theoretically, Walt never asked her to be cast in any more upcoming roles since he viewed her as having the most ideal voice of Snow White, and didn't want her to be known for other roles essentially, which personally makes this situation slightly weird. Nonetheless, after the death of her time at Disney, she took on "2 uncredited roles… one being the singing voice of Juliet in *The Wizard of Oz*, and singing in Martini's bar in *It's a Wonderful Life*," (Ball, *The Disney Classics*), and as a turning point also made a couple returns as Snow White, though not quite under Disney's influence anymore; despite the warped expectations Disney put her under, she was optimistic about sharing this experience as much as she could, before her casualty from lung cancer at age 80, back in 1997.

Back into the introduction, there were nine documented types of voiceover; though, the question in this case is, how would these forms of voiceover be portrayed, let alone what would be the distinction between each form of voiceover? Rebecca Strassberg begins her list with commercial work, which serves the purpose of getting a product or a message across

through the means of advertising. She goes on to explain further that the main gist isn't playing the role of a character, but instead simply relaying a message to the target audience via communication. Furthermore, Strassberg adds that although "commercial work makes up a smaller portion of VO work—about eight percent—it can be one of the most lucrative with repeat work and guaranteed payments with union contracts," (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), while it could be also important to further relay said message through affective marketing tactics.

Next on the list is entertainment which is arguably the most common among the general options of voiceover. Furthermore, animation voiceovers are alone basically filed down to any TV show anyone can think of, whether regarding western animation or a Japanese originated term referred as anime. Although it's been common knowledge that especially in this day and age, the credits mostly contain A-list actors, this also suggests there could be space for those specifically focused on voice acting, as well as less known names in the industry. An example that Strassberg gives was "Auli'i Cravalho, the lead in Disney's 'Moana,' [who reportedly] had never worked in VO until that film," (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), which proves there (hopefully) could be a stronger possibility in the mere future of credits being no longer taken by A-list actors, and finally giving due diligence to talents whose main focus is voice work. Another entertainment opportunity right down the alley is in video games, which more arguably is aligned with animation, in the way that "video games are a huge industry for voice work, and the medium spans countless genres [from] a samurai [to] a completely fictionalized robot-dragon hybrid," (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), only really recognizing the industry for its endless bouts of creativity. This is not to say that animation doesn't have any creativity whatsoever, but generally both animation and video games offer a variety of voice work opportunities.

Along with there being an entertainment aspect of voiceover work, there is also a grouping of narration voice work. One of the forms that is mainly focused on narration are

audiobooks, given that with the rise of these electronic readings also comes the rise of voiceover options for those who ideally like to read. It could be possible for the authors alone to invest in audiobook narration, the artistic aspects of audiobook reading has expanded, through “voice actors [often being] hired to play different characters, which can make listening to an audiobook even more dynamic,” (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), though to be the most ideal audiobook voice actor is to have proper enunciation, as well as a reading voice that can be heard and can be straight to the point. Furthermore onto narrations, documentaries are also included on this section. Instead of being given the opportunity to voice multiple characters, voice actors are needed “to narrate, move stories along, and keep listeners engaged, [ultimately setting] the tone for the entire project,” (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), emphasizing that it’s absolutely crucial to know about the story ahead of time, in order for the narrator to better tell the story, by conveying the appropriate emotions stressed throughout a documentary to keep viewers further hooked.

Next on the list are virtual assistants or GPS systems, which arguably could be the most useful in terms of application in the real world. Though a relatively newer form of voiceover, it is stressed that “voice actors with clear, easy to understand tones can consider a career in GPS and virtual assistance audio,” (Strassberg, Back Stage), though there is no distinction between these forms of voiceover. Although there is not a lot of discussion from the article about how these types of voiceover can be applied, there are an influx of examples in the real world. GPS system voiceovers can be heard from people’s cars as they try to get to their destinations, they can be heard on subways which tell people when and where the next stop will occur, as well as on everybody’s cell phones, which can be utilized for biking, walking, running, or other generic forms of transportation. On another note, virtual assistants have been prevalent in recent times, containing the broad knowledge to answer people’s

questions, and as of the past five years, they have become more varied in personality, behaviors and emotions; this is similar to the development of artificial intelligence.

Upcoming on the list of voiceover types are both corporate and educational videos, along with health and wellness applications. Though they might provide different subjects, they are both under the guise of keeping a certain front to appear more professional in the subjects of the matter. Corporate and educational videos are not quite as ideal as, say, entertainment voiceover forms, though they still have quite a lot of options for aspiring voice actors. In summary, most voice work within corporate or educational means involve "training materials, human resource videos, university course videos [that] offer a world of opportunity," (Strassberg, Back Stage), mainly requiring voice actors to remain in a more professional mood throughout, as well as to be more careful with discussing behavior in these occupations, as well as opportunities to further careers, prolonging the professional face. Similarly to this, health and wellness is "a fast-growing type of voiceover work, [involving] exercise, meditation, and inspiration videos, apps, and recordings," (Strassberg, *Back Stage*), though instead of having to rely on one tone constantly, the tone varies depending on the energy the voice actors think consumers should possess, this is also true for the actors' reading pace, as it also varies depending on the preferred level of energy.

Last but not least, there is one remaining form of voiceover which technically spread the well misinformed knowledge that this is the only type necessary to be a voice actor, this form in question are announcements, whether through the means of sports, news, radio or DJs, as well as public service systems; an example of an announcement is portrayed as "that voice you hear over on the subway platform letting you know trains are delayed," (Strassberg, *Back Stage*). The misinformation that would normally be spread regarding this type is that to be a voice actor is to have a big, loud booming voice that others could recognize, and this was what made people famous; this could be further from the truth, since

there are many differing voices in the industry, and overall, all it does is discourage others and furthermore make them feel as if their voice is incompetent. Based on the requirements, an announcing voiceover job typically "requires a deep knowledge of the subject, the ability to think on your feet, and confidence reading from a prepared script with little time to rehearse," (Strassberg, Back Stage), and somehow, unlike other voiceover artists, putting those most interested in this type of work on a time stretch as a result, which can test the width of their ability on these three factors.

The 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike

It's no secret that the pandemic has worsened opportunities for those who want to make it to stardom from behind the big screen, and to make matters worse, the future is widely ahead of us, possibly more than what we think. The 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike happened between July 14, 2023, and November 8, 2023, where members of the union were fighting for higher pay, better working conditions, along with a number of contracts which include cutting into the use of artificial intelligence. Right off the bat however, it should be of due diligence to start on sources which occurred during the strike, not after its finale.

Parker Herren and Gillian Follet from *AdAge* have put advertisers in a position where they should be in the know as to what's going on in Hollywood, as a big portion of these stars are involved in two Guild strikes. Beginning their speculation, Herren and Follett have documented how the actors' union have made the decision to strike along with WGA, hoping to "[put] further pressure on Hollywood studios to agree on terms concerning residual pay in streaming and the use of AI in TV and filmmaking," (Herren and Follett, *AdAge*), though they believed advertising would somehow put a stop to the studios that want to put productivity above authenticity, or in the case of this article, paying their workers fairly and putting their talent to good use rather than relying on artificial intelligence. However, a reason why these two might believe advertisers could potentially stop this strike could be due to how

“advertising has become a necessity for monetizing digital audiences, whose subscription fees alone weren't enough to fund the hundreds of millions now spent on many series… consumers already struggling with subscription fatigue may begin questioning the value of cable or streaming payments,” (Herren and Follett, *AdAge*), basically interpreting that by advertising these cable companies or streaming applications, it would hopefully attract more customers to spend their money to feed onto the content that is being advertised. While putting into account that advertising could help prevent the strike from going any further, they have asked a couple media buyers what they thought the short-term implications would be, hadn’t the strike stopped. One buyer mentioned that the strike could absolutely cause prime time pricing to skyrocket, adding that, “‘The media companies have shown that they're not investing in prime time… why would we continue to fund their future development of a [direct to consumer] business by paying ridiculous prices in prime time and areas of the marketplace where they're not even trying to gain audiences back,’” (Herren and Follett, *AdAge*), specifying that there are major networks that were already prioritizing sports broadcasts, as well as reality or game shows over series shows which contain a script, whether fictional or not; this marked the beginning of lack of creativity in these networks, so to speak.

Jeff Schuhrke from *New Labor Forum*, accessed from the website Sage Journals, goes on to discuss what went down during these grueling 118 days, as well as how this strike truly started to stir people’s suspicions of artificial intelligence, which has already been heavily discussed by this point. Schuhrke begins this analysis by explaining that “the SAG-AFTRA strike was the largest and most visible work stoppage in a year that saw more than half a million U.S. workers stage over 400 strikes, [costing] the national economy an estimated $6 billion in lost consumer spending,” (Schuhrke, *New Labor Forum*), with the inclusion of another strike taking place around the same time against the WGA (Writers’ Guild of

America), which arguably lasted longer. This is an insane loss of money, especially considering the SAG-AFTRA's move to end the strike; this took place as soon as said guild "secured a tentative agreement on a new, three-year contract… Thanks to the strike, the union secured protections around the use of AI," (Schuhrke, *New Labor Forum*), which honestly should have been a given from the moment someone wants to enter stardom via the Guild. While the majority of the strike might've been caused with the breach of AI, there's some speculation that the strike might also involve the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, "casting calls have switched to being unpaid and done almost entirely remotely instead of in-person and with compensation, as they used to be. This means anyone anywhere with basic recording equipment can submit a self-taped audition, leading to an explosion in the labor supply," (Schuhrke, *New Labor Forum*), thus those who are just trying to make a quick buck are smothering and cutting in front of people who genuinely are trying to make it into the industry with raw, authentic talent. On top of this, the sloppier way to make it big comes off as if none of their work is professional, let alone stable, as again, their only goal is to make more money.

Perspectives from Voiceover Actors

The research into voiceover acting has also involved interviews with working artists, those of which have spent a significant time of their lives in the voiceover field. Pamela Prather has spent over 20 years of her life on her career; she is a former faculty at Yale School of Drama and NYU, as well as being a former assistant professor emeritus at Purchase College. Currently, she is holding her own business called Pamela Prather Coaching LLC, as well as coaching for the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA). Further onto Randy Savage, he has done voice work and production for over 20 years, mostly specifying his career on documentary narrations, corporate videos and business applications.

First of all, Prather and Savage were asked about their background knowledge of voice acting, regarding what they have worked for in terms of the voiceover field. Prather starts with stating that she has been involved in the field ever since her 20s. She began her career in radio as a junior in college, while she majored in broadcast journalism as an undergrad at the University of Essex. Way before the ease of technology and digital work was utilized in almost every career, Prather stated how she had "to cut tapes, to put them together, to slice them and all that," (Prather, *Google Meet*), in the name of editing demos. Onto the next step of her career came news, where she would be part of a big band commercial radio station in Florida, as well as the titled "#1 Radio Station" over the decades, KISS-FM. When she was applying for an MFA in acting, the head of Voice and Speech decided to teach her the basics after noting that Prather was good at what she was doing, as well as her undergrad background. Prather was taught about the technique of voice, specifying her interest in the intellectual side of these techniques, like "how to put things together… what would the sound effects be like," (Prather, *Google Meet*), etc. After this period of her life, she goes on to teach what she has been taught once before. She begins her teaching career at Yale School of Drama, practicing voice and speech, then migrating to SUNY Purchase with these same teachings; she worked with a team of professionals, and had her students "leave with a voiceover demo," (Prather, *Google Meet*). Proving that this has worked, she stated that a small number of her former students were able to find opportunities to open up their career with the demos she let them do. Basically, in terms of background, Prather has been on two sides of the coin, both as a talent and a coach. Savage began his career as a radio DJ along with Prather, as he did commercials as part of his job. He also expresses his enjoyment with doing the work, taking his time to study the art of voiceovers with books, as well as taking lectures taught by fellow voiceover artists. Savage has also stated that he's continuing to learn different techniques, styles, etc. to learn how to phrase words differently. He recommends

future voice actors to take voice acting classes, since it's important to know how to "act" with your voice, in short of a better saying.

Secondly, they were asked what the greatest factor is for a future voice actor to have, as well as specifying a number of selections that could work for an answer. Prather answers this with one word; authenticity. What she means by authenticity is you have to be connected, taking examples from a few voice actors from *The Simpsons*, as well as Danny DeVito in an actor's perspective; she goes on and explains how these examples are known for the uniqueness of their voice, as well as the fact that their voice comes from a place of authenticity. Another thing about authenticity that she goes on to talk about is how it "involves some combination of experience and training," (Prather, *Google Meet*), in order to not come off as "put-on," in her words. Savage answers with extroversion tendencies; in a further explanation, he states that voice actors tend to come into the field expecting to have a big announcer type voice, or in his words, "a lot of people get down on themselves because they don't have… the voice they think they need to have," (Savage, *Zoom*). However, with the voice he's trying to describe, only a small portion of the work in this industry is based on having a booming announcer voice for movie commercials, or trailers.

Then, they were asked whether one could make a living off of just doing voiceover work, compared to doing voiceover work with the inclusion of other ways to earn money. Prather straightforwardly says no, you can't just make a living off of doing voiceover work; she states the similarities of voiceover work to doing acting gigs. She then goes on to offer advice that she was told in grad school; she says that in order to live a happier life, you need to find things you're passionate about, including voiceover work. Along with that, she suggests finding something, or multiple things, that will earn you enough money to make a real living. An example she gives of this is while one is doing voiceover work, they also study and work on dermatology on the side; "I want to do facials like they have, you know, a business that's

going that they need voiceover work for," (Prather, *Google Meet*). Then, she goes on to say that life as an actor can be grueling, double of this for a voiceover actor; comparing these two careers, Prather points out that voice actors earn less, and are faced with less high-paying jobs. The bottom line of this is that many voice actors usually work other jobs besides voice acting to make ends meet. Savage reflects on how it used to be possible for voice actors to make a living with just their voice. Then, he starts explaining that times are much different due to the blossoming of artificial intelligence. He inserts some personal experience by adding that he "was never one to fully immerse [himself] in a full-time voiceover career because [he] just [has] other interests," (Savage, *Zoom*), such as audio production. He also recommends those who are looking to become voice actors to look into the SAG-AFTRA, along with other unions, as well as to people who are wanting to become full-time voiceover artists and are serious about it.

After that, they were asked if there was a reason why industries decide to keep their voiceover artists anonymous, while including the possibility that this decision might be up to said voiceover artists. Prather starts by saying this is an excellent question, before hypothesizing that "it makes it easier for them to slot in somebody else, so it's all about money," (Prather, *Google Meet*), then she basically goes on a tangent describing that if someone uses AI to get what they're looking for, or uses an actor whose voice is used by AI but nothing is known about them, this actor won't know that their voice is earning the other person money, and if they try to make more work to earn themselves money, said person would turn them down and look for someone else. Then, she professes this society depends on people with more money to make changes; in her words, she states that "it's one of the challenges of being in a capitalistic society… the sad thing is you either have to opt out of this society or you have to make a lot of money so that you can change things," (Prather, *Google Meet*). Savage states that most voice actors he knows are well-known for what they

do, but after we have a quick back and forth on what I'm trying to look for, he does some thinking for a minute before explaining that artificial intelligence might be an underlying issue in this scenario. He also provides a contrasting statement; "people will upload their voices and let them be duplicated, but they don't want other people in the voice industry to know… because there's a level where [voiceover artists] are like, AI is bad… we need to band together and charge what we're worth instead of selling our voices $10 a pop," (Savage, *Zoom*). Along with this, he implies that some people intend to go anonymous, as some people use a DJ alias on radio stations, to summarize what he's said.

Then, they were asked what the biggest obstacle is that voice actors face today, while listing some possible obstacles that relate to the project, let alone have been written about. Prather says that artificial intelligence has become a growing obstacle in the voiceover field, specifying that there is a barrier to entry. Afterwards, she goes on to explain that "it's fun and enjoyable, and that's why you see these animations with famous stars playing all the roles of the voices… what's left for the little guy, right? Not a lot," (Prather, *Google Meet*), implying that there isn't a lot of slots for new or future voice actors to make it big, since A-list actors take those spots. She also mentions the fact that podcasts used to not be as frequent as they are now, and these days everybody with the slightest hint of fame wants to start podcasts to become bigger celebrities, leaving nothing for those who actually want to make it big with pure talent; this is what she refers to as a barrier of entry. She reflects a lot about her past, specifically back in her 20s before she knew what she was going to do in the future. Savage starts by saying there are two things he thinks could be obstacles for voiceover artists; he starts by explaining how there were online services about ten years ago that would advertise selling interested people's voices for cheap, which devalues their voices, as well as the voiceover industry itself. He gave a heads up that it's not totally the fault of those trying to make a living, stating that he "fully [understands] these people want to get into the business,

but you have to value your voice enough to charge enough money for it… a lot of the cheaper voices are not professional, they can't do what you want them to do," (Savage, *Zoom*). Along with this, he also agrees alongside Prather that artificial intelligence has become a HUGE issue in the voiceover industry, especially now. He states that artificial intelligence will wipe out voice actors, providing services which would take away income from voice actors; these same services will let you clone your voice, so that others can use it while you're being sent a monthly fee. However, he's not fully against it, as he made a comment wishing to duplicate his voice before the interview due to allergies. Along with this, he has sometimes used AI to clean up audio while editing, along with finishing up last minute commercials.

This is when they were asked questions about the 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike. The first question in this cluster was to describe the events of the strike from their memory, or in other words, what caused it. Prather initializes her answer with how the strike had to do with actors being "used as it were, to then be regenerated again and not being compensated for things like that," (Prather, *Google Meet*), or in other words, they aren't being paid for their talent being reused for any purpose by another person. She wasn't sure how to further proceed with the first part, which was a valid response. With the reason why it was caused, she goes on to explain "well because of changes to the entertainment environment due to streaming, the writers and the actors went on strike," (Prather, *Google Meet*). She admits she could only hypothesize in general, but she was able to identify that the writer's strike ended in September 2023, and the SAG-AFTRA Strike ended in November 2023. Savage also confessed that he didn't know much about the strike. However, he states that one of the big things involved in the strike is artificial intelligence once again. Another thing he points out along with that is how regularly, genuine actors and voice actors alike had to fight "against the companies using AI or CGI to duplicate their personas, and they wanted to make sure that they were compensated going forward," (Savage, *Zoom*), he assumes being one of the issues.

Second to lastly, they were asked if there was any damage done after the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike was over, including the curiosity of if this strike has affected voice actors in the future. Prather starts with how it'll "extend the potential for human beings to stand up for their artistry, and hopefully enable them to do so for the long run," (Prather, *Google Meet*), basically implying that it'll give future (voice) actors the potential to protect their work from those who want to use it for malicious purposes, or who want to use it while not valuing the pure elegance and standard of an actor's voice; but she hasn't really implied that any damage was done after the Strike was over, so the question might have been a reach. She does confess to a fear of hers from this emergence of artificial intelligence, that being "not only will it take jobs away from people, but it will stifle people's creativity because they'll forget how to be creative," (Prather, *Google Meet*), and in all honesty, this is a valid fear to have in this day and age. Savage admits again that he is not knowledgeable on the SAG-AFTRA Strike, but he starts by stating that "from what [he has] been told, [he thinks] there hasn't really been damage done… what [he] can recall on the SAG-AFTRA strike [is] they were refusing to pay their people, or not paying them as often," (Savage, *Zoom*). Another thing he points out about this strike was the fact that there were companies who are saving money and ultimately screwing over people who genuinely make a living off of their voice, especially when others are doing the same to their employees. The actors are just trying to keep their rights and have others treat them like they have their rights rather than kicking them in the dirt.

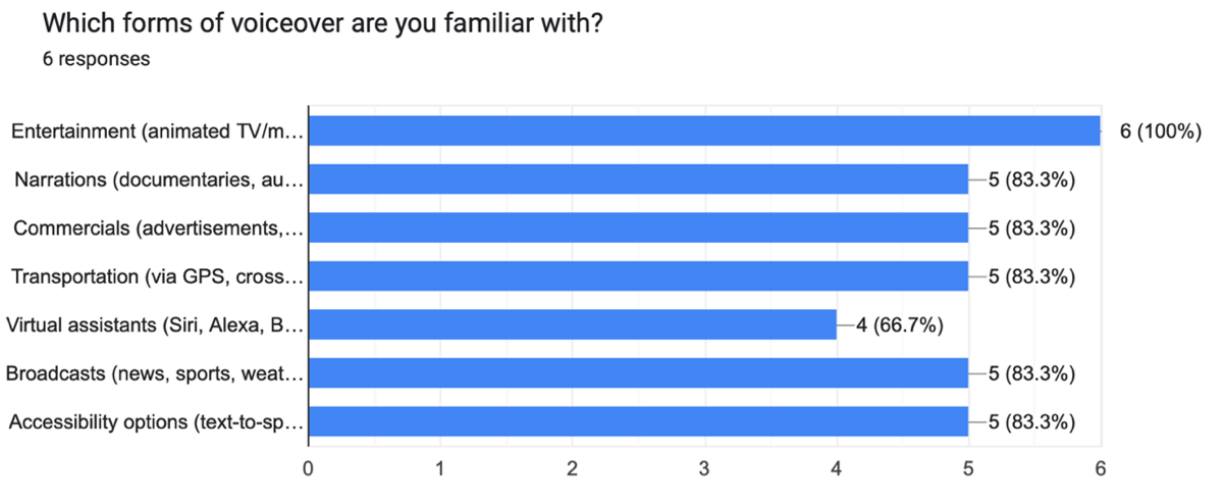
Finally, they were asked to give the greatest piece of advice to future voice actors. Prather's advice to future voice actors is to try and meet people around the field, those who have done professional work or those who have retired or migrated to another career; she also offers advice before joining a union, which consists of doing voice related stuff on the side for free, or a small price, and to receive feedback from experts or other professionals. Another piece of advice she gives is along the lines of experimenting; for example, starting a podcast,

or doing something where you're using your voice for practice can be a way to improve the way you speak, along with opening yourself up to ways you can say a sentence. She ends her piece of advice by also giving a brief synopsis of what she has been saying, which is "creating opportunities for practice and opportunities for mentorship and learning," (Savage, *Zoom*). Savage's advice has one word; practice. Every day. As his form of practice, he would spend his days reading the newspaper out loud before there was technology, and he did the same with books. He also listened to commercials, animations, movies, products, etc. in order to get an idea on how to express words and to better utilize his voice. One thing he adds to this is "listen to what they're doing with their voice… because you can say the same line 10 different ways, and it means something different each time if you know how to use your voice," (Savage, *Zoom*), before adding observance to his string of advice. Rather than trying to be a big Announcer in his dialect, he instead suggests that future voice actors try and be "the guy next door," (Savage, *Zoom*). He ends his advice by simply stating to just have fun with it, do the thing you enjoy most about the field and you'll become better at it; you need to like something to be good at it.

Collective Perspectives On-Site and Online

To add onto some quantitative data, a small survey from Google Forms was created, which asks mainly for open ended answers regarding voiceover work. The audience for this survey are students at Purchase College, though only six people have scanned the QR code on pamphlets scattered across campus. The purpose of this survey in great detail is to figure out which forms of voiceover the students on this campus are familiar with, as well as generally anything they know about voiceover work, through prevalence in their own lives, as well as what they think the future holds for jobs in the voiceover field. In a personal sense, this survey serves the purpose of wonder as to how much people really know about the voiceover industry, without having to learn about it in immense detail.

Question 1 Answers:



Reflecting to these results, people are most familiar with entertainment (animated TV/movies, video games, etc.) as a voiceover form, which was expected. The forms that tie against each other are narrations (documentaries, audiobooks, etc.), commercials (advertisements, upcoming movies, etc.), transportation (via GPS, crosswalks, subways, etc.), broadcasts (news, sports, weather, etc.), and accessibility (text-to-speech, voiceover settings on mobile phones, etc.), which was surprising, since initially there would have been more variety in answering. Though, they are the least familiar with virtual assistants (Siri, Alexa, Bixby, etc.) as a form of voiceover.

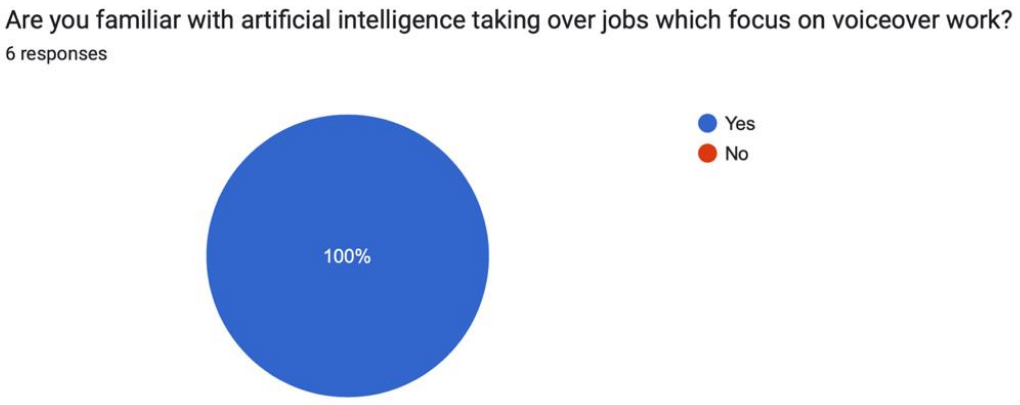
Question two asks, "How has voiceover work become more prevalent in your life? It can appear as consumption of said content, using it as a form of aid, as well as gaining knowledge of some circumstances," (Sawka, *Google Forms*). Here are the answers listed below.

"Consumption of said content."
"It's something I used to want to do, and it made me feel like I could be something really cool."
"I mainly use it for narration purposes, like audiobooks."

“Voiceover work is prevalent in my life because of the media I consume. I’m always listening to video games and movies. As someone who wants to be an actor it’s something that I’m interested in doing.”
“I think watching shows and video games is my main source on consumption. Voice acting in animated shows really adds depth to a character. I always think of [Uncle Iroh] as a prime example, just from how influential and loved both his voice actors are.”
“I have heard it all the time on the subway systems when I would go to school, or the video games I played involved voice actors. Cartoons also were a great source of prevalence when it came to voice over in my life. In my life, it was more for consumption, but there were circumstances where I’d gain knowledge.”

Overall, most people have ultimately stated that they feel voiceover work is prevalent in their lives due to the consumption of said content, normally appearing in the form of audiobooks, video games, anime, or even commercials can count as this. An outlier in these answers states that voiceover is applied in their life, having heard it in the subway systems when they went to school; or based on the formation of the question, has used it as a way to gain knowledge on some circumstances, in this case being to find out where the next stops are. Someone has stated how they also want or have used to want to become a voiceover artist, which genuinely stood out, since the voiceover industry would love new faces.

Question 3 Answers:



These results ultimately were not surprising, since every responder has recalled being familiar with artificial intelligence taking over voiceover focused jobs. However, it would also not be shocking that people might have caught wind of this fact, given the rise of artificial intelligence on social media platform apps like TikTok, Facebook, or X (Twitter), as well as artificial intelligence itself being the concrete of many apps in store, whether free or for pay.

Question four asks, "Do you genuinely think voice actors' jobs are becoming less prevalent in the world of careers? Explain if you feel like." (Sawka, *Google Forms*). Here are the answers listed below.

"Yes. I feel like it's happening already, and companies always want to look for a way to cut corners."
"Sort of. I feel like with lots of jobs, voice acting isn't often thought about and gets looked over a lot. It's a really hard industry to break into, and the pay often isn't stable. This deters people from trying, so I think yes in that sense, but no in the sense that people still do, given how many shows, movies, games, announcers, broadcasts, etc. exist."
"Not less prevalent, at least not yet."
"I don't think they're less prevalent but just under appreciated. I don't think a lot of people realize how much work goes into voice acting and how difficult it is to do. I hope it gets more recognition in the future as there are a lot of talented people in the profession."
"No, voice over is a key component of almost all media. A [person's] interpretation of a character through their voice is what gives them personality, and a good narrator can make a bad show or commercial even better. They become so iconic you can always tell the product they're advertising for or the character without having to see them. That's what makes a memorable commercial/show and keeps people interested and invested."

> "I think they are still around in the world of careers, but the same voice actors are hired so it makes the process of becoming one harder. AI only [takes] up a small portion of the voiceover field but not completely everything, so voice actors will always have their niche."

Overall, there is a mixed response within these answers, some saying that voice actors get looked over but not quite less prevalent, while others are stating that it isn't the case yet. One person is in total disagreement, and explains that voice acting is a "key component of almost all media… [voice actors] become so iconic you can always tell the product they're advertising… without having to see them," (Sawka, *Google Forms*). Another person is on the opposite side of this, stating personally how "it's happening already, and companies always want to look for a way to cut corners," (Sawka, *Google Forms*).

Along with the survey marketing the consensus of people on campus, another survey with some questions from the previous survey was created for another audience to answer; this new survey contains at least one new question, along with two questions that the voiceover actors that were interviewed were unable to answer. Instead of using Google Forms again, Mentimeter was used for this survey; this was initially in hopes to appear more anonymous, though they also had a greatly useful variety of question types. The audience in turn of this new survey are people on the website Reddit, specifically users who frequent a subreddit named r/VoiceActing. This is a subreddit with over 100,000 members, and it seemed to be the most active voiceover subreddit all around, but it still seemed relatively empty. After waiting two weeks for responses, only six participants went to the link and provided feedback. However, this was the same number of participants on the previous survey, so they had similar weight. The purpose of making this survey was to show differences in the knowledge from a number of those who are actively trying to make voiceover work their career, as compared to students on a college campus who are studying for various careers; in a deeper explanation, this survey was made in hopes to receive information from those who are already knowledgeable in the field, as well as to relay the

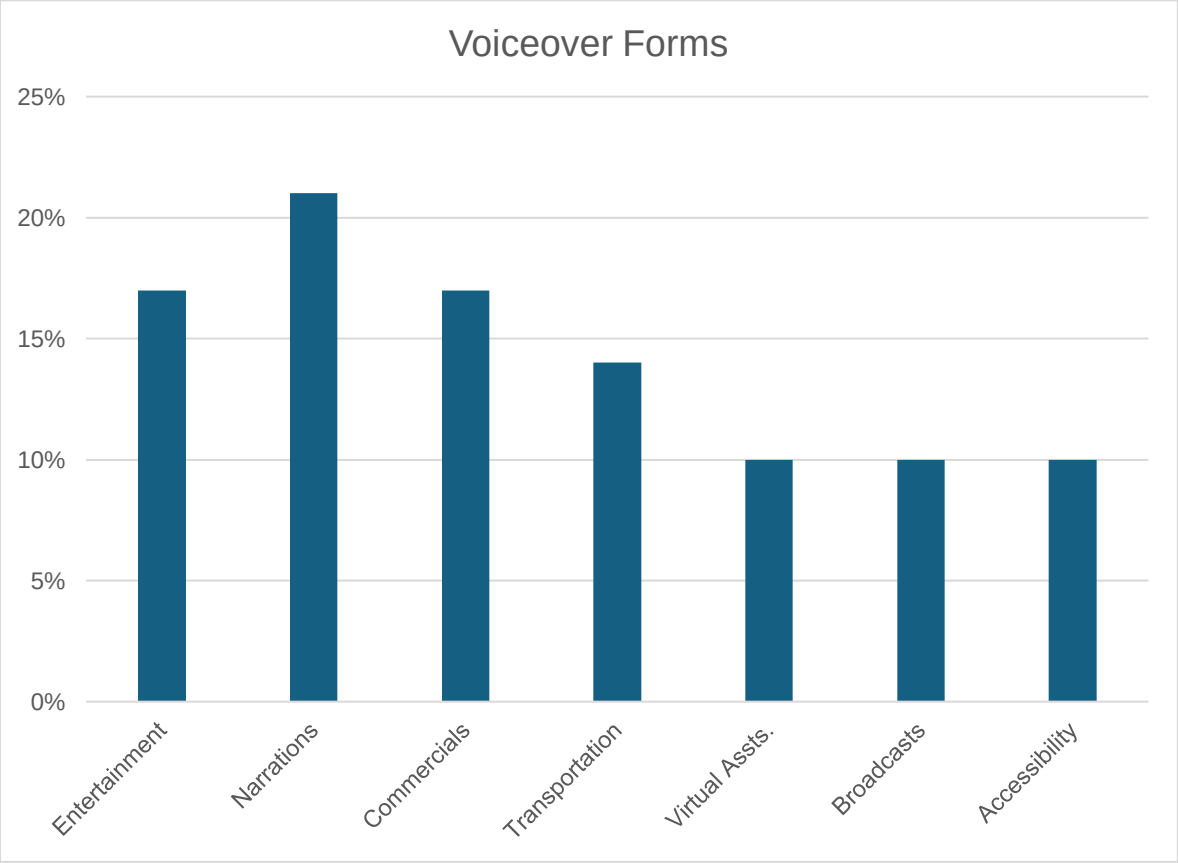
processed information to those who want to get into the field. Again, in a personal sense, this survey serves the purpose to find out exactly how prevalent voiceover actors are in more specific aspects, to find out if there are other obstacles to discuss from the perspective of those who are already in the field, to learn about context and information that was missed from the interviewed voiceover talents, as well as to receive pieces of advice to give to future voiceover artists.

Question one asks, “First of all, what interested you into joining this subreddit?” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below.

“I'm a low-level voice artist (under 100 credits), and so wanted to follow along with how others in the industry are faring!”
“I have a lot of knowledge and a desire to share it!”
“I am a VA.”
“Always loved voice acting. And I follow on what’s happening with the strike quite a bit.”
“I took an intro class in voice acting and am testing theaters for pursuing it.”
“I was interested in taking a look at this survey since a friend of mine shared this link to me.”

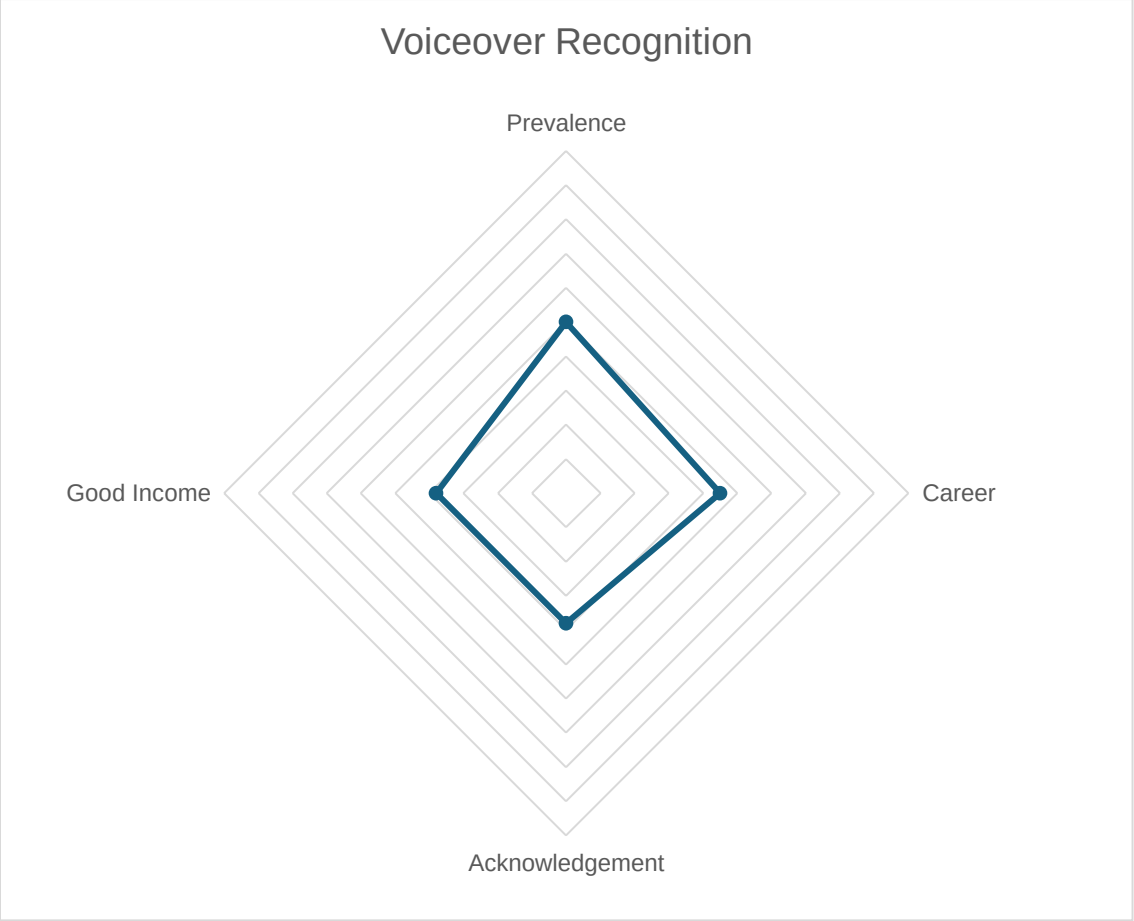
This is a self-explanatory list of results, since most people according to the survey have either done voiceover work, or have been interested in learning about voiceover work. However, someone in particular has shared being a low-level voice actor who wanted to know how other voice actors in the field are holding up, which is very considerate. Also, someone else has referred this survey to a friend.

Question two asks, “Which forms of voiceover are you familiar with?” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below via a chart.



According to the results, 20% of people were familiar with narrations, there was a tie of 17% where people were familiar with entertainment and commercials, 13% of people were familiar with transportation, and there was another tie of 10% where people were familiar with virtual assistants, broadcasts, and accessibility. Reflecting on the data pulled from the survey, the results were shocking; instead of entertainment having the most votes, similarly in the previous survey, most people in this group suggested narrations to be a more common form of voiceover. On top of this, virtual assistants, broadcasts, and accessibility shares a common factor of being the least common forms of voiceover, which isn’t surprising, considering the last survey’s results with virtual assistants especially also had the least votes.

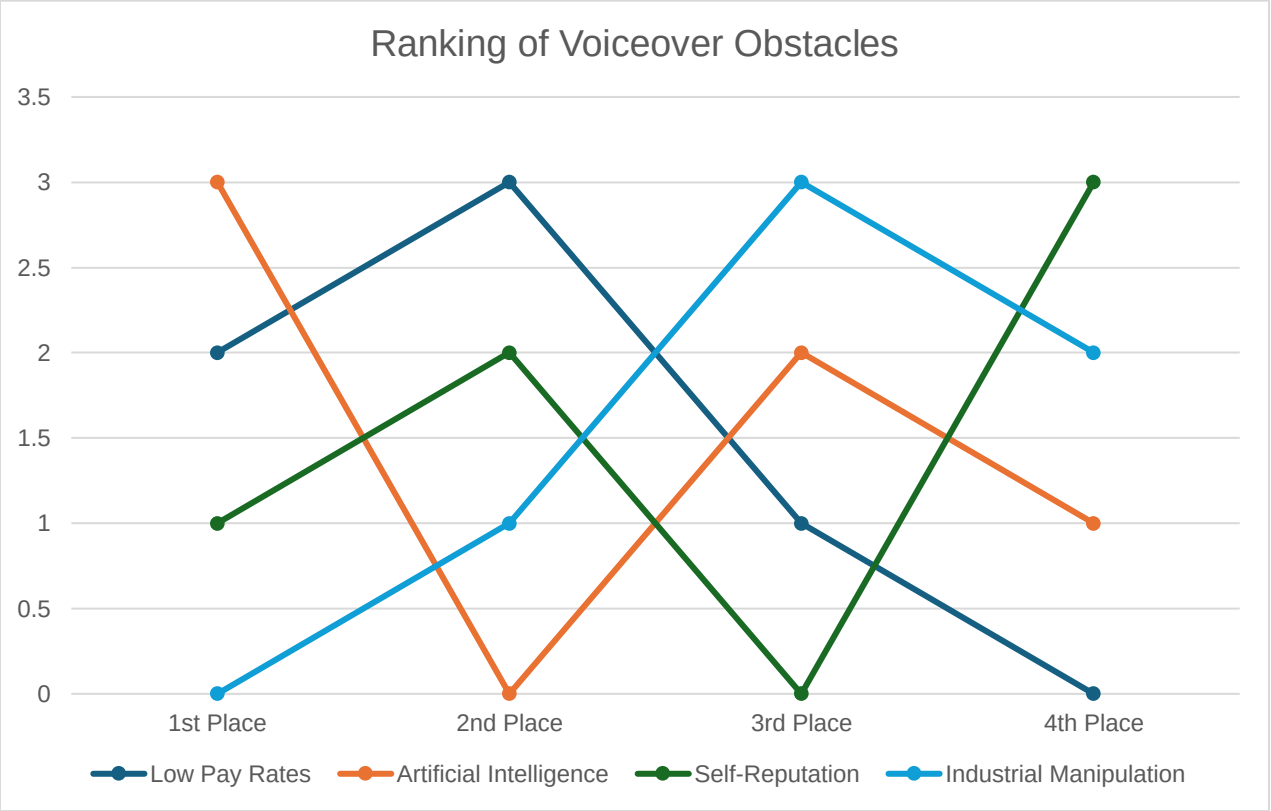
Question three asks, “How would you rate the likelihood of recognition the average voice actor receives?” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below via a chart.



The results on this chart explain whether certain forms of recognition are common in voice actors, or whether these forms are scarce. To further describe what this chart is looking for, the data measures the attention that voice overs are more likely to receive, whether in terms of financial means (good income and career) or physical means (acknowledgement by others, prevalence in films). On a scale of scarce (1) to common (10), prevalence was given a 5, career was given a 4.5, and both good income and acknowledgement are tied at 3.8. Since this question is relatively new, expectations of the question being successful were mixed regarding which form of recognition would be scarce or common, so it was surprising to reveal that there is recognition in the field on a general note, let alone that not all the data is the same or constant.

Question four asks, “Which of these obstacles are you most to least familiar with being an issue in voiceover work?” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below

via a chart.



This is one of the newer survey questions, where participants were asked to rank which obstacle they are familiar with in terms of most to least familiar. Although the data may look confusing to some, this is how each of these obstacles ranked based on the average of what the participants chose. Low pay rates is in first place, artificial intelligence ranked second among this question, self-reputation came in third, and in last place was industrial manipulation. It was shocking to see that artificial intelligence didn't rank first, but it was somewhat expected in terms of the data.

Question five asks, "Are there any obstacles not already listed that you think should be acknowledged?" (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below.

"Over-saturation - there are a lot of lower-level VO's and so competition can be fierce."
"Oversaturation of the market and ignorance about how the industry works."
"SAG-AFTRA board members who want to enforce AI presence in voice work."

“High cost to creating a national quality demo, and costly voice coaching act as disincentivizing firewalls to even get into the work.”

These results were a bit surprising, but most have considered over-saturation to be another obstacle in the voice acting field. Over-saturation, which was the most common answer among six participants, is another term for overflowing, in terms of auditioning for a common role. In other words, the competition between other voice actors is also considered an obstacle.

Question six asks, “How would you describe the events of the 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike, what caused it? If you don't have an answer for this, type N/A,” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below.

“N/A”
“The 2023 strike was the TV/Theatrical contract, which most voice actors don’t work. I don’t have enough characters to explain it.”
“Creators do not want to be replaced by AI. Bottom line. There are currently no US laws in place protecting creators from their likeness being replicated by AI without their permission.”
“Artificial intelligence and how rampant it is. But they are not dealing with it the way they should be by adding protection to their members.”
“N/A”
“This strike has been both beneficial with the need to strike for the safety and overall security of VO as well as a bit of a struggle in terms of trying to find work during the VO strike.”
“AI has been a huge cause of the start of the strike as well as the pay rates being way too low for the cost of living for VOs.”
“Devastating and uncertain for the future of voice over.”

It was very relieving to get answers regarding the 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike from this survey, considering there was insufficient information from both Pamela and Randy. According to the results, there are a number of different answers ranging from the strike

being beneficial in some way, to the strike overall not quite affecting voice actors. Besides this, there is an ongoing theme of artificial intelligence being the main cause of the strike itself. One participant said, “Bottom line, [nobody wants] to be replaced by AI. There are currently no US laws,” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*), regarding the protection of the people getting targeted by artificial intelligence.

Question seven asks, “Furthermore, how would you think the 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike will affect voice actors in the future? If you don't have an answer for this, type N/A,” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below.

“Given the soft stance on AI, and lack of protections, there's a lot of professionals going into AI voices and effectively pulling the ladder up behind them.”
“Again, the TV/Theatrical contract doesn’t affect most voice actors, as it really only applies to SAG animated projects, and those are scarce.”
“It will be difficult to prove that someone used and/or altered your voice without your permission. All burden would be on the creator to prove, or the offender would have to outright admit it.”
“If they enforce AI representation for their members, they might, or will lose a lot of voice actors who will be looking elsewhere for protection.”
“N/A”

Similarly to Question 6, most of these answers are regarding artificial intelligence. One person thinks that the strike will affect voiceover actors because “It will be difficult to prove that someone used and/or altered your voice without your permission,” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*), basically explaining that unless the one trying to alter one’s voice comes clean, there is no real way to figure out who is really messing with their business. Also, this quotation further proves that the rise of artificial intelligence is greatly harmful, due to the damage already dealt to current voice actors.

Question eight asks, “Finally, what is the greatest piece of advice you can give to future voice actors?” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*). Here are the answers listed below.

“ACTING Classes, and some light audio engineering training!”
“Do your homework, know what you’re getting into, and treat it like a business!”
“Be authentic, be expressive. At this point AI cannot replicate emotion well.”
“Don’t be afraid to ask questions, and to protect your peace within this line of work.”
“Be ready to invest a relatively large amount of money up front with little return for quite a while. For example, a voice coach program (which includes training and a demo) costs over $4000.”

These answers are honestly really beneficial for future voice actors, especially since each piece of advice is different. Another self-explanatory type of question, these aren’t quite results, but just tidbits of information which they believe would help future voiceover actors get over the hurdles of many obstacles willing to face these wonderful people. Though, a piece of advice that stood out was a comment which suggests investing a sum of money without the expectation to receive an ideal return, whether through feedback or rates; they also add that “a voice coach program [with] training and a demo costs over $4000,” (Sawka, *Mentimeter*), and as someone who has attended a voice coach program in the past, the response is a very accurate example.

Conclusion

Though there were many reasons to speculate the scarcity of voice acting jobs, whether written down or not, there seemed to be a connection. For the most part, artificial intelligence was the most prevalent obstacle in my research, given that its publicized rise has also contributed to the 2023 strike in the SAG-AFTRA union. Along with this, artificial intelligence seems to be prevalent in the surveys I’ve sent out, as well as in the answers my interviewees have given me. Most importantly, artificial intelligence is something my generation of voice actors should be worried about, considering damage has already been done in the form of prolonging strikes and people’s privacies being put in jeopardy.

In regard to the least prevalence, however, I was barely able to input anything regarding industrial disloyalty or manipulation at face value, though I was able to somehow

reflect on some catalysts mainly caused by audition holdings. This was still shocking to me, since my initial thought process was that companies would just come off greedy to their employees, but genuinely this could apply to any industry now that I think of it. Speaking of which, self-reputation could also be applied to any industry, since in this day and age, the worst people in a moral sense could end up becoming somebody very high in power or wealth. I would give examples of this; however, it's already being seen everywhere to the point at least one person should come to mind.

I wanted to give lower pay rates their own paragraph, since its prevalence was somewhat in the middle. There were great deals of evidence of voice acting jobs becoming more accessible on websites, therefore resulting in professionals getting less income from their talent. However, the issue I've faced is that this information was found on sources I've pulled up from Google, rather than the Library database system, since I had a tougher time trying to find articles in the system; although they might not be peer-reviewed sources, the content in these online articles have helped prove a point, along with provide more information than I would have expected from a database article. On the other side of the coin, although there is prevalence, I might be making this issue out bigger than it truly might be in the voiceover field, since truthfully, it's become more difficult to make money in any way, shape or form, without the means of exploitation.

Also, in some way, artificial intelligence might be the root of my other problems discussed throughout the paper. By stealing actors' voices and plastering them onto the internet, the people with these voices could lead said actors to lose money. To make matters worse, by using said voices for mal intent, it could also sabotage those actors' reputation as a voice artist, unless they prove somehow that this wasn't their doing in any way. But here's the kicker, industries are losing more of their employees due to artificially intelligent voices and

their websites, therefore losing them money, and also potentially causing their businesses to go bankrupt.

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