

**HOW HAVE MUSICAL THEATRE
STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS
BEEN IMPACTED BY CULTISH
BEHAVIOUR?**

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This research is dedicated to the survivors of Averno and Isa Medina and Amanda Montell, the co-hosts of the 'Sounds Like A Cult' podcast.

Abstract

This paper examines if cultish behaviour is present in the musical theatre industry, looking specifically at drama schools and industry settings. While both drama school and industry settings showed a high presence of cultish behaviour it affected demographics differently and was more harmful in drama school settings. Utilising the Cultish Behaviour Quotient (CBQ), a diagnostic tool developed for this study, it was found that conditions for thought reform could exist within drama school settings.

Incorporating qualitative and quantitative data from the CBQ and other online sources, this study demonstrates that it is possible to not only develop an initial diagnostic tool but to use it on a large scale to explore the effects of totalistic behaviour within industry cultures.

Keywords: cults, cultish, abuse, musical theatre, cultish behaviour, drama schools, diagnostic tool, CBQ.

Trigger Warnings

This paper contains in depth discussions of ableism, abuse, abuse of minors, cults, dissociation, eating disorders, mental health, racism, self harm, sexism, the sexualisation of minors, and transphobia,

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Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS	DEFINITION
AQ	The Autism Spectrum Quotient
CBQ	Cultish Behaviour Quotient
ECR-RS	Relationship Structures Questionnaire of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised
GAI	Group Attachment Interview
MMD	Mercury Musical Development
MTN	Musical Theatre Network

Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Allistic:	A person who is not autistic.
Cultish	A set of behaviours, structures and techniques derived from cults and totalism that is typically deployed in a group setting.
Code Switching:	The modifying of one's "linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting" (Morrison, 2023).
Gaslighting:	The "psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator" (Merriam-Webster, 2023).
Loaded Language:	The psychological manipulation of a person through terminology which has acquired a strong emotional charge to spark a specific reaction and shut down critical thought. It can also involve the changing of meaning of existing words or the creation of misleading euphemisms (Montell, 2021a, 82-83).
Love-Bombing:	It is defined as the psychological manipulation of a person wherein they are showered with supposedly unconditional love and affection. However, in reality this love is based on adhering to strict principles of the manipulator (Ross, 2014, 128-129).

- Ritualistic Reality: Discussed by Montell as 'ritual time' (2021a, 125), it is defined as the psychological manipulation of a person by failing to mark the difference between normal life and a more spiritual space to avoid a return to reality and space for critical thinking.
- Thought-Terminating Clichés: Coined by the psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton (1961), it is defined as a form of loaded language that seeks to manipulate the listener through halting an argument and discouraging critical thought through a cliché. Common examples can include: "Stop thinking so much", "It is what it is", "Boys will be boys", "Everything happens for a reason", and "It's all God's plan" (Montell, 2021a, 81).
- Truth-Telling: Found in Synanon, Jim Jones, and more (Montell, 2021a, 41), truth-telling it is defined as the psychological manipulation of a person through social control often masquerading as group therapy sessions which often involve participants showing their loyalty to a cause by publicly humiliating and exposing truths related to other participants.

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Introduction

Cultish behaviour in theatre can be found from its origin to the modern day, though perhaps not in the way the average theatre practitioner may expect. It is not uncommon to be taught, influenced by the writings of Aristotle, James Frazer, and the Cambridge Ritualists, that cults and ritualistic practice became the foundations of theatre (Morgan and Brask, 1988, 178-180; Rozik, 2005, ix). Aristotle's viewpoint, one of the earliest recorded mentions relating to the origin of theatre, was

“that drama, in particular, tragedy, emerged from the dithyramb of the Dionysus cult rituals of Heroic and of early Classical Greece. The dithyramb was a choral poem in honour of the god Dionysus, with the ritual led by a male figure who came to represent Dionysus or some other divinity.” (Morgan & Brask, 1988, 179)

However, both Aristotle and Frazer's research is not reliable. Historians argue over Aristotle's sources (Morgan & Brask, 1988, 179), mainly as his writing occurred two hundred years after the supposed birth of theatre (Rozik, 2005, xii). Next, we must examine Frazer's general practice. His racist attempts to force Christian language upon other cultures and religions (Larsen, 2014, 47-48), combined with his use of contemporary aboriginal communities as substitutes for primitive human societies (Rozik, 2005, xii), raise concerns over the validity of his conclusions.

It is crucial to start with this to show that whilst theatre could have roots in the cultish and ritualistic, what is more curious is this story's “grip on the imagination of the lay [intellectual]” (Rozik, 2005, x). Is it not more cultish that theatre practitioners and the industry at large accept this imprecise account of theatre's origins without question?

To look at it from a modern perspective, I first heard Musical Theatre described as a cult by youtuber Katherine Steele, who invites you when first watching her videos to “subscribe to the musical theatre internet cult” (Katherine Steele, 2022). While at the time, I viewed it as a harmless joke, with the word cult often being used in fandom and niche community settings (Bey, 2021; ‘Cult’, 2023), the phrase came back to the front of my mind when musical theatre creatives from TikTok went public with their experiences within Averno.

Originally described as “a ‘Marvel Universe’ for Musicals” by the New York Times (Vincentelli, 2020), Averno would later be labelled as a cult (see Appendix C). From that point forward, it became clear to me that Musical Theatre had cultish behaviour built into it, but what was not clear to me was what impact this behaviour was having on the industry, be it positive or negative, and how far spread it was.

Through this research, I wanted to uncover whether Averno was a one-off or an indicator of a deeper problem within the culture of Musical Theatre.

It was determined that this study would approach this investigation by examining the broader impacts of cultish behaviour in musical theatre, focusing on the UK and online spaces. Geographically, I chose this as a focus as this is where I, as a researcher, had the best understanding of the systems in place, having worked freelance as a musical theatre composer and producer in the UK. For this research, having an ethnographic approach was essential to understand the nuances of experiences in this research; as cultish behaviour, I believe, can be hard to spot without such an approach. Moreover, it was also decided to focus more broadly on the industry as a whole rather than singling out any one institution; this is because the average individual in society is less likely to have personal experience with a 'capital c' cult, but many people will have encountered the cultish in their everyday lives. After all, cultish groups can promote connections in positive ways (to find relationships and community) or can allow predatory and abusive behaviour.

Regarding language use, the word cultish was important as while abusive practices in musical theatre might create an interesting framework, abuse is hard to identify with and report (VanDerBill, 2022). Moreover, in my opinion, abuse fails to capture the nuances of systemic practices that can have positive and negative impacts that I was interested in studying, like the word cultish can (Montell, 2021a, 19). Finally, with the current zeitgeist around cults in popular media (Montell, 2021b), I hope that young people examining their own experiences in institutions like drama schools might be more likely to find and engage with this research.

Given the lack of research, it was imperative to focus on and establish if cultish behaviour was present in the musical theatre industry. In conjunction with this, if cultish behaviour was present, the study hoped to ascertain to what extent cultish behaviour was causing harm and if it was affecting any group in particular. It was also crucial to determine if cultish behaviour was present, what methods or tools were being utilised most frequently and to ascertain if they caused any harm. Finally, as this research involved the development of new tools for initial identification, it needed to be demonstrated that they would be effective in their intended function.

This investigation likewise set out to build upon the research of Amanda Montell in her book *Cultish* and Alexandra Stein, writer of *Terror, Love and Brainwashing*, as well as the writings of other cult academics. With a notable research gap in how lay people interact with cultish in everyday communities and industries, this research desired to build a foundation that other academics could build upon in future research. While Stein and Ross provide brilliant tools and resources for assessing cults, there are no such tools for practical applications for cultish groups like those explored by

Montell. While the Cultish Behaviour Quotient, the tool at the focus of this research, was developed with the musical theatre industry in mind, the intent was to create a tool that would be practical to other researchers interested in studying the cultish in other industries.

By taking an integrated approach, this study wanted to address the above goals by utilising and testing a tool for identification called the Cultish Behaviour Quotient (CBQ). This early version of the survey would involve qualitative and quantitative data to allow for phenomenological study and to give the statistical data meaning when reflecting on subjective human experiences. Initially, it also involved case studies which depended on content analysis and unobtrusive research to allow victims of cults and negative cultish behaviour, particularly in the case of Averno, space for healing. However, this research will be examined in a later report due to constraints relating to word counts.

Indeed, this study faced many cuts due to the scope of the research intended to address this critical and under-researched topic. Difficulties also arose from the controversies around the term brainwashing, discussed more in-depth in chapter one, which this research also originally intended to address as the CBQ focuses on clearly defining the depth of what cultish behaviour is. However, this approach of starting broadly and focusing in benefited the research in helping present a broad picture of the state of cultish research and musical theatre.

In Chapter One, the existing literature and research around cults and the cultish will be examined with a focus on what defines cultish, what terms divide different researchers, and how the CBQ was developed in conversation with other research. In Chapter Two, the results of how drama school students responded to the CBQ will be presented, focusing on how the CBQ can help answer the research questions laid out in this introduction. This will be followed by Chapter Three, which will examine and discuss the implications of the results, along with suggesting and considering why the results came to be. Chapter Four will then present the results of how industry professionals responded to the CBQ will be presented along with comparisons with the previous results collected. Chapter Five will debate why there are differences between the results of industry professionals and drama school students. Finally, the conclusion will address the limitations of the research, make recommendations for future research, and summarise and reflect on how successful the CBQ was.

Chapter One: What is Cultish Behaviour and How Do We Define and Identify It?

1.1 Literature Review

When embarking on this research, it quickly became evident that more consistency within cultish research was needed to define such experiences, primarily as this research deals with making a tool to help identify cultish experiences. Therefore, this chapter seeks to explore current leading theories and criteria on what defines these terms due to the lack of academic consensus about what defines a cult (Montell, 2021a, 32). In this chapter, we will be focusing on the writings of three different researchers who have studied cult behaviour:

- Amanda Montell, writer of *Cultish* and co-host of the *Sounds Like A Cult* podcast
- Rick Alan Ross, writer of *Cults Inside Out*
- Alexandra Stein, writer of *Terror, Love and Brainwashing*

To begin with, all three of these writers agreed that cults are not necessarily based in religion and that the term new-religious movement is not accurate as to think of cults as purely religious is detrimental to people who live or have lived in cults without a religious centre (Montell, 2021a, 39; Ross, 2014, 5; Stein, 2021, 6). There was also a wide variety of cultish groups studied between these three researchers, from the Newman Tenancy (Stein, 2021, 9), to CrossFit (Montell, 2021a, 9), as well as overlap with both Ross and Montell using Synanon within their examples (Ross, 2014, 21; Montell, 2021a, 40). Montell has even discussed the Cult of Theatre Kids in her podcast with Isa Medina (2022a), as well as touching on many similar theatre and drama school adjacent topics like Child Stars (2023a), Stand-Up Comedy (2022b), and Academia (2022c). Many of these researchers and those they referenced used terms consistently across the three books, including 'Loaded Language' (Montell, 2021a, 81; Ross, 2014, 170; Stein, 2021, 147), 'Charismatic Leader' (Montell, 2021a, 11; Ross, 2014, 17; Stein, 2021, 6), and 'Cognitive Dissonance' (Montell, 2021a, 85; Ross, 2014, 142-145; Stein, 2021, 57-58). However, there was a more notable division between the writers.

One of the most contentious identifiers within cultic research, brainwashing is a polarising term. As an example, Montell takes the stance that it is merely a metaphor and that "you cannot force someone to believe something they absolutely do not on any level want to believe by using some set of evil techniques to "wash" their brain" (2021a, 34). However, Ross and Stein put forth solid arguments and evidence around using the term when used properly as an alternate term for coercive persuasion, a definition circulated by Edgar Schein (Ross, 2014, 121). Ross, who dedicates a whole chapter to this topic in his book, acknowledges the vagueness within the term brainwashing. Nevertheless, he

defends its use due to its links to broader cultural knowledge. Ross concludes that the term brainwashing lacks use within academic settings, specifically as coercive persuasion is not as simple as the term brainwashing makes it out to be (2014, 118-119). Other proposed terms include: "...thought reform (Lifton), resocialization (Berger and Luckmann), total conversion (Lofland), mind control (Singer, Hassan), or, most recently by Lalich, bounded choice" (Stein, 2021, 13).

In his book, *Coercive Persuasion*, Schein describes three stages of this process: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing (1961, 140-141). Unfreezing is the motive to change given by the charismatic leader, which seeks to destabilise the intended, with the word unfreezing used to suggest the intended had a frozen or stable view of the world before this moment. As defined by Schein, changing is the process of the charismatic leader using various methods and arguments to intimidate the intended into questioning their worldview or belief system. Finally, refreezing is when the charismatic leader has successfully influenced the intended person's belief system, hoping to redefine it to one of their choosing. However, this may not always work as it depends on whether the individual's view of themselves has changed. Stein's argument and evidence for brainwashing build on this concept while also using attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby. Stein explores how cult leaders may replace previous attachments of their followers with themselves to form disorganised attachments, a theory developed by Mary Main and Judith Solomon (Stein, 2021, 28).

There is particular debate as to how one can measure or prove brainwashing as a science; as Moore put it when interviewed by Montell, "For a theory to meet the standard criteria of the scientific method, it has to be controvertible; that is, it must be possible to prove the thing false" (2021a, 35). However, to engage in devil's advocate, shouldn't it at least be given a chance to be studied as Cathleen A. Mann put it in the introduction to Ross' book, "Criticism and dissent are good; they make our theories better. There are no theories that are absolutely proven in science" (2014, 7).

A decision was made to use a section of the CBQ to explore brainwashing further and expand Stein's study on attachment behaviour. The ECR-RS, developed by R. Chris Fraley, was chosen for this purpose after careful consideration (Fraley, 2011). Initially, it felt important to add to this field of research which would allow this study to draw its own conclusions on the accuracy of attachment theory and its links to coercive persuasion. However, after conducting the CBQ, it was later found that Stein had developed the 'Group Attachment Interview' or GAI (2021, 213). Having discovered it too late to replicate the process as part of the CBQ, I eventually determined that I did not feel equipped to draw conclusive data from including the ECR-RS as part of this research.

Building on this discussion of brainwashing, it was deemed necessary to establish more precise and consistent terminology regarding coercive persuasion. As a result, the diagnostic tool created for this

research avoids using front-facing terms. Instead, the CBQ would ask participants whether they related to ideas and common themes around terms and tools. This would also mean participants did not have to have in-depth knowledge of cultish terminology and might allow participants to be more willing to identify with a cultish experience, with the language dissociated from negative assumptions.

Avoiding front-facing terms was particularly important when building out the assessment tool as it became clear from analysis that there was a spectrum of cultish behaviour between those who used cultish techniques and tools neutrally contrasted with destructive cults where harm was taking place (Ross, 2014, 97); a spectrum which is often not understood by the public. Statistically, few cults are involved with “criminal activity of any kind” (Montell, 2021a, 35). However, members of the public often assume that all cults or cultish behaviour is harmful due to:

“A feedback loop of scandal [which] is created: Only the most destructive cults gain attention, so we come to think of all cults as destructive, and we simultaneously only recognize the destructive ones as cults, so those gain more attention, reinforcing their negative reputation, and so on ad infinitum.” (Montell, 2021a, 36)

This assumption can be incredibly harmful to those trying to leave cults and their family members, as this perception can ultimately lead to misunderstanding and a lack of support, with victims being “relegated to a subclass of [humans]” (Montell, 2021a, 37). To prevent this bias from impacting the screening tool results, the CBQ tried to keep the language as neutral and devoid of direct reference as possible while maintaining data accuracy.

After reviewing the available research on cultish behaviour, I found there was a deficit when it came to studying general cultish behaviour in industry settings like those of musical theatre, even though there had been discussions of such behaviour existing. Therefore, I decided to build a screening tool using the existing research pool around what defines cultish behaviour and coordinate a study focused on musical theatre students and professionals.

1.2 The Cultish Behaviour Quotient (CBQ)

The CBQ drew inspiration from the Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ), a commonly used screening tool for autism (embrace-autism.com, 2022). The diagnostic questionnaire approaches assessment by offering participants statements and asking on a sliding scale how much they agree with different statements. The coding of these statements varies based on whether they align with or contradict autistic traits, resulting in a final score assisting in diagnosis. Moreover, it uses no front-facing terms allowing anyone to understand it without specialist knowledge of autistic diagnostic criteria. Finally, the test is inconclusive and presents averages of individual scores (both autistic and allistic) for participants

to compare against to show there is a sliding scale when it comes to identifying autistic traits. Individuals with higher scores are more likely to be diagnosed with autism. The AQ was crucial in developing this diagnostic questionnaire because its objectives matched those of the CBQs.

Although the CBQ may not rely on qualitative data collection in the future, it is currently necessary during the developmental stage to ensure the accuracy of the quantitative data in reflecting the participant's experiences. Likewise, this qualitative data would help with understanding the nuances of an individual's experiences, which quantitative data cannot provide as it would not be possible to conduct interviews as part of this study.

Stein's five dimensions of cults were foundational in determining the structure of the CBQ. These were "leadership, structure, ideology, process and outcomes" (2021, 15), which were modified into four categories: Leadership, Structure, Ideology, and Tools and Processes. The first section focused on whether participants felt that those who led the group displayed traits of a charismatic leader. This section is particularly important, as noted by Stein:

"...totalist groups, cults, totalitarianism, even controlling forms of domestic violence, are set apart – not by the fact of religion or ideology – but by the nature of the relationship between leader and follower". (2021, 15)

This was then expanded upon in the next section concerning the group's structure, focusing on whether the structure facilitated cultish behaviour. Structure, Stein explains, "must maintain the single point of dominance of the leader, isolate group members and, in most cases, provide controlled access to and from the outside world" (2021, 16).

When examining the following section that pertains to ideology, as Stein highlights, the belief system of the group is not what is important (2021, 18-19); Instead, the CBQ aims to provide statements about how their ideology and structure prevent participants from being exposed to other belief systems, aside from the teachings of their leader. The penultimate section, Tools and Processes, build off this with Montell's and Ross' methodology placing importance on the effects people might feel resulting from their engagement with the group and specific types of language features used. Examples of these include delusional phases (Ross, 2014, 130), mind-altering practices like chants (Ross, 2014, 105; Montell, 2021a, 47), glossolalia (Montell, 2021a, 142), and ritualistic reality (Montell, 2021a, 125) to name a few.

Finally, at the end of the CBQ, participants were asked if they considered their experience cultish after reviewing their previous responses and were requested to provide an explanation. Obtaining this

information was necessary as, unlike the AQ, this study lacks a clear control group for comparative purposes. This is because cultish behaviour is more open for interpretation than diagnosing autism. The process of having participants define their own experiences helped to establish control groups that could be used for comparison. Moreover, cultish behaviour can exist in any field or industry, which made me conclude that I could never be sure that any control group I selected would be majoritively impartial.

Other questions included in the CBQ also invited participants to disclose their gender identity and age. This came about as I wanted to determine if sexism or ageism meant certain groups were more affected by cultish behaviour than others.

Two versions were made to distribute surveys - one for drama school students and another for industry professionals. Both versions had the same questions, except for how they referred to the group's leaders. Although both surveys were advertised on social media, the study concentrated on prioritising the use of pre-existing networks of intended recipients to prevent biased results from only having participants I knew personally. MMD and MTN were enlisted for industry professionals, who aided in distributing the research callout in their mailouts and social media. In an effort to reach out to drama school students, fifteen drama schools were contacted, which are listed in Table 1. A point of contact was asked to share the participation information with their students and staff. It is difficult to determine which schools passed on this information, but Rose Bruford and Trinity Laban confirmed they did. Upon reflection, perhaps administrative staff did not share the participation information with their students for fear of it reflecting poorly upon their institution, despite the anonymous nature of the project. After all, there have been previous accusations of drama schools creating cult-like environments creating negative press for said drama schools (Hemley, 2021).

Table 1. Drama Schools Contacted Relating To The CBQ

Rose Bruford GSA Mountview Central RADA Guildhall Arts Ed Royal Scottish Con	Royal Welsh Con East 15 LAMDA Trinity Laban RAM Italia Conti Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
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Chapter Two: Results of ‘How Have Drama School Students Have Been Impacted By Cultish Behaviour?’

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the question ‘How Have Musical Theatre Students Been Impacted By Cultish Behaviour?’ using results from the CBQ when given to the demographic of current drama school students. It will focus on whether drama school students of musical theatre-related disciplines found cultish behaviour present in their training, if it affected any group in particular, what methods mainly were commonly used across all participants surveyed, and what personal impact it had on them during their studies.

The structure of this chapter has been divided into multiple sections looking at the key results around: whether cultish behaviour was present, how it was practised when it was present, the demographics of those affected most, and other themes written about by participants which the CBQ did not account for.

2.2 The Presence Of Cultish Behaviour

First, we must address the study's aim to determine whether cultish behaviour was present in a drama school setting; This was done by using the results of the Likert scales used in questions 2-5 (see Appendix A), which were scored +2 to -2 depending on whether the statement indicated cultish behaviour. The participants' results of these questions were then given a mean score to account for outliers in a participant's data set. Results were then compared against question 7 (see Appendix A) to determine, when compared to other participants' results, what scores were more indicative of cultish behaviour being present and which were not. This examination excludes comparing participants' scores for individual questions, which will be explored in 2.3.

Table 2. Drama Students - CBQ Key Findings

Mean Score of People Who Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	22.50
Mean Score of People Who Didn't Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	-13.75
Percentage of People Who Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	80%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over -14 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	87.5%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over 7.5 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	92.9%

Figure 1. Drama Students - CBQ scores vs whether pupils found their experience in musical theatre cultish?

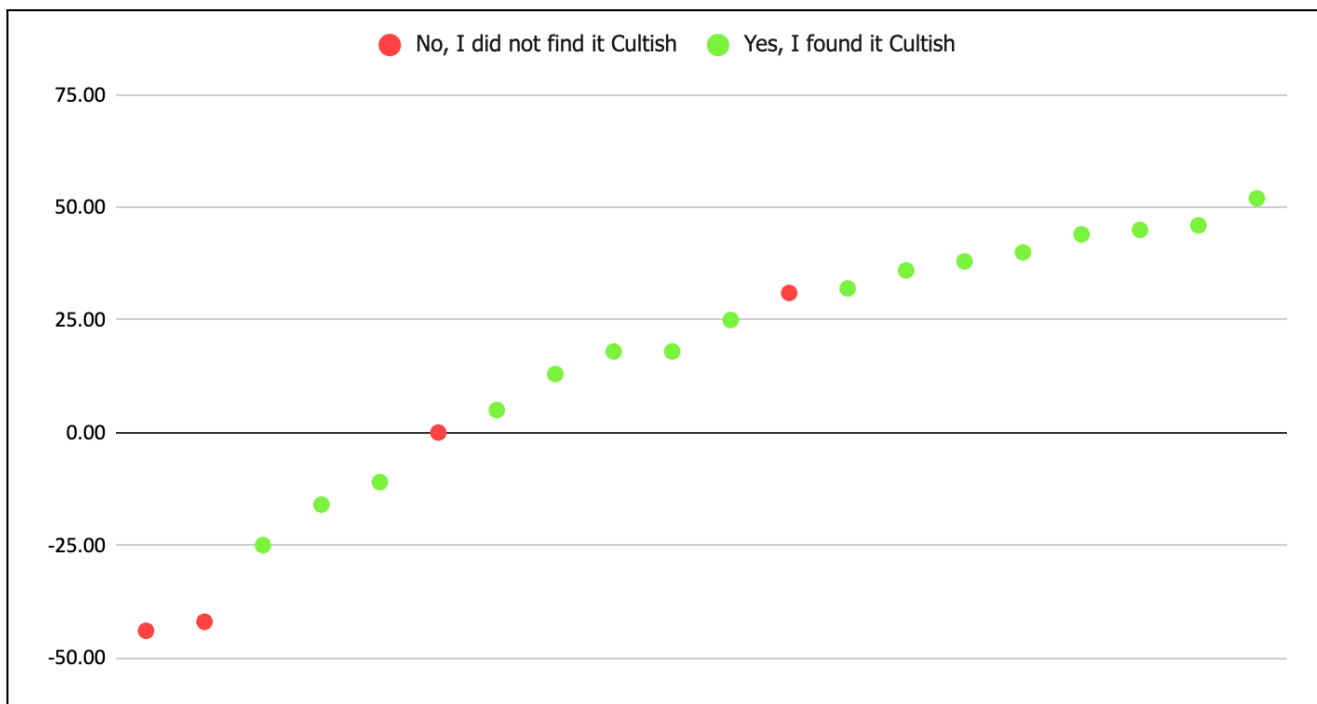


Figure 1. The y-axis shows scores, while the x-axis shows participants' scores on a scale from low to high. The colours of the data points indicate whether the participant identified their experience as cultish.

A high percentage of over 80% of pupils found their experience cultish regardless of their score. While the majority of people with experience they identified as cultish had positive scores, three participants with sub-zero scores still identified their experience as being cultish. Equally, one participant with a non-cultish experience had a score of 31. One individual who did not personally find their experience cultish noted, “Other institutions, I have witnessed or been told about, I know are far more cultish” (18-24, Genderfluid).

2.3 The Practice of Cultish Behaviour

Next, analysis was essential of what practices and methods of cultish behaviour were the most present or shared across the experience of all participants. To obtain results, statements from questions 2-5 (see Appendix A) were analysed to find their mean scores on the Likert scales used on each across all participants. Results were then ranked from the highest mean score to the lowest and created into a bubble cloud and groups by subtitles of these questions in the CBQ (see Appendix A) to help visually indicate which practices were most present.

Figure 2. Drama Students - Bubble Cloud of Average CBQ Scores

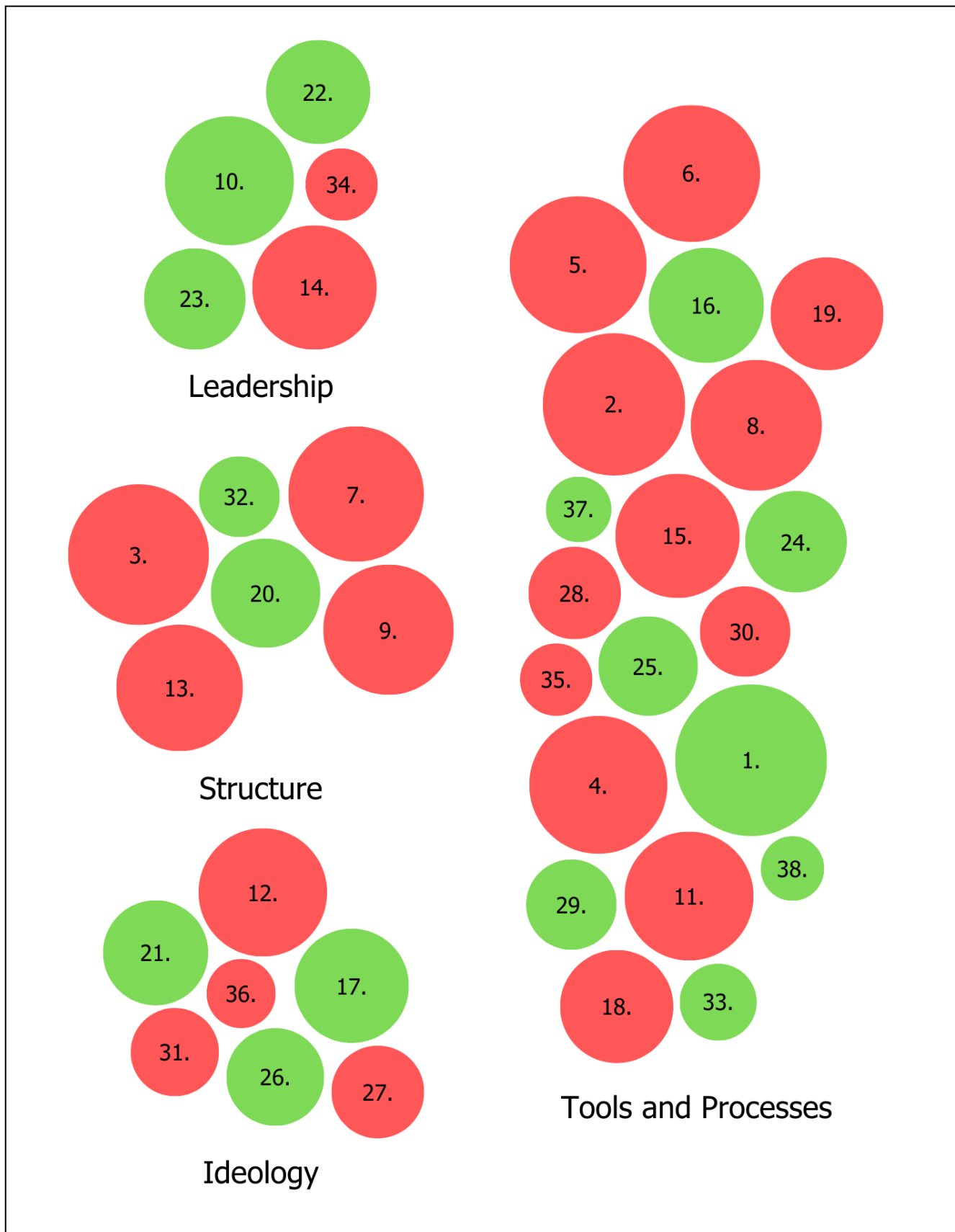


Figure 2. The colours of the data points indicate whether the statement was cultish phrased (red) or uncultish statement (green). Note that the scale is accurate when compared to similar graphs.

Figure 2. (Continued) Drama Students - Bubble Cloud of Average CBQ Scores

1. The schedule not allowing for adequate rest (1.35)
2. Suffering from anxiety due to isolation (1.15)
3. Teachers having notable favourites with special privileges (1.11)
4. Taking part in pre-show rituals (1.05)
5. Struggling with mental overload due to being deprived of breaks, food, or time to reflect (1.05)
6. Struggling with anxiety due to the level of perfection required (1.05)
7. Only having time to socialise with people within my place of training (1.00)
8. Regularly taking part in exhausting drills (0.90)
9. Only living with people who were also training with me (0.89)
10. Teachers possessing strong communication skills, an ability to be persuasive, and the charm to influence others (0.85)
11. Use of nicknames and insider terminology (0.85)
12. Adapting reality to fit in with my teacher's narrative (0.84)
13. Feeling isolated from the outside world (0.80)
14. Teachers requiring strict obedience (0.75)
15. Struggling with dissociation because of pressure put on pupils by teachers/leaders or fellow students (0.75)
16. Dress code being enforced (0.55)
17. Feeling gaslit by Teachers (0.53)
18. Taught chants (0.50)
19. Privacy and boundaries not respected (0.50)
20. Course not aligning with expectations (0.42)
21. Not allowing to interpret tasks in preferred working style (0.32)
22. Teachers using threats or the fear of punishments (0.30)
23. Teachers not being flexible around rules and treating students as unequal (0.25)
24. Required to reveal trauma in a group setting (0.25)
25. Teachers using thought-terminating clichés (0.20)
26. Teachers shutting down debate and enforcing ways of thinking (0.16)
27. Only teachers having the authority to dictate answers to questions (0.05)
28. Teachers pitting pupils against an outside force in order to bring them together (0.05)
29. Changing name (0.00)
30. Encouraging telling on rule breakers (0.00)
31. Teachers preventing discussion beyond taught material (-0.05)
32. Communication being cut to friends and family (-0.21)
33. Loaded Language (-0.30)
34. Teachers code-switching (-0.40)
35. Love Bombing (-0.40)
36. Cutting ties to other groups in order to be welcomed (-0.47)
37. Glossolalia (-0.55)
38. Not understanding rituals were not based on reality (-0.60)

In the top eleven of the average CBQ scores (see Figure 2), one fell under ‘Leadership’, three under ‘Structure’, and eight under ‘Tool and Processes’. This data would indicate that these subheadings are where most cultish behaviour is found. When thinking about the impact of structure, one student even wrote, “I feel like there is a strong hierarchy within this industry. And there is definitely a culture of competition” (18-24, Female).

It is worth mentioning that out of the top five scores, two were related to students being given insufficient time to rest, take breaks, and process information. One student wrote, “We were refused toilet breaks and shamed if we needed to go” (18-24, Nonbinary), while another wrote, “a big expectation to put your whole life aside for a show, particularly over the rehearsal period. Likewise an overriding belief that issues within the industry are "just the way things are" and "cope"” (25-34, Nonbinary Woman).

According to Figure 2, isolation placed twice in the top eleven, which was also evident in the feedback students gave. One male student who was 18-24 said, “It was really isolating as we were only allowed to talk about show work to one another and not our own personal lives because the tutor said that it was irrelevant to our practice”. Another wrote, “Our timetable and [a] lack of communication made things impossible to plan, so it’s been extremely tough to keep in touch with people... the timetables make it near impossible to meet new people. I have therefore felt extremely lonely and this has resulted in multiple long term depressive episodes” (18-24, Agender).

Finally, many noted they took part in pre-show rituals (see Figure 2), which ranged from saying “break a leg instead of good luck” (18-24, Nonbinary) to “Starving in the run up to ballets” (18-24, Agender) and “Chants and mantras during warm-ups (ie, “fat kids don’t get callbacks”)” (25-34, Nonbinary). It is worth noting that many reported knowing that rituals were not based in reality, with that scoring lowest on the average CBQ scores (see Figure 2), with many written responses referring to superstitions like “never whistling in a theatre” and “leaving a light on when the theatre is empty for the theatre ghosts” (18-24, Female).

Table 3. Drama Students - Bias In Phrased Questions

Mean Score for Uncultish Phrased Statements	0.24
Mean Score for Cultish Phrased Statements	0.55

When it came to bias in statements presented, on average cultish phrased statements, which meant that participants agreed their experience was cultish, did score higher (0.55) than those that were uncultish phrased (0.24), which meant that participants disagreed that their experience was cultish.

2.4 The Demographic of Cultish Behaviour

The CBQ inquired about the age and gender of the participants, as well as whether their gender identity aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth. This data collection aimed to determine if any demographic groups were impacted by cult-like behaviour, specifically related to sexism and transphobia. As all students were between 18-34, it was difficult to quantify whether age impacted this study and has thus been excluded.

Table 4. Drama Students - Age Demographic

Number of Participants Aged 18-24	17
Number of Participants Aged 25-34	3

Figure 3. Drama Students - Gender

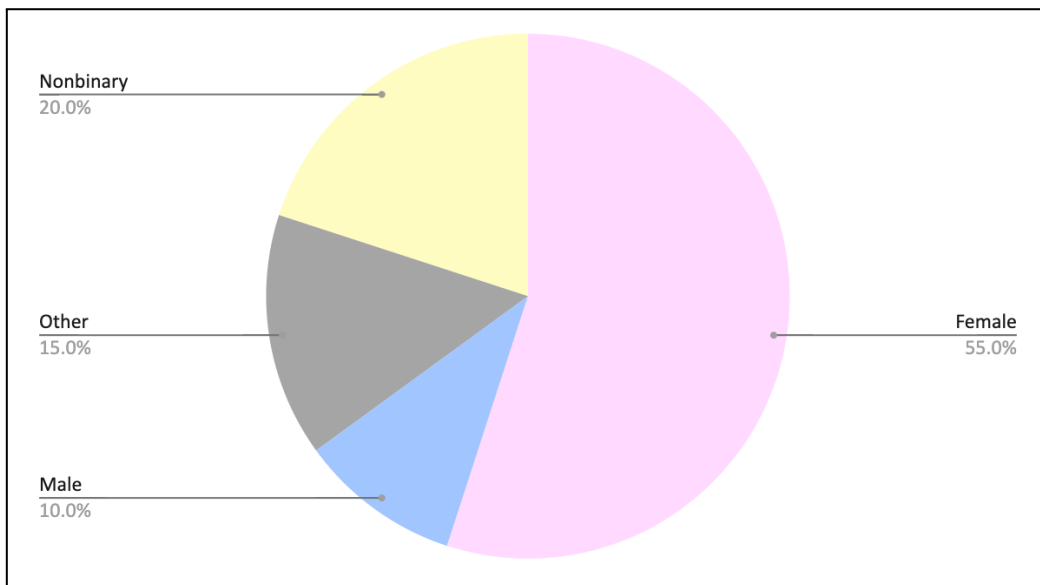
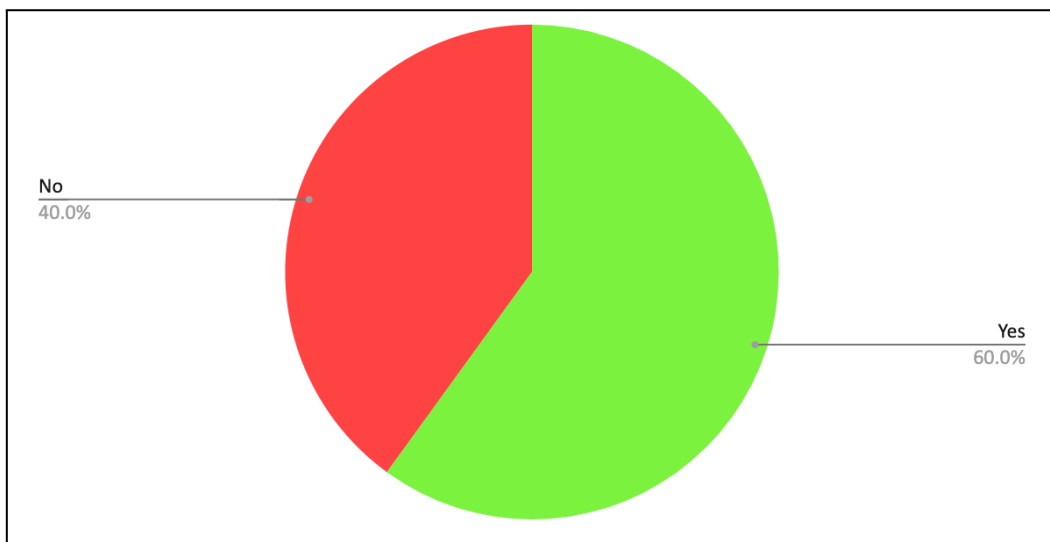


Figure 4. Drama Students - Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?



As can be seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, there was a higher percentage of individuals who were trans taking part in the study compared with the UK population, which is 0.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2021). There was also a higher percentage of females taking part which reflects on survey bias (Smith, 2008) and the higher rates of women in drama school compared to men (Clifford, 2021).

Figure 5. Drama Students - Highest Scores By Gender

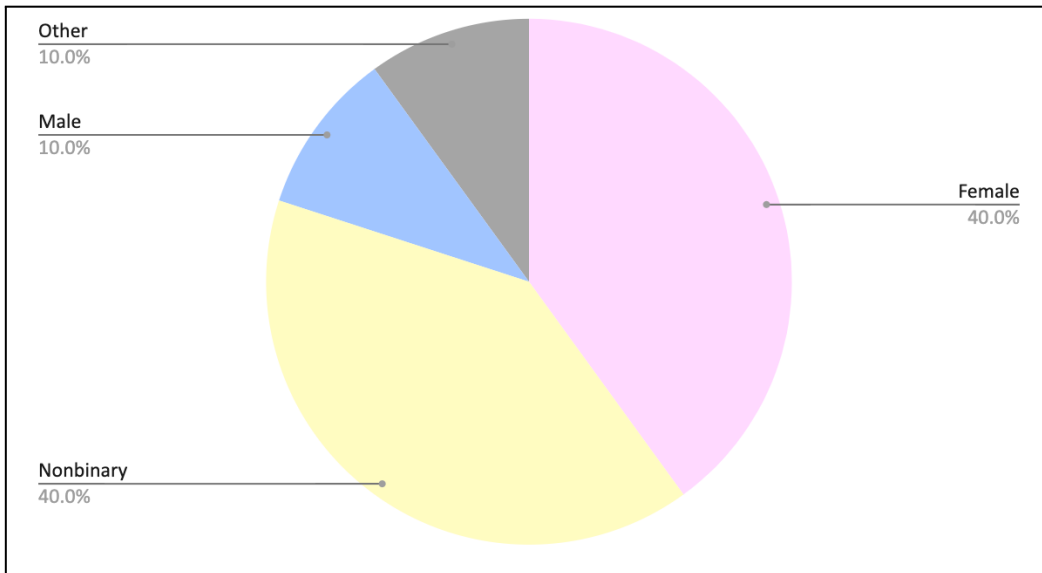
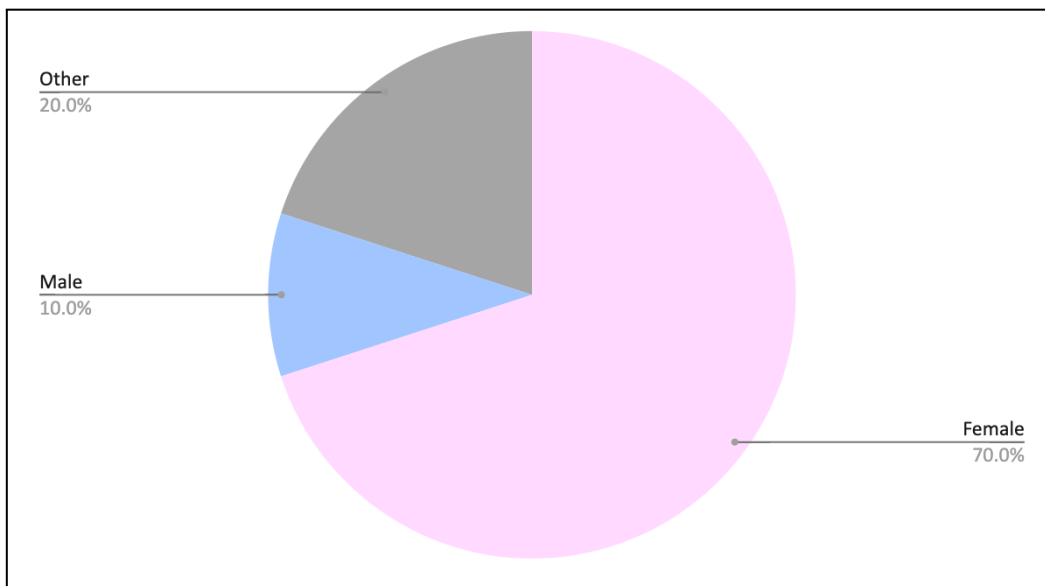


Figure 6. Drama Students - Lowest Scores By Gender



When comparing gender to those who scored higher in the CBQ (specifically those in the top 50%), nonbinary people and women were the most present (see Figure 5). Women also had the largest majority in the lowest CBQ score, but they also made up 55% of CBQ participants.

Based on students' written responses, it was observed that their gender identity, particularly among those who were trans, had an impact on their experience with cultish behaviour. One student wrote,

“We were punished if we didn’t follow the dress code, even if this went against our gender presentation... I was told I had to wear a dress for an event, despite explaining at length why it made me uncomfortable in that situation, being forced to explain in tears to a principal after hours” (18-24, Nonbinary). This behaviour can be found in the scores relating to enforced dress codes as part of cultish behaviour (see Figure 2). This approach was also seen more broadly with other identities from disability, race, size, and neurodivergence (see Appendix B).

2.4 Other Written Responses

Other written responses and experiences brought up (see Appendix B), which the CBQ was not built to assess for, included discussions of the cult of eating disorders present, a subculture of self-harm, “predatory people [being] excused if they are seen as valuable or useful and even protected” (18-24, Nonbinary), and “people at the top like, directors etc took advantage of underage students and would have relationships with them” (18-24, Female).

Figure 7. Drama Students - Sentiments In Written Statements

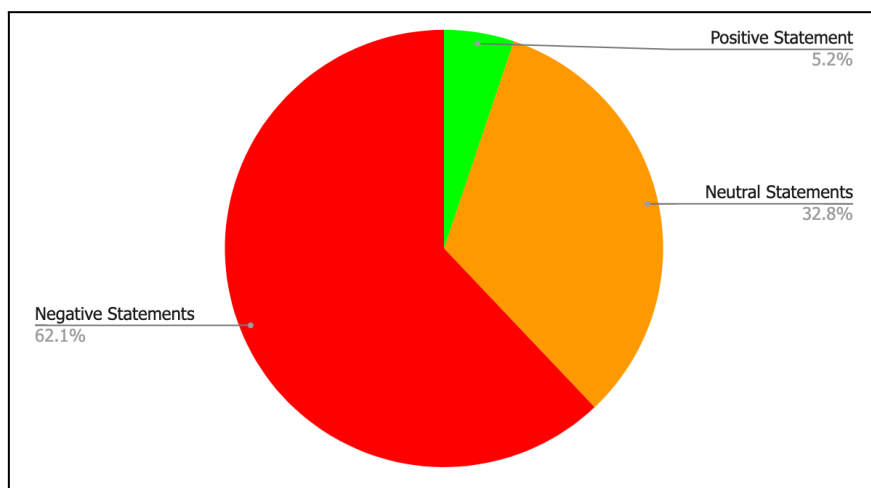
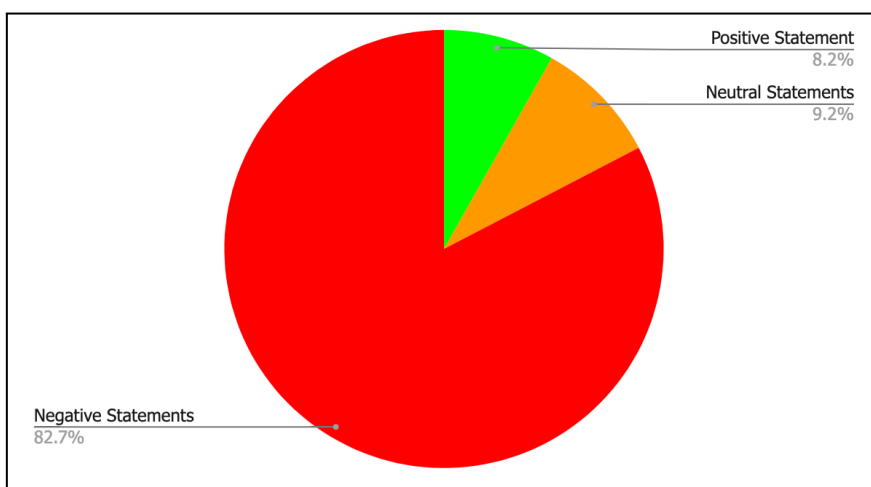


Figure 8. Drama Students - Sentiments In Key Emotive Words



Chapter Three: Discussion of Cultish Behaviour and Drama

School Culture

3.1 Discussion

It is clear from the data uncovered in the previous section that cultish behaviour is highly present in drama school settings, a fact I do not personally find surprising. After all, it only takes a quick online search to find many first-hand accounts of how drama schools “break you down in order to build you up” (Robinson, 2017), with “students’ passions [being] turned into weapons against them” (Boudreau, 2021). I would argue that such accounts, combined with the CBQ results, mirror the description of coercive persuasion and Margaret Singer’s six conditions for thought reform (Ross, 2014, 203). In this chapter, we will use Singer’s conditions to discuss how cultish behaviour is practised, whom it affects, and if drama schools allow for conditions in which thought reform could occur.

The first of Singer’s conditions is to keep a person unaware of the plans to institute control over them (Ross, 2014, 203). During the process of researching this topic, while I spent some time reading books that focused on particular acting techniques, I discovered that very few books are available that outline how to teach drama school students. There were little to no mentions of techniques designed to break students down in any textbook about acting methodology, perhaps beyond Lee Strasberg’s work at the Actor’s Centre (see Appendix C). It could be argued that the absence of documentation actually supports the existence of this. However, without further study, including interviewing drama school professors, we cannot know as it simply may not exist because this practice does not exist. Whether or not this method is intentionally not in the written record, we cannot know; as Ross puts it, “few cultic groups or leaders readily or willingly admit their agenda or ultimate purpose” (2014, 203).

Singer’s second condition centres on how groups manage time and the physical setting (Ross, 2014, 203). When focusing on settings and cultish compounds, I believe that any university or drama school campus is already likely to feel isolated by the very nature of this period in young people’s lives. Often young people live independently for the first time when completing a degree in higher education; this corresponds with data as more than 50% of young people leave their parents’ homes by the age of 23 (Office for National Statistics, 2019). To add to this, students have likely migrated to study their degrees, either internally or internationally, with students making up roughly one-fifth of all migration in England and Wales in 2014 (Swinney and Williams, 2016); adding to their isolation as they might not know anyone in the new area they are living in. This change, combined with increased loneliness in students (Jeffreys and Clarke, 2022), is reflected in the CBQ, with anxiety and isolation ranking second on average scores and pupils agreeing that they felt isolated from the outside world (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, when looking at cultish compounds, the CBQ reflects that the statement relating to 'only living with those training with me' was ranked ninth out of thirty-eight (see Figure 2). The CBQ's findings fit with Ross' exploration of cultish environments, which states that "many cult groups seem to gain influence and control over their members through a process of increasing isolation and estrangement from mainstream society" (Ross, 2014, 23). Therefore, we could argue that currently drama schools are in a position where they can capitalise on student's vulnerability and increase the cultish influence in their institutions.

To next look at controlling time, we know from the CBQ results that ritualistic reality is quite pervasive in those surveyed and was placed within the top scoring results of techniques present with strict scheduling, often preventing adequate rest, depriving students of breaks, food and time to reflect, and the use of repetitive and exhausting drills (see Figure 2). According to Montell, it is paramount for oppressive cultish groups not to let ritual time end as it gives "no separation, no going back to a reality where you have to get along with people who might not share your beliefs" (Montell, 2021a, 126). Ultimately, ritualistic reality prevents reflection and therefore prevents critical thinking. I believe that if students in drama schools are not given enough rest, they may not be able to recognize when their working environment is unsafe. This could also make it difficult for them to speak up to someone in a position of authority about any issues.

Singer's next condition involves creating powerlessness in individuals, also referred to as "learned helplessness" (Ross, 2014, 204). In my opinion and this context, this is often created in drama schools through the culmination of many small comments and actions in which an individual's worth is questioned. Through such questioning, an individual becomes dependent on the institution and their teachers for approval and a sense of self-worth. This "needing to prove your worthiness through suffering" (Medina and Montell, 2022a) is well documented in the zeitgeist through the concept of the tortured artist (Banyanmadhub, 2018; The Art Assignment, 2018; The Art Assignment, 2019). This condition can also be identified through the CBQ's relationship with mental health, which is closely tied to the idea of worth. In the CBQ, there were discussions of a separate "eating disorder cult", a normalisation of self-harm, and "pushing oneself to the limit simply because "thats how it is" or to prove yourself". Quantitative data supports the claim that individuals experience anxiety from the pressure to be perfect and dissociation due to expectations from teachers and fellow students. This is evidenced by high average scores in these areas, as shown in Figure 2.

Singer's fourth and fifth condition can be explored together as they are concerned with suppressing old behaviours and attitudes whilst instilling new ones (Ross, 2014, 204). This is similar to Schein's process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing (Schein, 1961, 140-141). While it is important for educational institutions to teach new ideas and behaviours to their pupils I believe the difference from

normal and cultish practices lies in the expectation of the student with respect for their autonomy and opinions. Many student participants in the CBQ reported in writing a failure from staff to respect their opinions and identities, with cultish behaviour often relying on tradition and discrimination. As one student put it “I was not allowed to have my own opinions, if they did not align with that of the principals...I was TOLD I could have my own opinions but I was constantly challenged and criticised for trusting myself. Especially regarding my gender presentation” (18-24, Nonbinary). Accounts like these particularly around transphobic cultish behaviour were reflected in the scores of nonbinary students with them being more likely to score higher than their male and female peers (See Figure 5). To continue examining, resistance to reshaping, as reported by another student, could be forced upon students with the threat of punishment as they wrote “if we didn't bow to the whims of our teachers, we would be threatened with blacklisting” (18-24, Agender). Of course when looking at the data from the CBQ, a statement related to teacher’s threatening punishments ranked in the lower half of averages though it is worth noting it was still over the expected baseline of zero (see Figure 2).

Finally, Singer’s last condition for thought reform explores closed systems of logic that utilise authoritarian structure (Ross, 2014, 204). This overlaps with Stein’s research, who believed there was overlap between cults, totalistic groups, and even domestic abuse situations where there was a defined structure between a follower and a leader (2016, 15). Looking at the CBQ, we can see how drama schools are structured influences students' lives in both its qualitative and quantitative data. As described by one student, “the mentality encouraged in my experience of drama school [relied on] unrelenting loyalty, blind trust in authority figures” (18-24, Nonbinary). Figure 2 illustrates that teachers having notable favourites and being awarded special privileges based on structure were ranked third in average scores for individual questions in the CBQ. It is understandable for a school to have a structured system; however, it is unacceptable for an educational institution to harbour predators (see Appendix B) and to direct students to mindlessly trust their teachers without any room for constructive criticism.

The only question therefore left to answer is if drama school settings display all but one of Singer’s conditions for thought reform, is it possible they have initiated such systems without awareness? I would argue that is not possible. The idea of breaking people down in drama school is not a hidden conversation and, from my experience, is often talked about both in school settings and online spaces. It is even talked about online when pupils decide whether or not they should attend such institutions.

Drama schools can be cultish in positive or neutral ways that have been explored in this discussion less than I would have liked. I have heard of pupils have engaged in strange rituals like being birthed from a giant fake vagina upon starting their course; theatre kids chanting before starting a show, “we’re going to fuck, kill, pillage and burn” (Medina and Montell, 2022a); and pupils “not saying or seeing the

rhyming couplets until the first show” (18-24, Female). There is nothing wrong with this kind of cultish behaviour, and it can often create a sense of community among pupils who are alone for the first time in their lives. However, when a culture of thought reform exists within drama school that is used to perpetuate abuse, an attitude of tradition sweeping behaviours “under the rug” (Medina and Montell, 2022a), and the ultimate harm to people’s mental health and future careers - that is when cultish behaviour becomes unacceptable.

3.2 Conclusion

While we could argue that no individual is more likely than another to be targeted by cultish groups, according to Ross, “we are all more vulnerable and suggestible when we are suffering depression, feeling lonely, experiencing a difficult transition period, or trying to navigate in a new environment” (Ross, 2014, 235) many of which can describe new students in drama school settings. While Stein argues that there is no vulnerable profile (2016, 49) and that it is natural for lonely people to seek out a group and “whether [individuals] find a totalist or non-totalist group to satisfy this need to belong may be strictly a question of luck” (2016, 59) I would argue, in the case of the cultish practices of academia and drama school, there is a difference. As highlighted by a participant in the CBQ:

“There is an aura created by drama schools that they are incredibly special places where only a select few are gifted the opportunity to train, so there is a want to follow to rules and abide by the status quo. This is easily exploitable: requiring students to work long, unsociable hours with little to no downtime; changing yourself as a person to fit into their vision of perfection.” (25-34, Nonbinary)

Unlike other cultish groups, young people are often expected to engage in higher education if not encouraged. Combine the cost to be part of these institutions, from audition fees, train travel to auditions, and the high student loans pupils are left with, and it is understandable why there is a stick-it-out mentality. Moreover, these exit costs doubts are most likely aided by the current cost of living crisis and financial instability. That is without even considering the mental toll students can be placed under when leaving, as one participant put it:

“I was humiliated upon trying to withdraw from my course and I had a mental breakdown not long after. I felt worthless, ashamed, with no sense of self or purpose. My main passion in life had been warped into something that triggered panic attacks.” (25-34, Nonbinary)

Chapter Four: Results of ‘How Have Industry Professionals Been Impacted By Cultish Behaviour?’ and Comparing Them To Students

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the question, ‘How Have Musical Theatre Industry Professionals Been Impacted By Cultish Behaviour?’ using results from the CBQ when given to the demographic of current and former musical theatre workers. Furthermore, the chapter will uncover how their results compare with those of Drama School students. There will be a focus on whether cultish behaviour is present in the working industry, if cultish behaviour has affected any group in particular, what methods were most commonly used across all participants surveyed, what personal impact it had on them during their careers, and their experiences compare and contrast to drama school students.

The structure of this chapter has been divided into multiple sections looking at the key results around: whether cultish behaviour was present, how it was practised when it was present, the demographics of those affected most, and other themes written about by participants which the CBQ did not account for.

4.2 The Presence of Cultish Behaviour

Using the same method used in 2.1, it was possible to determine and compare what scores were more indicative of cultish behaviour being present and which were not. This examination excludes comparing participants' scores for individual questions, which will be explored in 4.3.

Table 5. Industry Professionals - CBQ Key Findings

Mean Score of People Who Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	20.00
Mean Score of People Who Didn't Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	-15.50
Percentage of People Who Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	56%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over -14 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	71%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over 7.5 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	78%

Figure 10. Industry Professionals - CBQ scores vs whether workers found their experience in musical theatre cultish?

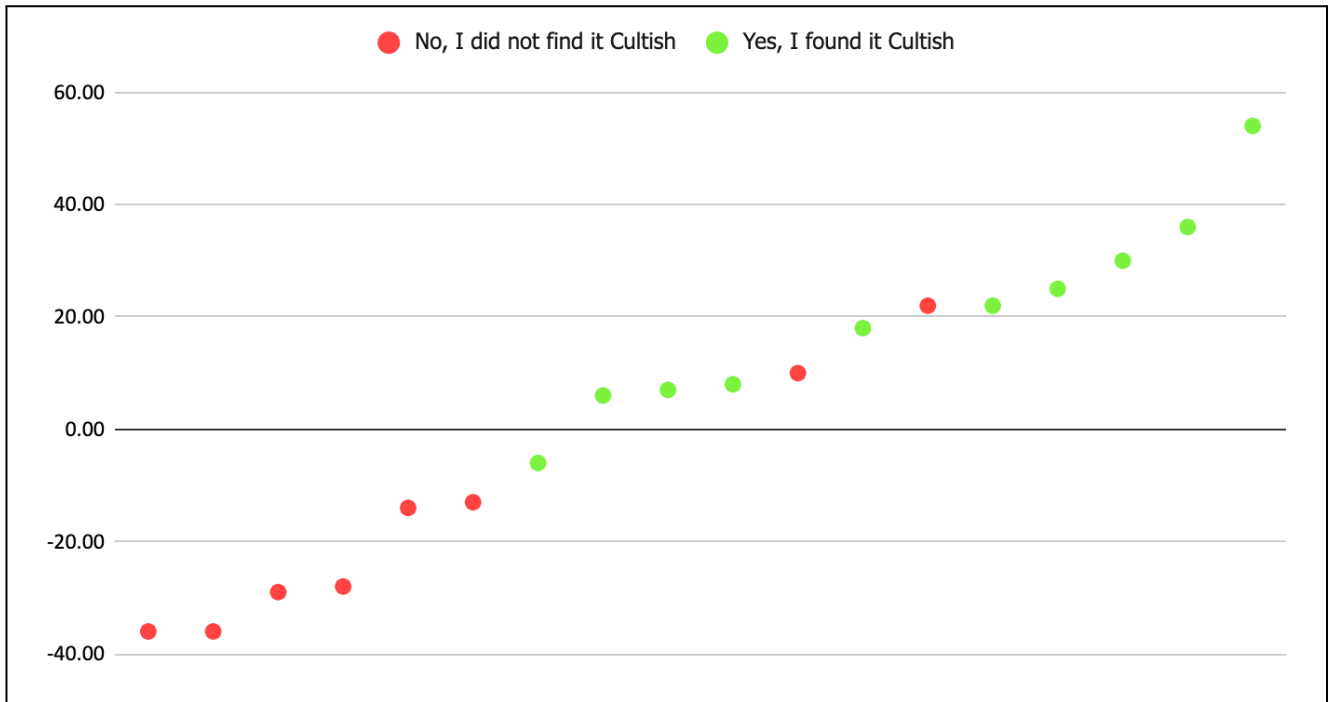


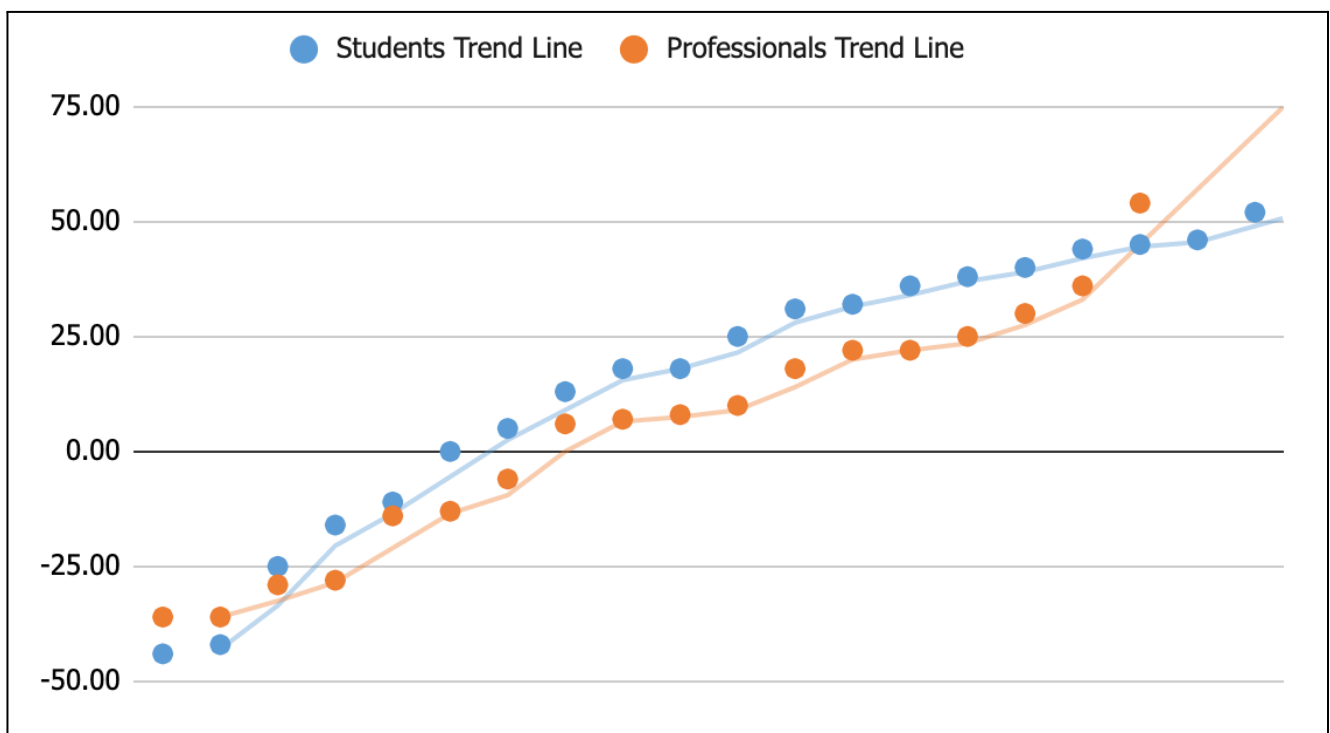
Figure 10. The y-axis shows scores, while the x-axis shows participants' scores on a scale from low to high. The colours of the data points indicate whether the participant identified their experience as cultish.

A lower percentage, when compared to drama students, of over 56% of professionals surveyed found their experience cultish regardless of their score. While a few higher-scoring people identified their experience as cultish, most people with scores over zero found their experience as being cultish, with those with sub-zero scores describing the opposite. When looking at survey responses, there were more critical responses to the survey, with one participant highlighting that they found “it difficult to answer this because I don't know what your definition of cultish is.” (65 and Over, Male) and other outright saying “I'm not comfortable with the comparison of industry standards and practices with ritualistic cultlike behavior [sic]. The study appears to assume a connection between the two that I don't share” (45-54, Male). Interestingly all of these responses came from male participants over 45 who possessed sub-zero scores and did not rate their experience as cultish.

Table 6. Drama Students Compared To Industry Professionals - CBQ Key Findings

Statements	Drama Students	Industry Professionals
Mean Score of People Who Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	22.50	20.00
Mean Score of People Who Didn't Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	-13.75	-15.50
Percentage of People Who Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	80%	56%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over -14 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	87.5%	71%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over 7.5 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	92.9%	78%

Figure 11. CBQ Scores of Students' Experience Compared With Professionals' Experience



As we can see from Table 6 and Figure 11, comparing drama school students' experience across the board scored higher, with a higher number of people identifying their experience as cultish. This data gives merit to one student's comment: "there are many great creatives who are driven out of the industry because of abuse and bullying during training, leaving only those who benefited from these systems to perpetuate the cycles" (25-34, Nonbinary).

Figure 12. CBQ Scores for Students and Professionals vs whether they found their experience in musical theatre cultish

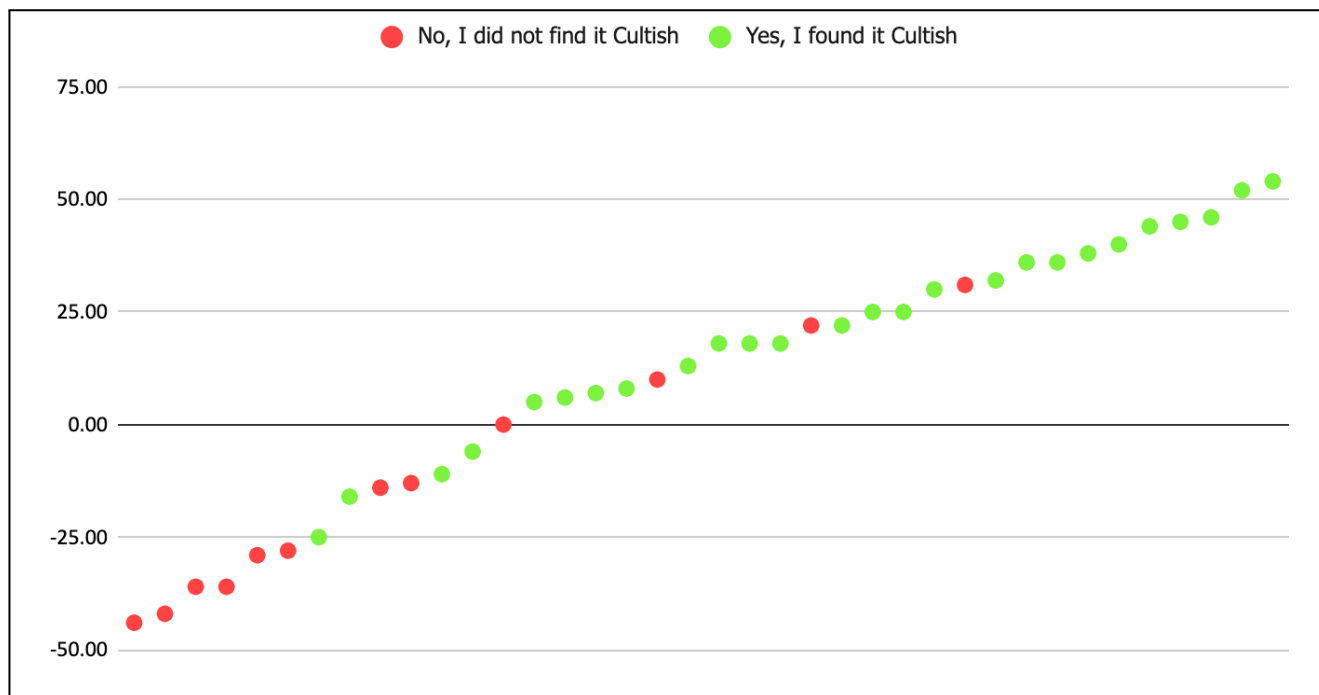


Table 7. Combined - CBQ Key Findings

Mean Score of People Who Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	21.53
Mean Score of People Who Didn't Self Identified With The Cultish Experience	-14.92
Percentage of People Who Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	68.42%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over -14 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	80.00%
Percentage of People Who Scored Over 7.5 Claimed Their Experience Was Cultish	86.36%

Finally, of all the thirty-eight people surveyed across both reports, 68% said they had cultish experience (See Table 7). I was initially worried that the titles of these studies would only draw people who had experienced cultish behaviour to complete the CBQ; however, these statistics prove otherwise.

4.2 The Practice of Cultish Behaviour

This next section concerns what practices and methods of cultish behaviour were the most present across the experience of industry professionals, comparing them to the experience of drama students. The methodology behind this is explained in 2.2.

Figure 13. Industry Professionals - Bubble Cloud of Average CBQ Scores

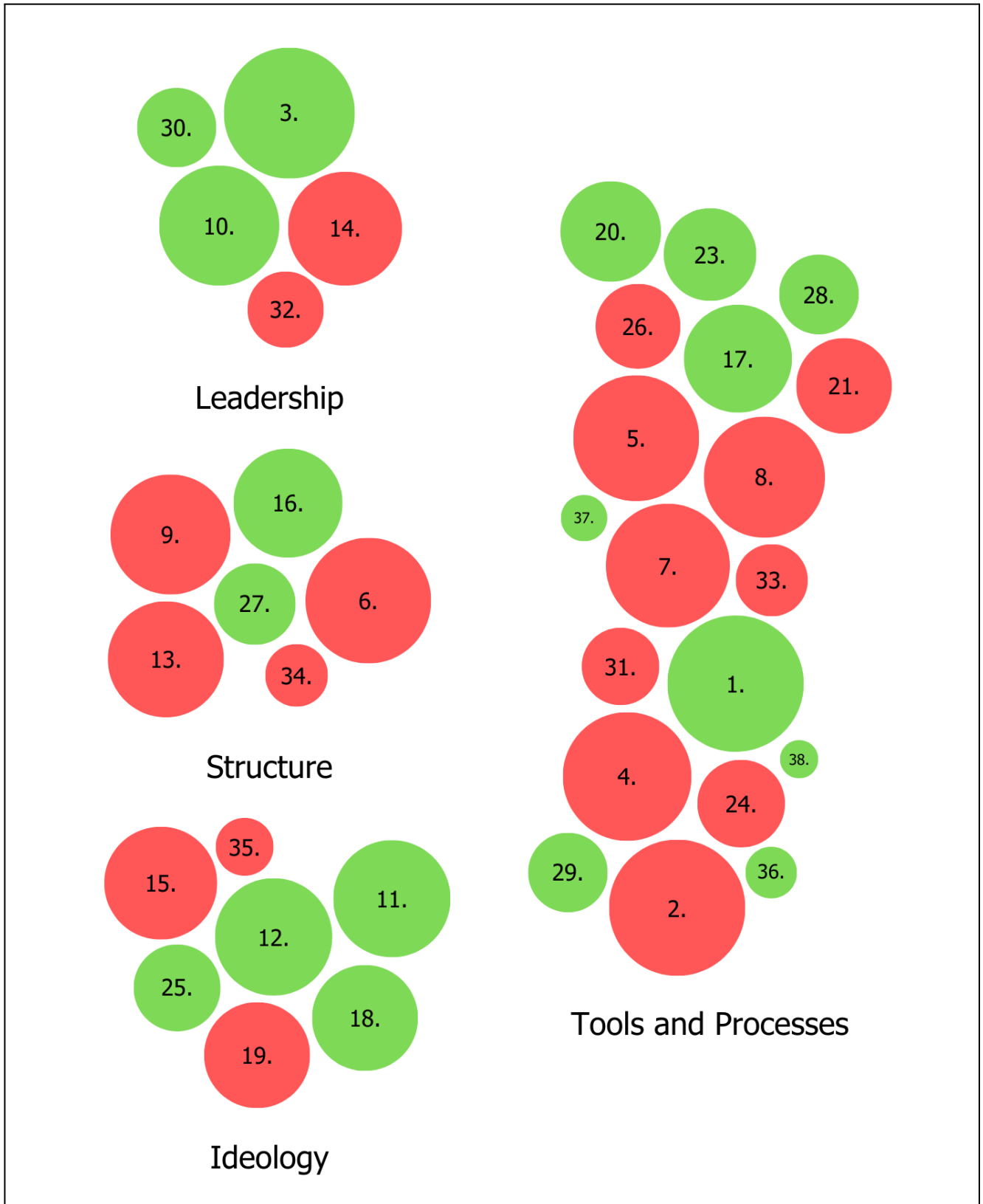


Figure 13. The colours of the data points indicate whether the statement was cultish phrased (red) or uncultish statement (green). Note that the scale is accurate when compared to similar graphs.

Figure 13. (Continued) Industry Professionals - Bubble Cloud of Average CBQ Scores

1. The schedule not allowing for adequate rest (0.94)
2. Taking part in pre-show rituals (0.94)
3. Workspace leaders possessing strong communication skills, an ability to be persuasive, and the charm to influence others (0.83)
4. Use of nicknames and insider terminology (0.78)
5. Struggling with anxiety due to the level of perfection required (0.72)
6. Workspace leaders having notable favourites with special privileges (0.71)
7. Love Bombing (0.67)
8. Regularly taking part in exhausting drills (0.61)
9. Only having time to socialise with people within my workspace (0.59)
10. Leaders not being flexible around rules and treating students as unequal (0.59)
11. Feeling gaslit by leaders (0.53)
12. Leaders shutting down debate and enforcing ways of thinking (0.53)
13. Feeling isolated from the outside world (0.50)
14. Leaders code-switching (0.47)
15. Leaders preventing discussion beyond taught material (0.44)
16. Work not aligning with expectations (0.35)
17. Leaders using thought-terminating clichés (0.33)
18. Adapting reality to fit in with my leader's narrative (0.29)
19. Only leaders having the authority to dictate answers to questions (0.29)
20. Suffering from anxiety due to isolation (0.17)
21. Struggling with mental overload due to being deprived of breaks, food, or time to reflect (0.06)
22. Privacy and boundaries not respected (0.06)
23. Required to reveal trauma in a group setting (0.00)
24. Taught chants (-0.11)
25. Not allowing to interpret tasks in preferred working style (-0.12)
26. Struggling with dissociation because of pressure put on individuals by leaders or colleagues (-0.17)
27. Communication being cut to friends and family (-0.24)
28. Dress code being enforced (-0.28)
29. Loaded Language (-0.28)
30. Leaders using threats or the fear of punishments (-0.29)
31. Encouraging telling on rule breakers (-0.33)
32. Leaders requiring strict obedience (-0.35)
33. Leaders pitting the group against an outside force in order to bring them together (-0.44)
34. Only living with people who were also working / training with me (-0.65)
35. Cutting ties to other groups in order to be welcomed (-0.76)
36. Not understanding rituals were not based on reality (-0.89)
37. Glossolalia (-1.00)
38. Changing name (-1.17)

Figure 14. Combined - Bubble Cloud of Average CBQ Scores

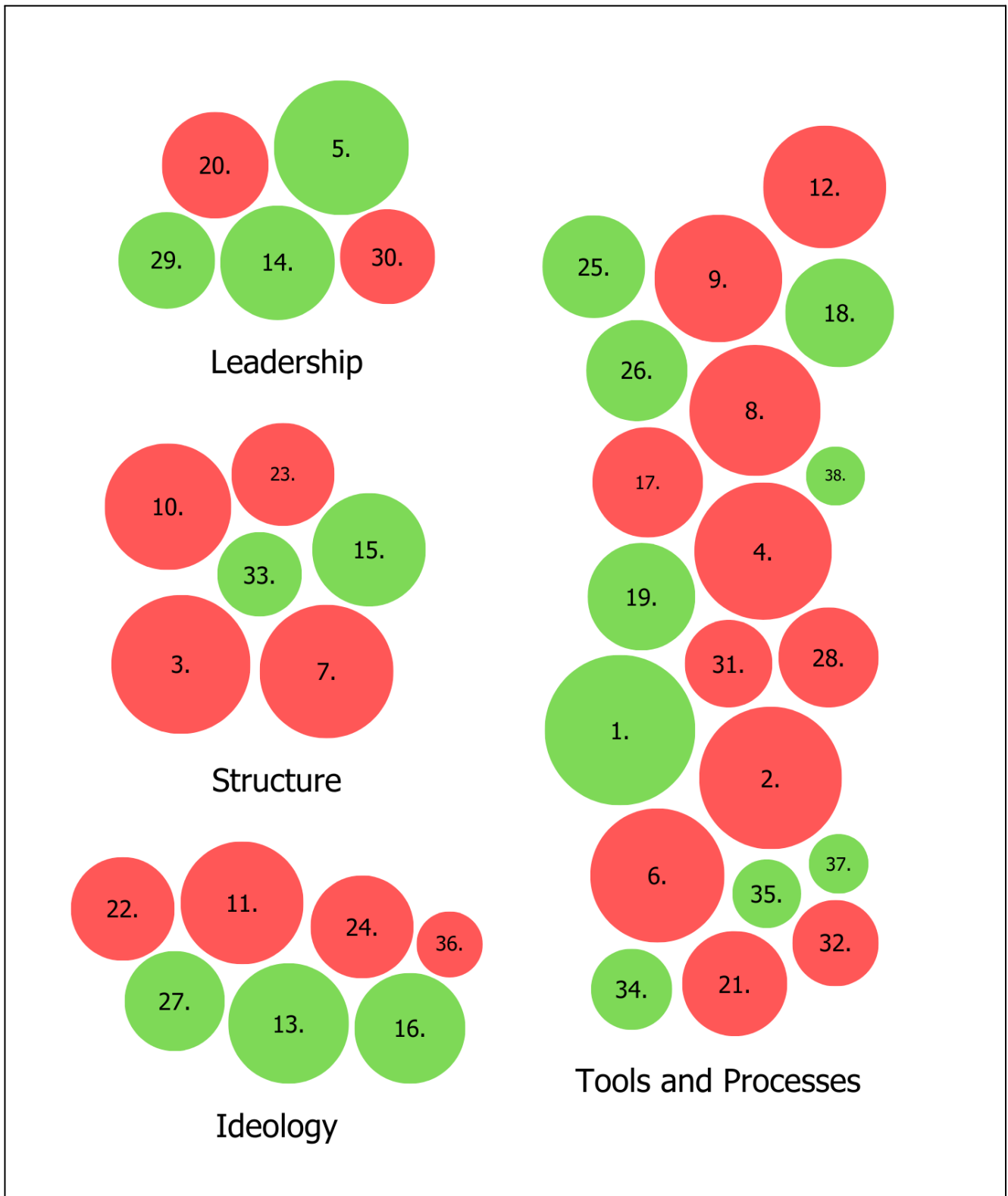
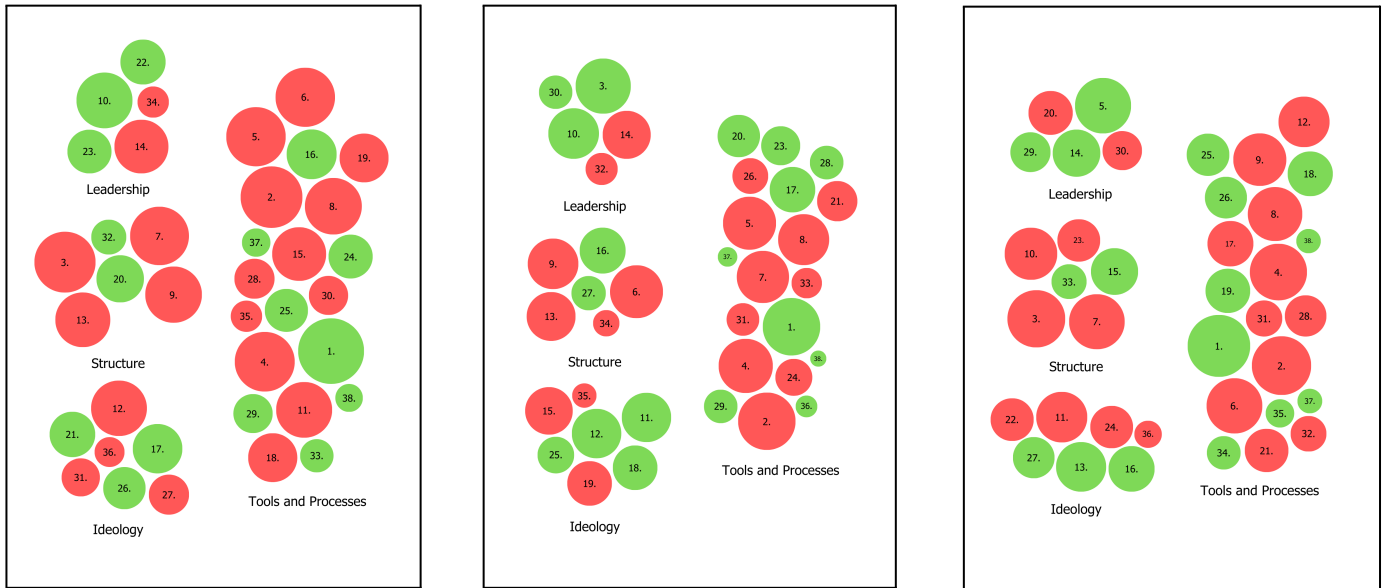


Figure 14. The colours of the data points indicate whether the statement was cultish phrased (red) or uncultish statement (green). Note that the scale is accurate when compared to similar graphs.

Figure 14. (Continued) Combined - Bubble Cloud of Average CBQ Scores

1. The schedule not allowing for adequate rest (1.16)
2. Taking part in pre-show rituals (1.00)
3. Workspace leaders having notable favourites with special privileges (0.92)
4. Struggling with anxiety due to the level of perfection required (0.89)
5. Workspace leaders possessing strong communication skills, an ability to be persuasive, and the charm to influence others (0.84)
6. Use of nicknames and insider terminology (0.82)
7. Only having time to socialise with people within my workspace (0.81)
8. Regularly taking part in exhausting drills (0.76)
9. Suffering from anxiety due to isolation (0.68)
10. Adapting reality to fit in with my leader's narrative (0.66)
11. Feeling isolated from the outside world (0.58)
12. Struggling with mental overload due to being deprived of breaks, food, or time to reflect (0.58)
13. Feeling gaslit by leaders (0.53)
14. Leaders not being flexible around rules and treating students as unequal (0.41)
15. Work not aligning with expectations (0.39)
16. Leaders preventing discussion beyond taught material (0.33)
17. Struggling with dissociation because of pressure put on individuals by leaders or colleagues (0.32)
18. Privacy and boundaries not respected (0.29)
19. Leaders using thought-terminating clichés (0.26)
20. Leaders requiring strict obedience (0.24)
21. Taught chants (0.21)
22. Leaders shutting down debate and enforcing ways of thinking (0.18)
23. Only living with people who were also working / training with me (0.17)
24. Only leaders having the authority to dictate answers to questions (0.17)
25. Dress code being enforced (0.16)
26. Required to reveal trauma in a group setting (0.13)
27. Not allowing to interpret tasks in preferred working style (0.11)
28. Love Bombing (0.11)
29. Leaders using threats or the fear of punishments (0.03)
30. Leaders code-switching (0.00)
31. Encouraging telling on rule breakers (-0.16)
32. Leaders pitting the group against an outside force in order to bring them together (-0.18)
33. Communication being cut to friends and family (-0.22)
34. Loaded Language (-0.29)
35. Changing name (-0.55)
36. Cutting ties to other groups in order to be welcomed (-0.61)
37. Not understanding rituals were not based on reality (-0.74)
38. Glossolalia (-0.76)

Figure 15. All Bubble Clouds of Average CBQ Scores



Drama Students

Industry Professionals

Combined

After analyzing the scores in the CBQ, it is worth mentioning that drama students had seven averages above one, whilst industry professionals had none, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 13. The industry professionals had more sub-zero scores, with fourteen total, while the drama students only had seven. Furthermore, this difference was reflected in comments with one professional saying, “it generally did not impact on my [professional development]” (25-34, Male) and another who said the cultish behaviour “... only makes the workplace sometimes less enjoyable” (25-34, Male). Of course, this was not the case for every professional, with some discussing how they had explicitly left the industry because of their treatment (see Appendix B), but those statements were in the minority.

The top ten scores for industry professionals in the CBQ were more spread out, with two falling under ‘Leadership’, two under ‘Structure’, and six under ‘Tool and Processes’. When it came to statements concerning leadership and structure, people discussed having a “separate and fulfilling home life separate from theatre” (55-64, Female), but there were also discussions of people struggling with “the expectation [to] ALWAYS to go above and beyond what you are being paid and there is just a sense that is what artists do” (25-34, Female). The two themes that came up repeatedly were workloads and communication problems, with one person saying, “communication is ALWAYS terrible as if magic is what holds productions together when really it is hard graft, collective solidarity and supporting artists” (25-34, Female). These “varying levels of clusterfuck expectations which preyed on my own expectations of perfectionism” (25-34, Female), which multiple artists expressed, were reflected in the test scores with schedules not allowing for adequate rest having the highest score along with struggling with anxiety due to the level of perfection required.

Figure 16. Leadership CBQ Average Scores for Students Vs Professionals



Figure 17. Structure CBQ Average Scores for Students Vs Professionals

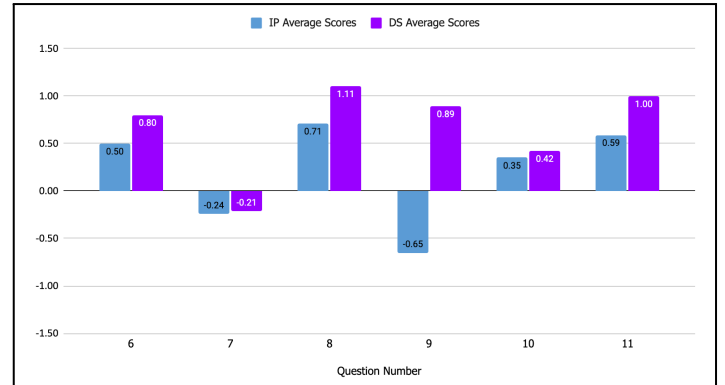


Figure 18. Ideology CBQ Average Scores for Students Vs Professionals

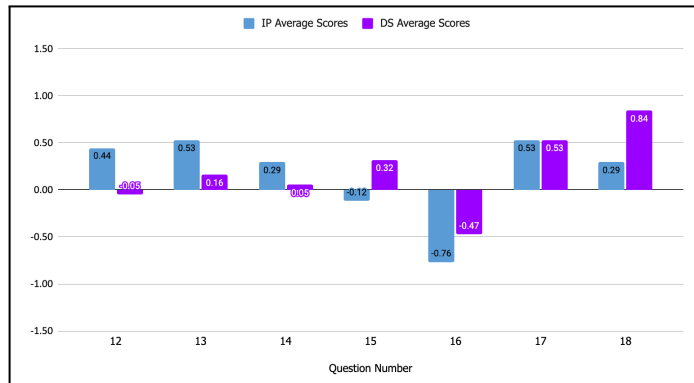


Figure 19. Tools and Processes CBQ Average Scores for Students Vs Professionals

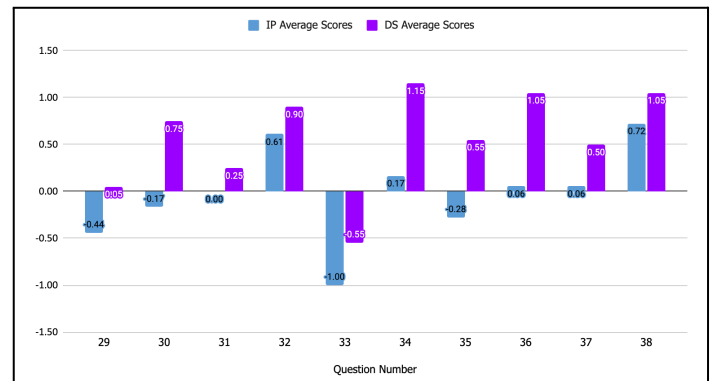
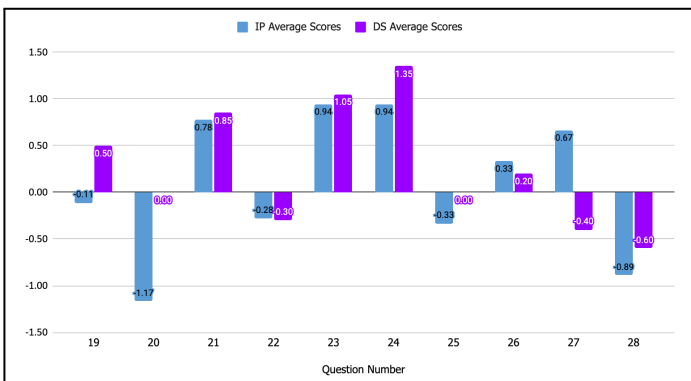


Table 8 Statements Which Had More Than A 0.5 Difference Average Between Industry Professionals and Drama Students

Statements	Score Difference	Who Scored Higher?
Only living with people who were also working / training with me	1.54	Drama Students
Changing name	1.17	Drama Students
Leaders requiring strict obedience	1.10	Drama Students
Love Bombing	1.07	Industry Professionals
Struggling with mental overload due to being deprived of breaks, food, or time to reflect	0.99	Drama Students
Suffering from anxiety due to isolation	0.98	Drama Students
Struggling with dissociation because of pressure put on individuals by leaders or colleagues	0.92	Drama Students
Leaders code-switching	0.87	Industry Professionals
Dress code being enforced	0.83	Drama Students
Taught chants	0.61	Drama Students
Leaders using threats or the fear of punishments	0.59	Drama Students
Adapting reality to fit in with my leader's narrative	0.55	Drama Students

Table 9. Number Of Times Each Group Scored Higher On Averages

Number of Times Drama Students Scored Higher	27
Number of Times Industry Professionals Scored Higher	10
Number of Times Both Scored The Same	1

In Table 9, it was observed that drama students frequently achieved higher scores than industry professionals when comparing their highest scores. Additionally, in Table 8, most scores with gaps over 0.5 were attributable to drama students scoring higher. Certain score differences are understandable, such as students living together during training or changing their names before entering the industry, but others are worrying.

Table 10. Industry Professionals - Bias In Phrased Questions

Mean Score for Uncultish Phrased Statements	-0.01
Mean Score for Cultish Phrased Statements	0.21

Table 11. Combined and Compared - Bias In Phrased Questions

Drama Student - Mean Score for Uncultish Phrased Statements	0.24
Drama Student - Mean Score for Cultish Phrased Statements	0.55
Industry Professionals - Mean Score for Uncultish Phrased Statements	-0.01
Industry Professionals - Mean Score for Cultish Phrased Statements	0.21
Combined - Mean Score for Uncultish Phrased Statements	0.12
Combined - Mean Score for Cultish Phrased Statements	0.39

When it came to bias in statements presented, on average cultish-phrased statements, which meant that individuals agreed their experience was cultish, did score higher (0.21) than those that were uncultish-phrased (-0.01), which meant that participants disagreed that their experience was cultish (see Table 10). Notably, there was a similarly small gap in the bias data for drama students which shows this goes beyond the individual experiences of the two groups (see Table 11).

4.3 The Demographic of Cultish Behaviour

As previously explained, the CBQ inquired about the age and gender of the participants, as well as whether their gender identity aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth. This inquiry explored whether any group, in particular, were being targeted by cultish behaviour.

Table 12. Industry Professionals - Age Demographic

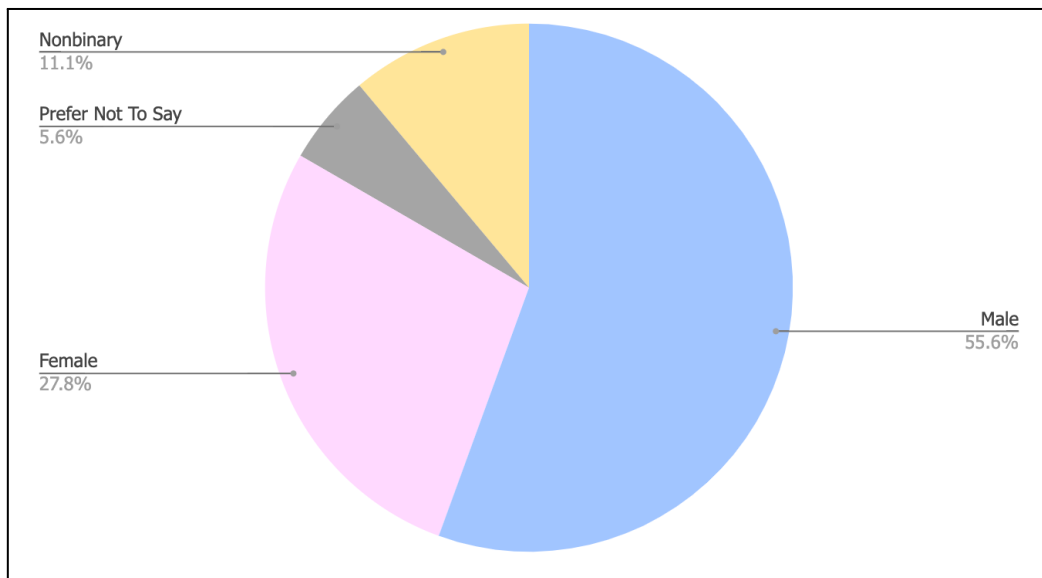
Number of Participants Aged 18-24	1
Number of Participants Aged 25-34	6
Number of Participants Aged 35-44	6
Number of Participants Aged 45-54	1
Number of Participants Aged 55-64	2
Number of Participants Aged 65 and Over	1
Number of Participants Who Selected Prefer Not To Say	1

Table 13. Industry Professionals - Average CBQ Score Based On Age Demographic

Number of Participants Aged 18-34	6.29
Number of Participants Aged 35-44	26.67
Number of Participants Aged 45 and Over	-24.75

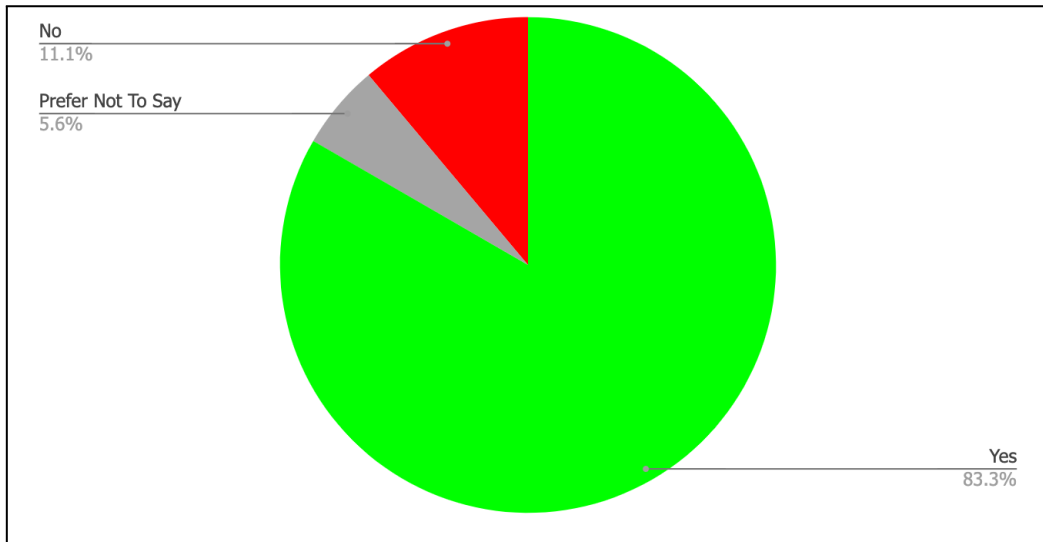
Regarding age, there were notable differences in the average scores, with older participants scoring notably lower (see Table 13). The older participants noted in their comments possible reasons for this, with one person saying, “Maybe because I’m (much!) older and worked in the professional sector that I only have positive interactions with theatre people” (55-64, Female). This sentiment was not echoed by younger people and early career artists, with one person saying, “I feel like there isn't an implied respect for early career artists (especially people who are not white cis men) that established people just get” (25-34, Female).

Figure 20. Industry Professionals - Gender



Compared to the Drama Students (see Figure 3), there was a higher level of responses from male professionals, with women and nonbinary people being the minority of respondents (see Figure 20).

Figure 21. Industry Professionals - Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?



A smaller number of people also identified as trans in the pool of industry professionals (See Figure 21) than the students surveyed (see Figure 4).

Figure 22. Industry Professional- Highest Scores By Gender

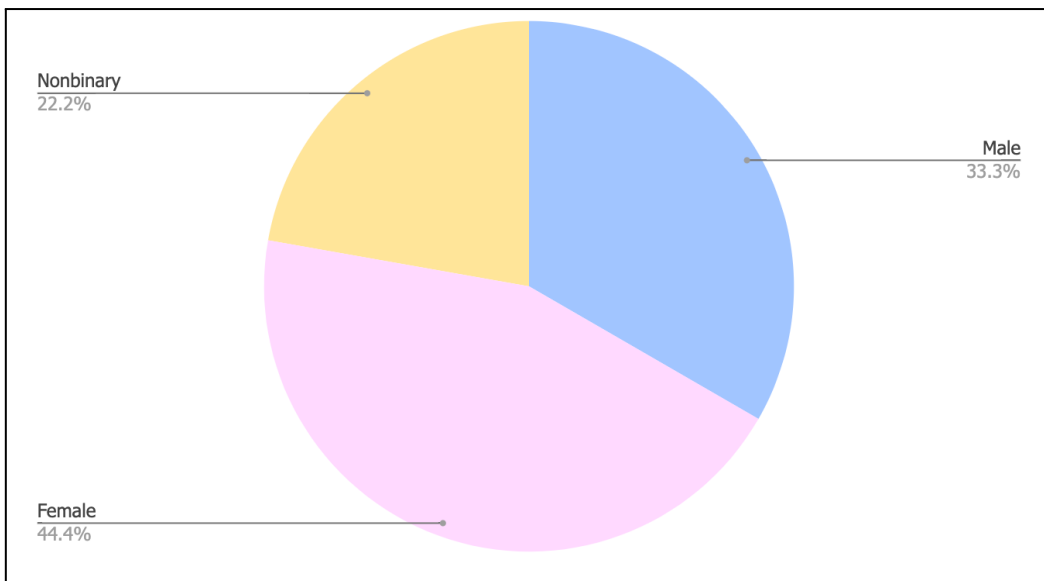
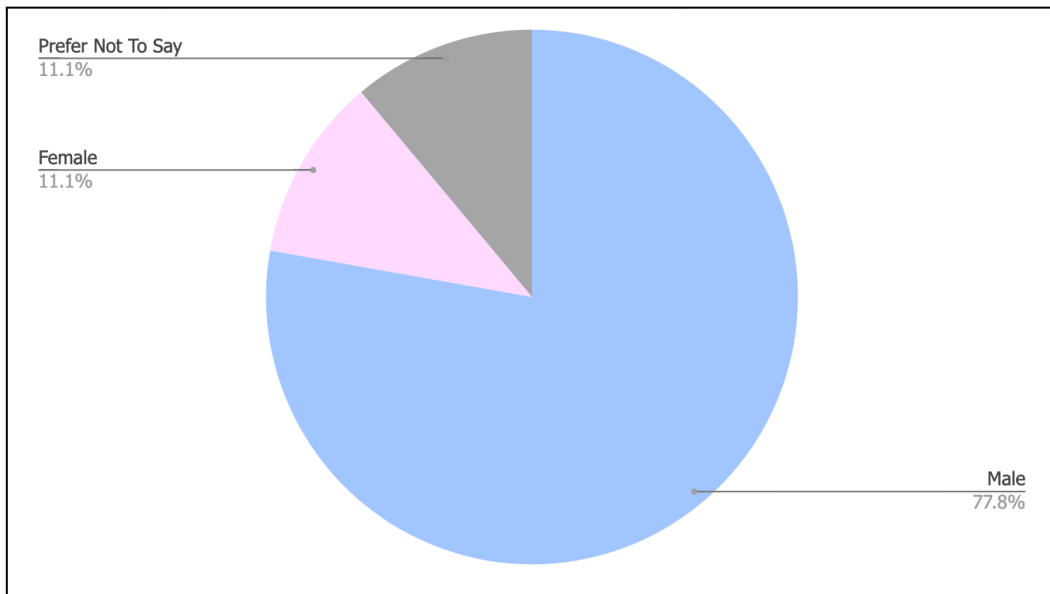


Figure 23. Industry Professional - Lowest Scores By Gender

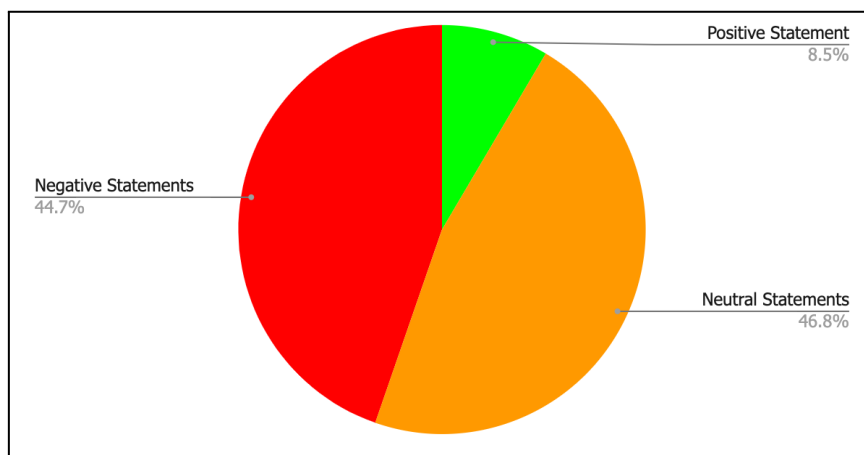


In analyzing the CBQ scores of those in the top 50%, women and nonbinary individuals scored higher even though they were a smaller group of respondents (see Figures 20 and 22). Men were also in the majority of those with lower scores (Figure 23). This difference was reflected in responses, with one trans person stating they had left the industry with “a major mental health crisis from an experience working in the industry...I was surprised but not shocked to find how closely I was identifying with experiences of people who survived/escaped cults” (35-44, Genderqueer).

4.4 Other Written Responses

There were notably fewer written responses from industry professionals, and all themes discussed were part of the CBQ.

Figure 24. Industry Professionals - Sentiments In Written Statements



4.5 Conclusion

The findings of the CBQ show that industry professionals reported lower levels of cultish behaviour present when compared to drama school students, with 56% of those surveyed finding their experience cultish regardless of their score. Regarding where cultish behaviour was most present, it scored highest in 'Leadership', 'Structure', and 'Tool and Processes', with common themes around poor communication and overworking. When average scores for questions were compared, drama students scored higher than industry professionals, with over 70% of the higher scores coming from that group. The bias found in 2.5 was repeated in the industry professionals' score, with cultish questions scoring higher than non-cultish questions.

When accessing groups affected, many older participants scored lower than younger participants. Moreover, despite this survey featuring more data from men, women and nonbinary people tended to score higher than their male counterparts. Finally, many of the written responses were more neutral and less indicative of harmful behaviour overall when compared to those statements from drama school students.

Chapter Five: Discussion Of Cultish Behaviour Comparisons

5.1 Discussion

When reviewing the data, I found that while there was no denying the presence of cultish behaviour in industry settings due to various checks and balances, no doubt assisted by unions, most of this behaviour was not harmful. In fact, similar to the drama students, the presence of rituals/pre-show rituals was one of the highest scoring questions on average, with the understanding that these rituals were real ranked lowest (see Figure 14), showing an awareness that while theatre might have a rich culture of ritualistic traditions, these rituals are not harmful.

To note a few examples of positive or neutral cultish presence, there is a well-documented shrine in “a particularly difficult to get to part of the attic [of the Globe]... [with] an array of offerings to Bacchus, and Dionysus” (#SuchStuff, 2018) as well as a book documenting a “collection of first-hand accounts of the paranormal drawn from theatres across the United Kingdom” (Mysteries & Monsters, 2021).

Figure 27. A Shrine to Dionysus In The Globe (Cathal, 2019)



When looking at these examples, I am reminded of Singer’s first condition of thought reform: keeping a person unaware of the plans to institute control over them (Ross, 2014, 203). These examples of theatre not hiding its cult-like behaviour suggest that the conditions of thought reform are generally not present. This view does not suggest that the whole industry is free from negative cultish behaviour as there are standalone examples (see Appendix C), along with negative accounts from some professionals taking the CBQ. Instead, I am trying to suggest that, unlike the closed environments of training, it is difficult to argue that widespread thought reform is possible with the current industry culture, which I would argue is slowly becoming more open about confronting issues.

One intriguing aspect of the industry CBQ data was how it related to the data gathered from drama school students, specifically in Table 8. While some differences were to be expected, there were others I did not anticipate, like drama schools reporting on average a more substantial presence of leaders requiring strict obedience, struggles with mental overload due to being deprived breaks, struggles with dissociation due to pressure to succeed, and leaders using threats or the fear of punishments. These differences were substantial because there is no concrete reason for these to exist in such disproportionate amounts and because their neutrality is less ambiguous. On the whole, these are harmful things when they occur. This revelation leads to the question of why such behaviour is more tolerated in drama schools without any repercussions.

5.1 What Divides Industry and Student Experiences

In my opinion, a significant factor that distinguishes the musical theatre industry's relationship with less harmful displays of cultish behaviour and drama schools' more damaging relationship with its students is exit costs. Exit costs (Ross, 2014, 78) or the sunk cost fallacy (Montell, 2021a, 103) is a phenomenon where people tend to stay or refuse to abandon harmful or damaging strategies and groups because they have emotionally invested in them, even though it would be more beneficial for them to leave. As Montell puts it:

“Irrationally, we tend to stay in negative situations, from crappy relationships to lousy investments to cults, telling ourselves that a win is just around the corner, so we don't have to admit to ourselves that things just didn't work out and we should cut our losses.” (Montell, 2021a, 103)

Arguably, it may seem more complicated to leave a career and industry than a training institution if a person is experiencing harmful cultish behaviour. However, I would pose that financial ties and societal expectations encourage people to push through drama school and leave the industry upon completion. As put by one professional in the CBQ:

“I'd say 90% of my class and the ones around it didn't go into the industry to do it professionally - which is obviously fine - but one can't help but think that the nature of the university system affects that. I'd imagine other industries (majors) have a far higher “retention” rate after graduation” (35-44, Male).

Drama schools can be more expensive than most universities (Allingham, 2021), with some fees being more than £15,000 per year, which also excludes audition fees (Mountview, n.d.). That is a substantial financial incentive to complete a degree, as many benefits that differentiate drama schools and university education are not seen until the end of a degree, such as industry showcases. On top of this,

in a recent study, nearly half sixth form and college students felt pressure to pursue a university-level education, with nearly two-fifths also saying they would feel like a failure if they did not (Hall, 2020).

Compare this attitude to how society talks about career changes. In one study, it was said that 34% of adults were looking at changing careers at some point within the next two years (Jones and Windett, 2022), and another found that 72% of theatre freelancers were pessimistic about their future careers (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2022). For many interested in a career change, the internet can provide plenty of advice and short retraining courses, something not found for drama school students, with transfers between schools sometimes being impossible due to the audition requirement fees and lack of guarantees. Moreover, unlike drama school students, many professionals do not have financial ties to the theatre industry in the long term as theatre has a problem with “pay insecurity” (Sharratt, 2022) compared to other industries. In fact, data from Table 8 suggesting love bombing is more present in the industry than in drama school makes sense as this may be done as leaders have less financial control over professionals and therefore rely on more immaterial methods to convince people to stay in adverse environments.

While one participant said, “The fact that it happens in the education side shows that the whole culture is rotten” (35-44, Nonbinary), I would disagree. Ultimately, what I think we have is a pipeline problem. When looking at the industry while these issues exist, there are standalone harmful cultish cases like Ponyboy Curtis (Levesley, 2022); they are also more than ever being openly addressed. I found multiple articles discussing “[overhauling] pay to stop talent drain” (Snow, 2022), “Backstage theatre workers 'pushed to breaking point due to lack of work-life balance'” (Masso, 2019), and “Overcoming the Overworking Mindset” (Cowart, 2020). Yet when it came to discussing drama school culture I could find only a few articles discussing the closure of Drama Centre London due to “course culture and student welfare” (Redmond, 2020) and individuals' accounts of their experiences (Robyn Holdaway, 2021). Although a male respondent aged 25-34 stated, “I find this [cultish] attitude is less prevalent with actor musicians and "straight" theatre actors”, I believe the theatre industry as a whole should scrutinize the influence of drama schools on students entering the industry, particularly as this is where most negative cultish behaviour takes place. If we focus on fixing the drama school system as the source of these issues, the industry may suffer from less negative cultish experiences.

Conclusion

“I mean we’ve quoted these aphorisms that come up all the time talking about the subjectivity of what a cult is: A cult is like porn, you know it when you see it, and like cult plus time equals religion...like it is so subjective. You can look at a room of people in all white and be like ‘yeah that looks like a cult’ but conformist uniforms alone are not enough. It’s when there is like intense dogma and oppression that goes along with it that you’re like ‘oh, okay that white uniform isn’t so cute anymore.’” (Medina and Montell, 2023b)

Subjectivity is almost inescapable in cultish research, which does not help those seeking to understand their experience without becoming cultish researchers themselves. But as valuable as they are, gut feelings cannot be the only options we can give those seeking to analyse their experience. When I began this investigation, I sought to help others define their experiences, to understand in depth what the impact of cultish behaviour was across the musical theatre industry, and to build a tool that would help others in defining and understanding similar experiences in different fields for future research use. I believe I have achieved my goals by utilising the CBQ to provide both qualitative and quantitative data on how musical theatre needs to adapt urgently to provide drama students with more enriched educational experiences. With a few revisions (see Appendix D), I believe the CBQ will be beneficial for further research within my industry and others.

Initially, I expected to find equal levels of cultish behaviour in the industry and drama schools; however, upon analysing and comparing the data, I came to the realisation that this was not the case. The average comparisons between these two data sets highlighted where drama school culture might be impacting students negatively and aided in narrowing it down to specific methods rather than just broad presence. I found my methodology succeeded in uncovering the data I wanted; however, there are specific changes I would like to make in my future research, along with the study of whether the CBQ can be adapted for content analysis, such as in the case of Averno (see Appendix C). I am also interested in conducting further research on the pipeline (see Appendix C) of how cults enter institutions and how institutions might unintentionally prepare people to enter cults which is a line of inquiry this study uncovered.

Despite all of this, some limitations hampered this study and changes I would seek to make in future work on this subject. Firstly, in an attempt to generate as much data as possible, I took on more than I was academically capable of, especially concerning contributing to research in brainwashing and attachment theory. In the end, I decided to throw out my data from this section as I realised, as a researcher, that I lacked the knowledge on how best to perform this analysis. I also failed to create a

question asking people if they found their cultish experience harmful, which led to relying on content analysis of participants' statements. This method was time-consuming and lacked the clarity this question could have addressed and should be included in future studies using the CBQ (see Appendix D). Next, I could have asked participants for more information about what demographic backgrounds they came from in order to help identify whether other groups were also affected more by discriminatory cultish practices. For example, I could have asked people about their class, race, and disability/neurodivergence, which some participants mentioned as impacting them in their written statements. In hindsight, I also should have changed the survey title to avoid discouraging people with neutral or positive experiences from participating. The word "cult" has a negative stigma, which may have resulted in more responses from individuals with negative experiences. Finally, I wish I could have found a suitable control group to compare results against. This regret is because, without data from other industries or control groups, I cannot know if these data sets are high or low compared to the general population.

Regardless, I believe this data has filled a sizable gap in the research related to and defining cults/cultish on top of highlighting areas for further research in musical theatre. While Stein's 'GAI' (Stein, 2021, 213) seeks to help others define whether they have been part of cultish groups, it does through interviews with a researcher, which is impossible for many. While the CBQ cannot replace more rigorous support and research into cults, I hope it can serve as a preliminary diagnostic tool like the AQ is in the field of Autism. Moreover, the data generated from this first exploration of the CBQ offers new insight into the harm that drama schools are likely to perpetuate through the possible conditions for thought reform present in the culture and attitudes of those with power.

Future studies of such cultish research have many directions but could address finding a suitable and large control group, if the CBQ can be used with only content analysis, and if the CBQ is applicable for interrogating cultish behaviour in other fields and industries. For theatre practitioners who have engaged in this and want to create changes in their institutions, I recommend having individuals fill out the CBQ in your institution to find more personalised data for improvements. At the present moment, while I want to give suggestions for healing from the harm cultish behaviour can cause, that is another study in itself.

As I stated at the beginning and throughout this study, theatre and rituals have much in common, which can be both positive and harmful. As Montell observed, "Theatre and religion have this thing in common where we're just doing this for something larger than ourselves. It's like you need to prove that you're truly worthy of this larger than life thing by going along with whatever I say. It is no accident that so many cults prey on people who are interested in theatre because they've been conditioned from an early age to go along with anything in pursuit of their dreams of being an artist" (Medina and

Montell, 2022a). As an industry, I believe we have a problem dismissing the cultish because it feels part of the job, which can ultimately have a devastating impact. We know from the Newman Tenancy, Shen Yun, Ponyboy Curtis, The Actors Centre, and Averno that cults can thrive in the theatre ecosystem and become not only industry-endorsed but staples (see Appendix C; Levesley, 2022; Half as Interesting, 2023). It is hard to discuss exploitation and abuse, and it always will be, but to ignore it when it is staring us in the face will never be acceptable. If we do not work to eradicate it when we see it, the pipeline to harmful cults and cultish practices will only grow and only become more normalised. My ultimate wish for this study is that it equips individuals with the understanding and bravery to identify and denounce harmful cult-like behaviours in the future. I hope we can strive for a world where checks and balances prevail and where the horrors of Averno are only a distant memory.

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Appendices

Appendix A - CBQ Survey

Section One - Leadership

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
My workspace leaders lacked strong communication skills, an inability to be persuasive, and lacked the charm to influence others.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders always required strict obedience to rules and their decisions even if it came at my own personal expense.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders were very flexible around rules and liked to make us feel like equals.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders modified their speech and behaviours to appeal to my peers different experiences and backgrounds.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders never used threats or the fear of punishments within the workplace.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

Section Two - Structure

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
I felt isolated from the outside world when I was working within the industry.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I maintained regular and consistent contact with my friends and family while I was working within the industry.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders had notable favourites who were awarded special privileges.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I only lived with people who were also working with me, either on my current projects or part of the wider industry.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
The work always aligned with my expectations as laid out by job postings.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I only had time to socialise with people within my workplace or wider industry.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

How many friends did you gain when entering the industry (estimate)?

How many friends did you lose when entering the industry (estimate)?

If you have left the industry, how many friends did you lose when leaving the industry (estimate)?

Section Three - Ideology

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
There wasn't room for discussion or disagreement beyond what our workspace leaders told us to do.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
Debate was an important part of our workspace with our workspace leaders allowing different practices to co-exist.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
Only my workspace leaders had the authority to dictate answers to questions.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I felt welcome to interpret tasks and materials to my working style.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I had to cut ties with other groups I trained/worked with in order to be welcome into the industry/a particular job.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I never felt that I was gaslit by my workspace leaders during a job.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I had to adapt what I understood to be true to fit in with my workspace leader's narrative.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

Section Four - Tools and Process

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
I would be taught chants, either as part of my job or as part of a pre-show ritual.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I never changed my name whilst entering or during my time in the industry.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was taught lots of nicknames and insider terminology of my group by my workspace leaders or peers.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
Insider terminology was never imbued with strong emotional charge or emotions to trigger a specific reaction.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
We often took part in pre-show rituals such as refusing to whistle in a theatre space, refusing to say Macbeth in the theatre, etc.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My work schedule allowed me to always be well rested for shows, rehearsals and work.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was encouraged to tell on my peers to my workspace leaders if they weren't following strict rules.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders never used phrases similar to "It is what it is", "Boys will be boys", or "Everything happens for a reason" which shut down conversations.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was often showered with praise by workspace leaders to help push through stressful times.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I always understood that any rituals we did were purely based on superstition and not reality.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders pitied us against an outside force or rival organisation to bring us together.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I struggled with dissociation during my job caused by pressure put on me by my workspace leaders or peers.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2

I was never required to reveal trauma I had for my job in a group setting.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
We regularly took part in draining drills or set movement sequences to help us reach perfection and work on our focus. E.g. repeated high energy dance sequences or warm up games.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I never experienced glossolalia (unintelligible sounds that seem to approximate words from some perceived foreign language during states of religious intensity)	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I suffered from anxiety due to isolation during my time working.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
We didn't have a dress code we had to follow.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I struggled with feelings of mental overload due to being deprived of breaks, food, or time to reflect on what was happening.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My privacy and boundaries were respected whilst in the industry.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I struggled with anxiety due to the high level of perfection required.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

What were some of the rituals you took part in as part or saw happening as of putting on shows or training? E.g. Not saying Macbeth while in a theatre.

Section Five - Attachment Theory

Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you believe each statement best describes your feelings about close relationships in general.

1. It helps to turn to people in times of need.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

2. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with others.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

3. I talk things over with people.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

4. I find it easy to depend on others.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

5. I don't feel comfortable opening up to others.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

6. I prefer not to show others how I feel deep down.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

7. I often worry that other people do not really care for me.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

8. I'm afraid that other people may abandon me.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

9. I worry that others won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Please answer the following questions about your workspace leaders.

1. It helps to turn to this person in times of need.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

2. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this person.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

3. I talk things over with this person.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

4. I find it easy to depend on this person.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

5. I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
6. I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
7. I often worry that this person doesn't really care for me.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
8. I'm afraid that this person may abandon me.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
9. I worry that this person won't care about me as much as I care about them.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Section Six - Final Thought

Have you found your experience in the musical theatre cultish?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning.

If you answered yes, did this prevent or hamper your professional development?

Appendix B - Relevant Text Responses From The CBQ

Drama School CBQ Comments

- “Punishment or the threat of being denied roles/degree marks were often held over our heads if we had absences, even if these were approved or for medical reasons.”
- “I was not allowed to have my own opinions, if they did not align with that of the principals. There were notable exceptions, such as a singing teacher and an acting teacher, but otherwise, I was TOLD I could have my own opinions but I was constantly challenged and criticised for trusting myself. Especially regarding my gender presentation.”
- “We were refused toilet breaks and shamed if we needed to go.”
- “We were punished if we didn’t follow the dress code, even if this went against our gender presentation, and we were even instructed to wear rehearsal blacks on zoom in the 2021 lockdown, even if we were appropriately dressed for the class.”
- “The Teachers had charm, but lacked the empathy to relate to us”
- “Our timetable and [a] lack of communication made things impossible to plan, so it’s been extremely tough to keep in touch with people... the timetables make it near impossible to meet new people. I have therefore felt extremely lonely and this has resulted in multiple long term depressive episodes.”
- “If we disagreed with staff, or advocated for ourselves regarding disability, gender or race, this also was used against us if we were seen to be “too angry”. They would underpin this with the idea that they are forward thinking, so it’s impossible to progress, and you leave the conversation feeling silly that you ever brought it up.”
- “I’m neurodivergent and teachers refused to implement my reasonable accommodations”
- “I have felt trapped. Especially when it’s been like an echo chamber when I had problems people in college didn’t understand regarding my gender.”
- “I felt that I was gaslit about the queer landscape of theatre and what I knew to be true.”
- “We were punished if we didn’t follow the dress code, even if this went against our gender presentation... I was told I had to wear a dress for an event, despite explaining at length why it made me uncomfortable in that situation, being forced to explain in tears to a principal after hours.”
- “My tutor would consistently tell us that “we were all in the same boat” even if some of us had more training previously, and tried to make us all seem equal and level with one another without taking into consideration how different people acted or felt”
- “It was really isolating as we were only allowed to talk about show work to one another and not our own personal lives because the tutor said that it was irrelevant to our practice”

- “I feel like there is a strong hierarchy within this industry. And there is definitely a culture of competition.”
- “In my experience the people at the top like, directors etc took advantage of underage students and would have relationships with them. And due to this it felt like we were fighting to be the favourite. Which when I look at it now is soo fucked up.”
- “I also think the discipline we were taught and the “rules” of the industry were trying to teach us to be submissive and just take a load of shit.”
- “[I was] told I couldn’t have panic attacks because they are attention seeking and I would get fired from a job.”
- “[I was] told my casting was [the] fat funny friend and I shouldn’t sing the main girl songs.”
- “The mentality encouraged in my experience of drama school relies [on] unrelenting loyalty, blind trust in authority figures, and “leaving what you know at the door”. There are exceptions to the rule, but it has been an uncomfortable reality.”
- “If we didn't bow to the whims of our teachers, we would be threatened with blacklisting.”
- “One teacher told us that, in a 'casting couch' situation, which 'will definitely happen', we should go along with it to get the job.”
- “There was a whole separate eating disorder cult whilst I was there”
- “I felt as though my looks, personality and socioeconomic background effected [sic] how people were with me. I felt extremely judged based on those attributes, being neurodivergent as well I felt like its just been so hard and I often feel uncomfortable.”
- “Theres a set way that no one feels that they need to change. Theres a subculture of self harm and pushing oneself to the limit simply because "thats how it is" or to prove yourself.”
- “Predatory people are excused if they are seen as valuable or useful and even protected.”
- “While not deeply apparent or instilled in my training, I have experienced a cult-like feeling in MT circles.”
- “Jargon and phraseology that is simply not explained, and practices and customs that are expected -- but never detailed ahead of time.”
- “A big expectation to put your whole life aside for a show, particularly over the rehearsal period. Likewise an overriding belief that issues within the industry are "just the way things are" and "cope”.”
- “Looking back a lot of the beliefs I had about myself and about the industry etc are completely different and we’re dictated by what I was told by superiors”
- “There is an aura created by drama schools that they are incredibly special places where only a select few are gifted the opportunity to train, so there is a want to follow to rules and abide by the status quo. This is easily exploitable: requiring students to work long, unsociable hours with little to no downtime; changing yourself as a person to fit into their vision of perfection.”

- “I know many people - including myself - who were manipulated, humiliated and taken advantage of by members of staff, but you are made to believe it is in your best interest.”
- “The course leaders also encouraged aggressive competition amongst the students, often leading to bullying and unsafe work spaces.”
- “The industry itself is toxic in so many ways, and I understand a need to prepare students for that, but in reality most schools are feeding into those problems they’ll encounter when they graduate (ie, power imbalances, emotional manipulation/gaslighting, self esteem issues).”
- “You are made to feel that if you can’t cope with the dangerous training environment, you can’t be a good performer. It is bizarre that those ideas have become entwined so deeply.”
- “There are many great creatives who are driven out of the industry because of abuse and bullying during training, leaving only those who benefited from these systems to perpetuate the cycles.”
- “It always felt very competitive but also like we were trying to be clones of one another and not always encouraged to express our individuality.”
- “My family begged me to leave because I was so depressed and unwell from dieting. I was humiliated upon trying to withdraw from my course and I had a mental breakdown not long after. I felt worthless, ashamed, with no sense of self or purpose. My main passion in life had been warped into something that triggered panic attacks. My relationship with my body image and food has never fully recovered. Thankfully I don’t live in the same city anymore, as I don’t think I could cope with bumping into my old teachers. I know of a few people who have starting training at the same school since I left and I feel a deep sadness knowing the abuse that went on in that building is 100% still occurring. It’s taken 10 years and a lot of therapy to finally realise that I wasn’t the problem, and I didn’t deserve what happened to me.”
- “I have been fortunate in my individual experiences and unique institutions that my boundaries were rarely violated and my peers were affirming and didn't pressure me into conformity.”
- “Other institutions, I have witnessed or been told about, I know are far more cultish.”
- “While I think some individual aspects could be labelled as cultish, I don't think musical theatre training is cultish... it's just toxic and needs its own word instead of cultish.”
- “There are some weird things that are present in musical theatre, superstitions and the such but I don’t think these, or the incredibly - mostly unnecessarily- heavy work constitutes cultish behaviour. The whistling comes from the flies, so has a historical reason. Macbeth is just superstition, like touch wood and nobody would claim that was cultish.”

Drama School CBQ Reported Rituals

- “We all did chanting as part of our warm up exercises”
- “We didnt [sic] say macbeth when it was show time”
- “We were expected to be silent 10 minutes before show time to "get us in the headspace"
- “Can’t bow unless there’s an audience there.”
- “Can’t cross on the stairs.”
- “Break a leg instead of good luck”
- “Starving in the run up to ballets”
- “Superstition around Friday Matinee disasters”
- "Not saying good luck before a show but saying 'break a leg' instead"
- “The act of competing to see who could stretch themselves thinnest”
- “Saying ‘break a leg’ instead of ‘good luck’”
- “Never whistling in a theatre”
- “Leaving a light on when the theatre is empty for the theatre ghosts”
- “Not saying or seeing the rhyming couplets until the first show”
- “Shared ensemble breathing”
- “Any rituals of that nature were "self-inflicted"...Teachers/Leaders didn't impose or teach them.”
- “Chants and mantras during warm-ups (ie, “fat kids don’t get callbacks”)

Industry Professionals CBQ Comments

- “I don't understand which workplace you're asking about. As theatgre [sic] professionals we have had many, by definition. What would you like us to use? Choose out most problematic? But this then skews data based on your stated goals.”
- "I feel like there isn't an implied respect for early career artists (especially people who are not white cis men) that established people just get.”
- “Also communication is ALWAYS terrible as if magic is what holds productions together when really it is hard graft, collective solidarity and supporting artists. ”
- “I have children and grandchildren and have a separate and fulfilling home life separate from theatre.”
- “I feel the expectation is ALWAYS to go above and beyond what you are being paid and there is just a sense that is what artists do. For a long time I bought into this. Now I definitely do not. “
- "I think this ties in with importance of over working and the lack of money and the more time required. You sort of need to buy into the lie that everyone is doing it for the art and for the love or it is very obvious very quickly you are actually the most expendable as the artist. Which is why Unions are so important "
- “Refusing is not a ritual. Both examples of rituals consist of not doing something. It is not

appropriate to make a blanket statement that rituals were based on superstition and not reality. If a cast gets in a circle before a performance, this is 1st of all a much better example of a ritual, and 2nd, cannot be objectively dismissed as ineffective and not based in reality.”

- “I trained at The MTA, which whilst having a very high standard and intensity of training, gave paramount importance to its students mental health. Any feelings of depression or anxiety I felt I could talk to our dedicated counselor to.”
- “I worked a professional production of Sweeney Todd whilst being at university full time”
- “God, absolute varying levels of clusterfuck expectations which preyed on my own expectations of perfectionism etc. The amount of extra work I have done and other artists have done.”
- “The incident that led to me finally having to leave the industry involved a major dissociative episode that took place during tech week on a show in which I had to reenact trauma, while being harassed by coworkers in real life, and had begged employers for help and was granted none.”
- “I’m not comfortable with the comparison of industry standards and practices with ritualistic cultlike behavior. The study appears to assume a connection between the two that I don’t share.”
- “Maybe because I’m (much!) older and worked in the professional sector that I only have positive interactions with theatre people.”
- “I’ve always felt that I had agency in my decision-making and my interaction with others. As a creative, it is my role to support and enable others in a safe environment.”
- “I find it difficult to answer this because I don’t know what your definition of cultish is. Inevitably there is some grouping in music and musical theatre because of similar interests.”
- “The nature of working at a different time than the people with 9-5 jobs gives you an isolation from the rest of the world and can often mean that your working world and the colleagues around that are raised on a pedestal (as you don’t have the opportunity time-wise to correspond or meet up with other on the outside). This can lead to mentor figures opinions/words becoming far more important to your wellbeing than they should (especially in a tour environment) and your whole patterns are based on the ritual of the theatre timetable.”
- “Musical theatre trained people seem to be very clique oriented and dismiss other cultural things or knowledge as unhelpful to their development. Which results sometimes in a lack of understanding of the wider causes of our world or the cultural biome of theatre. There seems to be a lot of unwritten rules.
- I find this attitude is less prevalent with actor musicians and “straight” theatre actors”
- “Have worked for several theatre companies where leaders cultivated insular dispositions regarding the organization and established “in” groups and “out” groups within the organization; was harassed/abused by members of “in” groups when taking actions that

displeased leaders.

- Have noted tendencies toward segregation between departments (e.g. tech vs performers, admin vs production, etc.)
- Have experienced unwillingness on the part of superiors to engage in discussion/entertain suggestions regarding projects and goals.
- Have experienced failure on the part of superiors to share information.
- Have noted distinct endemic rivalry between organizations.
- Have frequently encountered unrealistic expectations regarding time commitment/work output."
- Yes, but part of that was the nature of the class load. You're surrounded all day with the same people, and usually nights and weekends as well - simply by the show schedules and events. But long hours (8 shows a week) are part of the industry - that's not the educators fault. Though in hindsight a 5-6 show week would have probably been better for anyone. Then again, the theatre - even on that level is a business, and they have bills to pay and costumes to build...
- I have found it time consuming but have always tried to make time for other interests outside of my job
- Yes but not in a specific way necessarily, it is more as a broadly cultural experience that gets sometimes into pointy situations.
- "More so theater conservatory than the industry. And within the industry that behavior is more relegated to directors on ego trips unwilling to collaborate or hear any one question their ideas"
- A little, yes. There are the rituals and the expectation to socialise with the people you're working with and that you'll drop everything for the sake of the show. The way information about people who are not safe to be around is communicated as missing stairs means that new, vulnerable people who don't have the connections to people who will tell them who to avoid are put at risk. Also, the way powerful abusive people are protected. Some of these people are like cult leaders with their favoured underlings and those who are desperate to become favoured or who fear being cast aside. I've seen institutions cover things up, conveniently have their online course review system break until after the deadline to review the course has passed when a student made a complaint against the course leader which was upheld. The fact that it happens in the education side shows that the whole culture is rotten. I've seen competent people be blacklisted for work because they don't fit socially because of their neurodivergence. For all the theatre likes to celebrate individuality, what's tolerated and celebrated is heavily constrained within a very narrow set of norms. Cast members acting judgemental when someone refused to cancel their holiday in order to extend the run. They way we're expected to dedicate 100% but our chair can be cut on an hour's notice because the director decides they want a different orchestration after the previews. You have to suck up to

the right people in order to keep working.

- I had to buy into the mindset in order to belong to this group - a group that afforded me an incredible amount of exposure. As soon as I challenged the leader, I was cast out.
- As I was in recovery for a major mental health crisis from an experience working in the industry I was surprised but not shocked to find how closely I was identifying with experiences of people who survived/escaped cults. Seeking out memoirs and accounts of cult survivors helped me feel less alone in my recovery.
- No - it generally did not impact on my PD. Especially in the music-side of the industry, it is all based on who you know and therefore having more time with your mentor figure/boss lead to a closer relationship and more chance of promotion/opportunities on other shows.
- No, it only makes the workplace sometimes less enjoyable
- Yes
- I can't say that it did. But I also worked my ass off to be one of the more 'favored' (cast) people in the program, so I'm sure that played onto it. I didn't take it lightly and busted my ass. I'd say 90% of my class and the ones around it didn't go into the industry to do it professionally - which is obviously fine - but one can't help but think that the nature of the university system affects that. I'd imagine other industries (majors) have a far higher "retention" rate after graduation. Then again - like breaking into sports - it's incredibly competitive and hard to break in, and some people just can't cut it.
- Yes. Because people accumulate power and gatekeep and if you can't play their game you are on the outer.
- I do believe me not playing those directors games or standing up for myself and others has hampered my career
- Yes. I got out of the theatre industry. I'm now trying to get out of working in music all together.
- I thought my career was over 100%. Time has shown me that that's not the case.
- I didn't realize until I was already out.

Industry Professionals CBQ Reported Rituals

- “Saying ‘break a leg’ instead of good luck”
- “Not whistling backstage, not saying Macbeth”
- “Prayers”
- “Warm-up singing / games and pep-talk before show - same every night.”
- “General superstition, training drills to motivate tye [sic] company, creating a pot to tip our dressers, etc”
- “Was once compelled by a superior to engage in elaborate ritual as a consequence of having said "Macbeth" in the theater”
- “Not saying McB (I still won't).”
- “All of the normal ones like Macbeth etc. I think as a writer you tend to escape some of the warm up weirdness. I always enjoy stepping away when it gets to much and I normally can.”
- “Not saying “good luck” on opening night.”

Appendix C - The Cultish Pipeline

1.1 From Cult To Institution: The Method and Strasberg

So how does the cultish make its way into drama schools, beyond theatre's supposed cultish origins and enjoyment of rituals. One of the examples I could find of this in practice was through the methodology of Strasberg, his creation of 'The Method', and how he positioned himself as a cult leader within the institution of the Actors Studio. Referred to as "like Jesus" (Hirsch, 1984, 151), "...hot-tempered and authoritarian" (Hirsh, 1984, 157), and the "...high priest of the Method." (Hirsch, 1984, 125), Lee Strasberg created the acting technique known as 'the method' or just 'method acting'.

Strasberg's technique drew from Staniskys practise focusing on emotional memory and psychological "which was quickly dropped by Stanislavski, because he viewed it only as a last resort and found that his students who were employing it too heavily were experiencing mental problems" (Broey Deschanel, 2021). This method was refined in the teachings found at the Actor's Studio, which Strasberg oversaw and taught at. As described by Hirsh, who wrote a book exploring Strasberg's legacy and interviewing members of the Actor Studio, it is the "longest-lived, most important and controversial theatre organizations in the history of American entertainment" (1984, 12).

The Actor's Studio and the Method utilities many cultish techniques including loaded language and "distinctive code words and phrases that are repeated over and over, with incantatory insistence" (Hirsh, 1984, 125), truth telling (Hirsh, 1984, 130), structures of favouritism (Hirsh, 1984, 160), is often used by male stars to "self-mythologize [and] becomes a cult of [an] individual actor" (Broey Deschanel, 2021), and can contribute to poor mental health when used (Westbrook, 2021). While new students are supposed to be "discouraged from doing affective memory exercises too soon" (Hull, 85) I have personally heard of actors engaging in emotional memory or emotional recall within their first year of training.

Perhaps, this is one way the cultish enters institutions of training through a failure to properly critique and evaluate how the cultish are built into certain methodologies and guru-like teachers. To close with a quote from Mark Westbrook:

"Method acting usually revolves around the cult of the teacher's personality. Originating with Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner, the personality is still the driving force behind a Method class. Learning is about the student. Acting is about the actor. The teacher is the guide, not the topic. The class should be about the actor's development. It's true the personality of the teacher helps the class, but there are some very charismatic teachers that speak utter nonsense." (Westbrook, 2021)

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1.2 From Institution to Cult: Averno

Please Note: All the names of participants in Averno have been changed.

“The point of Averno is exploration. I made this world for you. Yes you, the person I’m talking to right now. If you need a place to go, new friends, new music, a world that makes you feel alive, an escape - Averno is waiting.” - Taylor, Creator of Averno (Rothenberg, 2020)

Before 11th August 2021, Averno was widely regarded as an up-and-coming transmedia franchise platforming young creatives, with the New York Times even calling it “a ‘Marvel Universe’ for Musicals” (Vincentelli, 2020). Despite being mostly early career artists or minors, the franchise and its leading creatives were well respected. The group even had a three-album record deal with Broadway Records, releasing three new musical cast albums for Willow, Over and Out, and Bittersweet.

As social media mutual and a casual fan of their musicals, I admired these creatives. It is often difficult for unknown writers of new musicals to break out into the mainstream, especially young creatives. As Taylor, the leader of Averno put it in an interview with the New York Times, “I’m 21 but people still have trouble taking me seriously sometimes” (Vincentelli, 2020). Watching young marginalised people write musicals about acceptance and being praised for it is, sad to say, revolutionary in our industry. Moreover, I still believe many of the individual writers and artists involved in the group are the next generation of well-regarded creatives in their respective fields.

Figure 1: A 2020 Gathering of Members of Averno With Faces Blocked Out



However, everything changed on 11th August 2021 when multiple creators came forward to expose the main creative leads, Taylor and Robin, as cult leaders who exploited, manipulated, gaslighted, groomed, spiritually manipulated, and sexually harassed minors. This document, in turn, led to many more stories about the pair being brought forward about the unhealthy work environment within the franchise. These detailed and eloquent reports can be found on the Instagram account @exverno and online at <https://exverno.carrd.co/> (Exverno, 2021a).

While initially intended for this study, I plan to do a full report using content analysis and the CBQ. Early data have shown high statements relating to cultish behaviour in structure, ideology, and other themes the CBQ does not account for. Such themes include: encouraging self-harm and eating disorders, exploitation, IP/copyright theft, physical abuse, racism, and the sexualisation of minors. Away from the public eye, as put by one ex-member, Taylor was manipulative and often inappropriate:

“Over my year of working with Averno I witnessed many situations I wasn’t comfortable with, or that raised red flags. At the time I convinced myself that this was my own anxiety playing tricks on me, as no one else seemed bothered. However, when I witnessed Taylor making uncomfortable sexual comments to my friend who was 16, I expressed concern and spoke out, I was treated as if I was the “pervert”/inappropriate one for interpreting these comments that way.” (Exverno, 2021b)

Figure 2: Map of Averno (Source New York Times)



Averno Is Calling

In retrospect, looking back through the countless documents produced by Taylor, such as the Averno Bible, it is obvious to see the signs of spiritual manipulation that should have been picked up by these companies that gave the franchise legitimacy. Taylor often publicly talked about how Averno was a genuine place and had been calling out to individuals their whole lives (Exverno, 2021b) (Smith, 2020), was tailor-made to target lonely teens (Rothenberg, 2020), and had a strict system of control in place for dictating which content was real or not (Vincentelli, 2020). Even without knowing the details cropping up behind the scenes, including thought control and abuse, these red flags should have been enough.

“Taylor would constantly remind us that we were spiritually connected. We had a discord channel that used to be active in a work server about how events in our lives prophesied us joining Averno.” (Exverno, 2021b)

Perhaps because it had cults baked into its very being, with the Departments of Cults being an in-world organisation, as well as it being in the tagline: “Conspiracies and cults, sinners and saviors, Averno has it all.” (Smith, 2020) Surely if a franchise acknowledged the fact that it had cultic inspiration, it would avoid becoming a cult itself? Alas, this was not the case. As one member, Ben, put it:

“In the Beginning, the fan server was proudly (by Taylor) named “The Averno Cult”, I never imagined how true this statement would become. Taylor would often assure us that Averno was not actually a cult, however, would contradict this by proudly proclaiming how we fit the requirements of a cult.” (Exverno, 2021b)

In such a short report, there is no way I can get across the nausea I feel when reading these statements from children. This cult was complex and hit many criteria to qualify as such, even without using the CBQ. As one participant, Jordan, put it:

“When I was 16, I was lured into a cult that disguised itself as a safe space for young queer and neurodivergent people. I worked unpaid for them for two years. I was manipulated, abused, and gaslit. My work was stolen and used without credit. My lyrics were taken and put to other melodies. All by someone that I thought was my best friend. I was spiritually manipulated. I was given excessive amounts of psychoactives without my knowledge or consent. I was pushed to my limit and forced to disassociate. I was taken out into the woods and was pushed into psychosis. My trust was completely destroyed. I had the one thing I loved (writing music) ruined for me for a long time. I wasted two years of my life working tirelessly for someone who only wanted to use me.” (TikTok, 2022)



Figure 3: Willow Album Cover



Figure 4: Over and Out Album Cover



Figure 5: Bittersummer Album Cover

There are those who might believe that Averno was a relatively minor franchise in comparison to larger industry competitors, but that is far from the truth. At the time of the New York Times article in 2021, they had 125k followers on TikTok, 47k on Instagram, and 1.4 million streams on Spotify (Vincentelli, 2020) which are numbers some new musicals could only dream about gaining. Moreover, whilst it might have started over discord among young people, it is essential to acknowledge that they were supported or encouraged by adults and established media outlets. That is without even mentioning that most of the people who were exploited or harmed by Averno were minors, with adults no doubt being aware of the pay exploitation many faced.

To give a few examples from participants about how institutions like Broadway Record failed in their own duty of care to these minors:

- “Proper crediting of the team members for their collaboration was few and far between...I, myself, was never compensated for vast amounts of art and graphic design that was, at one point, published by Broadway records.” (Exverno, 2021b)
- “After all of our work was done and the albums were released, no one in the cast knew if we were even being paid. It wasn't until a full year later during a production meeting at the second Camp Averno that we were told we would be credited as artists and would be entitled to 3% of streaming sales.” (Exverno, 2021b)
- “On the day of willow's release, I had been in prolonged contact with a member of Broadway records who was asking me to finish the CD booklet for willow. I was struggling to finish it because I was taking 3 college classes, 2 high school classes, and I didn't know what a ZIP file was. He struggled to interact with me because he expected me to work much quicker than I was capable. They blamed me for not being able to credit people, people Taylor chose not to provide credit for.” (Exverno, 2021b)

There is no way to conclude this report positively, as the collapse of Averno saw no call for change within the industry—many, including Taylor and Broadway Records, so no repercussions. What I try to find hope in is the courage that these young people had not only to expose their abusers but to continue to make art about their experience in the fallout. Many have worked to re-release songs they wrote while in the franchise and create new versions of songs to reflect the harm they went through, like Auggie Greenwood's *How To Let Go*, Fairything's *Outta The Woods*, and Thawney's *The Forest*. To end with the words of August Greenwood's *In The Black*:

“I’m just getting by with the hope that I’ll escape from the well, taking my time, from the centre of hell, and as I see the light of a fire that stands all alone, I’ll see the world has been waiting for me to come home.” (Greenwood, 2022)

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Appendix D - Revised Industry CBQ Survey

Section One - Identity

How Old Are You?

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	Prefer Not To Say
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What Is Your Gender?

Male	Female	Nonbinary	Genderqueer	Other: _____	Prefer Not To Say
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Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

Yes	No	Prefer Not To Say
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Please describe your ethnic origin by choosing the most appropriate description from the options below

<p><i>These categories are based on the Census 2011 categories and recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality. You may find none of these predetermined options satisfy how you identify, if they don't, you're welcome to use the option "other" to write in your own words how you identify:</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi Asian/Asian British: Indian Asian/Asian British: Pakistani Asian/Asian British: Chinese Asian/Asian British: Japanese Any other Asian background Arab/Arab British Black/Black British: African Black/Black British: Caribbean Any other Black background Mixed Race: Asian & White Mixed Race: Black Caribbean & White Mixed Race: Black African & White Mixed Race: Arab & White Any other mixed race background White/British: English White/British: Northern Irish

White/British
White/British: Welsh
White/Irish
White/European
Any other White Background
Gipsy or Irish Traveller
Not Known
Prefer Not To Say
Other:

Do you consider yourself to be neurodivergent?

Yes	No	Other: _____	Prefer Not To Say
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Do you consider yourself to have a disability, a long term health condition, or illness?

Yes	No	Other: _____	Prefer Not To Say
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Compared to people in general, please describe how you would self-identify your socio-economic background?

Working Class	Middle Class	Upper Class	Other: _____	Prefer Not To Say
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How do you describe your sexual orientation?

Asexual
Bisexual
Gay Man
Gay Woman/Lesbian
Heterosexual/Straight
Pansexual
Queer
Other:
Prefer Not To Say

Section Two - Leadership

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
My workspace leaders lacked strong communication skills, an inability to be persuasive, and lacked the charm to influence others.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders always required strict obedience to rules and their decisions, even if it came at my own personal expense.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders were very flexible around rules and liked to make us feel like equals.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders modified their speech and behaviours to appeal to my peer's different experiences and backgrounds.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders never used threats or the fear of punishments within the workplace.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

Section Three - Structure

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
I felt isolated from the outside world when I was working within the industry.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I maintained regular and consistent contact with my friends and family while I was working within the industry.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
My workspace leaders had notable favourites who were awarded special privileges.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I only lived with people who were also working with me, either on my current projects or as part of the wider industry.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
The work always aligned with my expectations as laid out by job postings.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I only had time to socialise with people within my workplace or wider industry.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

Section Four - Ideology

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
There wasn't room for discussion or disagreement beyond what our workspace leaders told us to do.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
Debate was an important part of our workspace, with our workspace leaders allowing different practices to co-exist.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
Only my workspace leaders had the authority to dictate answers to questions.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I felt welcome to interpret tasks and materials to my working style.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I had to cut ties with other groups I trained/worked with in order to be welcome into the industry/a particular job.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I never felt that I was gaslit by my workspace leaders during a job.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I had to adapt what I understood to be true to fit in with my workspace leader's narrative.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

Section Five - Tools and Process

Statements	Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Unsure / Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
I would be taught chants as part of my job or as part of a bonding activity.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I never changed my name whilst entering or during my time in the industry.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was taught lots of nicknames and insider terminology of my group by my workspace leaders or peers.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
Insider terminology was never imbued with strong emotional charges or emotions to trigger a specific reaction.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was encouraged to tell on my peers to my workspace leaders if they weren't following strict rules.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders never used phrases similar to "It is what it is", "Boys will be boys", or "Everything happens for a reason", which shut down conversations.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was often showered with praise by workspace leaders to help push through stressful times.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My workspace leaders never pitied us against an outside force or rival organisation to bring us together.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I was regularly encouraged to take part in rituals within industry settings.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I always understood that any rituals we did were purely based on superstition and not reality.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I struggled with dissociation during my job caused by the pressure put on me by my workspace leaders or peers.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I was never required to reveal trauma I had for my job in a group setting.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2

We regularly took part in draining drills or set movement sequences to help us reach perfection and work on our focus. E.g. repeated high-energy dance sequences or warm-up games.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
I never experienced glossolalia (unintelligible sounds that seem to approximate words from some perceived foreign language during states of religious intensity)	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I suffered from anxiety due to isolation during my time working.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
We didn't have a dress code we had to follow.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I struggled with feelings of mental overload due to being deprived of breaks, food, or time to reflect on what was happening.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My privacy and boundaries were respected whilst in the industry.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2
I struggled with anxiety due to the high level of perfection required.	+2	+1	+0	-1	-2
My work schedule allowed me to always be well-rested.	-2	-1	+0	+1	+2

Any detail you would like to add based on these questions:

Section Six - Final Thought

Have you found your experience within your industry cultish?

Yes No

If you answered yes, was it harmful?

Yes No N/A

Please explain your reasoning.

If you found your experience cultish, did this prevent or hamper your professional development?

Yes No N/A

Please explain your reasoning.
