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Matters in Light of the #MeToo Movement**

www.polishtheatrejournal.com

Publisher

Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw

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Shifting the Landscape: Why Changing Actor Training Matters in Light of the #MeToo Movement

October seems to have become the month when world headlines are dominated by men in high places being called to account for their past behaviour. October 2016 saw the Trump tapes made public, with commentary from the current President of the United States revealing his less than egalitarian attitude towards women. October 2017 was all about Weinstein, while October 2018 saw the denouncement of Brett Kavanaugh, now an associate justice of the US Supreme Court. And in the past week, the British press has been rife with reports of our own Prime Minister's previous 'peccadillos'. That we are here at this conference, 'Change – Now! What We Have Been Silent About at Drama Schools', in October 2019 captures the zeitgeist and is especially important.

Our story begins with arguably one of the most powerful Hollywood moguls in cinematic history. Three weeks ago, the BBC premiered a documentary film titled *Untouchable: The Rise and Fall of Harvey Weinstein*.¹ It is compulsive viewing. It should also be compulsory viewing.

For decades Weinstein had used his power to exploit and abuse. His behaviour was common knowledge in the industry, his name constantly heard in 'whisper networks'. On the rare occasion anyone tried to file a formal complaint, Weinstein employed the legal machinery of Miramax (the company he had founded with his brother Bob) to harass and intimidate them until they agreed to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA). This was accompanied by a sizeable sum of money in return for their silence. NDAs are commonplace in the film industry and carry hefty legal implications if they are broken. Originally used to protect a company's intellectual property, or where public disclosure might compromise security, they have become increasingly used as a means to hide abuse and harassment, leading to a discussion in the UK at the governmental level on whether the use of NDAs should be subject to more stringent regulation.² Weinstein's use of NDAs was a crucial element in maintaining his powerbase.

1 *Untouchable: The Rise and Fall of Harvey Weinstein*, dir. by Ursula MacFarlane (BBC/Samuel Marshall Films, 2019).

2 Louise Skinner and Sarah Stock, 'UK Proposes to Tighten Rules on Nondisclosure Agreements and Confidentiality Clauses', *Lexology*, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=eb2f6c68-8ee7-4a99-8fb4-91f2daf2ef8f> [accessed 14 October 2019].

As early as 2002, the American journalist Ken Auletta had attempted to uncover the truth behind the Hollywood rumour mill and been met with a wall of silence. No one was prepared to testify in court. The power of Miramax at this juncture, and by implication the power of Harvey Weinstein, was immense. Miramax had gone into partnership with The Walt Disney Company in June 1993, and by the early noughties, after a string of box-office hits, including *Pulp Fiction*, *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, and *The Crying Game*, had become one of the most powerful production companies in the world. In 2000, Weinstein, heavily involved in the Gore-Lieberman campaign and looking to position himself in the political arena, decided to delay the release of a film called *O*, a post-modern take on *Othello*, concerned the film might be something of a political hot potato. When two journalists, Rebecca Traister and Andrew Goldman, buttonholed Weinstein at a party to question this decision, they were met with a torrent of physical and verbal abuse, including Weinstein's now famous statement: 'I'm glad I'm the fucking sheriff of this shit ass fucking town.'³ Despite the incident being witnessed, and photographed, many times, no pictures were ever published, and when Traister took the story to her editor at the *New York Times*, he advised: 'Harvey is Russia. Don't write about it.'⁴

Absolute power was now corrupting absolutely. Not only were NDAs used to effectively silence women who tried to press assault charges, but refusal by the newspapers to publish such stories meant they were becoming complicit in the suppression of Weinstein's abusive behaviour; he had indeed become 'the sheriff'. In the end, a combination of factors created a perfect storm: Disney bought out Miramax, and a change of direction in their film output impacted adversely on the Weinstein currency. And vast sums of money were still being spent on NDAs, a phalanx of top-end lawyers, and a security firm of ex-Mossad known as Black Cube, in an attempt to keep Weinstein from being exposed. Even when told that there were now women prepared to testify, his response was: 'It's a great story; I'll buy the rights and make the film.'⁵ It was the dogged persistence of three investigative reporters that finally toppled Weinstein, creating an environment where truth was finally able to speak its name.

On 5 October 2017, the *New York Times* published a powerful report by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey revealing multiple allegations of sexual harassment against Weinstein.⁵ Ronan Farrow's exposé in the *New Yorker* went live five days later.⁶ All three journalists were later awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. Within days the world's media experienced an unprecedented reaction.

³ Rebecca Traister, interviewed in *Untouchable*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, 'Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades', *New York Times*, 5 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html> [accessed 9 November 2019].

⁶ Ronan Farrow, 'From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein's Accusers Tell Their Stories', *New Yorker*, 23 October 2017 (released online 10 October 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories> [accessed 14 October 2019].

On 15 October 2017, the actress Alyssa Milano declared her own experience at the hands of Weinstein, using the hashtag #MeToo.⁷ By the end of the following day, #MeToo had been re-tweeted more than half a million times and received more than twelve million posts on Facebook. The floodgates had been opened, and a torrent of disclosure poured forth. Finally, the lid was being lifted on decades of abuse and harassment in the entertainment industry.

However, #MeToo was no kneejerk reaction to Weinstein, but a movement established over a decade earlier in 2006 by the civil rights activist Tarana Burke, who coined the phrase after a young girl told her of the sexual abuse she had suffered at the hands of her mother's boyfriend. Burke freely admits she did not know how to respond, and afterwards said she wished she had simply replied to the girl 'Me too'. Burke recognized that solidarity can provide some small form of help, what she terms 'empowermental empathy', that the stronger the voice that protests, the greater the possibility for change. In founding MeToo, she hoped to both highlight and eradicate the systemic abuse she found in her own community.

A number of other hashtags appeared, including #TimesUp,⁸ which, initially set up as a legal defence fund to provide legal, financial, and media support for the acting profession, soon opened its doors to all women regardless of their professional status. Networks of support began to emerge. Street demonstrations began happening across the world. The voices of abused women got louder – and louder. The World Health Organization estimates the prevalence of sexual violence as the experience of one-third of all women worldwide.⁹ But sexual harassment exists in every workplace and sector of society, and men as well as women are targeted: abuse is abuse and perpetrated irrespective of gender, as is clear when we look at what was happening on the other side of the pond. While the world watched aghast as more and more women came forward with testimonials against Weinstein, the British press was busy unveiling its own monsters.

In the immediate aftermath of Alyssa Milano's revelations, Vicky Featherstone, artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre in London,¹⁰ organized a Day of Action for 28 October 2017, which elicited 150 anonymous testimonials of sexual assault. These accusations led

7 Dino-Ray Ramos, 'Alyssa Milano Tweets "Me Too" Hashtag Inspired by Tarana Burke, Raising Awareness of Sexual Abuse', *Deadline*, 15 October 2017, <https://deadline.com/2017/10/alyssa-milano-me-too-hashtag-twitter-rose-mcgowan-sexual-harassment-awareness-1202188999/> [accessed 14 October 2019].

8 Constance Grady, 'Time's Up was at the center of the 2018 Golden Globes. One year later, what has come of it?' *Vox*, updated 6 January 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/1/4/18165557/golden-globes-times-up-legal-defense-fund-sharyn-tejani> [accessed 14 October 2019].

9 World Health Organization, 'Violence Against Women', 29 November 2017, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> [accessed 6 October 2019].

10 Royal Court Theatre, 'Artistic Director Vicky Featherstone Programs a Day of Action in Response to the Weinstein Revelations', 17 October 2017, <https://royalcourttheatre.com/artistic-director-vicky-featherstone-programs-day-action-response-weinstein-revelations/> [accessed 11 October 2019].

to the very public downfall of two major figures in British theatre: Max Stafford-Clark, ironically the former artistic director of the Royal Court, who had gone on to found the Out of Joint theatre company, and former Old Vic artistic director Kevin Spacey. On 27 November 2017, barely a month after Farrow's exposé, BBC news reported that the Old Vic was confirming twenty testimonials of alleged inappropriate behaviour by Spacey, three of which had been reported to the police. A few weeks later, Gabriel Byrne, who had co-starred with Spacey in the 1995 Oscar-winning film *The Usual Suspects*, revealed production on that film had been suspended for two days after Spacey made unwanted sexual advances toward a younger actor.¹¹ In a subsequent interview with the *Sunday Times*, Byrne also recalled working with Harvey Weinstein, and compared the behaviour of the two men, stating that Spacey's *modus operandi* had a similar 'element of absolute abuse of power'.¹²

Byrne talked about the difficulty of reporting 'common knowledge'. This reluctance, along with a lack of official reporting mechanisms, has been another contributory factor to the years of silence. 'Whisper networks' (a term used to describe unofficial naming of suspected abusers to warn other people) illustrate why we must have robust policies in place: rigorous and effective policy makes it far harder for people to argue 'common knowledge but not my personal experience' as a reason for ignoring suspected abuse. Vicky Featherstone's Day of Action at the Royal Court allowed whistles to be blown, revealing the underbelly of the British theatrical landscape. But why, if the licentious behaviour of Kevin Spacey and Max Stafford-Clark had been common knowledge for many years, were whistles not blown before? Perhaps further explanation can be found in the case of Gina Abolins, education officer for Out of Joint, who had complained of inappropriate and sexualized comments by Stafford-Clark.¹³ A spokesperson for Stafford-Clark disputed her claim, claiming that any inappropriate behaviour was the result of a stroke and made under the influence of alcohol.

Almost immediately, the high-profile actress Tracy Ann Oberman came out in support of Abolins, publishing an article in the *Guardian* publicly detailing her encounters with Stafford-Clark which had occurred decades before his stroke:

It was humiliating and disconcerting, and given my lack of professional experience at that point, I found myself looking around the room and thinking that this must be normal. This must be what being

11 Will Butler, 'Gabriel Byrne says that Kevin Spacey's "sexual behaviour" delayed filming on "The Usual Suspects"', *NME*, 5 December 2017 <https://www.nme.com/news/film/gabriel-byrne-kevin-spacey-sexual-behaviour-delayed-filming-usual-suspects-2168410>, [accessed 11 October 2019].

12 Eithne Shortall, 'Usual suspect was Spacey for misbehaviour, claims Byrne', *The Times*, 3 December 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/usual-suspect-was-spacey-for-misbehaviour-claims-byrne-m2q829vjv> [accessed 11 October 2019].

13 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "'Directors are no longer untouchable gods': transforming British theatre", *Guardian*, 27 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeand-style/2018/jan/27/directors-no-longer-untouchable-gods-transforming-british-theatre> [accessed 11 October 2019].

an actor is like. I never said anything about it at the time, and it simply didn't cross my mind to talk to anyone official.¹⁴

The board of Out of Joint asked Stafford-Clark to step down as artistic director, but the official reason cited was his wish to 'focus on his international freelance career'. There was no mention of the allegations.¹⁵ Another example of powerful people choosing to obfuscate the truth.

Six key points now emerge in the re-telling of these fallen idols – points that must be carefully considered if we are to successfully establish new protocols.

- First, that the structures of our industry created hierarchies of absolute power where those who held such positions frequently felt entitled to exert that power for their own gratification. Some of those hierarchies were interlinked with other social structures, such as the police, media, and governing bodies, so when behaviour was challenged, those accused were able to rely on a safety net of conspiracy, collusion, and silence.
- Second, that there was an almost complete lack of official conduits for the reporting of abuse. Instead 'whisper networks' and 'private lists' were relied on to act as warning systems. By all accounts, these were largely ineffective in stopping known abusers.
- Third, that the advent of non-disclosure agreements has provided a legal mechanism which, rather than protecting a company's creative output from competitors, has been used to cover up illegal activity.
- Fourth, that the nature of our profession – where in Britain the official statistic for actor unemployment stands at eighty-three per cent – has created a culture where gratitude for any work opportunity was accompanied by a form of 'common-knowledge censorship'.
- Fifth, that for many victims of abuse, recounting their experience to the authorities was as traumatic as the initial assault itself.
- Sixth, that harassment, abuse, victimization, and intimidation had become an accepted and 'normalized' part of our industry.

If we are to genuinely move forward, we must acknowledge, and address, the very uncomfortable truth that decades of abusive behaviour had become 'normalized'. Many of the statements in *Untouchable* allude to a tacit understanding that success in Hollywood required acquiescence on the casting couch. In Britain, too, there was an acceptance that inappropriate comments and physical contact were a form of *droit du seigneur*, that overt questioning by great directors about how you lost your virginity or suggestions of a threesome was just an eccentric foible, a badge of creative genius. Britain has a strong and proud

¹⁴ Tracy Ann Oberman, 'Max Stafford-Clark pestered me for sex long before his stroke', *Guardian*, 26 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2017/oct/26/max-stafford-clark-sex-tracy-ann-oberman> [accessed 11 October 2019].

¹⁵ Alexandra Topping, 'Theatre director Max Stafford-Clark was ousted over inappropriate behaviour', *Guardian*, 20 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/oct/20/theatre-director-max-stafford-clark-was-ousted-over-inappropriate-behaviour> [accessed 11 October 2019].

tradition of trade unions. At the time of #MeToo, the actors' union Equity had already been soul-searching, urged on by its members to examine the casting process and whether it genuinely reflected equality and diversity within the acting profession. By October 2017, Equity was already in the process of issuing its Manifesto for Casting, which contained a number of clauses directly relating to the concept of 'safe space' working, including the following:

No sex act should be requested at any audition or that an actor be requested to engage in simulated sex acts.

A performer should not be requested to undress in whole or in part unless a mutually agreed observer is present.

In line with legislation, performers should not be asked for personal information verbally or in writing as part of the audition. This includes actual age, ethnicity, disability, pregnancy, marital/civil partnership status or sexual orientation.¹⁶

Maureen Beattie, who was then vice president of Equity, immediately galvanized the union to create an Agenda for Change, stating:

Equity is taking a lead in creating the culture shift that is the proper response to the tide of horrifying revelations of sexual harassment. [...] There should be zero tolerance of behaviour that – under the Equality Act 2010 – is against the law. [...] We are demanding a more professional working environment where our members and future members will not have to endure or observe sexual harassment and where perpetrators understand there is nowhere to hide.¹⁷

Issued one month after #MeToo, this agenda added to the Manifesto for Casting by addressing all areas of the industry, with specific reference to, and recommendations for, drama schools:

Develop the Equity student deputy network of student representatives

Conduct an annual survey to review and improve the relationship between the union and students

Encourage student deputies to report how bullying and harassment policies operate in their schools

Maintain regular contact with and visits to vocational educational establishments

Equity calls for safe spaces for castings and auditions¹⁸

Equity also proposed a number of ways to exert pressure in order to ensure compliance, suggesting that key organizations such as the Arts Councils, Creative Scotland, and the BFI use their leverage with those they fund. Additional measures include addressing gender

¹⁶ Equity, www.equity.org.uk [accessed 11 October 2019].

¹⁷ Equity, 'Agenda for Change report', p. 4, www.equity.org.uk/media/1263/agenda-for-change.pdf [accessed 11 October 2019].

¹⁸ Equity, 'Agenda for Change report.'

balance in the workplace, promoting dedicated helplines, declaring a zero-tolerance approach to violence and sexual harassment at the start of every rehearsal process, and ensuring that policies are included as a signed understanding on every contract. It is worth noting in this hashtag era that in June 2019, Equity created a new hashtag, #This is not working, to protest against the lack of action by the British government. This was linked to an online petition requesting immediate revision of the laws on sexual harassment. Our government has been somewhat preoccupied with other matters, but on 30 July 2019 they agreed to effect a consultation. And the unions intend to keep applying pressure.

So how have we at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) responded to this climate for change? As an educational establishment that receives public funding, we are accountable on every possible level and must respond to government legislation. We have a number of committees comprising members of staff from across the various faculties, and we actively engage student representation on a number of key groups, as their voice is vital in ensuring transparency of process. The Consultative Forum, the specific body responsible for the approval of all policies, meets six times a year to interrogate new proposals and to revisit and update existing strategies, ensuring they are legally compliant and fit for purpose. Once approved, appropriate training is implemented so that all staff are cognisant of the parameters, implications, and responsibilities for their working practice.

While whisper networks sometimes provided a mechanism through which victims of abuse could identify with each other and speak out, they were not always effective in stopping the abuser. And their very informality meant they could be 'weaponized', used to spread unsubstantiated gossip. In large part, this was Gabriel Byrne's defence: how do you prove rumour?

One solution is to establish an effective, and balanced, whistleblowing policy that protects both the accuser and the accused, where false accusation is dealt with as seriously as genuine complaint. So let's examine how the RCS deals with the concept of whistleblowing. The RCS whistleblowing policy¹⁹ was established in 2008, and its purpose was to create an environment where no member of staff would suffer detriment in raising a legitimate concern over serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the RCS. The RCS procedures are in line with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which cites examples of what might constitute reportable behaviour, the most salient of which in respect of harassment and abuse are:

- A criminal offence has been committed/is being committed/is likely to be committed.
- A person has failed/is failing/is likely to fail to comply with a legal obligation to which they are subject.
- The health and safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be endangered.

¹⁹ Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Whistle-blowing Policy and Procedure (September 2018), <https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/hr/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2018/09/RCS-Whistle-blowing-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>, [accessed 11 October 2019].

- Disclosure must be in the public interest, show reasonable belief that it shows malpractice, and made using appropriate procedures.
- If an individual makes a malicious allegation, they will be subject to disciplinary procedures.

This last point is vital, because in all the anger, accusation, and furore surrounding this subject, we have yet to find balance. In acknowledging the existence of abuse, we must find definitions that are clear and unambiguous so that disclosure is never an excuse for unwarranted retribution or revenge – from either side of the claim.

Our whistleblowing policy is part of a suite of protocols that interconnect to address all aspects of life at the RCS. The Dignity at Work and Study Policy²⁰ (also established in 2008) aims to create an environment free from intimidation, bullying, and sexual, racial, or disability harassment, where all staff and students treat each other fairly and with mutual respect. This policy applies not only to staff and students but to our contractors, consultants, audiences, and the wider public. It clearly outlines codes of professionalism and expected conduct, recognizing the imbalance of power that exists between staff and students and describing the boundaries that must exist between staff and students, and indeed between staff themselves. It also cites the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which has guidelines for the prevention and management of work-related violence.

There are three further policies that articulate the ethos of safe-space working. The Trans & Gender Diversity Policy and Procedure²¹ came online in 2018 and encompasses the Human Rights Act 1998, the Gender Recognition Act 2004, the Equality Act 2010, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the Data Protection Act 2018. It looks specifically at issues surrounding sexual identity and recognizes a broad range of people whose gender identity is not expressed in ways typically associated with their assigned sex at birth, including those who have non-binary, a-gender, or gender-fluid identities. Under current British law, these identities are given the status of ‘protected characteristics’, and we accord these students the same respect and dignity as any other member of the RCS community. With over a thousand young people under the age of eighteen engaged in our life-long learning programmes, summer schools, and Junior Conservatoire, we also have robust policies on child protection and the role of the chaperone in productions that involve children.²² The policy states:

20 Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Dignity at Work and Study Policy (September 2018), <https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/hr/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2018/09/RCS-Dignity-at-Work-and-Study-Policy-V5.pdf> [accessed 11 October 2019].

21 Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Trans & Gender Diversity Policy and Procedure (July 2019), <https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/hr/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2019/09/Trans-Gender-Diversity-Policy-and-Procedure-v3.pdf> [accessed 11 October 2019].

22 Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Child Protection Policy and Procedures, portal.rcs.ac.uk/hr/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2018/10/RCS-Child-Protection-Policy-V4.pdf [accessed 11 October 2019].

The basic belief underpinning the Conservatoire's approach to child protection is that if children and young people are to learn respect for themselves and others they must be respected by the adults caring for them. All forms of physical, emotional and verbal punishment are unacceptable. Abuse, exploitation and humiliation are degrading processes which will not be tolerated.

This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also have four designated child-protection contacts able to deal with any emergency situation and a further nine staff trained to provide information and advice on child welfare and protection. All staff are required by law to be checked through PVG/Enhanced Disclosure Scotland to determine any previous convictions. The chaperone policy requires compliance with the Children and Young Persons Act 1963, the Children and Young People Act 2014, and the Children Performance and Activities Scotland Regulations 2014, and all chaperones must be licensed by Glasgow City Council. These policies exist – must exist – in order to be clear about the behaviour we expect and are expected to accord others. They are by necessity complex, wordy, and – the bottom line? – not many people read them properly!

So how do we promote policies to make sure that the very people they are designed to protect (a) know about them and (b) take ownership of them? The RCS has a number of internal mechanisms through which we can advertise new procedures: online information portals, e-mails, the principal's weekly letter, marketing, staff dissemination in the classroom, weekly programme meetings – a plethora of mechanisms. There is a danger of information overload, so the fundamental principles contained in all these policies have been distilled into one simple message. In February 2018, while waiting for the government to legislate and tighten up the laws surrounding sexual misconduct, Equity released its Safe Spaces Statement,²³ which the RCS immediately adopted. This statement is printed on large stickers and given high visibility, appearing in every rehearsal room and corridor at both our campuses. It encapsulates the spirit and intention of every other policy that we have. There is simply no excuse for anyone to pretend they do not know what we stand for.

Everyone working and learning together in this room is entitled to do so in a safe space: a space free of bullying and harassment of any kind.

We will honour our differences and collaborate in the true spirit of ensemble, promoting creative challenge whilst retaining the utmost respect for each other.

We will treat one another with courtesy and respect at all times, and if we are subjected to or witness bullying or harassment we will speak out knowing that our voices will be heard and we will be taken seriously.

We will actively promote a positive, optimistic and mutually supportive approach to work and study.

Together we can create a Safe Space.

²³ Equity, Safe Spaces Statement, <https://www.equity.org.uk/getting-involved/campaigns/safe-spaces/safe-spaces-statement/> [accessed 11 October 2019].

At the Warsaw conference, the first half of the presentation concluded with a short poll. Using smartphones, the conference audience were invited to log in to the Mentimeter app,²⁴ which allows real-time anonymized surveys. They were asked to consider five questions with a choice of Yes/No/Not Sure answers. Forty-three out of fifty-eight people present chose to complete the survey, and the results are tabulated below.

Question	Answer: Yes	Answer: No	Answer: Not sure
1. Have you ever been subjected to sexual harassment in your place of work?	19/43	20/43	4/43
2. Have you been told of someone else's experience of harassment in the industry?	36/43	4/43	2/43
3. Have you ever experienced behaviour from someone that made you feel uncomfortable?	39/43	3/43	1/43
4. Have you been in a situation where a contract or offer was made for 'reciprocal favours'?	11/43	25/43	7/43
5. If you answered 'yes' to any of the above questions, did you report it?	14/43	26/43	N/A

These results provided the conference with a snapshot of the delegates' experience in the industry. By comparison, of the 150 testimonials elicited during the Royal Court's Day of Action in October 2017, 126 were directly related to the profession, with the data breakdown as follows:

- 21.3% were incidents that happened in rehearsals or backstage.
- 16.0% were sustained inappropriate sexual comments over a period of time during a production or in a workplace.
- 14.0% happened at drama schools between tutors and students.
- 13.3% happened at work parties – press nights, birthdays, end of the run, Christmas, in the pub or at dinner, with alcohol. In the Town Hall meetings this blurred social context came up many times.
- 10.0% happened in interviews or auditions for jobs.
- 9.3% happened when invited or taken into an abuser's home.
- 7.3% happened in an office context.
- The remaining 8.6% were 'other' – witnessed, online, conference.
- There were 11 accounts of rape.²⁵

²⁴ Mentimeter app used for real-time survey, <https://www.mentimeter.com> [accessed 14 October 2019].

²⁵ Theatre M, 'Vicky Featherstone Announces Industry Code of Behaviour to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Abuses of Power', post at Mr Carl Woodward blog, 3 November 2017, <https://www.mrcarlwoodward.com/theatre-news-2/vicky-featherstone-announces-industry-code-behaviour-prevent-sexual-harassment-abuses-power/> [accessed 11 October 2019].

What is intimacy? The second half of the presentation in Warsaw began with participants asked to consider what their definition of 'intimacy' is. Responses largely related to where people do or do not want to be touched. We put up the following definition from Wikipedia:

Physical intimacy is sensual proximity or touching. It is an act or reaction, such as an expression of feelings (including close friendship, platonic love, romantic love or sexual attraction), between people. Examples of physical intimacy include being inside someone's personal space, holding hands, hugging, kissing, caressing and sexual activity.²⁶

We also included for our purposes that nudity or partial nudity is considered an intimate expression. What is intimacy coordination? By way of background, Equity's guide to Health and Safety says in relation to Fight Direction/Choreography:

Employers have a responsibility to use suitably qualified theatre fight directors and stunt action co-ordinators and stunt performers. You should always know who is in charge when stunts or fights are involved, so make sure you find out. Any changes to a fight or stunt action sequences must be reassessed and rehearsed appropriately.²⁷

It is our view that the same standards should be applied to scenes involving intimacy on stage or in film, in order to protect all parties working on the production. Moments of sensual proximity need to be handled with the same degree of professionalism and be appropriately choreographed; otherwise there is a chance for either a poorly executed scene or the potential for improper behaviour. Appropriate protocols and procedures must therefore be adopted. It is acknowledged that directors are often concerned that intimacy choreography will block the authentic response of the performer in the moment, but as with fight choreography, the 'performer brain' needs to be present, as well as the 'character brain', particularly given the possible vulnerability of the performers (mentally or physically).

(We showed a video²⁸ of Bernardo Bertolucci being interviewed about his film *Last Tango in Paris*.²⁹ We commented on the director's acknowledgement that he would not have shot the 'butter scene' differently, and he also says: 'I didn't tell her what was going on [that is, that butter would be spread on her as a lubricant], because I wanted her reaction as a girl – not as an actress ... to feel humiliated.' We then

26 'Physical intimacy', Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_intimacy [accessed 14 October 2019].

27 Equity, *Guide to Health and Safety*, 2005, https://moodle.gsmd.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/26364/mod_resource/content/0/Equity%20Guide%20to%20Health%20and%20Safety.pdf, [accessed 22 November 2019].

28 'Bertolucci over Maria Schneider', online video recording, YouTube, 5 February 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=RM14xCGcdfA [accessed 14 October 2019].

29 See Elihi Zehadi, 'Last Tango in Paris: Why the rape scene involving Maria Schneider is only generating an outcry now', *Independent*, 5 December 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/last-tango-in-paris-butter-rape-scene-maria-schneider-marlon-brando-bertolucci-a7457251.html> [accessed 10 October 2019].

posed the question to the audience: why do we need actors to do this work in that case? Surely an actor can draw on their training to give an authentic response that does not require the actor to be in physical or mental danger to get the result required.)

Why do we need it? Because actually intimacy coordination can help to get the best performance from people, once they have separated their personal body from the professional – they are in the character and not in personal intimacy.

We used the example of *Game of Thrones*, where the actors Kit Harington and Emilia Clarke's characters had to sleep with each other in the final series. Clarke recounted in an interview in *Variety* magazine: 'The first scene we had together, we both just started laughing. Why are you looking at me this strange way and saying these strange lines? You're my friend!'³⁰ And Harington told *Vanity Fair*: 'If you've known someone for six years, and they're best friends with your girlfriend, and you're best friends with them, there is something unnatural and strange about doing a love scene.'³¹ Arguably these scenes would have benefited from an intimacy coordinator, who could have spoken with the actors and helped them through the choreography in a way that made it true for the characters and kept the personal out of the way.

The RCS's Draft Intimacy Guidelines were then outlined in detail. Examples are given below of the detail discussed:

- The person completing the risk assessment for any production should consider whether there are scenes of a sexual/sensual nature that should be reflected in that document. How to appropriately negate or mitigate those risks can then be considered. The Stage Management team will at this point have an opportunity to raise any concern regarding their own involvement in the production with their Head of Programme.
- Directors must work with performers to set the terms for intimate scenes. In the event an IC has been employed, that Director will discuss the relevant scene with the IC and the performers involved to ensure all are aware of the purpose and the nature of the scenes. In each case, the performer must be consulted to ascertain information regarding their comfort with the required aspects of the scene, including types of touch in scenes of Intimacy.
- When intimate scenes are being rehearsed, only necessary people should be in the space: the Director, the IC, the Stage Manager and the relevant performers. Those people should discuss and agree whether the rehearsal space needs to be blocked from view and whether appropriate signage regarding the sensitive nature of the

30 Daniel D'Addario, 'Kit Harington on His "Game of Thrones" Journey and Life After Jon Snow', *Variety*, March 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/tv/features/kit-harington-game-of-thrones-finale-jon-snow-1203165896/> [accessed 9 November 2019].

31 Joanna Robinson, 'Emilia Clarke's Solo Flight', *Vanity Fair*, Summer 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/05/emilia-clarke-cover-story> [accessed 9 November 2019].

work should be displayed to prevent entry to the space by unnecessary parties.

- In blocking the Intimacy for the first time, the performers will each ask the other performer's permission prior to engaging in physical contact of any kind. Specific areas of touch will be agreed. The length of that touch and type of touch will be agreed.
- Moments requiring nudity/partial nudity/minimal clothing/simulated sex will be discussed and agreed in advance with performers. Intimacy Coordinator policy – filming/dissemination of material
- No cameras or mobile phone recording devices are to be used during the staging of Intimate scenes.
- Any publicity photos of productions must ensure photos taken of Intimate scenes are deleted where requested.
- All photographic or video materials involving nudity/partial nudity/minimal clothing or that involve Intimacy will be destroyed within 28 days, unless agreed in writing with the performer.
- There is to be no use of footage of Intimate scenes other than the final edited version of the production.
- Any live streaming or recording within venues are to be switched off prior to productions involving Intimacy.

In May 2019, the RCS premiered the opera *Dead Man Walking*. It was a collaborative production involving students from across the Acting, Opera, and Production programmes, an orchestra from the School of Music, and a children's chorus selected from the Junior Conservatoire. This opera is a perfect illustration of how the theory of our policies was articulated in practice and how the role of the intimacy coordinator addressed the challenges and served the director's vision. This true story, set in the Angola state penitentiary in Louisiana, focusses on one inmate, Joseph De Rocher, who has been sentenced to death by lethal injection for the rape and murder of two high-school sweethearts – a crime perpetrated alongside his brother, but which Joseph claims he did not commit. In an attempt to get his sentence commuted, he writes to a nun, Sister Helen Prejean, in the hopes that she will argue his case. In the end, after De Rocher's appeal is dismissed, the narrative focusses on the power of redemption as Sister Helen, through love and friendship, persuades De Rocher to accept responsibility for his crime and face his execution with dignity.

The challenges were many: the plotline contained scenes of intimacy, sexual violence, offensive language, verbalized misogyny, nudity, murder, and execution. The largely male cast portrayed a range of characters: inmates on death row, brutal prison warders, vengeful fathers, and a misogynistic priest. There was a sustained atmosphere of violence throughout, including a scene where Sister Helen is subjected to obscene verbal abuse and faints. Casting also included a chorus of children whose ages ranged from eight to fourteen years. Parents were apprised of the content and permission sought before auditions took place. The children were not told of the content.

Film censorship operates specific age restrictions, and the RCS felt it appropriate to ban the entry of children into the audience until after the opening scene of rape and murder. It was also imperative that the children's chorus, who appeared onstage immediately afterwards – and who would normally have been waiting in the wings – were kept away from the action. Creating a break to allow younger children to join the audience after the opening sequence also allowed us to keep the children's chorus in the dressing rooms until they were required to sing. The emotional content needed sensitive handling, especially as official statistics from the Counselling services group of the UK Conservatoires suggest that twenty-seven per cent of students have declared mental health issues, with a further ten per cent struggling with their mental well-being.³² It was clear that the opera's core themes had the potential to distress any student with unprocessed prior trauma, and the RCS counselling services were alerted early on in the process and able to provide additional support. Two opera students subsequently asked to be removed from the cast, and the RCS was able to create equivalencies that allowed them to meet their learning outcomes.

The Dignity at Work, Child Protection, Chaperone,³³ and Safe Space policies were all brought into play as essential mechanisms to ensure the welfare of cast and crew.

The newly established role of intimacy coordinator was also vital in securing 'safe space' working, and the protocols already described in the policy were effected throughout the rehearsal process. This included closed-set rehearsals and the use of prosthetic costuming. In working with the actors and the director, the intimacy coordinator negotiated and skilfully choreographed what was permissible and possible in order to keep the scene authentic and realistic. Once the boundaries were established, the scene was not allowed to deviate from the negotiated choreography unless the intimacy choreographer³⁴ were brought back in to renegotiate. The stage manager, who was also given appropriate training, adjusted any risk assessment protocols and was then responsible for ensuring adherence with the right to halt rehearsals should the director, or anyone else in the creative team, have attempted to deviate from what had been agreed upon. Mutual respect, negotiated boundaries, and a zero-tolerance approach means inappropriate suggestions or physical contact becomes impossible. In accordance with Equity's guidelines, the new RCS Intimacy policy will be a key element of all contracts, making it mandatory for directors to have an intimacy coordinator present if the nature of the production requires it.

³² Statistics supplied by Jane Balmforth, Counsellor for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

³³ In light of new legislation, the RCS has created a new Chaperone policy that will sit alongside and complement The Child Protection Policy. This policy will be published in early 2020.

³⁴ The titles are largely interchangeable – in America they tend to use the title Intimacy Director whilst Ita O'Brien who has pioneered the work here in the UK favours Intimacy Co-ordinator as this title is seen as having a 'Head of Department' role and status. Some use Intimacy Choreographer as a parallel to 'Fight Choreographer', but this label carries less authority.

(At this juncture in the presentation, Vanessa Coffey was joined by Thomas Zachar and Mccallister Selva, and together they demonstrated the physical architecture of intimacy choreography by recreating the sequence of the young lovers in the opening scene of *Dead Man Walking*.)

Meeting the challenges of this opera has given us a template from which to establish a working model:

- Production choice analysed. Does content require an intimacy choreographer?
- Director contracted, use of IC highlighted.
- All creative team made aware of production challenges: implications are considered and solutions implemented, including risk assessments, chaperone requirements, audience impact, possible closed-set rehearsals and sourcing by Costume department of appropriate prosthetics.
- All parties – cast, crew, creative team and marketing – sign up to Safe Space and other policies. Strict adherence to negotiated content of intimate scenes. This can be renegotiated as required, but only if the intimacy choreographer is present.
- Director, intimacy choreographer, and stage manager to review and monitor processes.

As educators, we are responsible for ensuring that whatever task we engage in, students are both creatively challenged in order that they reach their full potential but never feel threatened in pursuit of their career – that they are in a supported and respectful environment able to take risks, negotiate their learning, and grow as artists. For many, the role of intimacy coordinator is seen as a threat to creativity. The concern is that such a position will act as a brake on the natural flow of experimentation in the rehearsal process, that exploration of character and text will be stunted by worrying about what is permissible, of inadvertently ‘upsetting’ other actors. Many directors have, unsurprisingly, felt undermined by this new role, seeing it as a threat to their autonomy, rather than something that facilitates the creative process.

At the same time as we were involved in *Dead Man Walking*, our third-year actors were performing David Greig’s play *San Diego*. It is a complex piece about identity, with the central premise exploring the theory of six degrees of separation. One of the characters, Laura, self-harms, slicing off small portions of her body, frying the flesh and eating it in an act of self-cannibalism. While in a psychiatric unit, she meets a young man, David, and embarks on a relationship with him. The play contains a nine-page oral sex scene during which David bites off a section of Laura’s clitoris, which he then offers up to be fried and eaten. It doesn’t get more hardcore than that. In a video, Sorcha and Rowan, our two actors who played Laura and David respectively, discuss what having an intimacy choreographer meant for their creative

process.³⁵ Sorcha's analysis is extremely astute, and her comment about audience assumptions particularly insightful: if it is known that sex scenes are choreographed, then it becomes impossible for audiences to make assumptions about the actors' sexual identity or indeed their personal sexual preferences. The use of intimacy choreography establishes a protective mechanism that facilitates the necessary separation of character and the personal for actor and audience alike.

In Tracy Ann Oberman's case, she was able to continue her career, to find a way to process the abhorrent behaviour she suffered. But as *Untouchable* and the slew of books now being published on the subject prove, the collateral damage has often meant the abandonment of promising acting careers.³⁶

It is to be hoped that these books prove instrumental in reshaping gender relations. As Libby Burton, editor for the American publishing house Henry Holt, says: 'It's unprecedented because the #MeToo movement is unprecedented. If the publishing industry works as it should, it can capture a cultural moment in a way that solidifies it, adds legitimacy, and hopefully create social and societal change.'³⁷

There is much to discuss. No one is pretending that this journey will be easy. But it is a road we simply MUST travel. As educators, it is our responsibility to create new maps, cut away the deadwood, and ensure paths are clearly signposted, so that no one, ever again, has to use the hashtag #MeToo.

35 'San Diego', online video interview by Vanessa Coffey, <https://www.vanessacoffey.com/testimonials?wix-vod-video-id=cde2abf924044b21afa3249d95919705&wix-vod-comp-id=-comp-jx9a4f15> [accessed 9 November 2019].

36 Edward Helmore, '#MeToo: after Weinstein and Epstein, an "unprecedented" wave of books', *Guardian*, 14 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/sep/13/metoo-the-unprecedented-movement-that-launched-a-wave-of-books> [accessed 11 October 2019].

37 Ibid.

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ABSTRACT

Vanessa Coffey, Hilary Jones, Mccallister Selva, Thomas Zachar
Shifting the Landscape: Why Changing Actor Training Matters in Light of the #MeToo Movement

On October the 15th 2017, the American actress Alyssa Milano tweeted the phrase #MeToo to openly declare her experience of sexual harassment by the movie mogul Harvey Weinstein. By the end of the following day, MeToo had been re-tweeted more than half a million times and on Facebook received more than 12 million posts in 24 hours. Finally, the lid was being lifted on decades of abuse and harassment in the entertainment industry. There was an immediate response from British theatre with leading directors calling for a sea-change. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland already had strategies to ensure respect and tolerance in the training of its young artists. Alongside additional policies directly linked to the aftermath of MeToo, we also enabled a new role, that of Intimacy Choreographer.

Keywords: acting, theatre school, sexual harassment, ethics, Great Britain.