

The militaristic style of teaching in drama schools and its effect on mental health.

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DECLARATION

This dissertation does not breach the ethical principles set by my university's guidelines and is a product of my own work. I hereby give consent that my work is made available for reference for all future developments to my findings, at the discretion of the performing arts department at South Gloucestershire and Stroud College.

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Abstract

In this dissertation; I investigated the defining factors that cause mental health issues within the performing arts industry and if drama school students believe they would have had more success during their training and within the industry had they had mental health support at their institution. I gathered verbal and visual feedback from performing my part practical element to this project, asked quantitative and qualitative questions via an online survey, and asked qualitative and specific questions in an interview with a drama school teacher. My performance was in the form of a TED talk; in which I spoke very personally about my own experience, in order to ascertain that I gained the perspective of my peers and teachers on the subject.

The literature delves into the experiences of past and present drama school students, heads of mental health organisations, and heads of performing arts institutions. This provides the harsh statistics which have been overlooked by the media.

Expectedly; I found that the militaristic style of teaching and lack of emotional support was only present in certain drama schools, and that others offered their students support whilst teaching them the same amount of performance technique and skills. Unexpectedly; the older generation found no problem whatsoever with their time at drama school.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

To examine the effects of drama school teaching on mental health is the purpose of my study – a study that is important to me due to having experienced negative and positive effects first hand, and I would like to discover if there are more people like me who could have benefitted by receiving additional support during their drama school training in order to succeed and to not lose all confidence. A staggering 75% of young people in the UK with a mental health problem are not receiving treatment, and with this statistic so high, and with so many aspiring performers – there must be an enormous amount of vulnerable young performers suffering without any support.

“Performers are twice as likely as the general population to experience depression, according to the 2015 Australian Actors’ Wellbeing Study. Many suffer from performance anxiety and report high levels of stress arising from work-related pressures such as low income and job insecurity.” (Taylor, 2018)

With this being the case once the performer is established, it can only be worse in an environment where you are in training, as you are younger and more vulnerable; which is why the stigma around mental health in the performing arts must be broken, and everyone should be offered support and be treated with kindness. I want to research further into this topic as I would like to see what I can do to help with this issue and hopefully help others that have had a similar journey to me.

In my primary research; I discovered that substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and eating disorders are largely common in young performers which indicates that additional support has not been provided, as the percentage of people turning to these toxic methods of coping may not be so high if provided with the support of someone that understands the pressures of their training and the industry

1.2 Aims

This research project will identify whether drama school students, overall, feel emotionally cared for, or if they require some additional support and counselling. In order to accomplish this; I will be examining data from drama school students from

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many different drama schools to discover if it is a norm everywhere or if it is only specific to some drama schools.

1.3 Objectives

I will assess how performing arts students think they were treated at drama school and whether they believe they would have had greater success if they'd had mental and emotional health support and discover if there's a general trend in the answers, which I will discover from my questionnaire. In addition to this, I will gather feedback about my part practical to see if my classmates believe what I experienced in my first year of training was necessary to become a successful performer, or if they believe it would only hinder a young performer.

2. Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce research on previously written literature with evidence surrounding my chosen topic, in hope that it will clarify and back up my points. To do this, I will split these findings into four sections; firstly, the correlation between studies in the performing arts and mental health disorders, secondly; how drama school prepare you for the industry, and thirdly; why vocational training over university or no professional training.

2.1 Mental health issues in the arts

It is no secret that the life of a performer is unpredictable, inconsistent, and isolated.

“Added to this lifestyle of instability and uncertainty, there's the fact your pay is low or maybe even non-existent, and the unsociable hours mean you've barely seen your friends, family or partner”. (Thompson, 2017)

She adds that

“The conditions that come with working in the arts, be that as an actor, musician, writer, or anything in between, can be precarious and very stressful.”

Cal Strobe from the Mental Health Foundation added that

"conditions in the arts and entertainment industry can often undermine workers' mental health and wellbeing, with insecure contracts, low rate of pay and anti-social working hours. Further compounding harsh working conditions, performing artists are often asked to work for free, or 'for exposure'. Maintaining a healthy sense of self can be difficult if your work, passion, and skills are consistently devalued in this way." (Strobe, 2017 via Thompson, 2017)

Depression and anxiety has always been an issue for people working in the performing arts industry, but it is finally being recognized, as more and more people see that they are illnesses that need to be treated just as much as physical illnesses do, as is backed up by (Sinclair. M, 2017 via Thompson, 2017) an actor and the president of Equity when he says

"The stress of short-term contracts, irregular work, frequent rejection and the basic pressure to perform can all make life extremely difficult. The great advance is that people now talk about it rather than hiding it away like a guilty secret."

This shows that the industry is heading in the right direction when it comes to professional performers, but the story is quite different when it comes to young performers in training.

"Issues related to mental health are more common among performers than the general population with one in three of us affected every year. Over the past five years, Universities and Drama Schools have seen a dramatic increase in the demand for support for students with mental health issues."
(O'Toole, 2017)

O'Toole understands the issues the students of Rose Bruford College and other drama schools are having and is actively trying to support the students with their mental health. But as 'Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance is proud to be the first drama school to sign up to the #TIME4CHANGE Mental Health Charter.' this shows we have a long way to go when it comes to mental health support within drama schools as this is only a recent change for Rose Bruford, and they are the first college to offer support.

At an age where they're more susceptible to use illegal substances, students need all the support possible.

"Substance abuse is one of the most common risk-taking behaviours of adolescents and college students. While the use of illicit and performance-enhancing drugs by performing and visual arts students has not been extensively evaluated, these students may be at high risk for substance abuse because of the stress, competitive pressures, low self-esteem, and the association of substance abuse with other problems such as eating disorders." (Athletesandthearts.com, 2018)

It is argued that performing arts students are more likely than any kind of student to become involved with drugs because of the hardships they endure during their

course; be it performance enhancing drugs, drugs to help you sleep at night, drugs to give you more energy in the day, drugs to help you unwind on the weekend, or drugs to change the way your body looks.

“A few studies have shown that performing arts students are significantly involved in substance abuse. In one study of university dancers and theatre performers, in the previous 30 days, 26% had used tobacco, 12% marijuana, and 71% alcohol. Eighteen percent admitted to using drugs other than alcohol or marijuana, 2% on a monthly basis. Seven percent admitted to using drugs to improve their performance.” (Athletesandthearts.com, 2018)

This is an enormous problem as students aren't learning to cope in a healthy way without the drugs, and in the long run, these substances will be incredibly damaging to their internal organs, their mental health, and exterior looks. While the students know that it will be damaging to them, it doesn't stop them from using them, which shows that they're not mentally stable enough to be making these big decisions.

(Athletesandthearts.com, 2018) supports this statement by stating that

“Dancers and actors are weight conscious, and most have dieted to control their weight. Some utilize stimulants or laxatives and even vomit to keep trim. Anorexia nervosa has been reported to occur in up to 6.5% of students in professional dance schools. Anorexia nervosa may be more common in national rather than regional ballet companies, suggesting that it is related to the level of competition. The incidence of bulimia is hard to derive, but may be as high as 15%.”

as body dysmorphia and the brutal competition is a huge factor to add to this in drama schools.

2.2 Preparation for the performing industry

Today, being a triple threat is almost always a necessity. Each year, top UK drama schools are churning out hundreds upon thousands of new talented graduates into the industry, and the competition is fierce. Along with a sizeable amount of debt from drama school fees, there is the unlikelihood of stable and sustainable employment.

To make a substantial amount of money, performers will need to appear on TV or in a film.

"Year-long contracts in long-running shows can be a dream come true for many actors, but for some, they can feel soulless, and alienating. You'll be a small cog in a big machine, and you'll be expected to stay on top form eight shows a week for 12 months. At college, you may perform a show three or four times, in the West End you can easily clock up more than 400 performances." (Castings, 2014)

highlights how difficult life as a performer can be, even if you do successfully land yourself a part in a show. As a student, you will never have done a run of so many shows in your life, meaning you haven't been prepared for the amount of stamina you will need, nor how to manage your life surrounding those performances.

Often in drama school training, you will have been taught rep from different musicals and how to slot in to certain already established musicals, but you will - most often than not, have never experienced being part of the creation process, which is what many recent musical theatre graduates have had to do. If you're not lucky enough to be cast in a West End musical that's already established, you could end up workshopping on an off-West End production where you are creating your character with the writers and learning the choreography and songs for the first time, which can be *"liberating, for others terrifying."* (Castings, 2014)

In addition to this, you will often find musical theatre graduates having to teach singing or dance lessons, or holding acting workshops to make ends meet, but in drama schools, you are not taught how to teach, or how to survive in such a brutal industry that is difficult to access, and even then, these teaching jobs don't pay a significant amount and are also challenging to become a part of, as Castings (2014) claims

"Teaching young people generally pays about £25 an hour and most drama groups are aware you are an actor first and foremost and so will, therefore, keep the work flexible to fit around acting commitments. If you know you want to take on this kind of work, it's worth getting some experience as a workshop assistant; the performing is only one part of the job – classroom control and lesson planning are equally important. You may also find you start working

with undergraduates at drama schools or dance colleges. These jobs are also flexible but tend to go to industry professionals with a strong track record.”

Although with the militaristic style of teaching in drama schools which may prepare you for how to be in a West End show, the likelihood of that dream becoming a reality is very slim, and graduates are often left without guidance on how to survive the unemployment, and how to accrue a different kind of performing job to tide themselves over.

2.3 Why Drama School?

There is now large debate about whether it's even worth it to do the three years of musical theatre training, now that you can become famous and successful by appearing on reality television programmes, and the fact that you can turn up to an open audition and be seen as “right for the part” and be chosen without the required training. Theatre producer Richard Jordan argues that

“Even among drama school students, when you ask people what they'd like to do after graduation, some answer that they want to be famous. It's a big problem in the industry that those reality shows make it seem as if being an actor is easy and that you don't need the training. But if you're going to survive, then being properly trained is crucial, not just in acting technique but also in the techniques of getting a job, building a career and surviving in the longer term. Lots of young actors are no longer in the profession just six months or a year after leaving training. They may be very good actors, but they haven't got the skills to survive the harsh realities. Drama schools need to teach those skills too.” (Gardner. L, 2008)

Whilst looking into whether drama school training is much different to university acting training, I came across this statement:

“Unlike drama schools, these performing arts degrees from universities, while carrying the same or similar degree titles, are not as valuable in eyes of the industry.” (London, 2017)

As drama schools are much harder than universities to be accepted into and have much more ruthless and valuable training, industry professionals are much less likely

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to take a university BA Acting student seriously than someone who graduated from a drama school, as they are the cream of the crop.

However, Paul Roseby from the National Youth theatre believes that three years training at drama school is also unnecessary:

"Finding out whether you can act at that stage of your career is a waste of money; if you need to improve your vocal technique, or market yourself to get a film audition, you can learn those things on a modular basis. It doesn't need three years. You learn whether you cut the mustard by being in front of an audience." (Roseby via Trueman, n.d)

and that you can learn the needed skills to add on top of your talent in a year.

"But Edward Kemp, the director of the Royal Academy for Dramatic Art (Rada), insisted that formal training is essential: "If Paul Roseby wishes to defend the arts from being seen as 'soft skills', it is strange that he chooses to attack precisely the institutions which have spent many decades bringing rigour and expertise to the training of actors and theatre technicians." (Trueman, n.d)

Kemp hereby admits that the training in drama schools are tough and precise but clearly thinks that this is to the advantage of the students and is of great importance to people already in the industry.

"Alistair Coomer, casting director at London's highly regarded Donmar Warehouse, argued that training can take different forms: "While three years at Rada or Lamda is a real advantage, a year or two with the NYT would work equally well for someone else. British drama training is probably the best in the world, and that's the reason that we've got such extraordinary stage actors." (Trueman, n.d)

Although training at a drama school is the traditional way and the way that budding performers think about trying first to get a foot in the door with the industry, (Elkin, 2014) argues that it is possible to achieve success without any professional training at all. She goes on to say that when she appealed for professional untrained actors, she received plenty of interest and that many untrained actors had had success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many arguments backing up the training of drama schools and many stating that they aren't necessary in the production of a great performer and that sometimes it is just about who you know or being in the right place at the right time. It is clear, that even though drama schools and performing arts colleges are awakening to the mental health issues being experienced by their students, there is a long way to go in order to ensure that students in every institute are receiving the care that they need, whilst they receive the military-style training. It is possible that if they received the harsh but seemingly necessary brutal training to keep afloat in an industry where rejection is faced on a daily basis, whilst receiving professional mental health care to ensure they don't experience mental breakdowns of any form, it would be beneficial to both the student and the performing arts industry.

3. Methods and methodology

My methods of gathering the information I needed to inform my project was to ask my classmates specific questions in a questionnaire form about my part practical, and this was an enlightening source of gathering qualitative data. I also sent out a questionnaire on Facebook and Twitter to ask current or past drama school students only to answer my specific questions regarding their time at a drama school, and to find out whether they thought they'd been looked after by the staff, or if they felt they'd been let down emotionally. There was a disclaimer at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that only people that have trained at an accredited drama school would answer the questions. In conjunction with my questionnaires; I approached social research in the form of autoethnographic research, as this dissertation is influenced by my own experience.

“Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.[1][2] Autoethnography is a self-reflective form of writing used across various disciplines such as communication studies, performance studies, education, English literature, anthropology, social work, sociology, history, psychology, marketing, business and educational administration, arts education and physiotherapy.” (En.wikipedia.org, 2018)

Additionally; I discovered articles and journals online on my subject that helped inform my results.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

“Researchers have a responsibility to ensure as far as possible that the physical, social and psychological well-being of their research participants is not detrimentally affected by the research. Research relationships should be characterised, whenever possible, by mutual respect and trust.” (Research Ethics: A Handbook of Principles and Procedures, n.d)

Before taking part in my online surveys, the participants would read that the information that they gave me may be used for my dissertation and that their

answers would be given anonymously. All participants will be adults that have given consent for their words to be referenced. With regards to the interviews; I made the interviewee aware that the answers would be used for an academic purpose and that they had the right to be named or remain anonymous should they wish to be. I then asked them to sign a document to ensure their understanding of what I was asking from them.

3.2 Questionnaires

I decided on qualitative and quantitative methodologies in my questionnaires (Appendices 1 & 2), the first; my classmates only would partake in as it was based on my part practical performance, and the second would be sent only to current or past accredited drama school students. This was my decision as the data received would be more specific to my very specific subject, which can only be truly understood by people that have been to drama schools, or who experienced my part practical.

“Qualitative research studies can provide you with details about human behaviour, emotion, and personality characteristics that quantitative studies cannot match.” (Madrigal and McClain, 2012)

In my first questionnaire, my aim was to identify the defining factors that my current classmates believed would have affected their mental health negatively. I asked questions such as “What did my part practical make you feel about the style of teaching at drama school?” and “Do you think my experience would have been different if the teaching methods were the same, but if there had been a councillor to talk to at the school? Why?”. I asked these kind of questions as I would be able to get “Yes” or “No” answers to be provided with quantitative data, so that one may create a graph to display their answers, and in addition they would be given the opportunity to elaborate on their views to give me a clearer idea on how the ways of teaching I experienced would have hindered them.

In the second questionnaire, my ambition was to discover if other drama school students could relate with my experience or not, if they’d had support during their training, and what they would have benefited from if they had struggled with mental health issues. The following questions are some examples of the kind of questions that I asked in my survey to gather this information; “Was your emotional well-being

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overlooked by teachers during your training?”, “Did you at times find the style of teaching at your drama school was sometimes unnecessarily harsh, or did you think that was needed for you to succeed? Why?”, and “Do you think you would have had more success from your training if you'd had access to mental health support from your institution? How?”. I had a variance of open and closed questions; closed ones being purely for data research that I could display in a graph and gather statistics, and the open ones to gather a wide range of views and opinions on how harsh drama school training can be, and how it has benefitted the drama school's students in the long run.

4. Primary Research Results

4.1 Questionnaire Result

Regarding the questionnaire I sent to my classmates only, the feedback I received was as expected. When asked the question: 'What did my part practical make you feel about the style of teaching at drama school?' the responses were unanimous with the strong belief that where I had studied had been to harsh and cruel towards us from the beginning. One answer said

"That there is a lack of care for students, they seem to forget that these are still young people who need guidance and support. They don't think about the consequences of what they say or the emotional stress they cause." - (anonymous, 2018)

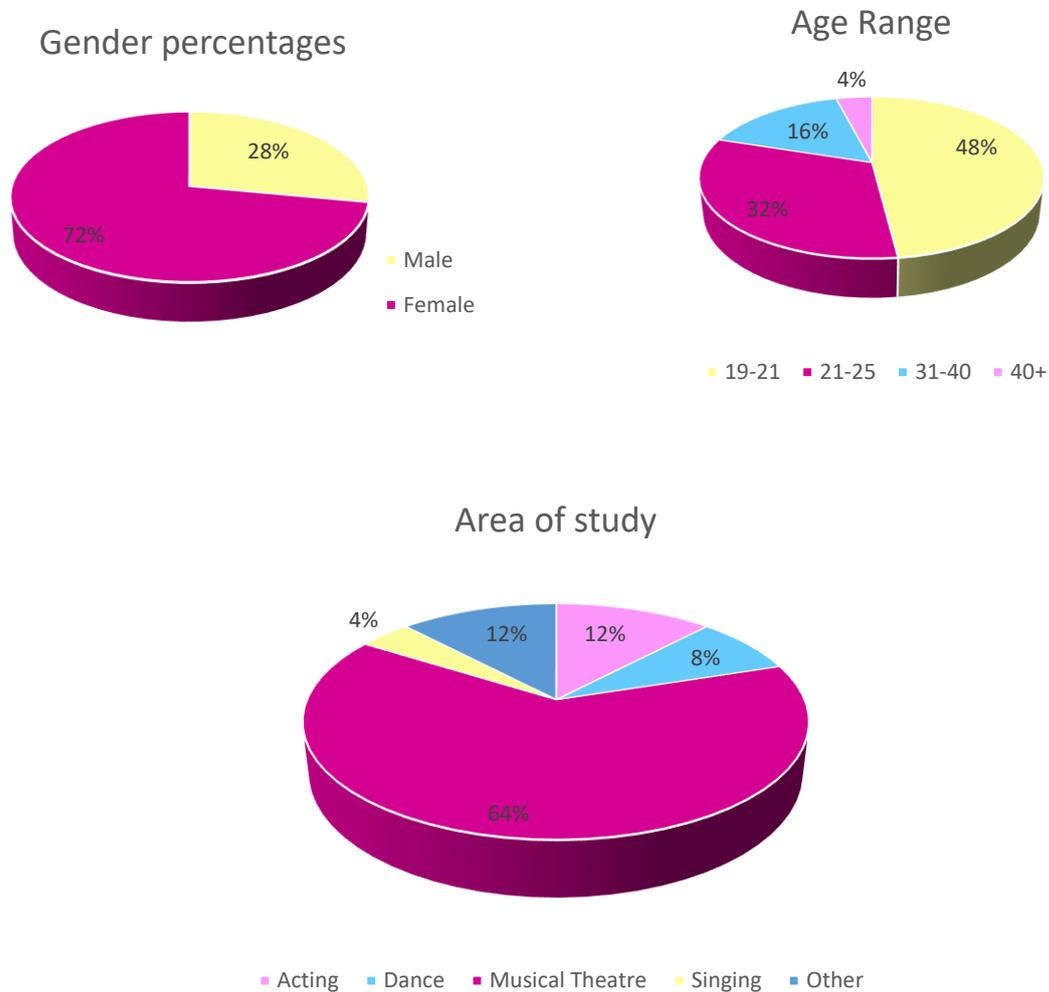
This statement supports the fact that young people are often the most vulnerable as they are at a time in their lives where the utmost amount of pressure is on them, and they are struggling to find a way to please everybody in their lives as it is without the added lack of guidance. Another responded saying

"Made me feel like in some places the teaching can be not just strict but hurtful, and sometimes people are not treated as human but cogs in a machine." (anonymous, 2018)

This person agrees that some styles of teaching are completely unnecessary, and that everyone should be treated as a human being, regardless of which industry they are involved with.

When faced with the question 'Do you think you would have coped with the experience I had? Why?', 100% of the eleven-people taking part in this survey answered with "No." which indicates the kind of training I received could be seen as exceedingly harsh and devastating with no true purpose.

The second questionnaire that I sent out was answered by 25 past or current drama school students, and as predicted; the opinions were varied. Here are my findings, in the form of a pie chart.



When faced with the question “Were you scrutinised for your appearance at your institution?”, 52% answered “Yes” and 48% answered “No”, which surprised me as we were all individually told within the first week of our musical theatre training how we should look. Clearly this isn’t an issue in every drama school.

Strikingly, the majority of the people taking this survey said that they didn’t feel their emotional wellbeing had been overlooked by teachers during their training, as 52% said that it hadn’t, and 44% said that it had. Regardless of the majority vote being positive news, 44% is still a high percentage of people who are perhaps suffering alone.

What I found most fascinating about the following question: “Did you at times find the style of teaching at your drama school was sometimes unnecessarily harsh, or did you think that was needed for you to succeed? Why?”, was that I was instantly aware of which establishment in which many respondents to my survey had studied by the way they communicated their experiences and about the support they received, and I knew precisely when my former classmates at the drama school I attended in my first year as a trainee performer had answered as they were the ones that spoke negatively about their experiences, which were congruent with mine. One person said:

“I think it was maybe a little too harsh too soon in first year, but now (midway through second year) it is too relaxed. I think it would be better to gradually build up resilience rather than tear people down straight away.” (anonymous, 2018)

This presents the idea that a more gradual increase of “harsh training” could be more beneficial as it gives you time to adjust and push yourself within a healthy timescale, rather than being overwhelmed with all the criticism all at once. Another said:

“Too harsh, there is a difference between encouraging and just belittling and tearing someone down.” (anonymous, 2018)

Which reiterates that certain methods of teaching can only hinder a person, and that an encouraging technique might be more successful.

10 out of 25 respondents answered “No” to the question “If you struggled with mental or emotional health issues, was there someone at the drama school for you to talk to receive help?”, which is again a high figure of people not receiving any advice when they’re struggling.

“I think it would’ve been good to have someone at the school whose job was to help people in these situations. I was lucky to have a teacher I trusted, but everyone doesn’t have that. But a professional that knows what they’re doing (and know the industry obviously, cause someone who doesn’t know the industry would be no help at all and would probably end up telling you to find a different path that will make you happy), who would keep everything confidential

would probably be a good thing. I think more people would be prompted to go and talk about their feelings if there was.” (anonymous, 2018)

This insightful answer understands that it is sometimes an uncomfortable experience to seek help for a mental health issue as it is sometimes seen as a somewhat taboo subject, and that a person must feel like they're in a place where they can share their worries. A past classmate responded:

“Yes - would have been more determined to carry on with the profession & mental health wouldn't have affected the work in class.” (anonymous, 2018), and another said “Yes. I would not have missed days because I couldn't move from bed.” (anonymous, 2018)

This would suggest that the training can be thorough and make you become more skilled, but without self-care and support; you aren't fully equipped to enter the field.

Lastly, I asked “Do you feel the training you received has prepared you for the performing arts industry? How?” The responses were varied again, but what stood out to me that the past classmates from the drama school where I initially trained at as a first year in the performing arts, whom I'd assumed thought that I was weak for how I'd dealt with the training we received; also struggled and now lack the motivation to continue in the profession, which is an enormous shame as I understand the fight they've had to be where they are.

One person over 41 years of age said:

“It was a long time ago, but I think if I were to retrain in today's society I think I'd need a lot more help” (anonymous, 2018).

This respondent seems to claim that society today is harder on young performers. The evidence suggests that this is true; as nowadays you are expected to not only be a triple threat, but to also have a fantastic physique, be facially attractive, and to play an instrument or have any other skills that others might not have, just to have a fighting chance. The competition is higher now than ever before, and a healthy mind is required in order to tackle it.

4.2 Part Practical Performance

The aim of my part practical performance was predominantly to share my experiences with my class, and to not only discover how they feel about the rigorous treatment I'd received, but as I was talking about my journey for the first time since it had happened two years ago; to discover how much I felt that had damaged me emotionally.

My part practical was in the form of a TED talk about my experience in my first year at a drama school, and the events that led me on to a path of self-destruction. I began by telling the audience of my life before I went, and how stable and happy I was, then informed them of how my life got progressively worse. I explained that with the trauma of the events experiences I had and the harsh criticism we all received from the very beginning of our training, my head wasn't in a good place to be focusing all my energy on becoming a better and stronger performer. I sang "I don't do sadness" from Spring Awakening whilst showing screenshots of tweets that my peers had posted online about the insults one specific teacher at the establishment where I had previously trained, and although the audience were laughing, as some of the insults were very inventive; they agreed that it would be embarrassing and hurtful to be the person on the receiving end of those cruel words in front of everyone. I then told them something I'd never told them before; that I hadn't chosen to leave the institution for the sake of my mental health, but that I'd been "kicked out" because of my state of mental health being viewed negatively as a "can't be bothered attitude". The audience were clearly shocked and many of them began to cry as they sympathised with me, which was evidence to me that no one should have experienced what I did.

To conclude my performance; I sang "If they could see me now" from Sweet Charity to display that you can get through an experience like that if you're tough enough. It is within my belief that this was effective as I showed pictures of the many leading roles I've had in my time at Bristol Institute of Performing Arts, and how, with hard work and determination, and a dash of reinventing oneself; you can succeed, despite earlier setbacks. The audience smiled at me encouragingly which made me realise that I had been trained well in a safe space; where I was cared for as a human being rather than a cog in a machine.

5. Part Practical Discussion

5.1 Influence

I was influenced to investigate this subject and to perform my part practical with particular method, by my own experiences. I knew that I wanted the piece to be emotional; so that I could discover whether I had overreacted during my time at drama school, or whether my emotional breakdown was justified. My classmates were shocked and horrified, and my TED talk about my life brought most of them to tears; which gave me my answer immediately.

My piece also had elements of performance art, with a shock revelation in it in a predetermined context, which can also go by the name of "shock art", as sometimes the ideas presented in this form of art can be controversial and taboo.

"The foremost purpose of performance art has almost always been to challenge the conventions of traditional forms of visual art such as painting and sculpture. When these modes no longer seem to answer artists' needs - when they seem too conservative, or too enmeshed in the traditional art world and too distant from ordinary people - artists have often turned to performance in order to find new audiences and test new ideas." (The Art Story, n.d)

I chose to make a shock revelation in my part practical performance, and deliberately didn't rehearse any element of my performance in front of my peers as I wanted them to be shocked in the moment when I let them in to my truth, which was achieved.

"Isn't the purpose of art to cause emotion, to make you think, to bring attention to an issue and to spread fervour?" (The Artifice, n.d)

My piece was a piece of dramatic writing which included elements of musical theatre by adding two songs from the musical theatre repertoire. I became overwhelmed by revealing the truth of my situation and broke down, even though the ending of my piece was meant to portray me as strong and having accomplished many great things since leaving the institution where I had previously trained in musical theatre. I understand now that it was a shock to me to be speaking my truth aloud, as it was never my intention to become so emotional throughout my piece. However, in

showing images of my triumph since leaving that experience behind; I believe I was still able to convince the audience that I had found success and strength in being in a better mental state.

“For personal connection and free thought to be established and generated about a work or idea, the analysis of “the artist” must take place.” (The Artifice, n.d)

Another influence of mine for this performance was Carley Rogers giving a TED talk about stress at school. She begins by telling the audience how lucky she is to have access to education, and how guilty she feels when she dreads going to school. She says

“The way I see it; putting that much pressure on yourself to make good grades and participate in every school activity is not the best high school experience. For me, this just adds to the pressure and anxiety; making it more difficult to learn. I am one who strives to do my best and the pressure and anxiety is making me question why. Why am I putting so much pressure on myself; that I struggle to go to school.” (TEDx Talks, 2012)

I felt I could relate to her situation and decided that a TED talk was the way for me to get my message across.

5.2 Creation and Development

I decided to use my pain as a tool, and finally reveal the true reason I had joined BIPA in the second year. I began by writing about my experience on paper, from start to finish. I didn't end up changing anything about it, as whilst I was writing it, I was reliving it all for the first time since it happened, it was raw and emotional, and that is exactly how I wanted to tell it.

“Art might originate in personal experience yet also address universal artistic, political, and/or social ideas.” (Ditton, 2015)

I chose to show screenshots of tweets quoting one teacher in particular at my drama school to show the kind of insults she would come up with, and to make the

audience think about whether or not that is appropriate or if it would have knocked their confidence

To conclude my performance; I sang "If they could see me now" from Sweet Charity with a slideshow of show pictures in the background to show the audience that with nurturing and opportunity you can turn a negative into a positive, and that if my past classmates and teachers saw how hard I now work to improve myself; they would hardly recognise me.

I included lots of information in my part practical as it was important to me to tell the story with each event leading to the decline of my mental health being referred to chronologically; which was intended with the purpose of allowing the audience to imagine and live the experience along with me. I also included some very incriminating and shocking information about myself and my behaviour to emphasize that my actions had been completely out of character, and that someone should have picked up on it sooner. I believe it was important for me to do this as I needed the audience to understand the true extent of my desperation, and to lead the piece to a climax when I revealed that I'd been removed from the course for my "lack of commitment" to the profession.

I wore clothes that I could move in easily as that is what I would have been wearing to train at the drama school where I previously trained, and it helped me relive the year I spent learning there, especially as I recreated being in my bedroom looking through photographs of my family and friends.

As mentioned in my literature review, there is an increasing amount of demand for support for students in drama schools that have mental health issues, which was backed up by my part practical, which drew attention to the fact that I hadn't been offered any form of support in the year I was at drama school, despite the clear fact that I was struggling. I also questioned why I hadn't been offered any support, as support does seem to be on the rise as also aforementioned in my literature review; especially in Rose Bruford College.

5.3 Part Practical Analysis

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At the end of my part practical, my classmates stood to embrace me as they cried, which indicated to me that I had done my job well, which confirmed to me that the militaristic style of teaching I received would have affected anyone's mental health, not only mine.

However, what I realised most from my part practical was that I am most certainly more emotionally damaged by my first year in training than I'd originally realised. As I hadn't spoken about it in two years and had suppressed the feelings of sadness, finally exposing the truth made me incredibly emotional, which was evident by the fact that I cried for almost ten minutes during my part practical, and I struggled to stop crying for a while after. In spite of this, I am glad that I was brave enough to do it, and I feel ready now to grasp the opportunities that come my way with both hands, and to make the most of everything I have learned.

My own experience suggests about the damage to performers on the whole that it could prevent talented people from becoming as successful as they had potential to be, due to the loss of confidence, and the loss of drive that they may now have. Many people in my questionnaire said that they now lack the motivation to continue down the route of musical theatre because of the way in which they were taught, which is what I was glad to show in my part practical performance that I hadn't, but this was only because I'd had a lucky escape. I didn't realise at the time; but being "kicked out" turned out to be the making of me, as I have achieved more than my previous classmates with a more nurturing approach of teaching and will be continuing my training in musical theatre at a well known accredited drama school in September 2018 as a result of my newfound hunger to strive in the industry.

To discover my passion for my craft by having this emotional release was a huge bonus for me.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Findings

During my part practical, my aim was to discover how the information I delivered to the audience altered their perspective of what drama school training can be like, by creating an impassioned and truthful TED talk. I also accumulated qualitative data. Finally opening up about the experience made me release all those feelings of resentment and self-loathing and realize that my treatment there had been barbaric. My class were in shock to hear about what I'd been through.

I used both primary and secondary research in this project to support my views and to challenge them, my intentions were not only to prove an issue in the performing arts industry, but to also learn about the different kinds of mental illnesses experienced in the performing arts environment.

“People with mental health problems say that the social stigma attached to mental ill health and the discrimination they experience can make their difficulties worse and make it harder to recover.” (Mental Health Foundation, n.d)

In this article; it is indicated that mental health is a sensitive topic primarily because of the social stigma that surrounds it. Sufferers of mental health issues are often deemed as liars or people that overreact, or people that look for blame for their behaviour; which makes it difficult to seek help.

“Society in general has stereotyped views about mental illness and how it affects people. Many people believe that people with mental ill health are violent and dangerous, when in fact they are more at risk of being attacked or harming themselves than harming other people.” (Mental Health Foundation, n.d)

This quote suggests the opposite and that the mentally ill are to be feared and are discriminated against in this way. Mental health is a popular topic in 2018, with the suicide rates of youths, men, and celebrities on the rise, the population are taking to social media to express concern over these tragedies and are helping to break the stigma. I believe that through my research I have concluded that in time; the correct and most beneficial help and support will be there for anyone having a difficult time,

but it may take years, especially with the current political climate, and Donald Trump's idea of a "better America" being one of discrimination. Despite this taking us in a step backwards, it has forced people to protest and speak up for their rights and beliefs which has given the world a sense of support. Social media is a fantastic platform, with many people using it to promote mental wellbeing, advertising helplines for those who feel the need to talk to a professional or international day of mental wellbeing where the people on the internet support each other and listen to each other's problems.

Talking about your problems can have a positive impact on your life, and that is something I strive to be able to be provided in drama schools to avoid dire consequences.

6.2 Recommendations

For further research of my chosen topic, I would recommend that snowball sampling may be used to gather a wider range of information, and that interviews would be conducted; an interview for some drama school teachers to discuss their methods of teaching, and an interview for college/university performing arts teachers to discuss their methods of teaching, and how they can be beneficial to the students.

7. Appendices

7.1 Questionnaires

1. Sample questionnaire for drama school students only

- What is your gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
- What is your age range?
 - 16-18
 - 19-21
 - 22-25
 - 26-30
 - 31-40
 - 41+
- What did you study?
 - Acting
 - Singing
 - Dance
 - Musical Theatre
 - Acting for screen
 - Other
- Were you scrutinised for your appearance at your institution?
 - Yes
 - No
- Was your emotional well-being overlooked by teachers during your training?
 - Yes
 - No

I don't know

- Did you at times find the style of teaching at your drama school was sometimes unnecessarily harsh, or did you think that was needed for you to succeed? Why?
- If you struggled with mental or emotional health issues, was there someone at the drama school for you to talk to to receive help? If yes, how did they help you?
- Do you think you would have had more success from your training if you'd had access to mental health support from your institution? How?
- Lastly, do you feel the training you received has prepared you for the arts industry? How?

2. Sample questionnaire for classmates only about part practical

- What did my part practical make you feel about the style of teaching at drama school?
- Do you think you would have coped with the experience I had? Why?
- Do you think their judgements on appearance were necessary? Why?
- In your opinion, do you think this style of teaching is beneficial to succeed in the industry? Why?
- Lastly, do you think my experience would have been different if the teaching methods were the same, but if there had been a councillor to talk to at the school? Why?

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