



**What are the defining factors that cause confidence  
loss and mental illness in the performing arts  
industry?**

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Presented as part of the requirement for an undergraduate award  
at the Faculty of Liberal and Performing Arts.

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## **DECLARATION**

This research project is the product of my own work and does not infringe the ethical principles set out in the university's Handbook for Research Ethics. I agree that it may be made available for reference via any and all media by any and all means now known or developed in the future at the discretion of the University.

Emily Mitchell

09/05/2018

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation investigates the defining factors that cause confidence loss and mental illness within the performing arts industry. After much research I found three main areas in which I believe to be the causes, these being body image, drama schools and training and industry expectations. There is a worrying amount of performers suffering with confidence loss and mental illness and so I chose to research this topic in the hope that I could raise awareness to those that are struggling, young people considering making a career in this industry and finally to anyone who's actions may be contributing to the mental illness of performers.

In this study I have used primary research methods by conducting interviews and questionnaires to provide me with qualitative and quantitative data. I have also used secondary research that has been presented in the literature review.

This study concluded that the confidence loss and mental illness could be due to the three factors that were found, but also by the popularity and overcrowdedness of the industry, which is leading to performers being treated as commodities. As it is a very popular industry, performers are easily replaceable if they are not coping with the stress, pressures and rejection within the industry.

This research project recommends that we acknowledge the factors that are causing performers to struggle with confidence loss and mental illness and to take into consideration any changes that could be made to reduce the amount of performers who are suffering.

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## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This study will investigate the factors that contribute to a performer's lack of confidence and mental health. It is important to understand how and why confidence loss/mental health issues are highly apparent in the industry and if anything can be done to decrease people's suffering.

The performing arts industry is hugely popular, with 'more than 60,000 actors on Spotlight and that number is growing substantially each year' (The Stage, 2016).

### 1.2 Rationale

The motivation behind this study comes from the concern that many people studying in performing arts are suffering with confidence loss and mental illness.

*"Depression and other mental health problems have always been issues for those who work in our industries," according to Malcolm Sinclair, actor and president of Equity" (Thompson, J. 2017)*

Professional performers often complain about their treatment and the brutality of the industry. Alana Grant, a recent auditionee, posted to social media.

*"The casting director told me I was cut. The reason I was cut in the first round was because I was overweight, too big for a dancer. I was genuinely gobsmacked... as a 5'9" tall woman of dress size UK 8-10, I was shocked and upset. The woman said it as if she was doing me a favour and that if I "sort out my body I might get a job". (Grant, A. 2017)*

She also went on to say that the industry is horrible, shallow and soul destroying and she couldn't understand why people are so accepting of body shaming (Grant, A. 2017). This post was shared to raise awareness of the problems performers face every day and as a warning to potential performers, many of whom realise that musical theatre is a tough industry, but don't often realise how difficult and mentally unhealthy it can become.

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to raise awareness to those who are considering training to become a performer in the industry, as opposed to pursuing it purely for recreational purposes. Exploring the defining factors that cause confidence loss could help performers to decide whether this is definitely the career path they want to pursue.

Through research, I have chosen three areas to further explore and help answer the research question. These areas were:

- Body Image

I discovered the pressures to maintain a certain body image and whether people thought there are signs of change in the industry regarding body image.

- Drama Schools and Training

I found out the opinions of drama school students to find out how challenging they found the process. I also learned how people feel about the teaching techniques that are being used during training.



- Industry Expectations

I researched the expectation and pressures on performers, and the current skills needed for employment. I also researched the average salary and statistics regarding employability.

## **Methods and Methodology**

### **2.1 Ethical Consideration**

I can ensure that this study will not breach ethical conduct and will present minimal risk. As per the university guidelines I can ensure that all participants will be made aware of the survey purpose and that they will remain anonymous. I will acknowledge that it could be a potentially sensitive topic and that they are not obliged to participate. I can also ensure that I will not be interviewing or surveying any children or vulnerable adults. All participants will be made aware that they can opt out at any time.

### **2.2 Methods and Sampling**

To successfully evaluate my chosen question, I have used a combination of primary and secondary data sources. My primary research consisted of a multiple choice survey targeting higher education students training for the industry and industry performers. This has provided the project with first hand quantitative data and also qualitative data by including a comment section to gain personal opinions from the participants. As I received 45 survey responses, I feel that qualitative data has benefitted my research more than quantitative, as the opinions and explanations from others has given me more knowledge and understanding of the project. 'Qualitative research helps... to understand the depth and complexity' of the industry (Malhotra et al, 2010) whilst quantitative research has proved accurate and useful when analysing large amounts of data (Malhotra, 2007). I used a variety of secondary data sources to further enhance my understanding of the project.

Later in the project I performed three songs with themes linked to my research question and asked for feedback from peers to provide me with further qualitative data.

All of these methods were conducted with ethical consideration.

The sampling method I used was theoretical sampling because this 'describes a sampling process that is based on emerging theoretical concepts' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), but it could also be argued that I used selective sampling as well because the survey could only be sent to a specific selection of people studying performing arts. Coyne (1997) said 'The researcher selects people according to the aims of the research'. Therefore any participants that aren't in the performing arts industry would give invalid research to this project and would not benefit my research.

## Literature Review

Cal Strobe (Mental Health Foundation) said “conditions in the arts and entertainment industry can often undermine workers’ mental health and wellbeing” (Thompson, J. 2017). This chapter will explore some of these conditions and consider three topics in particular that appear to be the defining factors causing confidence loss and mental health issues within the industry. Each topic will provide current and previous literature and ultimately offer the reader a better understanding of the issues. It will conclude with an overall summary.

### **3.1 Body Image**

There are few professions where employment is heavily based on looks, ‘in fact acting is one of the few careers where job advertisements are exempt from the legal equality law’ (Fitzjohn, 2014). The performing arts industry has become notoriously known for its high expectation of the perfect image. Heiland (2008) says

*‘Although all women exist in a culture in which their bodies are objectified, the dance world is pervasive with self-objectification and perfectionism, as well as various disorders that accompany this level of scrutiny, comparison, and reinforcement from the media.’*

This ‘perfect’ expectation appears to be predominantly in women. Buckroyd (2000) points out that ‘dance along with gymnastics, ice skating and swimming, recruits girls at an early age. The technical demands of these activities favour the pre-pubescent female body. The same is not true for boys, where the demands favour the post-pubertal boy’ therefore boys are not exposed to the pressures the same way girls are at such a young age. It therefore follows,

*'a boy, at least for the moment, is culturally less vulnerable than a girl to poor self-esteem, and by beginning training later, as he often does, has a better chance of having reasonably strong sense of self by the time the training becomes intensive. It is also a simple truth that fewer boys than girls engage in vocational dance training'* (The student Dancer. Julia Buckroyd. 2000)

However, this is not to say that men do not suffer with self confidence and body image. Buckroyd (2000) has also argued that boys have expressed anxiety about the need to maintain weight, fears of not growing tall and concerns about not being strong enough. The main concern for both genders in the industry appears to be weight gain and general appearance. Alter (1986) argues that, 'excess weight is an obsession with almost everyone who puts on a leotard and tights'. The performers feel very exposed when wearing these items making it hard to ignore their bodies and physical appearance. Storr (2011) agrees with this statement by saying 'all that bare flesh, all those mirrors, all that concentrated thinking... about your "look", it can push people towards anorexia or bulimia' and according to a BBC report 'about 1.6 million people in the UK are affected by eating disorders, the prevalence of them in dancers... is nearly 10 times higher than in non-dancers' (Moss, R. 2014). This statistic is increasing and Upton (2016) explains that the reason for this could be because 'the younger generation of dancers have been taught that if they are not skinny, they should not expect a future in dance'. Not only are performers having to worry about their weight, they 'have to be the right height, have the right face and hair and sartorial style' (Storr, W. 2011). However Upton (2016) says in contrast

*'I thought that acceptance into a company depended on a standard idea about weight, height, proportions, bone and muscular structure, and many other factors. But... each company has specific requirements. The reality is that the mold of the "perfect dancer body" is slowly transforming, so that more dancers with unconventional body types are now found in professional companies.'*

This ideology is encouraged by some performing arts schools, for example London Contemporary Dance School explains in their 'Induction and Advice Notebook' that cutting out food is not advisable and discusses nutritional value. It also provides information about support that their students can receive when feeling emotional or at risk of mental health issues. They state 'If you take the plunge and try to find help, you could save yourself years of unhappiness' (LCDS, Cited by Buckroyd, 2000). This is the type of positive message that students hoping to make it in the industry should be hearing. Fitzjohn (2014) who is a larger performer in the industry, expresses that she has witnessed gratitude and desperation for change from audience members. She says

*'I sometimes don't realise the impact my size has on audience members. It's very moving and inspiring for me when parents approach me with a larger child by the side of them and I receive comments such as... "thank you for showing it doesn't matter what size you are"; "thank you for representing a different body shape"'*  
(Fitzjohn, 2014).

This suggests that the strict body image and *typical* body frame within the performing arts industry could be slowly changing. Perhaps because audience members are not only appreciating but encouraging change.

### **3.2 Drama Schools and Training**

When training for the performing industry there is a consensus that teaching methods, long hours and daily expectations contribute to the stress and mental health of the performer. Buckroyd (2000) said 'physical training for young people has the potential to either enhance and develop their self confidence and self-esteem, or to undermine and damage it. The results in either are likely to be long lasting'. The industry is forever

growing and it would appear obvious that performers would be preferred to be 'enhanced and developed' rather than the latter.

Sophie, (Guildford School of Acting) said "I think it's important people know the reality of how tough the training actually is, numerous people in my year suffered depression and eating disorders due to stress etc" (Cited by Burlinson, 2009). This is advice from a student that has seen the effects that training can have on people. It's important to know that the expected level of professionalism within these schools is exceptionally high and students will suffer consequences if they do not meet these expectations. This is agreed by Fiona who studied at 'Mountview' who said

*"Drama school is HARD work! Long hours, early mornings, lots of extra work... and the tutors expect 100% commitment all the time. And it is STRICT! Three people have already been thrown off my course for lateness and absenteeism. Two other people have had written warnings about their professional demeanour and attitude. It is not a walk in the park!" (Cited by Burlinson, 2009).*

Prestigious schools have thousands of applicants every year and if a student isn't reaching the required achievement or commitment levels, there are plenty of other students that will. As a result, the high pressure for students to impress can lead to anxiety and mental stress. Buckroyd (2000) explains that 'There is a tradition in training that suggests that in order to be fully available for the training, the student must empty herself of everything but focus on the dance class: "Leave your troubles at the door"'. Whilst this teaching technique may help some students improve, it also has the potential to push others in the wrong direction. This view is supported by Hamilton (1997) who explains that the pressure on students performing is similar to elite sports, being in an extremely vulnerable position, judged solely on their performance. Hamilton goes on to say that a performer's belief in their abilities is important to determine how much risk they take. He explains that harsh criticisms are often used to motivate students to do

better, but can often do more harm than good by destroying confidence. He says 'The tragedy is that this behaviour continues to be practised under the misguided assumption that pain is necessary for progress', and 'There is no excuse for the destruction that these instructors inflict on young performers' self-esteem without regard for the long term consequences or emotional cost' (Hamilton, 1997). Similarly Buckroyd (2000) said

*'To behave in such a way with adolescents, who have no opportunity to protest or respond and whose sense of self is immature and fragile, cannot be helpful... in explanation of such teaching it has a long history... that teachers are often merely reproducing the mode in which they were themselves taught'*

This suggests the reason teachers often teach in this way, is purely because that's the way they were taught and so it seems fitting to replicate their own experience. Hamilton (1997) advises training academies to discourage teachers from only focusing on the negatives of students work and stop offering goals where success is always just out of reach. If they continue to do this, then performers may only ever view themselves as not talented enough, leading to a downward slide into a pathological view of themselves.

Although high pressure schools cause much stress for students, they also often provide the best possible exposure to the industry and so it is in students best interest to train at these schools.

*'The obvious advantage of attending a reputable drama school is that you get three years of good training; agents and casting directors will come to your final year shows and you will get some good advice and make good contacts with top industry professionals'. (Hughes, S. 2013).*



Therefore although the process of training might be mentally and physically hard, it could be argued that they are only preparing the student for the cut throat industry ahead.

### 3.3 Industry Expectations

After training comes the stress of the working world. This could be due to the pressures and expectation of the performer and the difficulty of keeping a stable job with a low income as well as the constant struggle of finding employment. Alison Chard, who is a UK Casting Director said

*'I do go to drama schools... and they always say "Oh yes we know there isn't much work out there, but we're going to be fine." And you think "Well how are you going to be fine? What is it that you're going to do that's going to work differently for you? "And a lot of the time you find they have no conception of the business really before they actually get into it'. (Cited by Sorrentino, S. 2017)*

The problem is that most students have little knowledge of the industry statistics. An Equity 2013 membership survey showed that 65.5% of performers work fewer than 20 weeks/annum and 86.3% of performers earn under £20K (Sparling, S. 2017). Surviving like this is bound to cause mental stress and pressure. Fiona from Mountview agrees... "It can never be overemphasised just how hard it is going to be. Our head of acting said that out of the 40 in my year only two or three will go on to work regularly enough to make a living from acting!" (Burlinson, K. 2009) and 'These days, even auditions are becoming rare as choreographers call in talent from the blessed pool of their own chosen. It takes less time, you see.' (Storr, W. 2011). What can make it even more difficult is that Davis (2010) explains that 'in recent years you're competing with celebrities, who will get in an audience but might not always be the best person for the part'. She also goes on to explain that there is no working your way upwards, you don't

start at ensemble and then small part followed by the lead, you're either right for something or you're not (Davis, H. 2010).

The current industry is very overcrowded leading to exceptionally high levels of competition. Storr (2011) said 'Things are getting harder, too, in the theatre world. These days, they say you have to be a "triple threat" – a dancer, actor and a singer'. These requirements in recent years could be because it's cheaper and more cost effective to hire people that can perform a number of things, instead of hiring individuals capable of just one skill. In addition to this Davis (2010) said 'For the audition, not only did I have to sing, dance and act, but I also had to play all the instruments I play'. Adding to this again, when auditioning, some shows require even more skills, for example '*The Lion King* requires you to learn puppetry and even stilts for some animal characters, *Starlight Express* required performers to be on roller skates, and many shows now require you to be both an actor and a musician' (Green, S. 2011). Competition means having any extra skills can give the edge needed to get the desired part over others. Not only must you have the skills, you must also be physically and mentally able to keep them up for weeks/months of performances. Any time off sick would not help with future job opportunities. Davis (2010) said "To be able to sing, act and dance and be able to maintain the same standard of performance eight times a week, with clean-up rehearsals thrown in, is an intense process". Therefore it's no wonder that performers suffer with physical and mental exhaustion.

John Hubbard who is a UK Casting Director said 'You're a product and you've got to market yourself (Cited by Sorrentino, S. 2017). According to Karl Marx 'a **commodity** is any good or service ("products" or "activities") produced by human labour and offered as a product for general sale on the market' (Cited by Dillon, M. 2014). Therefore it could be said that performers are commodities, and are being treated as objects as a means to make money. Edley and Bihn (2005) said 'Female dancers' bodies are objectified and commodified in order to sell tickets and souvenirs. (Cited by Heiland, T.

2008) meaning that instead of treating performers as people, they are being treated as money makers and therefore this could be the reason why the casting can be so harsh, as the producers can lose money if the performer doesn't appeal to the audience.

Johnson, S (2017) says

*'The social practice of treating people as if they were mere commodities is deeply problematic because the language that is usually used about markets is simply not appropriate when talking about people. Clearly the way that we talk about people will shape the way that we go on to treat them, and so commodification in this sense can be seen as implying exploitative practices.'*

To conclude, the research suggests that the defining factor of mental illness and confidence loss in the performing arts industry comes from how overcrowded the industry is, leading to performers being treated as commodities. The popularity of the industry means someone else will eagerly take the place of anyone who refuses to be treated badly. This leads to performers accepting mistreatment and their mental health suffers as a consequence. If performers need to be willing to accept this treatment in the working industry, it makes sense to prepare them for this whilst in training and ascertain if they are tough enough to handle it. Intensive training and focus on body image often from a young age can be linked to confidence loss and the subsequent high levels of mental health issues the industry is experiencing. This being said, there is evidence to suggest that the industry may slowly be changing in regards to body image and more companies are beginning to accept different shapes and sizes. This could positively affect performers' confidence when initially entering the industry. Conversely, if a wider variety of people are accepted, the industry will become even more popular and competition more intense than ever.

## Part Practical Discussion

### 4.1 Influences

At the outset, it seemed clear to me that a performance piece would be more persuasive than a TED talk or on screen presentation because I personally learn better myself through watching a performance than listening to someone talk. After discussing this opinion with some of my peers, it appeared that they had similar feelings to myself. I wanted to create a piece based on the three defining factors of confidence loss and mental illness, that I had found during my research for the literature review. These three factors were body image, drama schools/training and industry expectations. I wanted to show these factors to my audience through singing and acting to present them with the findings of my literature review. Previous to my degree I studied at Liberatus School of Performing Arts, where I had intense training in singing and acting, but mostly dance. What really stood out to me during my time there, was how the teachers spoke to me and the other students. They would comment on our skills, performance and image in an extremely offensive and upsetting manner. They would also vocalize their opinion of you in front of everyone watching. This is what influenced me to create the first section of my part practical as not only was it one of the factors I found, but it had also played a huge part in my own personal decrease in confidence and my mental health issues.

Another theme that inspired my piece is the hugely popular Instagram and Tumblr boards that young men and women of today are so addicted to. I, as well as many others can spend hours looking through Instagram and Tumblr, asking myself why I'm not as talented and perfect as the people I see on the screen.

*'The RSPH (Royal Society for Public Health) found that young people were most likely to associate Instagram with negative attributes and low self-esteem, resulting in poor body image and lack of sleep' (Fox, K. 2017).*

This information rings true to me because I am an example of one of these young people. Many of us today spend time creating Tumblr boards that often feature a feed of inspirational pictures that people aspire to. They include 'perfect' images of people and their life, much like Instagram, but the user is able to save these images and add them to their feed. This idea influenced me to create the mood board in my part practical that featured pictures of what I believe perfection to look like and words such as 'beautiful, confident, skinny'. I also listed skills such as 'accents, acrobatics, languages, puppetry', all of which are desirable within the industry, based on the research I found for my literature review.

Musicals such as *The Last Five Years*, *A Chorus Line*, *Follies* and *42nd Street* also inspired my piece as they all feature characters trying, and often failing, to make it in the industry. Characters such as 'Val' from *A Chorus Line* explains in her song that she even went as far as surgery to become attractive and succeed in auditions. This character and song inspired my body image section of the part practical.

## **4.2 Development and Creation**

I already knew of many musical theatre songs that had themes of struggling, confidence loss and striving for perfection, so I started researching songs to fit each of the defining factors I had explained in my literature review. Instead of simply performing three songs to the audience, I decided to create a story for the audience to follow. The story featured a young girl experiencing three stages of her life in performing arts, focusing on her experience whilst in training, then during auditions and finally changing herself to become more employable. I realised early on that I would need other people in my part practical, in order to play the other parts that I required for the piece. I chose four other girls and a boy to appear briefly in my part practical. The male part was required to be an audition panellist and 3 of the girls were to act as my peers in the first

scene and my competition in the audition scenes. The final girl I chose in particular to act as a teacher in my first scene. This was because similarly to myself she too had trained at a drama school and had experienced similar situations with the teaching to me. She could therefore draw from her own experiences when giving me criticism in my scene.

I then began researching songs that would fit each of those stages and managed to find three that perfectly suited each setting. The first song was “Let me be your star” from *Smash*. For this song I presented myself as the character performing a song for the first time to her new class. This idea came from the fact that at many colleges/universities, students are asked to perform a song of their choice to the class during their first week of study to break the ice and show off your skills. During the song, I had my character forget the lines to her song, and had another student join in the song to help her remember the lyrics. At this point the teacher in my scene allowed the student to carry on singing during my performance, so that the two of us were almost competing to be heard. After performing the song, the teacher gave me some harsh criticism, this was to show the audience that as performers we can often lose confidence at an early stage of our training due to the comments and attitudes from our teachers. I got my inspiration for this scene from the research I found when writing the literature review, when Hamilton (1997) explained that teachers often use criticism as a way of motivating students, but more often than not it actually destroys their confidence. The opinions of our teachers and our peers are so important to us and our development as a performer, because it shapes the way we think of ourselves. My second song choice was “Climbing uphill” from *The Last Five Years*, this featured the same character attending an audition and singing about her experience in the industry and explaining her thoughts whilst in the audition. This song choice was comic for the audience because the lyrics and theme of the song are so relatable to performers. The panic, anxiety, thoughts and feelings in the lyrics are what compelled me to choose this song because it showed the audience another stage of confidence loss and mental health within a performer’s career. Some

of the lyrics included “I’m up every morning at six, just standing in line with two hundred girls who are younger and thinner than me” (Brown, 2001). This is an insight to the thoughts that performers may have when they are auditioning. Other lyrics include “Why am I working so hard, these are the people that cast Russell Crowe in a musical, Jesus Christ I suck” (Brown, 2001). Although the lyrics appear comedic, they also show self doubt and lack of both confidence and self assurance, which is the emotions that I wanted to show the audience. When I finished singing, I had the audition panel tell me I wasn’t what they were looking for, but asked if I had any other skills for future reference. This idea came from research found in my literature review about Karl Marx theory of commodification. As explained in my literature review by Edley and Bihn (2005), I discovered that performers could also be seen as commodities because instead of being treated like human beings, they are treated as money makers as a means to sell tickets and merchandise. I therefore wanted to show the audience that casting directors are very strict when choosing their cast because if they don’t find the perfect person for the job, then it could cost them a lot of money. When my character realised she needed to be more than just a triple threat to make it in the industry, she created a mood board in front of the audience, as mentioned above. This was to express to the audience the mental turmoil and self destruction that we as performers can often put ourselves through. By doing this, I intended to show the viewers’ words and images that often persist in my own head when I myself am feeling insecure. To finish my performance I sang ‘Dance Ten, Looks Three’ from *A Chorus Line*. This last section of the performance was to show the audience the damage that the rejection and criticism of the industry can do to a performer. It was also to show the extreme measures some people are willing to take in order to be what the directors want, but by doing this performers are allowing directors to treat them as commodities, because they are treating themselves as a product. Celebrity actresses such as Lea Michele, Busy Phillips and Elizabeth Banks were told to get various surgery’s in order to get jobs. ‘Elizabeth Banks revealed she was once told by a casting agent to get a boob job if she wanted to be successful in Hollywood’ (Segal, 2017). The lyrics show a performer that

continued to get rejected and so she changed her looks with surgery and therefore becomes more successful in the industry.

The purpose of this performance was to present my findings from the literature review to an audience. It aimed to give the audience knowledge of what causes confidence loss and mental health within the industry and in turn helped them realise that if they too are suffering then they are not alone. I intended for the audience to witness emotional and insecure scenes, but also to lift the mood with a comic song that they could laugh and enjoy. This is because, as Chesser (2013) explained 'humour in a classroom enhances students' interest and participation, according to a study conducted by Ohio State University professors of psychology, Mark Shatz and Frank LoSchiavo'.

### **4.3 Evaluation**

My part practical performance was executed exactly as planned and I received positive feedback following the piece. I had asked my peers to send me a review of what they thought of my performance and what they got from it. Below are two examples of the feedback I received.

*'I thought your part practical thoroughly explained the extreme measures of how far a girl will go to be perfect in a panel's eyes. It showed the pressures from drama school and the competition you have to face in the performing arts industry. Leading you to change your body to be accepted and challenged in the industry' (Hicken. 2018).*

*'Your part practical highlighted the harsh teaching style used in drama schools. It is an industry that strongly requires a great sense of confidence and self determination yet throughout training these things are constantly being judged and pushed down. There has to be extra mental work by the individual to both respect the teaching in order to improve whilst simultaneously not letting the harsh words and actions affect you. The*



*use of the song from Last Five Years very realistically demonstrated the feelings of self doubt in doing what you want to do' (Allen. 2018).*

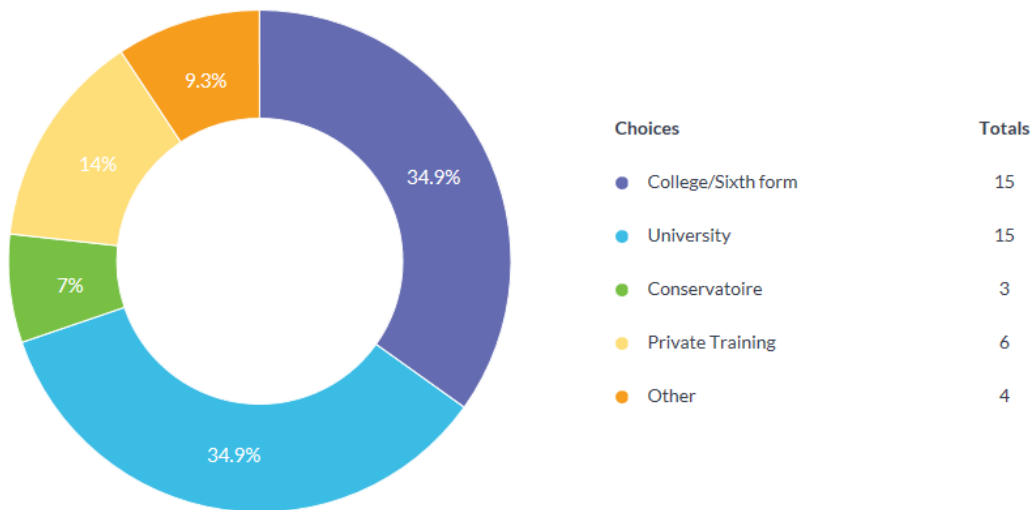
Both reviews were great feedback and offered different content. The first review commenting on what exactly she got from my part practical and how my character was affected throughout the piece. It was extremely positive and pleasing to see that she thought the piece was 'thoroughly explained' and she received the message that I was trying to show. The second review also commented on what she physically saw and got from the piece, but also shared a great understanding and knowledge of the topic. These reviews showed that my performance successfully portrayed a message to the audience.

## Primary Research Results

### 5.1 Survey Results

As part of my primary research I conducted a survey amongst students training in performing arts. The sample size was 43, with question 1 concluding that 33 were female, 8 were male and 2 preferred not to say. Question 2 concluded that 35 were between age 16 and 21 and 8 were over 21.

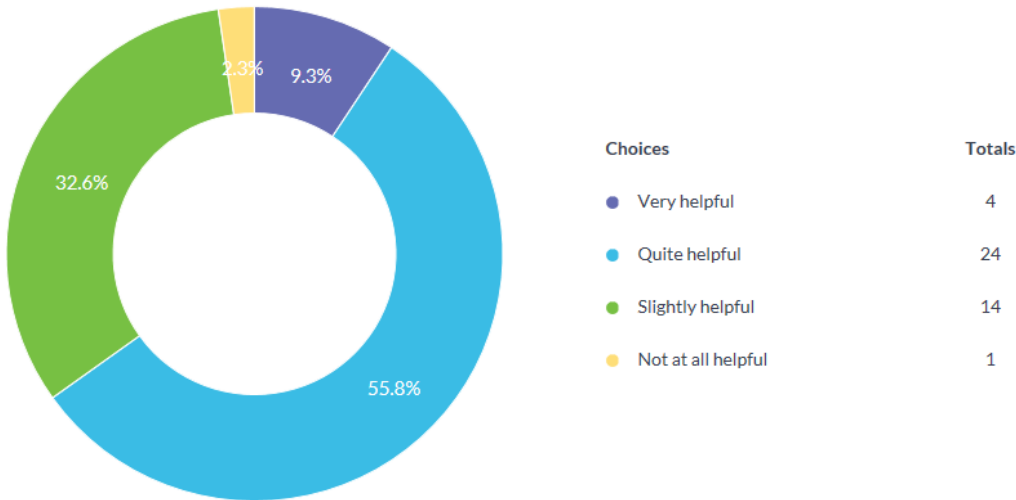
Q3 In what type of school are you training at?  
Multiple Choice 🔄



The information above shows that 34.9% of the participants are studying at College/Sixth Form, 34.9% at university and 7% at drama schools, 14% in private training and 9.3% in 'Other' form of training. This data is most likely heavily weighted towards College/Sixth Form and University because it was shared at the university I study at. Therefore they were the most convenient participants.

Q4

How supportive have you found the teaching methods given to you?  
Multiple Choice

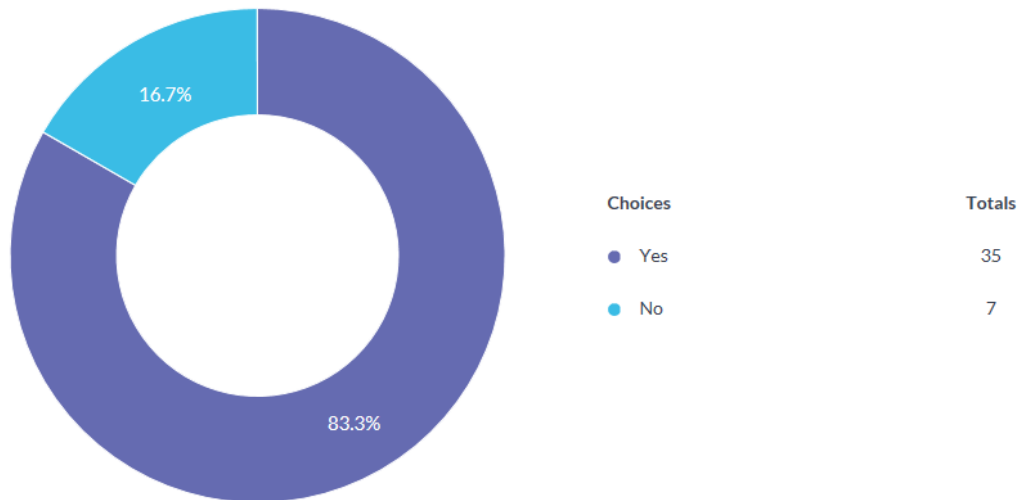


According to the results above 55.8% of students said that their teachers were 'quite helpful', 32.6% said they were 'slightly helpful', 9.3% said they were 'very helpful' and only 2.3% said they were 'not at all helpful'. This result shows us that although the research I found for the literature review suggests that the teaching causes a lot of confidence loss, they also believe that the teachers are helpful in their training. However it would be preferred for the percentages to be higher for 'very helpful' and 'quite helpful'.

Q5

Whilst in training, have you ever experienced or witnessed the teaching techniques to be personally insensitive

Multiple Choice



As is illustrated by the results above, there is a disappointingly higher percentage of people that said they had witnessed or received insensitive teaching whilst in training. From the research I found during the literature review, this is one of the main causes that causes performers to be unconfident and suffer with mental health issues. If teachers were to take a different approach when training the students, the percentage would be much less. The next survey question asks the participants to comment on their answer and give examples where possible, so that it can be pointed out exactly what performers are struggling with.

Q6 If your previous answer was 'Yes', please give an example. If you answered 'No', then please continue to the next question.  
Essay

A selection of answers have been chosen and are listed below.

*'Crossing the line into personal over professional. Singularising a specific person in front of a large group of people when it's clear that the person in question is trying their hardest with the skill set they have'*

*'Very uncomfortable with my body and I always wore top over my leotard and the teacher told me to take it off and I physically couldn't so I was removed from the class'*

*'Once during a dance class I was pointed out for not being able to hold a plank as long as some others because I'm a bit bigger than everyone else'*

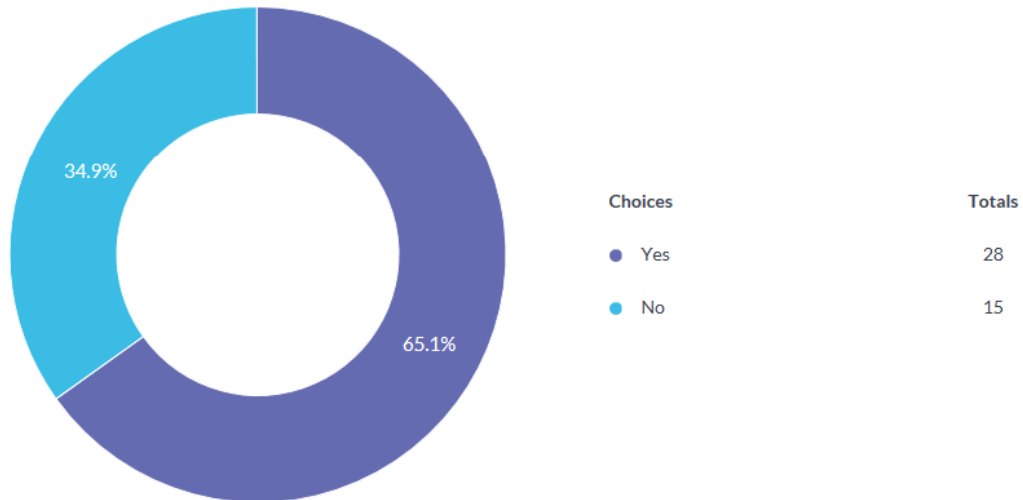
*'I've seen teachers ask students if they are willing to lose weight for a certain show insinuating some individuals body types weren't okay for the show they were casting'*

*'I have heard comments from teachers about students' weight being an issue and appearance issues'*

This selection of answers are very much in keeping with the research I found during the literature review. This suggests that the research found was accurate to the way students feel about their training now and that no changes have been made.

Q7

Do you feel pressure to have more skills than just singing, dancing and acting?  
Multiple Choice



Q8

If your previous answer was 'Yes', then please give an example. If you answered 'No', then please continue to the next question.  
Essay

*'Acrobatic, aerial and musical instrument'*

*'Looks - being told how I 'have to look' physically despite being an adult in a creative industry full of people who don't all look the same.'*

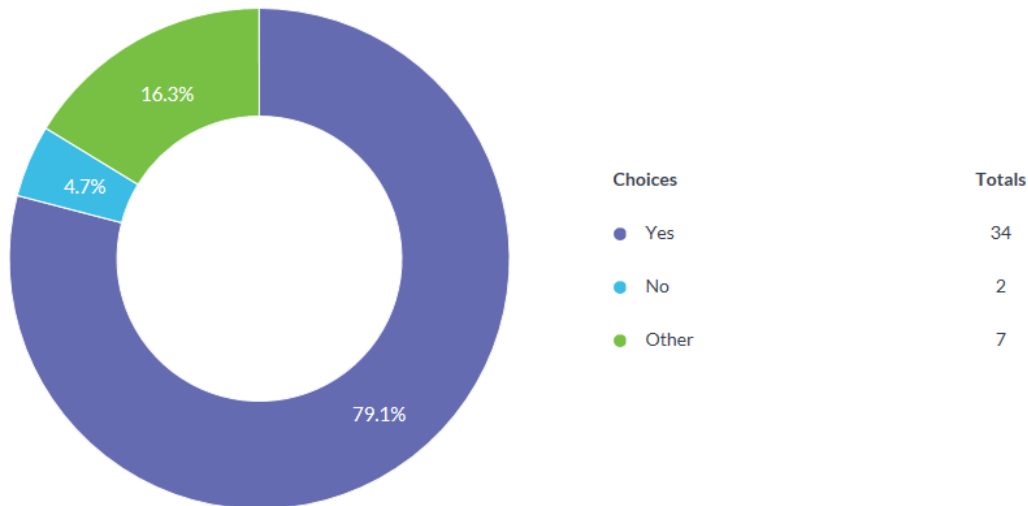
*'Sign language, athletic skills, circomedia etc'*

*'Circus skills, fitness, teacher to an acquired skill - singing, piano etc.  
Acrobatics/gymnast'*

*'Tricks are asked for at most auditions. Also - playing instruments and speaking other languages'*

As you can see from the above, purely being a triple threat is not enough anymore. Skills such as acrobatics, instruments and languages appear to be most common.

Q9

Do you perceive the industry judges performers on appearance first and then talent?  
Multiple Choice

Under the 'Other' answer, there was an option to comment. Below are some examples of what was said.

*'Sometimes yes, sometimes no - I certainly believe that it is not just about the talent anymore and if you don't have "the look" then you won't get the job'*

*'I think it depends on what they're auditioning for. For example if a show has a certain "look" they want people that fit'*

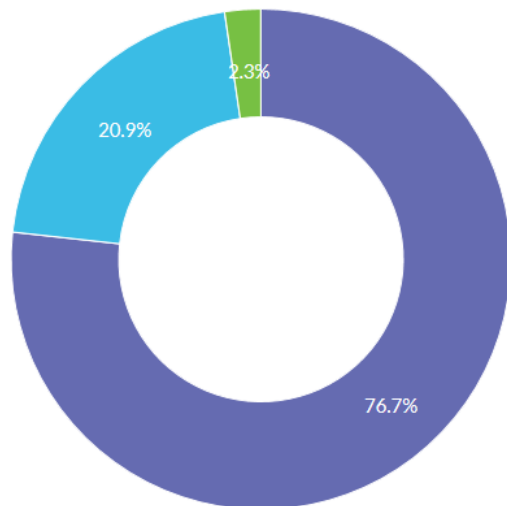
*'A bit of both, I think yes, they do judge. But sometimes they can be surprised at someone's talent. If that person is lucky enough to show their talent off'*



Generally the majority of people agreed that the industry is often based on looks and then talent. These quotes are in keeping with Grant (2017), who explained that she was cut from an audition because she was overweight. This quote was mentioned earlier in my research on pg.6.

Q10

Have you ever suffered from confidence loss or mental health issues related to your time in training?  
Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
● Yes	33
● No	9
● Prefer not to say	1

Q11

If your previous answer was 'Yes', then please comment on your answer if you feel comfortable.  
Essay

*'Suffered with an eating disorder growing up due to having the wrong body for ballet'*

*'I think it's due to the pressure of having to be beautiful and talented and never having a day off from that'*

*'There's too much to even list half of the issues I have experienced and that should say it all'*

*'You're pressured to all look the same and all fit it yet stand out enough to be noticed for lead roles'*

*'I felt that it was not realistic for me to become a performer as I "am not castable". As performance is all I've ever done, the prospect of not being able to continue really*

*scared me as did the prospect of continuing but being constantly put down in what I love'*

*'I feel as though the majority of my training has been based around how I look and breaking me down as a person in order to create what is desired in the industry. This has caused me to have a negative view of myself in general life'*

From the comments that I received, the most common answer referred to their appearance, which could suggest that performers are mostly unconfident and struggle with mental health due to the pressures of their image. However this is not completely accurate due to how many people completed the survey and that they were all in training, rather than professionals. Therefore if I had a wider range of participants then then answers could differ.

## 5.2 Interviews

After collecting responses from my questionnaire, I decided to interview two people. One person, a graduate from Urdang Academy, a prestigious London drama school and the other person in her first year of study at the also prestigious London drama school Guildford School of Arts.

The responses from Anonymous (2018) were as follows:

### **Q1. When studying did you ever experience the teaching methods to be personally insensitive in regards to appearance/weight/skill etc?**

*Massively, my ballet teacher would walk around the room prodding our stomachs calling them 'soft', same with our bum cheeks. We would get personal comments if she thought we had 'let ourselves go' that weekend.*

### **Q2. Do you agree that those types of teaching methods can help students prepare for the industry?**

*At the end of the day, the industry's demand for talent is only a small percentage of the positioning of individuals in shows. You need to fit into a costume. You need to be a specific height so you don't look funny in the line up. You need to look similar so you aren't taking focus away.*

### **Q3. Do you perceive the industry judges performers on appearance first and then talent?**

*Yes, colour blind casting is an ideal that is going to struggle to take a strong influence on the industry.*

**Q4. Do you perceive the industry is becoming more varied and accepting of different appearances?**

*There are more shows exploring 21st century ideas. The Lion King is one of the longest standing shows within the west end, and 90% of its cast members are black. Motown, Memphis, Hairspray, Book of Mormon, Miss Saigon... These are all shows exploring these themes.*

**Q5. Is there expectation to have more skills than just singing/dancing/acting?**

*Everyone can do all three of these disciplines. You need to be able to sing on your head, dance in the air and act on rollerblades. The days of the triple-threat are over.*

**Q6. Are you still working in this industry?**

*No I am not. I couldn't take the mental struggles I faced with being in the industry. I was called fat, swollen and podgy too many times to count. I had grown men screaming and swearing in my face if I wasn't hitting my triple pirouettes. I had my ballet teacher and principle sit me down and tell me they'd preferred me when I was painfully ill and skinny. The five % of fabulousness was not worth the 95% horror. I had no life, I was losing friends and I had no job. It wasn't worth the self deprivation.*

These answers are very much in keeping with the research I found during my literature review and in all honesty this is the response I had expected, but not to the extent of some of her comments. Learning from somebody who has had first hand experience in training, graduating and entering the industry from a well respected drama school was extremely helpful in progressing my research.

Second interview answers:

**Q1. When studying did you ever experience the teaching methods to be personally insensitive in regards to appearance/weight/skill etc?**

*Never personally insensitive as it is always made clear that this is your own personal journey for training and the teaching staff are always supportive and positive.*

**Q2. Do you agree that those types of teaching methods can help students prepare for the industry?**

*Partly yes, as most jobs are based on appearance in order to fit a character. It is also a very tough industry so having something to strive for and the odd set back makes you stronger.*

**Q3. Do you perceive the industry judges performers on appearance first and then talent?**

*Yes as it is a very aesthetic and physical industry and character requirements and looks do play a big role when casting. However the industry now is changing as there are a lot more ethnic roles out there and more opportunities.*

**Q4. Do you perceive the industry is becoming more varied and accepting of different appearances?**

*Yes because racial diversity is becoming a hot topic for the arts (the diversity initiative - Arts ED, Mountview etc). Also a lot more racial diversity in casting in shows, themes and storylines.*

**Q5. Is there expectation to have more skills than just singing/dancing/acting?**

*Yes, acrobatics and instrument playing are a huge part of theatre today.*

After receiving both results, although there are many similarities when talking about the industry itself, the differences could be for a number of reasons.

The first could be the training school itself, the teaching methods of the second could be less harsh. Secondly, my second participant is only in her first year of training and therefore has not experienced the full three years, and the despondency of trying to find work and compete in the real world. Finally it could be that the second participant just has a different mental attitude and stronger ability to accept the way the industry is and what it required of the performer.

Without carrying out more interviews with drama school students it is hard to be accurate, but it could be suggested that the teaching is more insensitive and therefore negatively contributing to a performer's health at certain schools.

## Conclusion

### **6.1 Findings and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to discover the defining factors that cause confidence loss and mental health within the performing arts industry. This would help me to expose all the possible reasons why performers are struggling. It would also help others in the industry to understand why there is such a stigma on mental health within the industry and what they can do to change it.

The data taken from my questionnaires was successful and definitely provided my research with more evidence of primary research to match my secondary research literature review. However the data could have been improved if I had targeted a wider audience. As students from my university were convenient to contact, they were the majority of the participants. Therefore the data I received could have been more accurate if I had more participants from other colleges and universities.

There is strong evidence from the primary and secondary research found that the defining factors are body image, training and the industry expectations. But is this something that is likely to change? The only change that has been noted so far is the idea that there may be more development when it comes to diversity in casts. This is because there has recently been more shows that require a different range of looks. For example *Hamilton*, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* and *Motown*, but the amount of shows are still very limited.

The industry is so aware of how many of its performers suffer with mental health, but the problem appears to be swept to the side. Harmon (2017) said 'Levels of moderate to severe anxiety in the performing arts industry were 10 times higher than the general



population; levels of depression in industry workers were up to five times higher', therefore why are there no extreme changes being made.

Bowman (2018) said 'it is time to make changes before you burn out, as well as lose all passion for the role you once loved'.

**Total Word Count: 7630**

**7. Appendices****Appendix 1 - Survey Questions**

	TITLE	QUESTION TYPE
Q1	What is your gender?	Multiple Choice
Q2	What is your age range?	Multiple Choice
Q3	In what type of school are you training at?	Multiple Choice
Q4	How supportive have you found the teaching methods given to you?	Multiple Choice
Q5	Whilst in training, have you ever experienced or witnessed the teaching techniques to be personally insensitive?	Multiple Choice
Q6	If your previous answer was 'Yes', please give an example. If you answered 'No', then please continue to the next question.	Essay

Q7 Do you feel pressure to have more skills than just singing, dancing and acting? Multiple Choice

Q8 If your previous answer was 'Yes', then please give an example. If you answered 'No', then please continue to the next question. Essay

Q9 Do you perceive the industry judges performers on appearance first and then talent? Multiple Choice

Q10 Have you ever suffered from confidence loss or mental health issues related to your time in training? Multiple Choice

Q11 If your previous answer was 'Yes', then please comment on your answer if you feel comfortable. Essay

## Appendix 2 - Part Practical Script

- I start by reading a letter aloud to the audience

*DEAR EMILY*

*WE LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU IN SEPTEMBER TO BEGIN YOUR DEGREE WITH US.*

*PLEASE FIND ATTACHED YOUR CLASS TIMETABLE.*

*DURING YOUR FIRST WEEK, YOU WILL TAKE PART IN A BALLET, JAZZ AND TAP CLASS TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU WILL BE IN BEGINNER, INTERMEDIATE OR ADVANCED DANCE CLASSES. WE ALSO ASK YOU TO PREPARE A SONG OF YOUR CHOICE TO PERFORM TO YOUR NEW CLASS ON MONDAY 2ND OF SEPTEMBER.*

*WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE YEAR AHEAD.*

*Girls enter stage chatting excitedly*

Emily: Hi, I'm Emily

*Girls introduce themselves to me over the top of each other*

Alice: What are you singing for your performance?

Ellis: We're all so nervous

Emily: Im singing 'Let me be your star' from Smash

Ella: Yeah I'm singing that too! I'm so nervous!

Emily: Oh really, what are you guys singing?

Alice: Im singing...

Ellis: Im singing...

Carys: Good morning everyone, welcome to your first day here. As you all know you were asked to prepare a song for this morning's session. Would anyone like to volunteer to go first?

Emily: I will

Carys: okay great, if everyone could take a seat and you can introduce yourself and the song to the class. When you're ready..

Emily: I'm Emily Mitchell and I will be singing 'Let me be your star' from Smash.

***'LET ME BE YOUR STAR' - SMASH***

Carys: Okay well done girls, so Emily what do you think happened there?

Emily: I guess I was nervous and I completely blanked on the lyrics, sorry

Carys: Okay, we know nerves can kick in on the first day, but I trust you won't make a habit of it.

Emily: Yes, I'm sorry

Carys: Luckily you had Ella to help you out. So talk to me about why you chose the song?

Emily: I've sung it before at my previous college and I got good feedback on it.

Carys: And the story behind it?

Emily: Yeah, so I guess it's about a girl that really wants to perform and so I thought it seemed similar to myself.

Carys: Right okay, so nice voice but next time I need more performance and passion. I was getting much more from Ella and so you need to make us look at you and nobody else on stage. I was more drawn to her performance.

Emily: Okay

Carys: Right, who's next?

Keiran: (Shouts) OPEN CALL AUDITIONS (sits at the table)

*The girls exit the room*

*I take off my lanyard put on my dress and put on my audition number.*

### **'CLIMBING UPHILL' THE LAST FIVE YEARS**

*Girls re-enter in song and then exit again*

Keiran: Thank you that's enough, unfortunately you don't quite fit the look that we are going for, for this specific show. We may have other opportunities coming up. Do you have any other skills?

Emily: umm skills?

Keiran: *(speaking as if obvious)* Accents, languages, dance ability, tricks?

Emily: Oh yes, so I'm trained in dance, singing and acting and I can speak a general American accent and... it's all on my CV.

Keiran: Okay, thank you. *(Leaves chair and stands at the back)*

### **BACKGROUND SONG**

- Sit on the floor and create a mood board of everything I want to be.
- Stick on perfect headshots

- Stick on perfect dance shots
- Stick on pictures of skinny dancers
- Stick on girls with sexy bodies
- Stick on words like perfect, unique, languages, Irish accent, Spanish accent, Scottish accent, Welsh accent, Cockney accent, Tricks, triple pirouette, flexible, puppetry, instruments, piano, guitar
- Lean the mood board up so that the audience can see
- Get changed in front of audience, taking off dress to reveal sexy leotard with pushed up boobs and shake my hair down and put red lipstick on.

Keiran: (Shouts) OPEN CALL AUDITIONS (sits down at table)

- Screw up old CV and hand a new one to Keiran.

***'DANCE TEN, LOOKS THREE' - A CHORUS LINE***

Keiran: We'd like to see you for the call back

Emily: Thanks

*Walk off stage confidently, followed by girls*

### **Appendix 3 - Part Practical Song Lyrics**

#### **'Let Me Be Your Star' - *Smash***

*[Emily:]*

Fade in on a girl  
With a hunger for fame,  
And a face and a name to remember.  
The past fades away  
Because as of this day,  
Norma Jean's gone.  
She's moving on...

Her smile and your fantasies play a duet  
That will make you forget where you are.  
The music starts playing,  
It's the beat of her heart saying...  
Let me be your star.

*[Ella:]*

Flashback to a girl  
With a song in her heart,  
As she's waiting to start the adventure.  
The fire and drive  
That make dreams come alive...  
They fill her soul.  
She's in control...

The drama, the laughter, the tears just like pearls-



Well, they're all in this girl's repertoire.

It's all for the taking,

And it's magic we'll be making;

Let me be your star.

*[Both:]*

I'll just have to forget the hurt that came before,

*[Emily:]*

Forget what used to be.

*[Ella:]*

The past is on the cutting room floor,

*[Emily:]*

The future is here with me.

*[Both:]*

Choose me!

Fade up on a star

With it all in her sights...

All the love and the lights

That surround her.

Someday she'll think twice

Of the dues and the price

*[Emily:]*

She'll have to pay

*[Ella:]*

She'll have to pay

*[Emily:]*

But not today...

*[Ella:]*

But not today...

*[Both:]*

Then she'll do all she can  
For the love of one man,  
And for millions who love from afar.  
I'm what you've been needing  
It's all here in my heart's pleading,  
Let me be your star!

**'Climbing Uphill' - *The Last Five Years***

When you come home to me  
I'll wear a sweeter smile  
And hope that, for a while, you'll...  
Okay, thank you  
Thank you so much  
I'm climbing uphill, Jamie  
Climbing uphill  
I'm up every morning at six  
And standing in line  
With two hundred girls  
Who are younger and thinner than me

Who have already been to the gym  
I'm waiting five hours in line  
And watching the girls  
Just coming and going  
In dresses that look just like this  
Till my number is finally called  
When I walk in the room  
There's a table of men  
Always men - usually gay  
Who've been sitting like I have  
And listening all day  
To two hundred girls  
Belting as high as they can!  
I am a good person  
I'm an attractive person  
I am a talented person  
Grant me Grace!  
When you come home...  
I should have told them I was sick last week  
They're gonna think this is the way I sing  
Why is the pianist playing so loud?  
Should I sing louder?  
I'll sing louder  
Maybe I should stop and start over  
I'm gonna stop and start over  
Why is the director staring at his crotch?  
Why is that man staring at my resume?  
Don't stare at my resume  
I made up half of my resume

Look at me  
Stop looking at that, look at me  
No, not at my shoes  
Don't look at my shoes  
I hate these stupid shoes  
Why did I pick these shoes?  
Why did I pick this song?  
Why did I pick this career?  
Why does this pianist hate me?  
If I don't get a callback  
I can go to Crate and Barrel with mom and buy a couch  
Not that I want to spend a day with mom  
But Jamie needs space to write  
Since I'm obviously such a horrible, annoying distraction to him  
What's he gonna be like when we have kids?  
And once again...  
Why am I working so hard?  
These are the people who cast Russell Crowe in a musical  
Jesus Christ, I suck, I suck, I suck  
When finally you come home to...  
Okay, thank you  
Thank you so much

**'Dance: Ten; Looks: Three' - A Chorus Line**

Dance, ten  
looks , three  
And I'm still on unemployment  
Dancing for my own enjoyment  
That ain't it, kid

That ain't it, kid

"Dance, ten

Looks, three,"

It's like to die!

Left the theater and

Called the doctor for

My appointment to buy

Tits and ass

Bought myself a fancy pair

Tightened up the derriere

Did the nose with it

All that goes with it

Tits and ass!

Had the bingo-bongos done

Suddenly I'm getting national tours!

Tits and ass won't get you jobs

Unless they're yours

Didn't cost a fortune neither

Didn't hurt my sex life either

Flat and sassy

I would get the strays and losers

Beggars really can't be choosers

That ain't it, kid

That ain't it, kid

Fixed the chassis

"How do you do!"

Life turned into and

Endless medley of

"Gee, it had to be you!"

Why?

Tits and ass!

Where the cupboard once was bare

Now you knock and someone's there

You have got 'em, hey

Top to bottom, hey

It's a gas!

Just a dash of silicone

Shake your new maracas and you're fine!

Tits and ass can change your life

They sure changed mine

Have it all done

Honey, take my word

Grab a cab, c'mon

See the wizard on

Park and Seventy-Third

For

Tits and ass

Orchestra and balcony

What they want is whatcha see

Keep the best of you

Do the rest of you

Pits or class

I have never seen it fail

Debutante or chorus girl or wife

Tits and ass

Yes, tits and ass

Have changed my life!

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