

‘Your transness, your otherness is your superpower,’ Transgender identities, Power and
Representation in the UK Theatre industry.

By

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Abstract

The 2010s and 2020s were when transgender experiences were given a platform in all areas, from the media to the education system. The theatre industry is no exception. The academic field of UK Transgender theatre is being established, partly due to the work that is being created by prominent UK Transgender artists such as Travis Alabanza and Tabby Lamb. Current scholarly work into UK transgender theatre is scarce but comparisons can be made between other types of Othered identities that contributed to the development of a theatre aesthetic, such as gay theatre. This thesis has explored transgender theatre, through the eyes of those in the industry and to investigate alternative methods that the wider theatre industry can become more transgender friendly and to encourage new and innovative work by the transgender community. Through a mixture of original semi structured interviews, a questionnaire and secondary sources, some of the issues that transgender artists face, such as the lack of funding for actor training, and identify ways that the industry can fix these issues. This thesis has aimed to fill the gap in the academic work by exploring the issues that transgender artists face and provide some potential solutions which could be used as a stimulus for further research or a comprehensive set of industry policies.

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Introduction

In October 2020 London's Donmar Warehouse theatre was due to host the musical adaptation, for the stage, of Patrick McCabe's book *Breakfast on Pluto*. After the casting decisions were announced, Kate O'Donnell quit her role as Ma Braden in protest (BBC News, 2020). Kate O'Donnell, who is a relatively well-known transgender performer and director, is the current artistic director of Trans Creative, a theatre organisation created, run by and run for the trans community. As a trans performer herself, she has a strong interest in promoting authentic trans theatre and giving real opportunities for trans performers and creatives. Consequently, O'Donnell felt uncomfortable when Fra Fee was given the role of Patrick/Pussy, who is a transgender character. As O'Donnell pointed out, West End roles do not come up for trans people often but O'Donnell decided she could not take part in a theatre production that supported the trope that trans women are simply men in a dress. BBC News shared advice from the trans lead charity Gendered Intelligence who argued that having cisgender men perform trans women characters increases prejudices and discrimination against the trans community because "many people internalise the myth that being trans is a performance, a deception, that trans women are 'really men'" (BBC News, 2020). Donmar Warehouse argued that they did try to find a trans actor but was unable to find an appropriate trans actor for the role, the theatre being "keen to ensure that trans voices have been central to the development" of the production (Masso, 2020). This case study has real life examples of the sort of institutional issues that trans performers and creatives face within the UK theatre industry, such as the many tropes that cis people create and maintain about the trans community and the idea that casting directors try to find trans talent but are unable to find talented trans actors. This thesis uses a variety of primary sources, five semi-structured interviews with prominent UK trans theatre makers and an online questionnaire with theatre professionals, and secondary sources, such as interviews and reports to explore the issues the trans community face in the UK theatre industry and how the industry can adapt to support the community. This is an important area of academic interest that needs urgent exploration due to the impacts that it is having on transgender artists in the present time and the urgency of this area of research is due to the damage that is being inflicted on the community and the wider industry. Representation and treatment of the

trans community within the UK arts industry is not consistent and varies between industry. Despite this, there are notable examples of fair and authentic representation for the community.

The UK's longest running SC-FI show – Doctor Who- has cast their first transgender actor as a prominent companion. Having a transgender actor perform as one of the main characters in one of the UK's most popular shows is significant for the trans community because it can help to contribute to more positive views of the community to be established. Transgender communities, in recent years, have appeared in film, television, theatre and in the form of positive news stories. 87% of cis women and 77% of cis men in the UK would describe themselves as not prejudice at all towards trans people (Morgan, et al., 2020, p. 8). Transgender people have also been protected and supported by new laws; The Gender Recognition Act 2004 created legal recognition and rights for some transgender people; allowing them to change their legal documents and legal gender and allowing their pre-transition life to be kept confidential, if they so wish, from their colleagues. The Equality Act 2010 designated gender reassignment as a protected characteristic, meaning they can not legally be discriminated against for planning to, during or after having gender reassignment treatment.

Alongside political and legal change, there has been some progress within the medical world. The International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision, which was published in 2019, removed the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, the medical term for being transgender. Despite the progress made in the last couple of decades, there has been some depression as well. Even though a high percentage of people in the UK would describe themselves as not prejudice at all, 41% of trans people and 31% of non-binary people have suffered a hate crime or incident based on their gender identity in the previous 12 months (Bachmann & Gooch, 2017, p. 4). Although there have been new laws to protect and support the lives of transgender people there are gaps; The Equality Act only defines gender reassignment surgery as a protected characteristic, which won't necessarily protects non-binary people who don't always require the treatment and therefore there is no protected characteristic for those transgender and non-binary people who do not undergo treatment. Although the Gender Recognition Act provides some support for the transgender community, it gives no support for the non-binary community or the gender diverse community, who does not fit in to the gender binary

system, because it only allowed people to legally change their gender to male or female and offered no options for non-binary people or gender diverse people, such as gender fluid people. Although the World Health Organization has declassified being transgender as a mental health condition, the United Kingdom's government has not followed suit and therefore to get treatment or support, you still need to be diagnosed by a team of doctors. The former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, decided that it was appropriate to repeat claims made by anti-trans groups, saying "when it comes to distinguishing between a man and a woman, the basic facts of biology remain overwhelmingly important" (House of Commons, 2022). Other members of his cabinet have said similar things in the public domain; Liz Truss, former Foreign Secretary and the former Prime Minister, said on the LBC radio that "woman have vaginas" (Truss, 2021) and Sajid Javid, the former Health Secretary and former chancellor, claimed that it was a "scientific fact" that only women have cervixes (Sajid, 2021). Although these statements may not be strictly transphobic, they oversimplify a highly complex topic in order to, many would argue, appease the 69% of Conservative MPs that oppose self-identification rights for transgender people (ComRes, 2018). Although there have been some tremendous advances, there is still a long way to go, partly due to the organizations that have been set up, or prominent individuals, that want to reverse the rights for the transgender community.

The rise in popularity of, a relatively small population, known as Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists – this thesis will make the argument, during the literature review, that this group of individuals can not claim to be feminists by using Judith Butler's work as evidence. Despite this, their anti-trans rhetoric has been gaining prominence within the United Kingdom. Groups such as Fair Play for Women and individuals like Germaine Greer and JK Rowling ascribe to their views, which will be discussed in more detail during the literature review. There has been evidence through history of potential transgender representation within the theatre. An example of this is through the practice of cross dressing; even during Elizabethan England, cross dressing on the British stage was widespread, with young boys wearing female costumes and presenting as female on the stage (Cressy, 1996, p. 439). Some historians argued that the prevalence of cross dressing during this period of time was a symptom of the sex-gender system being "under pressure" (Cressy, 1996, p. 438). Cross dressing was

evident throughout history, with for example the dame in pantomimes, or with modern drag circuits. The first half of the 20th century was difficult to present transgender stories, themes or lived experiences due to the governmental censorship from the Lord Chamberlain's Office which had strict rules regarding the presentation of homosexual or transgender issues. However, after the censorship was abolished in the 1960s, performances that explore homosexual theme and experiences started to appear on stages, with the first homosexual theatre company- the Gay Sweatshop Theatre leading the way. This laid the foundations for transgender theatre to flourish in the 21st century. During the 2010s and 2020s, there has been an increase in performances created by transgender theatre makers on British stages. Transgender artists, such as Travis Alabanza, is gaining notoriety in British theatre industry. If this trend continues, it suggests a positive future for socially marginalised groups within British theatre. The representation of transgender and gender diverse people is discussed further in the literature review. Despite the positive trends, it is essential to add in the social and global context – the aftereffects of covid, the war in Ukraine, the cost of living crisis and the potential illegal deportation of refugees by His Majesty's government - the legality of this policy which is still to be decided. This is important to take note of for two reasons. Firstly, when national or global issues arise, it is usually those marginalised groups that suffer as a consequence. Secondly, if the UK government is successful in removing or restricting the rights of asylum seekers, then they can start to do it to other marginalised groups, such as the trans community, for example, through the proposed Bill of Rights. These factors will be discussed, and their consequences will be explored in more detail in the literature review.

Aims of the Project

The foundational aim of this thesis is to explore how transgender creatives are treated and how the transgender community is represented by the UK's theatre industry. However, to avoid creating an isolated piece of research, it is vital to position this project in context, both in terms of its relationship with other academic work but also in the context of the theatre industry. This thesis, therefore, will attempt to make links with other pieces of related research, through the literature review and findings and discussion chapter. The thesis will also explore the history of trans theatre and, using the results

from this project, and offer potential ideas of what the future may hold. This thesis focuses on some significant themes; power relations and theatre processes, representation of the trans community, the relationship between theatre institutions and the trans community and the future of trans theatre. Finally, the thesis will conclude by making two types of recommendations; the areas that could be researched in the future. Secondly, industry wide recommendations; proposing potential policies/theatre processes that could be implemented to improve the prospects for the trans community. The research questions that were developed for this project are the following:

- How are transgender identities represented within the UK's theatre industry?
 - What is the relationship of transgender theatre makers with theatre institutions in the UK?
 - What strategies of resistance do trans theatre makers adopt?

Significance of this Project

The results from this project can have a benefit to society through extending the knowledge and understanding of transgender identities which exist throughout society. This thesis includes first person testimony from transgender and non-binary individuals and therefore the descriptions of these lived experiences could be used to help improve the general knowledge and understanding of the transgender community on a societal basis. Within many sections of society, a lot of academic work is focused on enhancing representations and opportunities for people in underrepresented demographics, such as the working class or female identifying individuals. The theatre has this same desire in many parts of the industry, and this thesis can aid in the process of reforming the industry to become a more inclusive environment for the transgender community. The results from this study can show areas that need to have further research in order to encourage reforms in the industry. This thesis could expose a gap in the current academia within theatre studies and could encourage further research to be conducted which could lead to the area of transgender theatre becoming a more extensive and more diverse area of research. Finally, on a more granular level, this thesis will be able to explore and celebrate the innovations that many transgender artists are developing in the industry and these results

could inspire more transgender people to establish a career in the creative arts industries thus creating more innovation for the industry.

Limitations of the Study

Although the research was designed in a way to produce the most valid results that it could with the available resources, inevitably there are limitations associated with this study. One of these limitations of this project is the lack of generalisation of the results and analysis due to a small sample size. A small sample size was used in this project for two main reasons; firstly, I was aiming to gather in depth, qualitative data about their lived experiences so it would be challenging to have a large sample of participants without compromising on the quality and depth of the data collected. Secondly, the target population, UK transgender theatre makers that openly identify as transgender, is a relatively small group of individuals, for many reasons that's discussed in the methodology chapter. Because of this, and because it is not quantitative data, it is hard to generalize about the whole target population. Despite this, the researcher is confident that they chose participants that represented a broad demographic of the target population (on class, gender identity, race, dis/ability, age and location) to be as intersectional and to be as representative as possible, which is discussed further in the methodology chapter. Finally, the choice of using semi-structured interviews as opposed to structured interviews may produce some limitations of the study design; because the semi structured interviews provide flexibility on what topics are discussed, the ability to compare results between participants may be "reduced because sequencing and wording will probably be different in each interview" (Newton, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the topics discussed in each interview may differ depending on the circumstances, interests and experience of the particular participants. Although this could be a potential limitation, the researcher considers this to be an advantage. This is because the purpose of this research project was to gain as much qualitative data about the lived experiences of the participants as possible and therefore a variety of topics discussed will mean a variety of lived experiences that can be understood and analysed.

The Importance of Language

When presenting information about transgender people and their experiences to those who have no or limited knowledge or experience can be pretty daunting – mainly because of the new terminology that is often used by transgender people and their allies. In this section of the thesis, some of the important terms will be discussed and clarification on their meanings will be implicit. The definitions that has been chosen for this thesis comes from the respected source GLAAD, who is one of the most prominent media advocacy organisation that primarily aims to improve representation of the LGBTQ+ community in the media. This source was chosen due to its reputation and due to its desire to use the most contemporary terminology.

Starting from the higher-level terminology, a person's gender expression is the way one presents their gender identity, through their dress sense, their name and pronouns whereas a person's gender identity is their inner feeling of their gender. When a person's gender identity and their gender expression does not conform to the traditional notions prescribed by society, this is where transgender identities become visible. Identifying as transgender refers to people whose gender identity does not conform with the sex that they were assigned at birth. Some people consider transgender and non-binary identities to be separate entities, however, in this thesis, the word transgender will use the broader definition to include any gender identity that does not conform to the cisgender identity. Non-binary is a gender identity is where a person's gender identity does not conform to the gender binary system, thus they do not identify as male or female, or their relationship between these identities are not as simple as it is with cisgender people. A cisgender identity is therefore at the opposite of the spectrum of gender and refers to a gender identity where their gender identity and the sex assigned at birth aligns (GLAAD, n.d.). Although this section only briefly discusses the key terminology, the reader is strongly encouraged to read through the GLAAD's glossary of terminology if this form of language is new. Although different people use terms such as trans, transgender and trans* with slightly different definitions, this thesis will use these words interchangeably due to the common usage of these words as interchangeable.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter of the thesis, the Literature Review, will explore the literature that has been published in academia around this topic. There are four main areas of focus: the history of the transgender community, the theoretical perspectives towards gender and gender identity, the emergence of the UK transgender theatre industry and power and power relations within the theatre industry. This chapter aims to situate this piece of research into the broader literature and seek to identify the current gaps within academia. The second chapter focuses on the methodology and theoretical framework of the thesis and research project. It explores the decisions made for this research project, for example the study design, and issues relating to how the study was conducted, for example the ethical considerations. This chapter aims to show the reader that thought and care had been taken to make sure the research could provide rich and accurate data whilst always prioritising ethical thinking. The third chapter is a combination of the results coupled with the discussion and links with the current scholarly work. This chapter is organised through a thematic approach, by focusing on the four main theme that was discovered through the study. The third chapter is the first part to the results and discussion section of the thesis. The chapter starts with the theme of representation within the theatre industry. The two main focuses for this theme is exploring historical representations of trans people and whether they have changed within contemporary theatre. The second theme will explore the links between the theatrical institutions and how that impacts the transgender theatremakers in the UK. This will explore how traditional institutions treat and support the trans community and offers explorations of alternative theatrical institutions, such as the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The third theme explores the closely linked theme of power within the industry and how those in power has a significant amount of power over transgender theatre makers. The final theme will explore the future of transgender theatre in the UK and what strategies can be looked at in the current industry to create a more positive future. This chapter will be followed by the conclusion chapter. In the conclusion I will start off by synthesizing the top results and briefly explaining what these results suggest about the broader issue of transgender theatre. I will then revisit my research question and aims and evaluate to what extent they have been met. It will then move on

to explore the contribution that this thesis and research project has contributed to the literature and industry as a whole. The chapter will then discuss the limitations of the project in a bit more detail and explain how the researcher reduced the impacts of the limitations had on the project. Finally, the chapter will present recommendations for further research, and suggestions for how the theatre industry can improve the representation of the transgender community and include more transgender people in positions of power. The final section of the thesis will consist of the bibliography and the appendices.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review will focus on three key areas, which will explore the available literature that will create a robust academic foundation for this thesis. For this thesis to have academic legitimacy, it is vital for this literature review to show academic rigour and understanding of the most important theoretical frameworks towards gender, from feminism to queer theory and transgender theory. This review will explore each of these frameworks and how they impact the world of the theatre. The second area that will be explored further is the popularisation of transgender theatre within the UK. This will cover prominent transgender performance, performers and fundamental policy shifts within the industry. Finally, the review will focus on the different types of theatre institutions, from the fringe to the mainstream and how different identities can impact one's success, such as being from a working-class background.

Theoretical Perspectives towards Gender and the Theatre

Scholars have debated and discussed issues such as gender, gender identity and gender expression since at least the start of the 20th century, when Freud developed his Psychoanalytic theoretical framework towards gender, which he argued that ‘gender development’ occurred during the Phallic stage which usually occurs in children between the ages of three years old and six years old (Freud & Breuer, 1957). As the decades went on, scholars started to develop an interest in gender studies, which led to John Money claiming responsibility for developing the term gender identity, to refer to a person’s inner sense of masculinity or femininity (Germon, 2009, p. 24). The idea of a person’s gender identity and their gender expression was then adopted and developed by second wave feminist scholars to build their argument that gender roles and gender expressions are used by the patriarchal society as a tool of oppression.

During the 1960s, experienced a shift in attitudes towards gender roles both in the private and public life. This second wave of feminism is usually defined in terms of a vast proportion of middle-class women who fought against government, public opinion, family organisations and private employers to knock down the institutional barriers and discrimination that women faced (Nicholson, 1997, p. 1). Building upon the success of first wave feminist, by achieving the right to vote for their representatives and gaining more rights and respect within society, the group of second wave feminists wanted to continue the momentum to challenge the patriarchal system by exposing how it works. Second wave feminists placed greater emphasis and importance on creating new academic research in order to support their cause which allowed scholars to develop their research into specific areas of women oppression, such as Anne Oakley. Oakley, abet celebrated the advancement in society that allowed women to take part in paid employment, she found that women still had a dual burden where even though she was in paid work, the structure of the nuclear family still relied on her free labour of doing the housework (Oakley, 1974). Another critical scholar that managed to have a defining influence over the movement was Carol Hinisch who argued that the personal is political (Hinisch, 2006, p. 6), which was a phrase that become popular amongst the second wave feminists. This argument was critiquing the common belief that what happened behind closed doors stays behind

closed doors. Hinisch instead argued that the relationships, norms and activities that occurred within the home was directly linked to the broader political landscape and scholars and policy makers should work upon this basis. A vital example of this was the expectation that women were responsible for the housework, which has a clear link to the “broad sense of the world as having to do with power relationships, not the narrow sense of electoral politics” (Hinisch, 2006, p. 1). When this argument is applied to the act of housework, it is clear that, due to the vast majority of nuclear families having the same structure, that the woman of the house being responsible for the housework was agreed by the woman but instead agreed under duress because the patriarchal nature of the nuclear family creates an unequal share of power within the relationship and therefore this acts as a tool of oppression against women. This idea relates directly to Oakley’s concept of the women being under a double shift because the man of the household could no longer use the breadwinner argument¹ because the woman was now contributing towards the household income but was still doing the housework. Oakley’s double burden was later developed, adding the emotional support of the family as an additional responsibility of the woman of the house and therefore terming it the triple shift (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995). Second wave feminists didn’t limit their research into just what happens within the family structures but also explored other areas of society, such as literature.

Kate Millett developed the theory of sexual politics which argued that those in power created and maintain a patriarchal and heteronormative control over society, and this can be seen through the western literature that supports these ideas (Millett, 1970). She argued that many of the writings of male authors contribute towards patriarchy through the way that they represented men and women in their writing. For example, she uses *Sexus* written by Henry Miller as an example of the way that women are represented as a “weak, compliant and rather unintelligent woman” (Millett, 1970, p. 6). She explained that writing like this can make the reader, if they are male, see a tremendous amount of power that they can experience during sex over the woman, which contribute to the patriarchal belief that women are inferior, and men hold the positions of power because they are biologically stronger

¹ This is the argument that men would use that because they are the breadwinner of the family, the person who brings in the money, then he should not be responsible for the housework.

(Millett, 1970, p. 6). Decades of second wave feminist had started to challenge the fundamental patriarchal beliefs of society and as the 1980s approached, a new wave of feminism began to develop, which is commonly referred to as the third wave of feminism. This type of feminism further split into different groups who had other priorities and beliefs about what can be done to liberate women from the patriarchal society.

Third Wave Feminism: TERFS, Glitch Feminism and Transfeminism

Judith Butler challenged the very foundations of feminist thinking, querying the most basic assumptions of Feminists; what is a woman? What is femaleness and femininity? She starts her book, *Gender Trouble*, with some potentially controversial quotes from other scholars, such as “Strictly speaking, ‘woman’ cannot be said to exist” (Butler, 1990, p. 3), which sets the scene for what she goes on to write. Is the term woman as simple as Feminist scholars have portrayed for many decades? She makes the argument that through the early feminist theory, it was important to have clear language to further support the political campaign of increasing representation of woman, due to the “cultural conditions” that acted against women (Butler, 1990). However, she then goes on to make the argument that in the modern world, there is no longer a simplistic definition of what it means to be a woman (Butler, 1990). Her theory of gender performativity disputes the idea that gender is natural part of being human (Finlay, 2017, pg. 32). Butler argues that no human is born with a preconceived notion of their gender before language, but we are instead “established as gendered subjects” (Finlay, 2017). Butler develop the term Heterosexual Matrix.

“[the Heterosexual Matrix] designates that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, gender and desires are naturalized . [is] . . a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990).

Butler challenges this term and critiquing the “essentialist and universal notions of patriarchy, women, and bodily sex” which she argues causes simplification in sexuality and identity (Patil, 2018).

Through her insistence on uncoupling the categories of sex and gender, Butler undermines the ontological a subject and their action. For example, if a woman puts on lipstick, this is not simply a characteristic of being female but instead it is an example of “girling” whereby the subject is only made intelligible through this action (Butler, 1993, pg. 35). By this logic, this means that there is no gender behind their gender expression but instead their gender and identity is created performative by the expressions that they choose, which used to be assumed to be a result of their gender.

Due to the changes within contemporary society, feminism has formed different groups trying to achieve the same goal through different means; from Glitch Feminism (Russell, 2020), to Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (Gutzwa, 2021) and Transfeminism.² (Koyama, 2003). These three types of Feminism were developed, mainly, in response to the rise in acceptance and understanding of transgender people, particularly transgender women, and the notion of gender identity. They have different perspectives towards transgender people, and it is important that this thesis analyses their perspectives in more detail. It is believed that the term Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERFs) was first used in a blog created by two cisgender radical feminists (Williams, 2016). The foundational belief system within this group of scholars is that transgender women stand for the complete opposite of what they want to achieve, as radical feminists, to free women, albeit only cisgender women, from the patriarchal restraints of society (Gutzwa, 2021). The main arguments and ideas of TERFs rests solely on the basic assumption that “sex is biological and fixed, rejecting the idea of socially constructed gender” (Hotine, 2021). This therefore means that they reject the idea of gender identity, whilst claiming it is a new characteristic of humanity, in favour of the more restricted term of sex. This is because they believe that the discrimination that women have been suffering from is intrinsically linked to the female biological body and the socialisation that a cisgender girl gets growing up (Hotine, 2021). For example, the women’s unpaid carer role is linked to them becoming

² Although Transfeminism is usually presented in the form of trans feminism or trans/feminism within England, I will be using the term ‘Transfeminism as this was the original way of writing it as set out by Emi Koyama (Bettcher, 2017, p. 2).

pregnant. However, once this claim is analysed, this argument could “work against TERFs” because it is the biology has been used by the patriarchal system to justify that women are naturally better at being caregivers and therefore it is the social biases that exists that create these links, not the biological female body itself (Hotine, 2021). Germaine Greer, a prominent TERF, claimed in an interview that transgender women “are not women” (Greer, 2015). A more recent example of a TERF is that of J.K. Rowling, who wrote an essay on her website that she called a manifesto that explained her views towards transgender women. Her central argument was that the transgender movement presented a danger to “young people, gay people” and threatened “women’s and girl’s rights” (Rowling, 2020). Some TERFs have compared transgender acceptance to violence towards women; Janice Raymond argued that “all transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating their body for themselves” (Raymond, 1979). Despite the popularity of TERFs within the United Kingdom, there have been some critique of their ideology. One particular criticism of the TERF ideology and the arguments that prominent TERFs publicly declare comes from the “third conditional” (Breslow, 2021) grammar argument. This criticism attacks the argument that TERFs, in particular JK Rowling, promotes that if they were born in a transgender accepting society, such as contemporary society, then they would have been persuaded to transition as a child, to potentially escape from the discrimination that women face in society. It is clear that people who make this argument are not supporting the systems in place that helps to keep trans kids in the United Kingdom but instead creating a hypothetical situation to create an illusion of a threat to modern day children (Breslow, 2021). Unlike other forms of feminism, TERFs don’t seem to accept the intersectional nature of being a woman in the 21st century. The rise in popularity of the intersectionality approach towards gender studies has led to an increase in forms of feminism that is accepting of transgender identities, such as Glitch Feminism.

According to Glitch Feminism, as theorised by Legacy Russell, the gender binary system is, and always was, precarious (Russell, 2020, p. 2). This gender binary system, which is toxic in its nature, forces us to believe that as individuals we are “unchangeable” and that the way that society views people’s identities is preconceived by society already without input from the community (Russell,

2020, p. 3). In the technological world, a glitch, referring to an error, is often seen as an anxiety inducing worry which creates a desperate need for it to be fixed. However, if we applied this notion of a glitch, something going wrong, to the biggest system known to man, the system that controls our society, then things start to take a different perspective. Glitch feminism celebrates these glitches within the societal machine as a form of “nonperformance” or “refusal” (Russell, 2020, p. 3). Glitch Feminism wants to break free from the habit of gendering someone’s bodies and instead bringing back the abstract nature of gender and race itself. At its heart, Glitch Feminism is “a manifesto that seeks to embody the material of a decolonised, art historical text intended to empower artists to speak for themselves” (Curran-Troop, 2022). This theory can be applied to the transgender community that is currently experiencing greater acceptance and support in the UK. Transgender people, and people who are gender diverse, can be seen as glitches in the system we call society. They don’t conform to the rules and norms of the gender binary system and therefore they are creating glitches in the mainframe of society. Instead of seeing these glitches as problems to be fixed, it could be seen as the right time to see them as “the most fantastic and beautiful mistake” (Russell, 2020, p. 4) of society and celebrate their differences and uniqueness. Transgender people were never “meant to survive, we are still here: an error in the algorithm” (Russell, 2020, p. 4). This can be applied to how transgender artists create theatre in the UK; many of these artists create theatre that celebrate their ‘otherness’ and uses it as a superpower. For example, Tabby Lamb’s work celebrates her transness and is unafraid to break the traditional theatrical or societal norms when it comes to gender and gender expression. Although Glitch Feminism endeavours to include the voices of transgender women in their work, Emi Koyama and Diana Courant develop a specific form of feminism that was created by and for trans women specifically.

It is commonly understood that the term ‘Transfeminism’ was coined by Emi Koyama and Diana Courant in their Transfeminism Manifesto (Stryker & Bettcher, 2016). The foundational principle of Transfeminism is “a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond” (Koyama, 2003, p. 5). Transfeminism is centred

around the idea of intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw developed the term intersectionality to discuss the differences between different groups within a community. She put this in context of the violence against women and argued that the specific type of violence that they experience is usually shaped by their other identity categories, such as their social class or their racial identity (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). She argued that mainstream feminist scholarship ignored the differences between the different groups of women and therefore a new intersectional approach to research should be adopted (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). The idea of intersectionality was adopted by Koyama in her transfeminist theoretical framework.

Koyama's interpretation of intersectionality has two key points; firstly, there are more than one forms of oppression and cannot be separated. Secondly, if we focus on privilege and oppression then we can see links between racism and sexism (Koyama, 2003). Transgender studies, Koyama argues, is a direct response to how transgender people, particularly transgender women, are treated by specific sectors of feminism, in particular Radical Feminism and TERF. This can be seen through a lack of representation of trans women within mainstream feminism, and even open hostility towards trans women by TERFs. Koyama argues that there are two ways to respond to the specific aggressive forms of Feminism that demands that trans women be excluded from feminism. The first is not to engage in the debate. This is because if you engage in the debate over whether trans women are women then you start at a point that suggests that it is acceptable to debate the legitimacy of a trans woman's identity but not other identities. This causes significant problems for trans theorists. Therefore, the second approach is to engage in their debates in order to show them where their thinking has gone wrong. Koyama argues that both directions have their merit but it depends on one's "specific goals at the time" (Koyama, 2003). This debate between the two sides of the argument can be seen through the creative choices that transgender artists make when creating their performances. For example, Tabby Lamb has created work from a perspective of educating cisgender audiences and therefore engaging in the debate of whether trans people are legitimate women and therefore engages in the discussion. However, Travis Alabanza's *Burgerz* performance refused to engage in the debate and instead started from the foundation that trans women are not only legitimate, and the wider transgender and non-

binary community, but they often suffer from trans-misogyny – where a trans woman often faces transphobia on top of misogyny. Both of these approaches are equally valid and trans people are entitled to use whichever approach they think is most effective at defeating transphobia.

By the logic of Butler’s arguments, it could be argued that she would support the argument that transgender people, particularly transgender women, are a legitimate gender. This view has been supported by an interview that was conducted with Judith Butler, when Butler, after being asked about Trans-Exclusionary Feminists, said “The feminist who holds such a view presumes that the penis does define the person, and that anyone with a penis would identify as a woman for the purposes of entering such changing rooms and posing a threat to the women inside. It assumes that the penis is the threat, or that any person who has a penis who identifies as a woman is engaging in a base, deceitful, and harmful form of disguise. This is a rich fantasy” (Butler, 2020). In this quote, she argues that having specific body autonomy does not define a person’s gender nor does it determine their intent towards other people or their danger levels, especially towards cisgender women. She also argues that it would be a dangerous decision on the part of feminists if they chose to go back in time and rely on the biological argument for gender or for putting so much emphasis on certain body types. Despite this, she makes it clear, that in her opinion, Trans-Exclusionary Feminists are not Feminists because they attack “the dignity of trans people” and they believe that “we have to renew the feminist commitment to gender equality and gender freedom in order to affirm the complexity of gendered lives as they are currently being lived” (Butler, 2020). This poststructuralist view is shared by many other scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault. De Beauvoir is perhaps most famous for her quote, in her book *The Second Sex*, saying, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 1949). Beauvoir suggests that gender is not created at birth but instead is gradually acquired through life (Butler, 1986). Although the feminist views that have been explored have very strong views on gender and sex, Simone de Beauvoir has a potentially more relaxed view of the relationship between sex and gender. TERFs may argue that sex determines a person’s gender and therefore sex is the more important aspect, Transfeminists may argue that it is how a person feels in

regard to their gender that is important, this literature review makes the argument that, in Beauvoir's opinion, they both have some level of importance. Due to the rise in academic work that explored trans and gay experiences, it was inevitable that a specific theoretical framework would be established to focus on gay and trans issues specifically, this led to the development of the academic theoretical framework of Queer Theory.

The word queer was originally used as a slur against homosexual people but as society started to shift, Stonewall had contributed to the increased acceptance and celebration of the gay community, the LGBTQ+ community reclaimed this word as a way of identifying themselves in a positive manner (Jagose, 1996, p. 1). LGBTQ+ people started to identify as queer if their sexuality was different to being heterosexual and if their gender identity was different to being cisgender. Therefore, a theory was established to study the lived experiences of the newly formed queer community – so called Queer Theory. Although many in the community may resist the temptation of the cisgender and heterosexual community to make a strict definition of queerness; some argue that “the more it verges on becoming a normative academic discipline, the less queer ‘queer theory’ can plausibly claim to be” (Halperin, 1995, p. 1). The rise in popularity and academic acceptance of Queer Theory needs to be put into the appropriate social, political and historical context. This rise happened during the AIDS moral panic of the UK and this would have had a big influence. This would have been the first time that gay and lesbian groups worked in an organised manner to achieve a shared goal (Morland & Willox, 2017, p. 7). It allowed the gay community to have a rethink of how they approach their activism and allowed them to reinvent their means of making their voices heard (Morland & Willox, 2017, p. 7). It could also be claimed that Queer Theory developed as a response to criticisms of forms of feminisms and the rise of postmodern and post structuralist ideas (Morland & Willox, 2017, p. 7).

Although Queer Theory is a popular perspective for the LGBTQ+ community, the relevance and effectiveness of using the queer theory perspective when studying the transgender community can be severely questioned. One of the issues of using a queer approach to trans studies is that many queer

theory scholars believe in the idea that trans studies came after queer, we moved from queer to trans; this isn't the case. As a result, even though trans studies has gained academic recognition as a separate area of academic discipline, some theorists, such as those from Queer Theory, do not see it as an individual area of research in its own right; it is treated as a subsection of queer theory (Keegan, 2020, p. 350). This doesn't mean that queer theory excludes trans studies but instead will only recognise it as an academic field if they follow a certain predetermined set of ideas and therefore trans scholarship is expected to support the central values of queer theory (Keegan, 2020, p. 350). As a result, this thesis will not be putting much emphasis on queer theory but instead will try to develop a trans approach. Although there is a growing body of academic work being created under the banner of Transgender Theory, it has not yet reached the same status as other, more established theories, such as Queer Theory or Feminism. Certain perspectives have also become outdated, such as postmodernism and will therefore not be given much prominence during the analysis.

The last fifty years or so has seen a rapid evolution in terms of theoretical frameworks towards our understanding of gender, sex and gender expression. The mid to late half of the 20th century saw a growth in Feminist debates and discussions and subsequent advancements in theory in regards to gender, which led to theories like TERF and Transfeminism being developed. After exploring a wide variety of different theoretical frameworks towards gender, this thesis will refine its focus on specific theories that is relevant to this research project, such as Glitch Feminism and third wave feminists. Ideas from key scholars will also be explored throughout this thesis, such as Butler's idea of gender performativity.

The Popularisation of UK Transgender Theatre

Transgender theatre in the UK has seen a noticeable increase in transgender themed performances or performances that star a transgender actor, or a transgender creative team. This section of the literature review will focus on two key sections of transgender theatre. The first section will focus on the foundations of transgender theatre, such as gay theatre and women's theatre. It will explore the struggles that these types of theatre encountered, and how some of these are similar to transgender

theatre, and how some of the developments that they achieved led to the transgender theatre development. The second section of the literature review will focus on the 2010s and 2020s where there has seen a huge rise in transgender themed performances, and industry wide reforms that have improved the industry to become more trans friendly.

UK Gay and Lesbian Theatre and Women's Theatre

To fully understand the popularisation of transgender theatre in the UK, it is important to understand the other theatre sectors that have helped to create the foundation for transgender theatre, such as Gay Theatre and Feminist Theatre. Up until 1968, when The Theatres Act was given Royal Assent, theatres in the UK were required to have their plays approved by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, through an official censorship process for theatres that was enforced by the government; to ensure material that was deemed inappropriate would not appear on British stages. Because depicting homosexuality on stage was effectively banned, playwrights had to be more creative when it came to representing the gay community. If a playwright was creating a homosexual character, the character "might be signified by appearance, manner, diction and behaviour" and the characteristics would all represent "effeminacy or femininity" and the opposite of traditional masculinity traits (de Jongh, 2005, p. 3)³.

Although two theatre productions can be credited as being a catalyst for persuading the Labour Home Secretary to establish an inquiry into the censorship of theatre, which led to the Theatres Act of 1968 that ended censorship, gay theatre still remained in the fringes of UK theatre throughout the late 1960s to the 1980s (Deeney, 2006, p. 398).

Although homosexual theatre often represented socially marginalised communities, the lesbian community was a group that was further marginalised even within the homosexuality community.

Helen Freshwater suggested that "many plays that reflect lesbian subjectivity or experience have been effectively excised from history" (Freshwater, 2001, p. 310); the suggestion is that lesbian theatre has

³ The modern-day metrosexual, a heterosexual man who is interested in fashion or traditional feminine activities, would have been seen as a synonym for a gay man in the 1920s.

suffered erasure during history, similar to the erasure of transgender theatre. Freshwater further claims that the images of lesbianism in British theatre in the first half of the 20th century was “often homophobic, prurient, and deeply conventional in their reinstatement of the heterosexual norm” (Freshwater, 2001, p. 312). The way that lesbian theatre was treated in the first half of the 20th century describes a similar story to how transgender theatre has been treated in the early 21st century. Like lesbian theatre was engaged in a potentially homophobic manner, transgender theatre has been treated with a transphobic attitude; both forms of theatre have suffered erasure and they both often were made or presented through the heteronormative lens. Despite the struggles that gay theatre suffered through, the latter half of the 20th century saw an increase in productions that explored overtly homosexual themes.

During the late 20th century, theatre companies started to explore homosexual themes on stage. The Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company was the first professional gay theatre company to perform on British stages, during the 1970s and beyond (Freeman, 2014, p. 136). This was a big milestone for UK gay theatre; instead of implying homosexuality on stage, theatre companies were now allowed to show homosexuality on the stage explicitly. Their goal was to create “authentically gay theatre through narratives and characters that reflected their own and other gay people’s experiences” whilst also ignoring the “narrow and often homophobic stereotypes that which had previously dominated the British stage” (Greer, 2012, p. 42). Inter-Action was a community-based theatre organisation based in London, that was established in 1968 to increase community involvement in the arts (Osment, 1989, p. XIV). The company was based at the Almost Free Theatre, who got its name from their practice of asking their audiences to pay for their ticket on the basis of what they can afford (Osment, 1989, p. XIV). The name also had a second meaning; “the aim was to produce plays that would lead people to the brink of liberation – to the state of being ‘almost free’ – at which point they could choose to take action” (Osment, 1989, p. XIV). The season that focused on women in 1973 helped to form The Woman’s Theatre Group.

The Woman's Theatre Group was founded as a mixed gender company, in 1973 at but had women in the majority; including in positions of power, including all the permanent members of the company were women and during the hiring process preference was given to women (Greer, 2012, p. 43). The company also worked differently to what was considered the norm within British theatre; instead of the director led, and the emphasis on the hierarchal approach to management, The Woman's Theatre Group was a performer led organisation, whose membership was a majority of performers, and commission work from outsider women writers or devised their own work (Greer, 2012, p. 43). The company later decided to be a single gender company, and Michelene Wandor, the company's artistic director, explained her views on the decision. As women they have the power to control the work they do (whatever power struggles and differences there are within the group). In the aesthetics of their work, because there are no men in the group, they are forced to conceive, evolve and commission work which is absolutely situated on the territory of women's experiences and relationships. (Wandor, 1984, p. 78). Companies like The Woman's Theatre Group were developed due to the support of Inter-Action. Inter-Action provided, possibly the most valuable, service for marginalised groups within the theatre industry. They trained members of a marginalised group, for example gay men, in all aspects of theatre and production; from directing to technical support. On the surface level, the significance of this service may be overlooked. However, this allowed the group of people to possess the skills needed in order to create their own theatre, independent from mainstream theatre and on their terms; the idea behind this scheme was that if the marginalised group "could take control over the whole process of production, they could be prey to the same problems they had encountered in mainstream theatre: being defined in part or in whole by limited, homophobic expectations, characters and narratives" (Greer, 2012, p. 44). The thinking behind this scheme is that if those who are discriminated against, or those in underrepresented groups, are given the training and tools that they need to create their own theatre, they will be less vulnerable to the institutional barriers.

There were two central principles that existed within gay theatre of the mid to late 20th century that created the need for gay led theatre companies. Firstly, the oppression of the gay community is directly linked to the "production and reproduction of damaging, limited and stereotypical images of

homosexuality” (Greer, 2012, p. 45). Secondly, the fundamental belief that the performing arts or theatre industry was gay friendly was misleading and only existed to conceal the fact that gay people were discouraged from coming out which led to a second level of oppression – self oppression (Greer, 2012, p. 45). At the same time that gay theatre was influencing the origins of queer and trans theatre, feminist theatre, specifically second wave feminists, were having an influence as well. Second wave feminist theatre makers started to use their own lived experiences as a way of creating theatre – thus developing the autobiographical performance.

Autobiographical Theatre and Solo Performers

Deirdre Heddon is a professor of contemporary theatre at the University of Glasgow and specialised in the study of autobiographical theatre in her book *Autobiography and Performance* in 2008.

Autobiographical work has been favoured by those who often face institutional barriers, which allows them a platform to share their own lived experiences. Heddon defines autobiographical performance as “a broad term which encompasses examples of solo autobiographical work, community and applied drama, oral narrative and oral history performance, verbatim drama, documentary drama, testimonial performance, performance art and instances of site specific and time based practice” (Heddon, 2008, p. 11). Autobiographical theatre is often created by “marginalised subjects”; most of the theatre makers that use autobiography in their work are black, gay, lesbian or transgender (Heddon, 2008, p. 2). Heddon argues that the link between marginalised theatre makers and the use of autobiographical work is not coincidental. This could be because this type of work can “capitalise on theatre’s unique temporality” and “its ability to respond to and engage with the present” whilst always keeping one eye on the future (Heddon, 2008, p. 2). Second wave feminists saw this type of theatre as a way of resisting their social marginality but instead become powerful individuals who have their own voice. The theatrical benefit of autobiographical theatre is that it allows the marginalised individuals or group to take centre stage and talk their truth to the world; although having a voice on the stage does not automatically turn that into political power or equality but it does provide a good start (Heddon, 2008, p. 3). Many theorists and practitioners not only acknowledge but celebrate the importance and

benefits of autobiographical theatre; Nellie McKay argues that “the life story (or portions of it) has been the most effective forum for defining black selfhood in a racially oppressed world” (McKay, 1995, p. 96). Although socially marginalised groups and feminist theatre makers recognise the importance and artistic quality in creating autobiographical work, not all people share the same level of enthusiasm towards autobiographical theatre work. John Howell levelled the following criticism towards the practice of this type of theatrical style. it is as often an ego show as a revelation; the virus of the I-Did-It-My-Way/I-GottaBe-Me strain afflicts the larger number of such acts, particularly in the performance art area which presents amateurish staging techniques and mini-personalities as often as original methods and subjects” (Howell, 1979, p. 158). Despite the criticism aimed at this art form, it’s difficult to ignore the positive impacts it has on socially marginalised groups. The notion that those who engage and produce autobiographical theatre are self-indulgence is, Richard Layzell argues, is a stereotype which they are stuck with until a new understanding of this artform becomes mainstream and dispels these myths and stereotypes (Butler & Ayers, 1991, p. 49). Heddon suggests that the negative attitudes towards autobiographical theatre might be rooted in prejudice. A close link between women’s theatre and transgender theatre and autobiographical work is clear. It could be argued that the prejudice that is aimed at these socially marginalised groups leads to the negative connotations with this style of theatre (Heddon, 2008, p. 4). Because of the effective use of autobiographical theatre that was used by second wave feminist theatre makers, other socially marginalised groups followed their example; Gay Sweatshop theatre “realised the importance the importance of autobiographical gesture within society” (Heddon, 2008, p. 25) and transgender artists, such as Tabby Lamb’s *Since U Been Gone* show uses this style. In contemporary theatre, transgender theatre makers typically use the autobiographical type of their debut show, for example Tabby Lam’s *Since U Been Gone*. Whether autobiographical theatre is a means of breaking the oppression of socially marginalised or an ‘ego show’, it deserves to be treated as a credible, creative and influential art form. The transgender theatre of the 2010s and 2020s have almost mirrored the experiences and

issues faced by the gay theatre during the 1970s and 1980s. The two central issues, explored by Greer⁴, that gay theatre experienced is being experienced in an almost identical manner by transgender actors at the moment. The theatre industry in its current form is rife with damaging images and stereotypes of the transgender community that is being reproduced on an almost daily basis. There could be an argument made that there is now space within the theatre industry for a contemporary form of Inter-Action to be established, with the specific goal of supporting early career transgender creatives in the UK. There would be some key differences between the original company and the potential new one. Firstly, not all transgender theatremakers want to be working in the mainstream and therefore become mainstream theatremakers. Some theatre makers celebrate their 'otherness' through resisting the mainstream and using this as a de facto superpower. Secondly, many transgender theatre makers not only resist being part of the mainstream, but also resist using mainstream theatrical styles or theatre processes. For example, some are more likely to use different mediums, such as using the internet to stream their work rather than the traditional theatre venues. As a result of this, the new theatre company could provide these resources and training to transgender creatives, or those who wish to be a creative, to not only compete in the mainstream but also to create their own space on the fringes of theatre, if that's the route they want to go down. This type of company, or set of companies, could provide the opportunities for trans creatives to take ownership of their work and have a space to have their voice heard.

Key Milestones of the 21st century Transgender Theatre

Although transgender theatre has existed in different forms throughout history, it could be argued that the start of an established transgender sector of the UK theatre industry started with Jo Clifford's *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven* which, when it was premiered in 2009. Was one of the first shows that was written and starred a transgender person in the UK (Dazed, 2019). During this time, attitudes towards transgender people was not as positive as during the contemporary era and

⁴ The idea that the oppression of the homosexual community is directly linked to the production and reproduction of dangerous stereotypes. Secondly, there is this myth that the theatre industry is gay friendly which is spread about to conceal the homophobia.

transgender people were not protected under the Equality Act 2010. Clifford spoke of protests, from religious groups, and received hostility from UK news organisations, such as the BBC, claiming that the play was ridiculous (Dazed, 2019). Despite the initial unfavourable response, her show was still performed years later and Clifford described a change in attitude, the death threats have disappeared and people now view going to see an LGBTQ+ themed show as a political act to show their support for diversity (Dazed, 2019). Some theatre makers believe that the primary responsibility is to give their audiences entertainment, however Clifford' argues that her role, is to tell a story, not to make their audiences feel comfortable. This could mean that theatre makers should explore and present the uncomfortable truths without fear (Clifford, 2012, p. 11). Since the performances of this controversial play was first performed, some industry wide changes have occurred.

Shortly after Clifford's performance premiered, Arts Council England (ACE) launched *The Creative Case for Diversity* with the principle aim of driving "change on our stages, our galleries and in our museums" (Hussain, 2020). The idea behind this scheme was to encourage those organisations who receive funding from ACE to improve their diversity levels in areas of leadership, governance and workforce in order to keep their levels of funding. Although The Creative Case for Diversity has been beneficial for certain demographics, such as ethnic minority groups and cis gender women, there has not been an equal degree of focus on the transgender community within the statistics, although the latest report of diversity has now included LGBTQ+ people as a demographic, which shows some improvement in terms of attitudes (Arts Council England, 2021). Despite the lack of desired progress from ACE, there has been some progress within the wider industries. The start of the 2010s saw a new wave of performances that started to challenge traditional ideas of 'truth' and 'identity', for example Lazlo Pearlman's *Fake Orgasm*, which explores questions of gender, identity and sexuality and asks questions, such as why does it matter to others who people are attracted to (Jeppesen, 2011). An important aspect of this performance is the natural ability of the show to question the very basics of identity and how society views identity of individuals. This is a key area that transgender theatre can explore because, for many cisgender people, the whole notion of the transgender identity challenges the very notions of what many are taught about one's identity. This was a significant milestone for

transgender theatre because these ideas were not discussed or debated within the public sphere, as it is in the 2020s. The momentum started building from the early 2010s, not just in terms of productions but also the support being offered to transgender creatives.

In July 2015 a new scheme called TransActing was established to engage with “trans and/or non-binary people’s place within the creative and cultural sector” (TransActing, n.d.). This joint collaboration between Gendered Intelligence and The Royal School of Speech and Drama started with a 5 day series of masterclasses, at workshops in London to help to prepare transgender creatives to develop their skills and gain more opportunities in the industry; this number has increased to around 200 people have participated in these workshops, panel discussions and master classes. This was the first of its kind within the UK – whilst having a partner like the Royal School of Speech and Drama (which is renowned for its quality of teaching and research) gave this project added trust and prominence. Within the UK, there are generally two different routes into performer training: the university route and the drama school approach. The stereotypical route for actor training is the drama school, where performers are given intensive training and prepare them for the acting industry. However, this option is not available to everyone as the cost of this intensive training can cost twice the amount of an undergraduate degree, with many of these schools requiring up to half of those fees paid up front, instead of paying for it through student finance (Moseley, 2019, p. 9). This option therefore is limited to working class people who do not have enough disposable income to pay for this type of training. The alternative route, therefore, for many, is to study at university a drama or theatre degree, as there is government backed funding for this. One of the differences with the TransActing program that helps its transgender participants is the community that it builds. In many of the drama schools or universities, there are few transgender people on the course, whereas in TransActing, all the participants identify as transgender and therefore it builds a community and network of transgender actors and creatives, which can aid in their confidence which helps to lead to a successful career (Mcnamara, 2020, p. 250). This project shows that it can be beneficial for there to be trans only spaces for participants to be able to develop their skills and confidence within a community where the participants have similar lived experiences and can collaborate on this strong foundation. Following

on from this innovative project, transgender themed plays started to become more popular within UK theatre.

In the latter half of the 2010s, a series of transgender or non-binary artists started to become established within their area of theatre. Although there are many artists who fit this new category, this review only has the capacity to explore those who are most well known and who have had a sizeable impact within transgender theatre. The first of those is a non-binary performer, writer and campaigner, Travis Alabanza, who has enjoyed a significant amount of success, not only within transgender communities, but within the mainstream industry as well. Alabanza, who grew up in a working-class family and identifies as both black and mixed race and non-binary, creates work to challenge transphobia within society and to provide audiences with knowledge and understanding of the struggles that transgender and non-binary people have to endure (Alabanza, 2022, p. 5). Their first performance was *Burgerz*, which was written in response to a transphobic attack that they suffered from in broad day light in London – when a burger was thrown at them whilst being called a ‘tranny’. However, Alabanza managed to turn this negative event into a “sassy, humane show” (Fisher, 2019). Although the stimulus and motivation for this show was the act of violence that Alabanza suffered, the show is not simply about their experience but instead they sat down with 190 trans people to gain an understanding of their experiences of transphobic abuse. One common theme that Alabanza discovered was that trans people often have food thrown at them (Affan, 2021, p. 99). Alabanza argues that a lot of discussions about transgender people and their experiences get focused on the theoretical side of things – exploring their legitimacy, the use of pronouns and which bathrooms they should be allowed to use- and very real and immediate issues, such as the inability for many trans people to leave their home safely in the UK – is often overlooked (Affan, 2021). One of the criticisms of current theatre is that the performances usually tell non-binary and transgender people their experiences rather than letting them explain their experiences themselves. Alabanza therefore argues that their show *Burgerz* was a way to talk back to the industry and to bring those transgender experiences that are often performed in queer clubs into the mainstream theatre institutions. This, if it could be achieved, would prevent the UK theatre industry from ignoring them, they would have to

listen. Other transgender artists have taken different approaches to the way they create and present their work, such as Tabby Lamb.

Tabby Lamb is a director, writer and performer, based in East London, who identifies as a femme non-binary theatre maker. She has written and performed in many theatrical performances and performing at different types of venues, such as theatres, Edinburgh Fringe Festivals and on the internet. She likes to make performances that inserts transgender experiences and characters in to every day situations and story lines, for example her recent performance *Happy Meal*. The performance *Happy Meal* explores the friendships that were made and how life was lived within online communities such as Club Penguin and MSN. Although a large proportion of her audiences are likely to identify as transgender, gender diverse or be trans allies, those cis gender people who don't have any experiences with transgender people can still relate to can relate to the main characters in the world of internet and classic websites that British kids and teens used whilst growing up (O'Dell, 2022). This performance shows the beauty of the safety of digital spaces for minority groups and allows them to be their true selves. In recent years, some structural change to certain areas of the industry have started to reform due to pressure from campaign groups and UK artists, such as The Trans Casting Statement.

As mentioned above, on 9th March 2020 a backlash towards casting decisions made by Donmar Theatre, where they cast a cisgender actor to perform a transgender character, become a catalyst for a set of changes within the UK theatre industry that would then become known as the Trans Casting Statement. The next day an open letter was written to Donmar Theatre regarding this casting decision. They said that their decision to cast a cis actor was disappointing and they believed if they could not find a trans actor to fulfil the role then they should not have performed that particular show (Taylor, et al., 2020). This led to a discussion amongst trans theatre makers of all demographics to devise a set of statements that theatres should follow, and this became the Trans Casting Statement. Although not much research has been completed into the effectiveness of this new policy or the long term benefits of this, due to it being only recently agreed to, the fact that many theatres have already agreed to

follow this shows that theatres are actively trying to improve the industry for the transgender community.

Although there has been transgender theatre in some form throughout history, it could be argued that the established transgender theatre section of the industry in the UK started gaining momentum in the 21st century and has had many recent developments in the last decade. Some of the early changes was achieved through trail blazers who sought to change the narrative on transgender issues and representations, such as Jo Clifford, which set the scene for more innovative theatre to be developed by theatre creatives, such as Travis Alabanaza. However, it is not just transgender artists that is gaining prominence that's driving the changes, but industry wide reforms are being tried and tested, such as all transgender acting courses (TransActing) or industry wide policies such as The Trans Casting Statement. These changes could indicate a somewhat optimistic future for transgender theatre.

Power Relationships, Theatre Processes and Institutions

Social Class and Theatre

Meritocracy is a concept that defines success as a result of hard work and thus if you work hard, you will find success in a meritocratic society or organisation. This concept was used as a foundational belief by UK governments, from Thatcher's government, through to the New Labour and reintroduced itself during David Cameron's austerity government. Tony Blair's Neoliberal New Labour government shifted its traditional focus, of focusing on institutional inequalities that existed within society, and instead argued that it was characteristics that were most commonly associated with conservatism, such as snobbery or privilege (O'Neill & Wayne, 2022, p. 3). Where traditional Conservatives would have used words like culture, to refer to the rich British history of the arts, New Labour used the word creativity and with this, a shift of focus occurred within the arts industries. Instead of focusing on the end product, the focus was shifted to the process of making and this therefore allowed anything that could be used to create more money could be classed as the creative industries. This type of thinking that took over the mindset of policymakers created the route for which people could see the positives of an industry which relies on precarious employment (O'Neill & Wayne, 2022, p. 3). Precarious, in the context of this review, refers to the contemporary

phenomenon where a person's living and working situations are subject to change, where the individual has no control or power over (Pewny, 2011, p. 43). Instead of the creative industries being built upon a meritocratic foundation, it could be argued that there exists a class ceiling where there is a limit on a person's income, and their ability to progress the industry ladder, based on a person's social class.

There has long been this debate between whether the theatre industries are a meritocratic industry or whether it relies on hierarchal systems based on identities such as social class, race or gender.

Prominent stage and screen actor Christopher Eccleson claimed to have a successful career in the theatre, especially in the cities, you need to meet three central criteria; you need to be white; you need to be born a male and you need to be middle class (Denham, 2015). Although there are always exceptions, for example Eccleson himself has managed to establish a successful career whilst also coming from a working class background, these unwritten norms or expectations can close a lot of doors for people who do not come from those demographic groups.

The precarious nature of the theatre industry creates a distinct disadvantage for the working class community. Since the 2008 financial crisis, precarious work conditions, especially within the arts industry, has become the norm, rather than the exception. This precarious labour market has been in the making since the 1970s, where, according to Guy Standing, a new global class has been established; the precariat (a mixture between the proletariat and the precarious work conditions that they are forced to accept) (Standing, 2016, p. 8). Since shifts in belief has occurred by policymakers in the UK, theatre makers have been forced into a more precarious and individualised theatre industry. Theatre makers can no longer rely on state funding but also to include private funding which can cause an industry that is made up of theatre makers, who have been forced to be independent and business savvy, who may have to change their artistic visions and still not achieve financial stability (Harvie, 2013). The new normal precarious nature of the theatre industry in the UK could be one of the factors that is influencing the lack of representation of transgender artists in the UK. Policies such as The Trans Casting Statement, although is positive for those transgender actors already in the industry, doesn't help those transgender people who want to join the career but are either discouraged

due to the lack of funding for training or who can't earn enough in the industry to stay in the industry. Middle class early career actors are more likely able to stay in and rely on savings or family financial support but with working class transgender people, who many may be estranged from their family due to transphobia, are unlikely to survive working in the industry without state funding or private organisations who aim to support them.

Fringe Theatre

The UK theatre industry has been built upon centuries of progress and theatrical experimentation which has led to the contemporary industry that exists now. This industry has been influenced by the different theatre practitioners around the world that have created a new perspective towards theatre, such as Stanislavski's naturalistic approach or Bertolt Brecht's political theatre approach. However, the industry is now becoming broad enough to allow outsider art to flourish and to find their own space. Many trans theatre makers have sought to use different methods or styles to create their work, for example Lamb used the internet to broadcast some of their work instead of traditional theatres. With transgender theatre makers, some of them resist the need to be absorbed by the mainstream theatre and performing in mainstream theatre institutions but instead desire to work in the fringes of theatre, such as the prominent Edinburgh Fringe Festivals.

As the 19th century came to an end, a movement within society started to gain momentum, a group of people who wanted to develop an independent form of theatre – free from those bourgeois that had controlled theatre for centuries. New types of theatres and clubs started to emerge with different types of financial backing (Chambers, 2011, p. 329). The goal of this movement was to create a form of art, or a form of theatre, outside of the commercial theatre industry. Many of those within this movement wanted to present this new form of theatre to groups within society who had been systematically excluded from commercial theatre, but this wasn't the main goal for all those involved (Chambers, 2011, p. 329). Within the UK this movement was led by an organised, set up by J.T Grein in 1891, The Intendent Theatre Society which was funded through a subscription service. Their principal aim was to perform shows that had artistic or literary value as opposed to a commercial value (Chambers, 2011, p. 329). Although there can be many modern definitions of fringe theatre, this thesis defines it

as any theatre, performance or piece of art that has literary or artistic significance as its foundational goal, as opposed to a commercial success goal, and is often funded through other means, than being funded by the bourgeois class.

Edinburgh Fringe Festivals have been growing at a fast rate, since its inception in 1947. However, the debates around this have also grown; the main argument being that as the festival has grown in size and popularity, it went from high culture to low culture, including work that is “superficial” whilst providing “a spectre of difference and choice but an experience of homogenising sameness and repetition” (Harvie, 2005, p. 74). However, the opposing argument is that the festivals allow for greater accessibility and improved opportunities for artistic creativity for artists (Harvie, 2005, p. 74). This, for example, is the viewpoint from many trans theatre makers; trans artists such as Kate O’Donnell and Jo Clifford who have performed trans themed plays at the festivals. Although the fringe is often entangled in debate over high/low culture, artistic/commercial work or democratic/elitist, these debates could also be used against other cultural institutions, like traditional theatres and museums. However, as the Edinburgh Fringe is often seen as part of globalization, the question over this festival is potentially more urgent than traditional cultural institutions. Some believe that globalization is a tool used by the west to dominate people and societies culturally as opposed to supporting diversification (Harvie, 2005, p. 75). This literature review will not attempt to delve into this debate in much detail, because whether the festivals are commercial or artistic, it’s not strictly relevant when whatever the answer is, it still acts as a springboard for many aspiring trans artists who often struggle to find support from traditional cultural institutions. Although this won’t be studied in much detail, it is still important to be aware of the criticisms of newer and more diverse forms of entertainment and theatre within the United Kingdom.

The Edinburgh Fringe has helped many transgender artists develop a career within the theatre industry. Alabanza’s *Burgerz* which helped establish them as a key transgender artist in the UK was initially performed at the fringe festival. Similarly, Tabby Lamb started their career at the Fringe festivals with *Since U Been Gone* but continues to perform their shows there with their newest show *Happy Meal*. The Edinburgh Fringe Festivals have been used by many trans artists, due to its

flexibility and lack of oversight by those in power, have allowed them to develop their craft and become better versions of themselves.

Conclusion

This literature review has explored key academic research into some of the important areas that are relevant to the research questions of this thesis. The structure that was developed for this chapter was built in a way that allows for each section to build upon the previous section. The first section focused on the theoretical perspectives towards gender and theatre. It started with the feminist approach towards gender; starting with second wave feminists who started to challenge the social roles that was assigned to each cisgender identity and started to resist these gender roles through activism, academic research and theatrical productions. Scholars, such as Judith Butler, challenged traditional ideas of gender and gender identity and contributed to the new perspective towards gender – a fluid understanding of gender. As the decades went on, new forms of Feminism developed, some were supportive of the transgender community, and some are more hostile towards the community. TERFs started campaigning against transgender women from being accepted into feminism on the basis that they do not see trans women as legitimate women. Whereas Glitch Feminist provided an explanation for transgender people and gender diverse people as beautiful mistakes in the matrix of society. The section then moved on to newer theoretical frameworks towards gender, including Queer Theory and Transgender Theatre. Queer theory was developed to provide a framework that understands and comes from a queer perspective rather than a heteronormative approach, which many theoretical frameworks are based upon. Despite the popularisation and usefulness of queer theory for developing an understanding of transgender people, it does not provide an adequate framework towards trans people and thus a new theory is being established – transgender theory.

The review then moves on to the popularisation of the transgender theatre industry within the UK. Transgender theatre started to develop prominence in 2009 when the performance *The Gospel According to Jesus, the Queen of Heaven* premiered and caused an uproar from audiences and the UK media. However, as time went on, and more transgender themed performances were developed and received better receptions, transgender theatre started to develop an authentic respect as a part of the

industry. Performers such as Travis Alabanza created performances centred around transgender experiences and this received positive reactions from their audiences and the media alike. The start of the 2020s centred around The Trans Casting Statement, which was signed by theatres across the UK, which encouraged theatres to cast transgender actors into transgender roles. This policy could improve representation over the next few years, although research has not been conducted on this as of yet.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Introduction

Designing a research design that could effectively provide answers to my research aims provided some challenges. A methodological framework was needed to achieve two things. First, a historiographical approach was needed to understand previous theatre movement within the theatre of socially marginalised groups, such as gay theatre, in order to understand the patterns and similarities

with contemporary transgender theatre within the UK. Secondly, original research was needed to examine how transgender theatre makers are treated within the industry and how power relations impact upon the work that can be created and by who; there has not been a comprehensive examination of the relationship between power relations and the transgender community in the UK.

To satisfy the needs of the research questions, a two-part solution was devised. A historiographical approach would be taken to examine the rise of gay theatre, women's theatre and queer theatre to inform how transgender theatre may develop. Secondly, a qualitative interview-based approach would be taken to find out the current state of transgender theatre by the transgender theatre makers themselves. This would be original research contributing to the broader academic research area.

Research Philosophy and Positionality

When it comes to choosing a technique for research, it is important to understand the advantages and limitations of each technique. According to Braun and Clarke, there are two main types of qualitative research strategies: Big Q and Small q qualitative research. Small q research is qualitative research that relies on quantitative and (post)positivist values whereas Big Q research is qualitative research that uses values and practices embedded in the qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 11).

Thematic analysis, which is often considered as a foundation to qualitative research, is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

Although this type of analysis can offer rich and detailed information in an efficient manner, it goes further by allowing the analysis of different areas within the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). It is important to acknowledge that thematic analysis does not exist in a singular form but instead has various styles of thematic analysis to suit the particular research focus; the three most common are codebook, reflexive and coding reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 11). code reliability thematic analysis derives from the small q and (post)positivist ideas of reliability and aims to gain the objective truth through qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 237). Although this approach has its benefits, it would be an ineffective method to use for this research project. This is because the aim of this project is to understand the lived experiences of the participants and therefore the idea of one objective truth is incompatible with this type of research project. Codebook thematic analysis is in the

middle between small q and Big Q, also known as Medium Q (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 242).

Reflexive thematic analysis relies on the qualitative framework whilst also using the Big Q method.

Individuals outside of academia and research won't often think or critique the way that they think about reality, or how reality is constructed; they have certain assumptions subconsciously, but as a researcher it is vital to make these unconscious assumptions front and centre of your research.

The two main type of research philosophy, Positivism and Interpretivism, in recent years have allowed an exploration of new and emerging philosophies in the world of research. This thesis comes from the perspective of the constructivism, which was developed by Interpretivism (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016, p. 1). Although scholars often dispute the specifics of what Constructivism is, it usually shares two common themes; the belief that the process of learning is through is constructed rather than a process of acquiring knowledge (Lefoe, 1998, p. 454). Secondly, instruction or teaching is a process of supporting the construction, rather than communicating the knowledge (Duffy & Cunnigham, 1996, p. 171). Constructivism can be compared to Judith Butler's view of clothing, in relation to gender. She argues that clothes do not represent a universal truth but instead the clothes create a meaning of gender (Butler, 1990). Braun and Clarke argue that this link can be compared to the link between constructivism and language. They argue that Constructivists believe that language does not reflect meaning but instead creates meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 180); therefore, language is very important for constructivist researchers. Similarly, this thesis has an awareness of the importance of using appropriate language, for example, this thesis will always endeavour to use the language that best represents a person's identity. Researching or representing the other can be a complicated issue; an issue related to power and privilege. In the words of Wilkinson and Kitzinger, "whether, and how, we researchers should represent members of groups which we do not ourselves belong – in particular, members of groups oppressed in ways we are not" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996, p. 1). This raises the questions of whether researchers should be researching communities that they do not belong to. Although this researcher belongs to the transgender community, they are also white and well educated and therefore issues arise over whether they should research transgender people who are mixed race for example. The researcher believes that if the good intentions are there,

and that the researcher is listening to their lived experiences instead of consciously imposing preconceived ideas, then it should be appropriate. Also, if researchers only researched as insiders, this could create inequality within research; this is because researchers generally come from different social privileges and therefore this could create a shortage of research within communities of marginality. However, Clarke and Braun have identified issues with researchers with social privilege trying to give a voice to marginalised communities but failing to interrogate their whiteness and the lives of those with social privilege (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 6). Because of this, the research has made clear the privileges that they benefit from, e.g., whiteness, in the researcher positionality and has been aware of their privileges throughout the project.

Contemporary research paradigms are built upon the basic assumptions that have been decided to provide “proper science”, for example objectivity and individualism (Sampson, 1978, p. 1333). Despite this dominant paradigm in research, this assumption neglects an important fact about the process of research; research can not be a “value-neutral activity” because no matter how much a researcher attempts to avoid bias, our own personal situations will have an impact on the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 14). Sue Wilkinson discussed different types of reflexivity that researchers should be mindful of. The first type of reflexivity is “personal” which is “often an expression of personal interests and values” (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 494). I grew up in a working-class family in the Southeast of England and I attended a secondary Modern school in the county of Kent, which still had the tripartite educational system in place. Growing up I managed to earn GCSEs and A-Levels and through my early adult years I managed to attend a university to study a BA Honours Degree and study towards an MA degree. I am in my early 20s and I am a white British student who is a transgender and neurodivergent woman, and my sexuality is not heterosexual. This is a mixture of “social privilege” and “social marginality” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 16). For example, growing up in the Southeast of England, a fairly rich county in a rich country globally, and having the opportunity to progress in educational institutions and being a White British student has given me social privilege. However, growing up in a working-class family, as opposed to a middle-class family, and being transgender provides me with some social marginality. Another important part of personal reflexivity

is that of political and ideological perspectives. I am a left to centre voter, who has voted reluctantly for Labour in past elections, and I trust and follow news from a variety of sources, such as BBC News, The Guardian and Sky News but I have a particular distrust of news sources such as GB News or heavily, American styled, opinion over fact style of news. I am an atheist and have a liberal view on most controversial views and will always lean on the side of giving people more choice, for example I support the woman's right to choose. George Simmel, a German sociologist, philosopher and critic, sparked a debate about the researcher being an outside or an insider of the group being studied; they argued that being an outsider increased the objectivity of the research (Weiner-Levy & Queder, 2012, p. 1152). There have been questions raised over insider researchers; are these researchers able to detach themselves enough from the community to be able to conduct good quality research (Holmes, 2020, p. 6). However, Bonner and Tolhurst argued that there are three advantages of being an insider researcher. Firstly, the insider researcher will likely understand the issues and the population better than an outsider researcher. Secondly, an insider researcher is less likely to undermine the flow of the population and their social processes. Finally, insider research is more likely able to gain more accurate information from the population as they are able to relate to that population well (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002, p. 4). Because of this, this thesis not only acknowledges that it is being produced by an insider researcher, but it's also being celebrated.

It is important to have an understanding of the journey and experiences of the researcher who has both run the study and written the thesis. I have had a strong education in terms of theatre and drama studies and have been taught different forms of theatre making. This is important because during the interviews, for example, when theatre makers discussed the way they create their theatre, there is the potential to gloss over certain details, due to my understanding of them already and therefore may lack the desired depth. As well as an academic curiosity, drama and theatre has a personal element to it as well. Drama has given me opportunities to experiment with different gender expressions and how to present my gender identity, as a transgender academic. Having been educated at a university, I understand that I have been given certain privileges in my life, which many in the transgender community may not have had the opportunity to experience. This therefore forces me not purposely to

impose any preconceived ideas onto my participants and to listen and understand their lived experiences.

Sampling

The sample population for this study was transgender (or any other gender identity that is not cisgender) theatre makers, directors, casting directors, actors, costume designers, and any other theatre professional, that currently has or has had a career in the theatre and performance industry within the United Kingdom. It was evident from the start of the project that this population was quite a small group of people for many reasons. For example, many non-cisgender theatre creatives may not yet feel comfortable or feel safe enough to identify as their true gender identity in public and therefore there would be no way of knowing that they are not cisgender and because there may be systematic barriers that prevent non-cisgender talent from succeeding. Because of this the project followed some basic rules during the recruitment phase. Firstly, the researcher only contacted people who feel safe enough and have enough space in their life to participate in, potentially, highly political research project – it could be claimed that in contemporary UK, simply being transgender is a political act in itself. The researcher also made sure that during the research process, the participants had control over what happened and could decide whether they felt comfortable enough to answer a certain line of questioning. Because the sample population was a small group of individuals, common probability-based sampling techniques would not have been appropriate therefore the researcher decided to use a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research project in order to gain information rich data with limited resources (Patton, 2014, p. 265). Judgement sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling, is when the researcher chooses participants that are typical of the target population (Tyrer & Heyman, 2016, p. 58). Judgement Sampling technique was chosen for a few reasons. Firstly, because the researcher could choose the participants, they could make sure that all parts of the transgender community had a chance to share their lived experiences, such as race, gender identity, dis/ability and social class, and therefore make the results more valid and more representative of the target population. Secondly, the researcher would be able to follow the rules that was set out initially to make sure the participants felt safe, protected and respected at all times.

Finally, it allowed the researcher to pick individuals at different phases of their career, for example someone who has just left drama school compared to someone who has been doing theatre/drag circuits for decades will have different lived experiences to share. The researcher chose the participants by researching all areas of transgender theatre using the internet. Because of the potential barriers that prevent transgender artists from being equally represented in traditional theatres, the researcher chose to find a broad spectrum of participants through contacting theatres and looking through their shows. It was decided instead to search the internet for new artists and established artists due to the fewer barriers that exist with self-publishing work online. The researcher also had a look through past performances from popular performance industries, such as the Edinburgh Fringe, as these have easier access for minority groups. Once the researcher had found a potential participant, it would be necessary to look through their career history, the critical reception of their work, their demographic information and what their stance is on campaigning, for example have they previously taken part in interviews to spread the word, as this would give the impression of a well-rounded view of whether they would be a good match for what was required. If it was decided that they were, then an initial email that briefly describes my project, who the researcher is and the potential dates for the research phase to see if they would be interested was sent. If they agreed in principle, a further email to allow them to ask any questions, send them a Participant Information Sheet and consent form and finalise a date and time for the interview would be sent. It was decided to conduct interviews online, via Microsoft Teams, for three main reasons. Firstly, this research took place in 2022 where the United Kingdom was still coming out of a two year long global pandemic so to ensure safety for all participants, it was thought that online interviews would be most appropriate. Secondly, it was advantageous to interview people from different parts of the United Kingdom and therefore in order to interview many different people from different locations, it would have been more appropriate to do online interviews to avoid unnecessary travel. Finally, because this project discusses some potentially sensitive and personal issues, such as their identity and their lived experiences, it was believed it would be better for them to be able to answer the questions in a place

they felt most comfortable and having online interviews allowed the participants to feel comfortable in their personal space.

Ethical Thinking

This section is titled ethical thinking rather than ethical considerations because ethics should be a constant state of thinking throughout the whole process, rather than at the start of the project when submitting an ethical application; ethical “thinking is not optional” (The British Psychological Society, 2014, p. 4). One of the most important parts of ethical thinking is ensuring informed consent is obtained from each participant; informed consent is when the prospective participant is “provided with information about the project in which they are being invited to participate that is sufficiently full and accessible for their decision about whether to take part to be considered informed” (Crow, et al., 2006, p. 83). They must also be free to choose to participate or decline without any consequences. This ethical thinking is especially important in this research project because this project involves participants that could be considered as vulnerable and therefore may because of “their perceived openness to coercion, exploitation or harm by more powerful others” (Crow, et al., 2006, p. 84). Because of how important the world of academia views informed consent, organisations that support researchers often make sure the researcher apply for ethical approval prior to research commencing. In line with this, a participant information sheet, that explained what the research project was about, the aims and objectives of the research, what the participants would be asked to do, details of their rights as participants and details to contact the researcher and their supervisor, was created and a consent form was created. These forms were given to Canterbury Christ Church University’s Research Ethical board for approval before the research started. Within contemporary academia, it is “an almost unquestioned belief that anonymity for individuals and research sites should be the standard ethical practice” (Walford, 2005, p. 83). The researcher of this project understands the importance for participants to have the right to privacy. Firstly, if they have no fear of being recognised or their views being made public, they can be honest. Secondly, the participants must not be put in a position where their responses can have an impact on their lives or their work; for example, if they admitted something about their workplace, it is imperative that the workplace should

not be able to identify the person who spoke the words from the research. Although the anonymity is important, for this specific project, it was decided that, if the participants agreed, it would be more beneficial for the research to be able to link the data to the person who said it. This is because in conjunction with the interview data, the productions and performances created by the theatre makers would also be discussed; therefore, if these two things were forcibly disconnected, the potential for deep analysis would be limited. As a result of this, there was a question on the consent form asking if the participant agrees for their name to appear in the thesis and they were asked at the start of the interview whether they agree for their name to appear, because, as discussed earlier, ethics should be a constant process of thinking rather than an activity to do for the one time. It was made explicitly clear to every potential participant that this was entirely voluntary, and there would be no consequences for refusing, and if they did refuse, they would still have the right to participate in the project, under anonymity if they wished. One of the most critical areas that ethical thinking must consider is during the interpretation of the qualitative data and how researchers represent their participants. This issue is “perhaps the most significant ethical dilemma we face” (Swauger, 2011, p. 500) as qualitative researchers. This is especially important in this project because this project uses reflexive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke, and therefore researchers who use this approach are open about creating meaning from their data, rather than summing up what the participants have said during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 214). Because of this, throughout the analysis of the results, every effort will be made to represent the participants and their statements as fairly as possible and to create meanings as close to how the participants expressed themselves initially. However, it is important to acknowledge that reflexive thematic analysis is not a detailed case study but to tell a story based on different participant’s data; therefore, there will be some parts of the story that a participant will agree with, and some parts that they won’t agree or resonate with (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 215). It is also important to be aware that the job of the researcher is to interpret what the dataset suggests, rather than retelling their stories; this means that the interpretation will include wider skills and knowledge that is brought to the project by the researcher (Chamberlain, 2011, p. 50).

Data Collection

This research project used two different research methods in order to find the answers to the research question and sub questions. The first is the semi structured interviews, which will provide detailed information about the lived experiences of the participants. The second is a cross sectional survey, asking open ended questions in order to collect qualitative data. Interviews Although large scale quantitative research methods could have provided trends and representative numerical data for transgender theatre, it would have ignored the important subjective lived experiences of the transgender theatre makers which would be essential for creating a more equitable industry for the community. Therefore, I decided to use semi structured interviews to gain in depth information about the lived experiences of transgender theatre makers and actors. An “interview is, quite simply, a guided conversation, however, unlike most other conversations, the purpose of an interview is to elicit specific kinds of information” (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002, p. 92). A semi structured interview is similar to the structured interview, in the sense that it has pre-determined questions but offers the flexibility for the interviewer to ask additional questions or follow up questions based on what the participant says. One of the reasons that this type of interview was most appropriate for this research project is because semi structured interviews “provide greater breadth and depth of information” and it allows “the opportunity to discover the respondent’s experiences and interpretation of reality” (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002, p. 92). This is an important feature for this research project because the overarching aim of this project is to understand the lived experiences of transgender theatre makers and actors so that the industry can understand how to evolve and develop for the better.

A cross sectional survey provides the researcher with “a snapshot of what is happening in that group at that particular time” (Mathers, et al., 2007, p. 6). In the context of this project, it was able to provide the researcher with a snapshot of what it is like being a transgender theatre maker in the UK during April to June 2022. Cross sectional surveys have many benefits, including their flexibility, which allows for good quality collection of data. This allowed the researcher to use this research method in conjunction with semi structured interviews to gain more in-depth information about the

participants' lived experiences. However, using cross sectional surveys solely can provide some limitations, such as the inability explaining motivations behind behaviours or thoughts.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique chosen for this research project is reflexive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke. Reflexive thematic analysis is a “method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves a systematic process of data coding to develop themes”, put simply, “themes are your ultimate analytic purpose” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 4). This analysis technique was chosen for two main reasons. To allow the researcher to be reflexive throughout the project and thus allowing to make changes along the way to improve the quality of the results. Secondly, it allows the researcher to develop key themes that are evident throughout the dataset. This allows for a detailed interrogation of the data to ensure data integrity. The analysis followed the six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke, but, as they recommend, it was not followed religiously, room for adaption was allowed. The first step was the Familiarisation stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). During this phase of the analysis, I watched the recording of each interview, one at a time. I would write initial notes about some themes and ideas and asking key questions, such as which perspective is informing that view. After this was done for each recording, I printed out each transcript. I spent some time on each document, rereading and making sure I know what each transcript said. After I was confident that I knew the transcripts well, I moved onto the second stage, generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This second phase allowed me the opportunity to review the initial notes I had written and to reread the transcripts with the intention of creating initial codes. I did this by reading sections of the transcripts, understanding what the meaning was behind it then creating accurate and meaningful codes. This phase produced a list of over thirty codes across the dataset. Once these codes were created and I was happy with them, I moved on to the third phase, grouping the codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This third phase required that I group the codes into accurate and meaningful themes that could convey the broader meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). During this phase, I got some paper and wrote out all of the codes from the previous phase. I then began to group codes into groups that shared similar

ideas, for example Power, Money and the Capitalist System grouped together different codes that were interlinked, such as money, power relations, cis assumptions etc. This allowed me to have broad themes that came up during the research which could be explored to answer the research questions. I then moved into phase 4, reviewing the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This fourth phase allowed me to take a critical approach when looking at the themes that were created in the previous phase. I interrogated each potential theme by assessing the evidence that supported each theme. If the evidence was insufficient or too broad, I made changes – whether that was removing the theme, re-wording it or splitting into more than one theme. This allowed me to have a greater level of confidence with the integrity of the themes. After this, I entered the fifth phase, defining the themes. During this phase, I was able to define what the themes meant. This added an extra level to the accuracy of the results because it allowed me to assess whether the themes' definitions matched the evidence for each theme. Finally, the final phase was the write up, this allowed me to present the themes and the implications of the themes to the reader. I provided evidence of each claim made and this allowed me to, fundamentally, answer the research questions.

The Participants

There were five theatre makers, based in the UK, who identify as a gender identity that is not cisgender who took part in the semi structured interviews as part of this study. This section of the chapter will briefly describe the different participants that took part.

Emily Ross is an early career actor within the UK, who is a white transgender woman. She studied an MA Acting – Classical and Contemporary Text at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland before moving into professional acting. She has gone on to do a variety of voiceover work and theatrical work during her career and is primarily based in London.

Tabby Lamb is a white, non-binary writer and performer, primarily based in East London. She has done a variety of performances, ranging from internet performances and stage shows. She has multiple functions for her work, ranging from entertainment for the trans and non-binary community,

educating the cisgender community and outreach/ campaigning for better rights, treatment and respect within society.

EM Williams is a non-binary, black mixed-race actor based in England. Since graduating from The University of Kent, they have performed in a variety of stage performances, television performances and short films. They have an extensive career within the theatre industry.

Edalia Day is a white, transgender spoken word artist, theatre maker and animator, based primarily in Norwich. Although she has a strong interest and training in the classical theatres, she uses a lot of animation and contemporary forms of technology to embrace her performances. Many of her performances have included improving representations of the trans community.

Emma Frankland is a white, transgender performer and writer. Recently her focus has been on the *None of us is Yet a Robot* which is a set of performances focused on gender identity and the politics of transitioning. She is also an academic and has published some of her work on the history of transgender theatre and provided examples of how we should examine transgender history, due to the problems of transgender erasure.

Chapter Three: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to explore in detail how the current UK theatre industry supports and seeks to provide opportunities for the transgender community. It also seeks to find the different ways that transgender creatives choose to create art, for example through fringe events or using the internet. The fundamental aim of this project was to discover how transgender identities are represented in the UK theatre industry and what the future might look like. Other explorations that this thesis has focused on, is the ability and choice of some transgender creatives to resist the move to be absorbed by the mainstream theatre and how this can be their superpower that propels and inspires them to innovate in their artistic style continually. Whilst exploring these issues, there are still foundational areas that need to be explored to develop a solid understanding; the power relationships that exist in the industry and how this affects the trans community, and the relationship between the trans creatives and theatrical institutions. This was achieved through using a mix of primary and secondary resource methods. This study completed five original semi structured interviews with five different transgender and non-binary identified theatre makers who are based in the UK, who are also at different stages of their career. These results were strengthened by an online questionnaire that sought to get a broader array of responses from people who have a connection to the industry but with a wider range of gender identities. To contextualise the results of this study, this thesis has used a range of secondary resources, ranging from academic research to interviews with Travis Alabanza, who is a leading non-binary performer in the UK.

The structure of this chapter will follow the themes that were developed through the use of reflexive thematic analysis, and the overarching theme of this chapter is the relationship between power relations and the development of the representation of the trans community. The chapter will then focus on specific themes from that point on, with the chapter being split in half; with the first section focusing on power relations and the second focusing on representations. The chapter will start with

exploring how the transgender community have historically been represented within the arts, but also how they are represented in the current industries and how they compare. By evaluating the evidence, both from this study but also secondary sources, the chapter finds that there has been some progress in some areas of the industry, but other areas need more work, such as the big national theatres. The chapter will then move on to exploring the relationship between theatrical institutions and the transgender theatre makers. This section will focus on some of the institutional barriers that transgender theatremakers face, but also how some institutions, including the fringe, support and encourage transgender talent. The third focus of this chapter will be on power relationships and its impacts on the work that is being produced in the UK. It will explore how those in power hold a lot of power over those who want to create art and if those in power lack diversity, this causes issues for those who want diversity within the industry. Finally, the chapter will explore what the future of trans theatre could look like in the UK. Although those in this study expressed concern for the future, many did manage to find things to be hopeful for. This chapter will explore primary data collected by this study, secondary data from other academics in the field and the discussions of these findings to create a multiple level understanding of the issues within transgender theatre.

Representations of the Transgender community in the UK theatre Industry

The theatre industry has long staked “a claim to be an artform that represents and reflects society” (O'Brien, 2020, p. 242). For this reason, the UK theatre industry has a duty to reflect the changes that has occurred in the UK since the end of the Second World War, both in terms of the demographic makeup but societal attitudes (Derbyshire, 2022, p. 199). However, UK theatre have not always been able to keep up in representing social groups and the changes that has occurred in the last several decades (Derbyshire, 2022, p. 199). One group in particular that theatre has struggled to represent fairly, in the view of the participants within this study, is the transgender community. Historical representations of the transgender community within the theatre, television and cinema, reflect transgender people or those who do not conform to the cisnormative norms, were deemed as other or dangerous. Transgender identities were often simplified down into specific and limited representations and followed a set of limited themes, such as “someone's wife leaves them, or they get

murdered, or they're a sex worker, or they're really sad and depressed, it always, it's always harrowing" (Lamb, 2022). The tropes that were commonly associated with the community could be quite harmful towards the community within wider society. This danger can be seen in many societies around the world, including in Brazil, which Frankland described in her writings. She described the genocide that those transgender people of Brazil are currently facing, that she spoke with, and this brings a new sense of urgency to transgender theatre and developing accurate representations of the community (Frankland, 2019, p. 776). Although this particular case study is from Brazil, it is not dissimilar to the UK society, where transgender violence is still a common experience within society, for example, where Alabanza created a performance about the sort of violence that they face and the reaction, or lack thereof, from the general public towards that violence. The data from these participants, when put into the context of current academic work and the current state of the UK, suggests that there needs to be a greater awareness from those in the theatre when dealing with transgender experiences and to consider carefully how they present these experiences to their audiences. The historical representations, such as representing the whole community as sex workers or having a low quality of life, could be credited as contributing to the transphobia that exists within UK society, and within the theatre industry in this country. Although the levels of transphobia has decreased, there are still some theatres that are hesitant to perform shows that involve trans actors or themes due to the potential push back from transphobes (Lamb, 2022), which suggests there is still a considerable level of bias or even discrimination against the community within the UK's theatre industry. Despite the wider reforms within society in the last few decades, ranging from the Gender Recognition Act 2004, the Equality Act 2010 and transgender being removed as a mental health condition by the World Health Organisation, representations within the industry have failed to have a radical revolution in how the representations are created and presented. As a result, it is vital for researchers to explore how contemporary representations are created, and to what extent they have changed, and thus examine the potential effects of these representations.

To understand how representations of trans people are developed in the contemporary theatre industry, it would be useful to use a popular play text that centres around transgender experiences.

The play text *Rotterdam* was written by Jon Brittain and debuted in 2015, before moving on to the West End and enjoying national success and receiving awards. The play starts with a couple, who both publicly identify as a cisgender lesbian couple, but the relationship quickly becomes more complicated when one of the partners explains that they are a trans man, who would now be referred to as Adrian. The play mainly focuses on the impact Adrian's identity has on others – whether that's his parents, his brother or his girlfriend. The play itself has very little consideration of Adrian's feelings or their point of view, but instead the audience sees the world through the eyes of Adrian's girlfriend or his brother and very rarely from his own eyes. It has been well documented from the various interviews that Brittain has conducted about his intentions behind this piece of writing. He had a few friends who had transitioned, and he wanted to give a voice to their experiences and put it into the mainstream. However, this play text has caused a wide array of opinions from the trans creative community. One of the main problems that some people see in this play text was outlined by Tabby Lamb in this study who argues that “it's not really about the trans character, it's about the partner and about everyone else in the life it uses the trans character for them to learn.” (Lamb, 2022). *Rotterdam* seems to side line Adrian in his own story, fuelling the misconception that transgender experiences are not as important as the cisgender experiences. This can be seen by the focus on how Adrian's identity affects everyone else, rather than how Alice's reactions affect how Adrian feels and how it affects his life. This attitude reflects wider society where the focus is usually on how people's transitions affect family and friends rather than the reaction of family and friends impacts the one who is transitioning. However, it could be argued that, *Rotterdam* has other, more central problems with how it is written and how it represents Adrian.

The problem with *Rotterdam* is that it has a central character who identifies as transgender, but the audience does not get to watch the life experiences of Adrian or develop any understanding or bond with Adrian as a character because the audience only learns things about him through the perspective of the other characters. The essential ingredient to a three-dimensional character is to identify the internal monologue of the character, and Adrian is lacking in this area. Although this is unlikely to be

a deliberate set of decisions by Brittain, it does highlight issues that can arise from cisgender people writing transgender experiences. Even though Brittain wrote this based on his friends, who had transitioned, it shows that he lacked the conceptual understanding of the experiences of the community and therefore contributes to poorly created transgender characters. This also provides further evidence for those who argue that transgender theatrical shows should be written by those who have the experiences of being transgender. There is some attempt to authentically create transgender characters, even if the success of this could be debated, this is not as straightforward when it comes to the non-binary community.

Although identifying as transgender can be easier to understand by some people, non-binary identities can be more difficult due to the variety of identities that it includes. Non-binary identities can include, but not limited to, the identities of androgynist, genderqueer or Gender blender (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). It therefore makes sense when Emily Ross discusses the potential simplification of the representation of the non-binary community in UK theatres. They argue that with regards to “the actual non-binary community, there's such a great variety, I think that can kind of intimidate writers and directors and producers in terms of what they want to create, and where they can go. And people's imaginations, sadly, are limited” (Ross, 2022). Emily Ross makes two important points in this quote. Firstly, which is an often-overlooked idea, is that the non-binary community is a group of vastly different identities with their own unique set of lived experiences. Due to the similarities that these communities share, these different identities are usually grouped together as the non-binary community. This thesis will follow this rule for two main reasons; so that the readers, and researcher of this project, can share a common understanding and secondly, so that this thesis gives a voice to all parts of the community, rather than representing each community and therefore creating the risk of not being able to give a voice to all the identities. Ross' second point is that cisgender people's imagination, especially adults, are often limited and therefore lack the ability to understand the complexity and diverse beauty that exists within the non-binary community. When both of these points mix together, it creates a theatre environment where representation of the non-binary community are lacking, but even when they do exist, they are usually represented in a limited manner.

Non-binary theatre can be quite creative and more capricious. According to one of the participants from this project's survey "Theatre created by the transgender and non-binary people is rarely seen. However, when it gains recognition, it's usually some of the best theatre out there. Cisgendered theatre is predictable" (Survey, 2022). Although this quote rests on generalised assumptions about what theatre by the cis and non-binary community looks like, it also makes a valid point, namely, that non-binary theatre often comes from an intense exploration of non-binary identities and their view of life. Because non-binary people often break the rules of society, or act as glitches in the system of society (Russell, 2020), challenging traditional norms and styles of theatre.

Despite the advancements made in terms of representations of the transgender and non-binary community in the arts, but particularly in the theatre industry, there is still some challenges that need to be overcome, such as the oversimplification of the complex identities and lived experiences that the trans and non-binary community share. Some of the historical representations, such as that of trans people being sexual deviants, have reduced within the mainstream, despite still existing in some forms of entertainment and arts. This section of this chapter has shown that although the progress is important to acknowledge, there is still big areas that need improvement, for example showing the variety of non-binary identities.

The dataset of this project suggests that transgender representations are still generally presented in a negative way and still relying on a limited set of stereotypes, as they were in the 20th century. 75% of those who participated in my questionnaire believed that the representations of the transgender community are still presented in a negative way. The term negative can be seen as a subjective term but one of the participants explained their view by saying that transgender characters are "always the 'issue' in the narrative (Murphy, 2022). Taking a wholistic view of the industry, things are getting better, representation is improving but they "are working towards maybe having like, one trans person in like every 10 show? Which, it's still obviously it's still absolutely fucking appalling. But it's a lot better than it was and certain companies and certain shows are leading the way" (Lamb, 2022).

Representations of the transgender community, as Lamb argued, is still lacking and needs more progress but it has had, to a degree, some improvement. One of the catalysts behind this change in

representations could be credited to the rise in transgender theatre makers who have managed to establish themselves within the theatre industry. For example, Travis Alabanza started their theatre career in the UK with their debut show *Burgerz* but they have managed to perform their shows in countries, such as the UK, USA and Australia. This shows that there are audiences within the theatre industry who want to watch transgender theatre and it can be a commercial success. This evidence, though, directly contradicts some of the reasons that Tabby Lamb has been told by UK theatre institutions, when defending their lack of trans work, by saying that trans work is not commercially viable or there is no evidence that there are willing audiences for these types of shows (Lamb, 2022). This chapter will explore the role of theatrical institutions will be explored further on in this chapter, but an important issue has been raised here; the lack of good quality transgender representations may not be solely down to transphobic views or the lack of understanding but also barriers put in place by theatre institutions and those in positions of power. The other driving force behind this change is the diversification of those in power and of the aims of newer theatrical institutions. EM Williams pointed to Lynette Linton, who was appointed as Artistic Director of the Bush Theatre in London, as evidence of institutions starting to change (Williams, 2022). Many believe that Linton has brought a new way for theatres to work, creating their foundations within a collaborative approach, and promoting diversity within the Bush theatre, which has become Linton's reputation (Durrant, 2022). Linton argues that the West End are still performing shows to traditional audiences whereas the Bush, under Linton's leadership, has started to experiment and change how theatre is done and how theatrical institutions can and should work – a collaborative approach to create a more innovative and diverse theatre industry (ibid). EM Williams further supports the argument that Linton is making progress within the industry for those groups who are not stereotypically represented well, such as those who are non-white. They said” the only place that I think is actually doing the work that needs to be done is the Bush Theatre with Lynette Linton, who is an absolute Goddess and in terms of like representation at the Bush Theatre... she's, I think, maybe the youngest artistic director that's been in London, ever, I think. And she's black mixed race and just fucking wicked” (Williams, 2022). Not only does the actions of Linton signal a change of direction with how theatre is done, but being a

young woman who is black mixed race can become role model for women and black mixed race people around the country to get into positions of power.

The Importance of Theatre Institutions within the UK

The modern UK theatre industry has, like most of society, become compartmentalized, where institutions value specialists, such as a director or a writer, over multiskilled individuals, such as those who write but also star in the performance (Argyropoulou & Vourloumis, 2015, p. 1). Alongside this desire, there has also been an increase in those artists who have had to adopt a precarious lifestyle—both in terms of personal living conditions and work conditions within the arts industry. The insecurity, that is a by-product of the precarious nature of the industry, heavily influences who can participate in the arts, but also which institutions that they can participate in. Funding, both in terms of funding their initial actor training but also the inability to attract a high enough salary for a career in the arts to be sustainable, can create barriers for transgender artists (Ross, 2022). Emily Ross argues that funding and money redistribution is vital in supporting transgender artists in the industry and that “there’s so much [that can be done] and a lot of it has to do with money and making it accessible in that kind of way” (Ross, 2022). The lack of funding or a stable income and the precarious nature of the industry have close links and contribute to each other. Due to these close links, it is important to explore the concept, that Lorey describes as, precarity. Precarity refers to the structural inequalities that exists within certain industries, such as the theatre industry, which is a direct consequence of the domination of those in power in terms of different social identities, such as race, gender identity, social class and sexuality (Kunst, 2015, p. 7). The precarity that transgender artists are influenced by, who may also openly identify as a non-heterosexual sexuality, are not cisgender and may not be white, face some institutional barriers in entering the industry but also maintaining a sustainable income that both allows them to support themselves personally but allow them to develop themselves artistically. As Ross described, the lack of funding can potentially discourage transgender people from pursuing a career in the arts, however, EM Williams does provide an exception to this. EM Williams described the salary expectations that artists can realistically earn if they get work at a traditional theatre institution, like The National Theatre. Williams described how they felt after getting their first

pay cheque from the National Theatre, they “rang my agent, because I was like, I think they’ve paid me twice. Because I didn’t know. No, that’s how much you get paid. And I was on the lowest rug. God knows what other people were getting“ (Williams, 2022). This salary is not only, in some cases, more than what they may earn at fringe and festival performances, but it is also a guaranteed salary. Working at fringe events and creating and performing your own work can have its benefits, such as being able to create authentic work that feels true to oneself without having to persuade others to support you (Lamb, 2022), it can also have a higher rate of precarity and a more instable income as the performers are not guaranteed a salary of a paying audience. This balancing act between working for a theatrical institution, where they are guaranteed an income, and producing their own work but potentially having an instable income and an uncertain future is something that many transgender artists have to consider in the UK industry carefully. Performing at festivals like the Edinburgh Fringe can have its artistic benefits, but it also has financial consequences that must be factored in.

Having the opportunity to perform at Edinburgh Fringe can be incredibly beneficial for developing artists skill and experience and offers the potential to perform to a large group of people whilst developing a reputation in the theatre and performance world. The fringe festivals have a long history of allowing access to artists around the UK, however this study focused specifically on how this type of theatre can be beneficial for transgender theatre makers. One of the features of the fringe festivals is the ability for transgender theatremakers to develop their own performances independent to the theatrical institutions, which as discussed early has institutional barriers, and therefore do not have to follow strict rules to contribute towards institutional commercial success or to fit a hierarchal narrative set by artistic directors. One of the differences between performing at the fringe festivals as opposed to traditional theatres is the focus on financial gains; many UK theatres, especially in London, are willing to increase their ticket prices, even if that reduces access to the theatre, in the name of increasing their profit margins (BOP Consulting, 2016, p. IV). However, with fringe festival performances, there is usually more of a focus on developing the artistic quality, and in terms of transgender performance, is “is more rounded, more truthful, less interested in giving a one-sided view of gender, more able to adequately engage in the issues affecting our community” (Murphy,

2022). Because of the immense interrogation that many transgender people must endure about their identity, some of those who become theatre makers are able to bring this same interrogative approach to performance and therefore often create more engaging work as they are less likely to follow the status quo. Because some transgender theatre makers have a desire to create theatre in alternative styles, using innovative theatrical devices and avoid traditional norms in theatre, this could give some transgender theatre makers the motivation to stay within the fringe of the theatre and resist attempts at becoming part of the mainstream of the industry; if they became mainstream, their style and theatrical choices might then be controlled by those in power. This could be linked to the argument that many queer theorists make. As argued by David Halperin, “the more it verges on becoming a normative academic discipline, the less queer ‘queer theory’ can plausibly claim to be” (Halperin, 1995, p. 113). In a similar manner as Queer theory, it could be argued that the more mainstream transgender theatre becomes, the less trans it will be and their identities could be merged into the mainstream and therefore lose their uniqueness.

Positions of Power and Gate Keepers within the Industry.

Those who hold positions of power, who often act as the gate keepers for their institution, have a large amount of power, both in terms of the artistic output of their institution but also the available opportunities and resources for theatre makers. One of the key debates within transgender theatre is the idea of who should write or perform transgender experiences on the stage. There are generally two sides of this debate; the first is that the creative arts industry should be a free space for any creative to create their own story about themes that interest them to further the creative output of the industry and thus there should be no restraints on a person’s creativity, even if that means they explore themes they have no direct experience of. This argument was supported by Edalia Day – with a caveat, the work must be of good quality (Day, 2022). Day discusses how people in the media who spread this fallacy that transgender people do not allow cisgender writers to write trans themed plays or characters simply because they are trans. Day argues that this is not the case, when she was asked whether cisgender writers can write transgender plays, she says “It is like, no, you totally can. Absolutely. You can, just

do not be so fucking shit at it” (Day, 2022). The argument here is that theatre makers should not be worrying about gender politics, over who should be allowed to explore certain themes, but there should be a focus on the quality of the productions being created. Like other sections of the industry, quality and creativity must come first to encourage innovation and to attract a larger and more diverse set of audiences. This relates to the point made by Tabby Lamb who argued that one of the goals of transgender theatre makers, amongst other theatre makers, is to create a lot more of good quality transgender representations (Lamb, 2022). Due to the current low number of transgender theatre makers in the UK, to achieve this, it is important that the trans theatre makers work with the cisgender community, rather than in isolation, to encourage better quality representations and stories. It is a strong argument that both groups of theatremakers should want to work together to create a better theatre industry for trans people, backed up by some of the data from this study, however, there are other negatives to this approach that needs to be addressed as well, such as the restriction of opportunities.

The other side of this debate revolves around the availability of opportunities for trans theatremakers and whether these opportunities are being restricted in the UK. An issue, that was raised by Williams in this study, is that there is currently a lack of opportunities for transgender theatremakers in the UK. They argue that if the goal is to have an inclusive theatre industry, then there needs to be new initiatives and campaigns designed to increase awareness and opportunities for the transgender theatre community. This is where the disagreements occur. Some may argue that there should be more policies that have the purpose of increasing the number of transgender people working within the creative and management processes of theatre making, such as creating transgender only training programmes or having quotas within specific job roles, like some industries have for cis women. Whereas, other theatre makers may see this as a direct attack on them and their freedom to make theatre, or even see it as a personal attack. This mentality, that is adopted by some cisgender people, links into the idea, that I am referring to as, cis fragility. When a performance is created through a cisgender perspective, many issues can arise. Firstly, the performance is usually created as a piece of educational theatre in order to educate cisgender audiences about transgender people. Although this

may seem like a noble approach, this often leads to the transgender character becoming two dimensional and focuses on simplistic themes such as the transition story or the coming out story and thus ignores the happier and complicated aspects of transgender experiences, such as their love stories. Theatre can be an effective medium to educate and support greater inclusivity within society or to campaign for social change. However, there is a credible argument that these forms of performances should be created by the transgender community because they have the lived experiences to make it authentic and they are the people who understand the issues that their community currently face and therefore know what needs fixing. White fragility also offers further complications for when cisgender people create theatre about the transgender community. White fragility refers to the idea that we live in a society where whiteness has a higher status than any other racial identity. If a person of another racial identity seeks to challenge or address concerns about white privilege, the white person sees it as an attack on their morality or their fundamental goodness of their personality and causing feelings of anger (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 1). This idea can also be adapted for the transgender community; when transgender people raise legitimate concerns about the treatment of their community or the way that society institutionally disadvantages the transgender community, some cisgender people consider this a personal attack on them or on their freedoms, especially their freedom of speech. For example, Mick Hume starts his Daily Mail article by asking the question “Still doubt that freedom of speech is under threat in Britain?” (Humes, 2021). The implication here is that because transgender people have spoken up and demanded that cisgender people treat them with the most basic of respect, for example using the correct pronouns or not deadnaming⁵ them, then they are attacking cisgender people’s fundamental right to freedom of speech. This is not the case, but this shows that the UK and most of the Western world has a section of their societies that have fallen victim to the transgender fragility. This transgender fragility causes issues within society but also has a knock-on effect within the theatre industry because it may cause theatres fears over whether they should write or commission transgender related shows. As alluded to earlier in the chapter, this fear of showing transgender theatre in the UK still affects a portion of the industry and thus potentially having a negative

⁵ Deadnaming refers to the act of using a person’s name, usually their birth name, prior to their transition and thus not respecting their right to their gender identity and their pronouns.

impact on the opportunities and resources that those in power are willing to invest in transgender talent. This is where the debate over who should be writing transgender themed performances or characters.

A common debate within transgender theatre is whether cisgender playwrights should be writing transgender themed plays or characters or whether this should be reserved for transgender theatre makers and writers. One of the arguments that is often put forward for allowing transgender writers to take charge of these performances is the idea of authenticity. There is a growing trend towards a style of performance of performed reality, whereby shows are presented as reality but lacking the authenticity, within popular culture. For example, when the show *Big Brother* first aired in the UK, it was designed to be a genuine social experiment however, it soon developed the style of performed reality and instead of being a social experiment, the producers recruited people's whose main aim for being on the show was to become famous. This style has transferred into the theatre industry; some forms of theatre, such as trauma theatre, can be seen as "beyond representation" and therefore should be devised in an authentic manner (Schulze, 2017, p. 9). Lamb proposed a theory about why authenticity is such an important factor for transgender theatre; she argues that "emerging queer and trans theatremakers that we are sort of led to we're all pretty much led to making autobiographical solo shows about our trauma as our like, big debut thing, whether it's burgers or *Since You've Been Gone*" (Lamb, 2022). Due to the increased focus on the traumatic aspects of some transgender experiences, it is key to have these stories told authentically, rather than by cisgender writers, who are unlikely to understand or have experience of transgender experiences. However, the issue with the current industry is that there is currently a lack of transgender theatremakers who can actively use their own experiences in order to create authentic transgender representations (Lamb, 2022). Additionally, as a lot of transgender work in the UK is used for educational purposes, for the cisgender audiences to gain a better understanding (Lamb, 2022), it is crucial that when sensitive issues are explored, such as trauma, it needs to be represented accurately and sensitively due to the real world impacts it could have. Because for many cisgender people, a theatre show could be their only interaction or knowledge of transgender experiences, they may use the representations and ideas presented in the show as gospel when it comes to understanding the trans community in the real

world. If these shows are then written by cisgender people, who do not have the real world experiences, then this could create fallacies in the minds of the cisgender audiences and thus create further issues for the transgender community outside of the theatre.

Even though 88% of the participants who took part in this study's survey argued that representation of the transgender community in the UK theatre industry are still at low levels, they also argue that where the representation does exist it is often more accurate than it once was. The remaining 12% argued that the representation has improved when compared to the historical representation, even though they do admit that the bar was low to begin with (Murphy, 2022). Despite the slow progress, participants in this study were able to see positives within the current climate. EM Williams described the great success of the Bush Theatre, in London, who are actively improving representation and opportunities for the transgender community. Williams argued that they "think that is the only house that's actually giving space for trans representation. There's also this really beautiful thing that I say beautiful and kind of like, it's extraordinary" (Williams, 2022). Because of the space that the theatre gives to trans people, it has created a positive and supportive community for the trans community within the UK theatre industry. This attitude that was developed by the Bush is key for two reasons. Firstly, if a theatre can create a supportive and welcoming environment for the trans community, the trans community will be more likely to participate in that theatres activities and recommend it to other social groups and therefore increases the organisation's business opportunities. Secondly, it is starting to create areas within the theatre industry where trans and queer people can feel safe enough to experiment and innovate within the theatre industry which could push the industry into using innovative methods. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship between transgender theatremakers and theatres; allowing transgender theatremakers to develop themselves and to develop an artistic reputation and loyal audiences, whilst increasing the profits and commercial viability of the theatre.

The Future of UK Transgender Theatre

One of the key themes that was explored in both datasets was how the future of transgender theatre may develop in the UK. 100% of the theatre makers that were interviewed in this study, to differing degrees, felt that there may be further challenges for transgender theatre makers in the future. This section of the chapter will explore the difficulties that the future may have for the trans theatre makers and what the potential causes for these might be.

One of the reasons behind the pessimism amongst the participants was the global and national difficulties that people are facing. Although issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, Brexit, the illegal war in Ukraine have impacts on all in society, it has a disproportionate impact on those who are already suffering. Those who are working class, those from minority groups and transgender people are often facing issues before these crises occurred and therefore this will add extra pressure on their daily lives. When Ross was asked about the future of transgender theatre, she made it very clear that she feels there will be challenges, she explained “I mean, am I optimistic about the future? No. We have a lot going on. You know, climate change, world war three. These things are huge. And where, you know, where the world is suffering. People on the margins, trans people are suffering all the more” (Ross, 2022). She makes the point that when society as a whole suffers, whether it is economic or societal difficulties, those who are already discriminated against are badly represented in positions of power in the country, are often unfairly targets of these difficulties. This can be seen with the current Tory government; during the financial crisis that the UK is facing, the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, has made claims that he could block a recent law that was voted for in Scotland, to make changing your gender in Scotland easier (Walker, et al., 2022). Emily Ross acknowledges that these global and national issues are having a dire impact on the theatre industry, for example, between March 2020 and December 2020 UK theatres and producers lost £1.04 billion (APPG, 2020, p. 2). However, for transgender theatre makers, there are multiple factors that’s influencing their situation, ranging from transphobia, the higher levels of unemployment they face (Lartey, 2016) and the precarity of the contemporary theatre industry in the UK (Fragkou, 2019). For many in the

transgender community, they have the added cost of health care, which many cisgender people do not need to budget for, due to the lack of support that the NHS offers the transgender community. Despite the principle of the NHS providing free healthcare to the UK population at the point of use, for transgender people this is not always the case. Press for Change conducted a study and found that 17% of participants were refused a referral to a gender identity clinic due to the GPs personal prejudices (Whittle, et al., 2007). This leads to many transgender people needing to pay for private healthcare for their transition, which can cost over £32,000 (The London Transgender Clinic, n.d.)

When transgender people have these sorts of costs, the cost of living crisis makes things a lot worse. As *Pinknews* reported, a trans man called Luke has been facing hugely difficult decisions due to the cost of living crisis in this country. Although he is working in his dream job of advocacy, he must consider quitting the job and getting a job at a supermarket so that he can afford the basics of life such as rent, bills and food. On top of the struggles with affording the basics, trans people often have to pay for extras with their healthcare as often the NHS is either unable or unwilling to support trans people with their healthcare. As each year goes on, the waiting time for trans people to get their first appointment increases – with some waiting five years for their first appointment. This leads to many trans people having to pay for private health care because they cannot wait for the NHS to provide services. In the case of Luke, because of the rising costs of everything, he cannot afford the costs of private healthcare, he has had to consider a process of “soft detransitioning” for two main reasons. Firstly, the rising costs have made medication more difficult to obtain. Secondly, the job market in the UK is still quite transphobic and therefore Luke has considered that if they detransition for a limited time, they might find it easier to find a better paying job. Therefore, if the transgender community are struggling with the very basics of surviving within this society, it makes it very difficult for members of this community to join the theatre industry, unless they come from a wealthy family. Thus, reducing the number of working-class people working in and creating theatre in the UK. Transgender theatre makers do not just have to deal with the current downturns in the UK theatre industry, but also other issues that make creating much more difficult, such as whether they can afford to eat, or their friends dying through suicide or the discrimination that they face in the workplace (Ross, 2022). These are the added pressures that transgender theatremakers must face, and that the current creative

industries are not putting in enough support for these issues. However, not all the participants was convinced that the future has to be negative.

Edalia Day does agree that the next few decades might be quite difficult however they believe that we can use the success of the last couple of decades to create a better future. They argue that the higher visibility and legal rights that the community has achieved can be vital in fighting for further respect and support for when the UK continues to face further struggles. They argue that the “World’s gonna go to shit”, with some of the issues explored earlier being key factors towards this bleak outlook, and they suggested that the “lovely little bubble of safety” that the trans community currently experience is not going to last for much longer (Day, 2022). Although the word safety could be disputed here, with high rates of trans murders, suicides, mental health issues and discrimination, when compared to what the future may hold for the community, it could be an accurate descriptor. They argue that this bubble could pop in the next few decades but this does not necessarily mean that the future has to be harrowing for the community. They argue “we’ve got this bubble. We’ve got this positivity, there’s so much backlash happening around the world. That’s the world for you. They like they’re terrified of us. And they’re gonna try really hard to crush us. But we’ve got this visibility. And I feel so passionate about spreading that visibility and spreading positivity and spreading truth” (Day, 2022). The argument being that if the transgender community can use the relatively safety that they experience at the moment, they can start building the foundations now for a safer and brighter future. In terms of the theatre, this could mean increasing the amount of transgender theatremakers in the industry now and to allow them to create authentic characterisations of transgender people which could contribute to the normalisation of complicated and three-dimensional characters. If this were achieved in the next few years, when the trans community are attacked further in the future, it would already be considered normal for people to think of trans characters as complex characters, rather than simple and limited stereotypes, and therefore this could become a norm. This would create a new bubble of safety and respect for the community within the industry. This is what Day thinks will happen; they argue that “trans stories are gonna get better trans stories are getting better. Trans writers are writing stories, trans artists are making stories and trans artists are getting better” (Day, 2022). If this trend of

improving quality and quantity of trans theatre continues in the UK, this can contribute to a more trans friendly future for the industry. Although representation is crucial for building a positive future, there are other contributing factors, such as the importance of money and the capitalist system.

EM Williams highlights the intrinsic link between the capitalist system and the theatre industry in the UK. They mention that “it's the British culture of shame of talking about money, and that we don't talk about these things. Because impolite. And the fact that everyone's scrimping and saving, especially a post COVID” (Williams, 2022). The idea of a British capitalism means that even though everything in society is influenced heavily by money and capitalism, it can be considered as impolite to discuss finances. This is especially important for those in the theatre industry who are struggling financially and this could prevent trans theatre makers from demanding better pay, rather than leaving the industry, due to the idea of not discussing it. This is an issue that could be explored to create a more fruitful future. If trans theatre makers are encouraged to interrogate how much they get paid, compared to the salaries of those who hold positions of power, this could create a stronger group of theatremakers, who then ultimately demand better conditions and pay, and then can not only continue to create better quality art, but have a better quality of life. Williams argues that if we want to see an intersectional theatre industry, which celebrates its diversity and inclusion, then there needs to be discussions between actors, theatres, ACE and the government to discuss how money can be redistributed within the industry and not only support transgender actors, amongst other minority groups, but to fairly compensate them for their work. For example, if a theatre wants to produce a performance about transgender experiences, then they should pay transgender playwrights, actors, directors and casting teams. This would directly put money into the pockets of the transgender community, thus encouraging and allowing them to develop their careers and their artistic work further.

Transgender theatre may be on course for a rough few decades but as the participants noted, there is hope if theatremakers and theatres start to make changes now. The two main things that can be worked on in the current industry is that of money and representation. The more financial support that is offered to trans theatremakers, and the better paid roles we give to trans theatre makers, the higher

up the theatre hierarchy they can reach and the more people that will be inspired to enter the industry. Additionally, the more and better quality representations the industry produces for the trans community, the better the foundation would be for the future. If the strong and accurate representations become the norm in the next few years, this will form new norms for the future and potentially create a more inclusive industry.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the findings, discussed these findings and placed them in the current academic context. It has explored the historical and current representations of the transgender community. Despite the progress that has been made in terms of creating more authentic characters and stories, the evidence suggests that there is still a lot more that needs to be done to create a more trans friendly industry. For example, there needs to be more variety in the types of stories that are told about transgender experiences. Instead of focusing solely on the transition story or the harrowing experiences of being rejected by friends or families, there needs to be love stories, stories of friends, surprise, suspense and shock, like there is with cisgender characters. Once this is achieved then there will be a much wider range of representations and thus allow transgender characters to be in stories, not because they are transgender, but just because they are another character in the story. The theme of representation was one of the most popular amongst both datasets and this therefore suggests that, among trans theatre makers, representation is a key issue that needs to be explored by researchers, theatres and theatre makers.

The link between institutions and transgender theatre was explored, where some institutional barriers were highlighted. Theatre institutions in the UK may, directly or indirectly, prevent or restrict trans theatre makers from rising up the hierarchy. The evidence suggests that, similar to the glass ceiling for women in the workplace, there exists a transgender glass ceiling for the trans community; which leads some of them to resist the mainstream theatre, and work within the fringes. Mainstream institutions do have its benefits, such as providing a steady and guaranteed income, it does have its negatives as well, such as the restriction of one's voice through proof reading and making artists follow an institutional artistic vision. On the other side, the fringe festivals do allow creators to be fully

autonomous with their creativity but it does not always provide a steady income which can cause stress professionally and personally for the creatives involved. The evidence from this study does suggest that there is at least a small move towards trans artists working in the fringe to enjoy the artistic liberty.

The influence that those in positions of power have on artists and creatives is huge; this may not be that relevant to those artists who are represented in these positions. However, artists that are not represented within the positions of power, such as transgender artists, the homogenous power that those at the top hold over them can be quite restrictive and damaging. The evidence in the study suggests that those in power do not represent those who work in the industry, or society as a whole. This can cause issues because those at the top might not have any experience or knowledge that the trans community face and therefore they are unable to create policies or systems within the industry to support them. To help create a bright future, those in power need to represent the artists within the industry, and society as a whole.

Although the participants feel, to differing degrees, unhappy about the future of transgender theatre in the UK, they did share points that can be praised and developed. A common theme that was discussed was that when the country goes through a crisis, such as the cost of living crisis, those who are already struggling and are being discriminated against will face a disproportionate part of the problems.

Within the theatre industry, this could include the trans community. To alleviate these issues, trans theatremakers can start preparing for the future now by creating and maintaining a strong foundation, of shared norms and values, which can become ingrained within the theatre's ideology so that in the future, some of the battles the trans community have won already, can be sustained.

Conclusion

By gathering first-hand accounts of theatremakers' experiences and analysing that data, by using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, this thesis has managed to explore important issues within the relatively new scholarly field of UK transgender theatre. The overarching area of focus of this project was to explore and reflect upon how transgender identities are currently being represented in the UK theatre industry. Within this main focus, there were more specific focuses, which were able to provide more detailed results. One of these aims was to investigate the links between theatrical institutions in the UK and transgender theatremakers. The purpose behind this was to explore whether there is adequate support within the industry for the transgender community or whether there are any institutional barriers that need to be highlighted. The second focus was to explore the other side of this equation; how transgender theatremakers respond to how the industry is set up. This focus wanted to explore the different strategies that some transgender theatremakers might be using in the UK to resist the mainstream and instead use their differences as their superpower. Although the limited scope that this project was realistically able to achieve would not be to explicitly prove that this is the case or be able to provide any explanation or evidence as to how widespread this is, it was able to provide evidence of it happening, at least in some pockets of the industry.

The Project's Outcomes

This project provided many opportunities for growth, exploration and new knowledge and understanding, both as a researcher and knowledge for the scholarly field as well. I was conscious, during the research design phase, that there is not yet a universally agreed approach or set of methodologies that should be used when researching transgender issues or using transgender participants. As a result, research was undertaken to find the best research methods and overarching methodology that should be used to both find and develop the best quality results whilst also respecting, making the participants feel safe and allowing the participants to share as much or as little and use their voice to do this. These criteria led to the selection of a qualitative approach towards the data collection for one main reason – I judged that this approach would give the space for each participant to truly reflect their views honestly and allow each participant to be seen in their own

unique set of experiences and circumstances rather than being seen as a number in a larger machine. This in no way attempts to invalidate or reduce the effectiveness and importance of a quantitative approach towards research, however, it was not the most appropriate approach for this study because I wanted to provide the opportunity for the participants to feel free to explain their views fully and have these opinions and experiences fully explored. Because there is no universal methodology and set of research methods standard for researching transgender participants, I had to use a variety of research methods; for example, using semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to divert to different areas that the participants want to discuss but still have a structure which allows both researcher and participants to stay on track. I do believe that this approach can contribute, albeit a small contribution, towards a universal methodology that can be used for research involving transgender participants – including using insider researchers when possible. Although a small contribution towards methodology was made from this project, further contributions were made through the results of the study.

While the smaller size of the participants of the study limits the generalisability of the results of this project, the results do show an interesting insight into how transgender identities are currently being represented in UK theatres. Although the limited and harmful set of tropes that were reserved for transgender identities has reduced, the negative attitudes or themes remain. 20th-century UK theatre generally represented transgender identities through tropes, such as sex workers, mentally ill characters or sexual deviants. The research conducted through this project suggests that the prevalence of these tropes has dramatically reduced but the representations are still negative – such as portraying them as lonely, sad or damaged. The results, therefore, suggest that there has been an improvement in the representation of transgender identities but there is still a lot more work that needs to be done. Another key theme that appeared within the dataset was the impact that theatrical institutions have on transgender artists within the UK.

The results of this study highlighted potential issues within UK theatrical institutions and provided some evidence that there are some institutional barriers towards transgender artists. Institutions hold much power over what type of theatre can be produced and who is given these opportunities, but as

this study and other scholarly work prove, this is not always a meritocratic approach. As Tabby Lamb described, transgender artists are often told by theatres that transgender, or more broadly LGBT theatre, does not sell as well as other types of theatre or is not as safe as other types of theatre, in terms of guaranteed income and high numbers of audiences. However, Lamb, when touring her work throughout the UK, has not found any evidence to back these claims up. The results also suggest that there could be a developing trend within UK theatre for some transgender theatremakers to resist mainstream theatre and by extension the mainstream theatrical institutions, by not only remaining in the fringes of theatre but celebrating it. Working within fringe events, such as the Edinburgh Fringe Festivals, does provide its own set of challenges for the theatremakers, such as an uncertain financial situation and uncertain audience levels, which can create extra levels of difficulty for those who do not have savings to rely on. However, these events do provide a lot of opportunities for those who are traditionally excluded or restricted by traditional institutions. The participants expressed the benefits of creating and performing their work in fringe events due to the freedom, as they do not have any people providing restrictions on what their performances can be about, and there is no proofreading of their writings and therefore the censorship that may exist in other institutions are not present in the fringe. The result of this project suggests that traditional institutions used ideas from the fringe about creative freedom and the fringe used ideas from traditional theatres by providing financial security to its artists. Linked to the theme of institutions is the theme of power and how much influence those in positions of power have over transgender theatremakers in the UK.

The people who hold power within UK theatre organisations have a huge amount of power when it comes to which opportunities artists get but also the distribution of resources, money and marketing power. The results suggest that the resources and money may be distributed disproportionately, which provides fewer opportunities for the transgender community. A possible explanation for this disparity is the demographic makeup of those in power. Because the majority of those in power are generally white, cisgender, heterosexual men, they lack the knowledge and understanding of other groups, such as the transgender community, and therefore, either consciously or unconsciously, restrict access and resources for transgender theatre. If policies were introduced, that mirrored some of the policies in a

business where there is a quota for women in positions of power, that set a certain percentage of transgender people at all levels of the creative process – actors, directors, artistic directors etc- then those in power would have a much broader set of knowledge and understanding thus be able to support all of their artists and encourage art form all sections of society. Due to the restraints of this project, it was not possible to dig into a significant depth of this area, but it has highlighted some of the issues that require further research and policy development by theatre makers, academics and theatres collaboratively. The final theme that was explored throughout this project was the future of transgender theatre.

All the participants in this study expressed, to differing degrees, a negative outlook on the future of transgender theatre in the UK. Some of the participants did, however, provide areas that can be seen in an optimistic light or areas that could be worked on now which could improve the prospects for the future. One of the key areas that were highlighted by Edalia Day was the importance of the progress that has been made and how this can be used to create a more positive future. For example, if transgender artists can consolidate the better representations and the norm of transgender writers writing about transgender themes and make these the theatrical norms then this will make a future where transgender people already have a basic level of respect. Some of the participants also highlighted that representations of transgender identities have improved and this trend is likely to continue, which provides more hope for the future. The results of this project do seem to suggest that there is not a high level of optimism, possibly due to some of the other themes that were explored earlier, towards the future but the artists do have faith in transgender artists to continue to make space for themselves and to resist the pressure that is applied to them by those in power.

Original Contribution to academia

This thesis has contributed new knowledge to the growing field of UK transgender theatre and highlighted areas that need more research. The new concept of trans fragility was devised within this project. This concept describes the reaction of some cisgender people feeling personally attacked after transgender people demand better treatment and more legal rights as they see this as being achieved at the expense of their rights or treatment. I believe this to be a valuable contribution as this can explain

some of the reactions that trans people often face when they try to have reasonable discussions and demand more understanding from society and therefore can be used to find solutions to these issues.

The second contribution from this project is the suggested steps that can be made to create a more positive future for transgender theatre. Although this contribution is small, it can be used in further research or in policy development by theatres to experiment. This effectively contributes to creating a foundation for future discussions and this can act as a springboard for these discussions to occur in the mainstream. Alongside contributions to academia, this project has also raised further questions that need further research and experimentation from those in the industry.

One of the biggest areas that need further research is strategies and policies that can be implemented to create more fruitful opportunities for the transgender community within the theatre. Research could be focused on whether policies such as quotas, transgender-only support programmes or transgender-specific courses to shortcut them into positions of power would be beneficial and effective. There should also be a specific focus on improving opportunities for early career transgender creatives, as this is the stage that this study suggests is the most difficult stage for transgender artists, such as joint partnerships between acting trainer providers and theatres.

Additional research could also be conducted on how the industry can reform its management structure and allow for more flexible, diverse and proactive management teams. This project did not have the scope to explore in detail how those in positions of power dominate the resources and finances of the industry and how this can be reformed. It was also unable to provide specific case studies of how individual theatres are run, except for a brief exploration of the management of the artistic director of the Bush theatre Lynette Linton. Further research could be conducted to find specific examples that lead to these issues and this can provide more information for those who are trying to diversify those in power.

Finally, this project was unable to go into great detail and find generalisability correlations between those transgender theatremakers who actively try to resist the influence of mainstream theatre.

Although this project did manage to find evidence that this happens with some practitioners, further

research with larger sample sizes would be required to establish whether this happens across the industry or whether these findings are an isolated set of experiences. If these observations were confirmed by further research then this newfound knowledge could be used by theatres across the UK to both work with the fringes of theatre and also improve their theatres to be more trans-friendly.

Final Comments

Transgender theatre is flourishing within the UK in the 21st century but this greater diversity often masks the complications and restrictions that transgender artists are facing daily. I believe that there should be new research from talented transgender academics across the UK to find solutions to these issues. Theatres and actor training providers should also work with these researchers because if together, they can increase the participation of transgender people in the arts, this benefits the training providers and theatres, by creating more revenue, but also the industry as a whole as new experiences and perspective can be used within the creative process. I hope that this thesis has been able to contribute to this industry, even if it is making people aware of the issues or the impacts it has. I will end this thesis with a quote from Tabby Lamb, which could be used as a catchphrase for transgender theatre in the UK.

We should all be “obsessed with the idea of like, leaning into our transness. I'm taking advantage of it and being able to like, but you know... like you're transness, your otherness is your superpower. And the way that we can use that on stage is infinite really” (Lamb, 2022).

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