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**Towards an Ethical Dramaturgy:  
A Practice-led Research Project on Verbatim Theatre**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

**Master of Arts**

in

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Verbatim theatre can be understood as the process of collecting verbatim material from real people, usually through recorded interviews, and using it to create a performance text that can be subsequently re-presented by actors in a dramatic context. This thesis argues that the creation of verbatim theatre from the words, experiences and lives of real people is simultaneously a dramaturgical and ethical task. Verbatim theatre practitioners such as Moisés Kaufman, Alecky Blythe, Hilary Halba and Stuart Young acknowledge the ethical responsibility theatre makers feel to honour and accurately re-present their interviewees in their work. However, there is a gap in the collective discourse on verbatim theatre regarding how consideration of the ethical obligations theatre makers have to their interviewees influences the dramaturgical processes and construction of their work.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the process of creating verbatim theatre, and uses practice-led and action research methodologies to examine what ethical practice during this process could be. This research used the creation of an original verbatim play titled *Strong Female Characters* to explore the ethical construction of verbatim theatre. Reflection on this process, combined with examination of the practice of other verbatim theatre makers, informs the key findings of this thesis. In addition to *Strong Female Characters* and a written thesis this research has prompted the creation of a manifesto that serves as a succinct chapter of this thesis and offers examples of some of the different ways ethical practice could be considered by the verbatim theatre maker and incorporated into their creative and dramaturgical practice.

## DEDICATION

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*This work is dedicated to my beloved Granny;*

*Mary George 26<sup>th</sup> June 1920 – 19<sup>th</sup> June 2019.*

*You are the strongest female character I will ever know.*

---

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Turner and Behrndt (2008), discussing verbatim theatre, state that “the editing of the [verbatim] material into an overall composition is clearly a dramaturgical task” (p. 190). This thesis will explore how the dramaturgical task of creating verbatim theatre is simultaneously an ethical task, as when constructing verbatim theatre “the dramatist must abide by some sort of ethical code if their work is to be taken seriously” (Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 10).

The question at the heart of this research is how do the necessary ethical obligations verbatim theatre practitioners have to their interviewees influence the dramaturgical processes and construction of their work? This question addresses a gap in the wider field of discourse and research on verbatim theatre. As while the ethical obligations of verbatim theatre makers are alluded to by numerous verbatim practitioners, there is yet to be a detailed and categorical discussion that examines the specific relationship and potential tension between ethics and dramaturgy when constructing verbatim theatre.

This research incorporates practice-led and action research methodologies and is concerned with the nature of verbatim theatre practice and hopes to lead to new knowledge that has operational significance for verbatim theatre makers and their practice (Candy, 2006, p. 3). Both practice-led and action research methodologies are constructed upon the idea that participation in practice produces insightful and revolutionary knowledge that is useful for the improvement of that practice. Consequently this research and its outputs are divided into three parts, the first of which is the construction of an original verbatim play titled *Strong Female Characters*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this verbatim play is a direct quote from one of the interview participants, (see appendix 2, p. 143).

*Strong Female Characters* was performed to an audience comprised of the interviewees and invited guests on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2019 in the New Place Theatre at the University of Waikato. The play focuses on the thoughts, opinions and experiences of a group of those who identify as women. From the play's conception and throughout its creation and rehearsal process I used an inclusive definition of "woman" and "female" and welcomed the input of cis-women, trans women, genderqueer women, and non-binary people who are significantly female-identified. The questions I asked in the interviews were broad and invited the interviewees to reflect upon their own experiences of identifying as women. Some themes and ideas that are implicit in the interview questions are the representation of women in media, the role of woman in society, feminism and gender equality.

*Strong Female Characters* alone is not this research's primary contribution to knowledge. There are multiple plays already in existence, such as Eve Ensler's pioneering feminist play *The Vagina Monologues*, which similarly have a strong focus on women and incorporate 'real life' through the use of ethnographic and verbatim theatre methods in their construction. *Strong Female Characters* can be considered as an incidental result of a practical research experiment that was undertaken with a focus on process, not product, to enable detailed examination of the way ethics can impact on dramaturgy. Ultimately *Strong Female Characters* was constructed primarily to produce findings to inform the principal outputs of this research.

The second output of this research is a written thesis. This thesis explores the wider field of discourse concerned with verbatim theatre, including: dramaturgy in verbatim theatre, ethics in verbatim theatre and the dramaturgical and ethical practice of other verbatim theatre practitioners. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to evaluate the techniques and methodologies used by different verbatim theatre makers. The verbatim practitioners discussed in this thesis are primarily from New Zealand, Australia, Britain and the United States. The dramaturgical techniques, methods and practices of multiple verbatim theatre

practitioners including Alecky Blythe, Moisés Kaufman, Paul Brown, Stuart Young and Hilary Halba among others informed the creation and construction of *Strong Female Characters*. This written thesis offers a synthesis of the first hand 'insider knowledge' gained through the creation of *Strong Female Characters* with the knowledge gained through thorough examination of the discourse and other verbatim practitioner's dramaturgical and ethical processes.

The third output of this research is a manifesto that offers examples of what ethical practice in verbatim theatre could be. Candy and Edmonds (2011) comment that in practice-led research the creative practice

leads the direction of the research and the outcome is something the practitioner can use and also hand on to others by making it generally available. The outcomes may be communicated to other practitioners in the form of case reports, principles and guidelines, or curriculum designs. (p. 36)

While this manifesto appears as a chapter of this thesis, it is designed to be a self-sufficient resource that could be made 'generally available' and used by others embarking on verbatim theatre projects. The manifesto discusses the idea of an 'ethical dramaturgy' and details the ethical principles and dramaturgical techniques I discovered and employed in the construction, rehearsal and performance of *Strong Female Characters*. This manifesto differs to existing guides to making verbatim theatre as it is primarily concerned with the ethical obligations and responsibilities of the verbatim theatre maker and the development of ethical principles and thinking.

## 1.1. DEFINING VERBATIM THEATRE

The term 'verbatim theatre' was first used by Derek Paget in his 1987 article "‘Verbatim Theatre’: Oral History and Documentary Techniques". Paget presents a definition of verbatim theatre offered by playwright Rony Robinson "who can be considered a pioneer of the [verbatim] method" (Paget, 1987, p. 317).

Robinson declares that verbatim theatre is

Firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary' people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material. (Paget, 1987, p. 317)

Paget (1987) introduces this definition as "the boundaries of verbatim theatre" (p. 317). In the subsequent years since the publication of this article the "boundaries of verbatim theatre" have shifted. Definitions and understandings of what constitutes verbatim theatre have broadened and developed along with technological advancements and changing social contexts. Robinson's definition is a useful preliminary definition to consider as it contextualises the term historically and can be used as a guide for verbatim practitioners to locate their work within the broad historical field of verbatim theatre practice.

Hammond and Steward (2008) define verbatim as a technique rather than a theatre form stating "it is a means rather than an end" (p. 9). Verbatim theatre director Robin Belfield similarly affirms that "verbatim theatre refers to the way a piece is created and, more specifically, the materials used to create it" (Belfield, 2018, p. ix). Robinson, Belfield and Hammond and Steward all define verbatim theatre by its process of creation. Therefore, verbatim theatre could be understood not just as an outcome or result, but as a process.

Similarly to Robinson's rudimentary definition of verbatim theatre, Belfield's extended definition of the theatre form/technique establishes the idea that verbatim theatre is created from words that were spoken in an interview. Belfield (2018) states verbatim theatre is "a play constructed with words that were actually spoken by real people, rather than created via the imagination of a playwright or devised by theatre makers" (Belfield, 2018, p. ix). Contrastingly Dr Tom Cantrell identifies in his book *Acting in Documentary Theatre* (2013) that Robinson's preliminary definition of verbatim theatre, which establishes verbatim theatre as "firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent

transcription of interviews”, infers that verbatim theatre “should be taken to mean ‘exclusively based on taping’” (Cantrell, 2013, p. 3). Cantrell (2013) goes on to observe that “it is clear that verbatim theatre is understood to be based on the *spoken* words of real people” (p. 3). He then indicates that this definition excludes verbatim works such as Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner’s *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (2005) which is “based entirely on written rather than spoken testimony” (Cantrell, 2013, p. 3).

Cantrell suggests that verbatim plays that are not comprised solely of spoken verbatim material, such as *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, fall within the wider field of documentary theatre, rather than verbatim (Cantrell, 2013, p. 3). Cantrell therefore prefers the inclusive term ‘documentary theatre’ over the potentially exclusive ‘verbatim theatre’. However, ultimately verbatim and documentary theatre are terms that are often used interchangeably. Despite the slight differences in definition, both terms imply that the material from which the play is constructed is not imagined or fictitious, but the real words of real people. Belfield presents the idea that it is the double layer of actual words, be those spoken or written, and real people that gives verbatim theatre its authority. Perhaps more so than other imagined plays, because it can claim to present reality in a way that the imagination cannot (Belfield, 2018, p. ix). Throughout this thesis the term verbatim theatre will be used as opposed to documentary theatre as this research examines the process of constructing a piece of theatre exclusively from the recorded spoken testimony of interviewees.

### 1.1.1 IDEA BASED AND EVENT BASED VERBATIM THEATRE

While verbatim theatre is often understood as a technique as opposed to a theatre form, it can usually be loosely grouped into two categories: event based and idea based verbatim theatre. Belfield (2018), while preferring the term “theme” as opposed to ‘idea’, observes that “most verbatim plays fall into two categories – those based on events and those based on themes” (p. 2).

Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project's *The Laramie Project* (2001) and Paul Brown's *Aftershocks* (1991) are both examples of event based verbatim theatre, as they are in direct focus on and are a reaction to a specific event. *The Laramie Project* was created in response to the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998 in Laramie Wyoming and *Aftershocks* centres on the impact of the 1989 Newcastle earthquake on the Newcastle Workers Club. Contrastingly, New Zealand verbatim theatre makers Hilary Halba and Stuart Young's verbatim play *Hush: A Verbatim Play about Family Violence* (2009) and British theatre maker Robin Soans' *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) are both examples of idea based verbatim plays. *Hush* presents a discussion of family violence in New Zealand and the play includes testimony from victims, perpetrators and experts of family violence. *Talking to Terrorists* aims to tackle the issue of terrorism and the best ways to resolve it. Similarly to *Hush*, *Talking to Terrorists* seeks to open up a discussion of terrorism and includes testimony from victims, perpetrators and experts. Idea based verbatim theatre also frequently references events, but rather than a single event being the central focus of the play, often multiple smaller events are referenced which support the key overarching idea of the play.

Australian verbatim theatre academic Dr Caroline Wake offers differing categories to idea based and event based verbatim theatre. Wake is especially concerned with the 'sub-category' of verbatim theatre called 'headphone verbatim'<sup>2</sup>. Wake, inspired by the examination of the work of Australian headphone verbatim practitioner Roslyn Oades and British headphone verbatim practitioner Alecky Blythe, categorises verbatim theatre into three genres. Wake (2013) states "an examination of Blythe's oeuvre suggests that there are three dominant genres of headphone verbatim theatre, which I term the 'social crisis'

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<sup>2</sup> Wake (2013) states that 'headphone verbatim' "typically involves a single author digitally recording interviews or interactions with subjects. He or she does not necessarily transcribe these words, but rather edits the recordings digitally, and then casts actors to perform both speech and non-speech [the other audible sounds captured in the recorded interviews such as gulps, sniffs and sighs]" (p. 322).

play, the 'social justice' play, and the 'social portrait' play" (p. 325). Wake's genres could be understood as more specific and developed categorising terms than 'idea based' and 'event based'.

## 1.2. DEFINING DRAMATURGY

Wake's categorisation of verbatim theatre into three "genres" which all include "social" in the title could suggest that all types of verbatim theatre are primarily concerned with and informed by society. Lehmann and Primavesi (2009) state that since the times of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who is widely acknowledged to be the first dramaturg and writer of the influential *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, "the notion of dramaturgy (not only in Germany) has been deeply rooted in the project of enlightenment, in the urge to educate the people and to build up the cultural identity of a nation" (p. 5). Therefore, it could be understood that the dramaturgy of verbatim theatre is inherently concerned with the wider social context and climate.

The role of the dramaturg and definition of dramaturgy has evolved since Lessing's eighteenth century Germany. Contemporary discussion of dramaturgy makes apparent that dramaturgy is "always in process, always emerging in relation to its context" (Turner, 2010, p. 151). Dramaturgy can be preliminarily understood as "the architecture of the theatrical event, involved in the confluence of components in a work and how they are constructed to generate meaning for the audience" (Versényi as cited in Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p. 18). The word 'dramaturgy' derives from the Greek *dramaturgia*, which could be understood as the composition or architecture of a play (Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p. 19). Dramaturg Fiona Graham similarly defines dramaturgy in an architectural sense, stating that "dramaturgy can be defined as the shape and form of a performance event" (Graham, 2017, p. 6).

## 2. ETHICAL AND DRAMATURGICAL METHODS IN VERBATIM THEATRE

“Dramaturgical processes involve choices about how material is represented and composed” (Graham, 2017, p. 6). In verbatim theatre the dramaturgical process of deciding how the verbatim material is re-presented and composed is inherently an ethical task. It is primarily through the analysis of the dramaturgy of different verbatim practitioners’ work that their dramaturgical processes and ethical practice can be understood. The dramaturgical processes used by verbatim theatre makers such as Moisés Kaufman and Alecky Blythe are often described in the introductions to their published play texts. While these prefaces give insight into how they dramaturgically construct their verbatim theatre, specific information on their consideration of ethics and its impact on the dramaturgical construction of their verbatim work is sparse.

In conjunction to published verbatim play texts there are a small number of handbooks and guides to making verbatim theatre such as *Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community* (2010) edited by Australian verbatim theatre maker Paul Brown. This text is primarily concerned with verbatim plays that are part of the Drama Curriculum in New South Wales Australia, and therefore is specifically targeted at school students. This means *Verbatim: Staging memory and Community* offers an introductory, broad and concise discussion of verbatim theatre. It features contributions from notable Australian verbatim theatre practitioners and theorists including Paul Brown, Roslyn Oades and Caroline Wake. The book concludes with a brief discussion and suggested workshop for students on “ethics, ownership, authorship” (P. Brown, 2010, p. 109). While this chapter includes a series of appendices such as sample interview release forms and discussion on interview technique, it does not offer insight into the relationship and potential tension between ethics and dramaturgy in verbatim theatre.

Another more recent guide to creating verbatim theatre is *Telling the Truth: How to Make Verbatim Theatre* (2018) by Robin Belfield. This text is a self-professed guide to making verbatim theatre: “this is, as the title suggests, a handbook, and a practical guide through the processes of making theatre using verbatim material” (Belfield, 2018, p. x). *Telling the Truth: How to Make Verbatim Theatre* presents its discussion of ethics in a single chapter and states that “verbatim-theatre practitioners should conduct themselves in an ethical way” (Belfield, 2018, p. 103). Similarly to *Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community*, it does not specifically discuss how the ethical obligations, responsibilities and considerations verbatim theatre makers have to their interviewees influence the dramaturgy and dramaturgical construction of their work.

*Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre* (2008) serves as a seminal text within the verbatim theatre discourse. Comparably to *Telling the Truth: How to make Verbatim Theatre* it presents a series of personal responses from prominent British verbatim practitioners Robin Soans, Max Stafford-Clark, Richard Norton-Taylor, Nicholas Kent and Alecky Blythe. These personal reflections give first-hand insight into the dramaturgical processes and some of the ways ethical considerations inform these theatre makers verbatim practice.

Tom Cantrell’s *Acting in Documentary Theatre* (2013) similarly offers case studies of four different British verbatim plays including Robin Soans’ *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner’s *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (2005), Richard Norton-Taylor’s *Called to Account* (2007) and Alecky Blythe’s *The Girlfriend Experience* (2008). In *Acting in Documentary Theatre* Cantrell establishes that the majority of the discourse on verbatim theatre prioritised the views of the director and/or writer of verbatim theatre and neglected the perspective, experience and processes of actors in documentary and verbatim theatre. Cantrell consequently takes “an actor-centred view throughout the book” (Cantrell, 2013. p, 12), and discusses the ethical obligation and responsibilities actors feel to correctly represent the verbatim subjects.

While these texts include some discussion of ethics in verbatim theatre, they are primarily focused on the dramaturgical methods and techniques of established verbatim theatre makers. I therefore turned to a number of journal articles that focused less on dramaturgy and more on ethics in an attempt to gain more insight into the nature of ethics in verbatim theatre. Some of these articles include: Janet Gibson's "Saying it Right: Creating Ethical Verbatim Theatre" (2013), Boone Hopkins' "Embodied encounters: Ethics, Representation and Reiteration in Ten Years of The Laramie Project'" (2011) and Michael Anderson's (2007) "Making Theatre from Data: Lessons for Performance Ethnography from Verbatim Theatre". While these articles acknowledge the necessity of ethical practice in verbatim theatre, similarly to the other literature discussed, do not specifically state exactly what ethical practice in verbatim theatre could be.

The publications of Hilary Halba and Stuart Young comment both on ethics and dramaturgy in verbatim theatre, and occupy a similar position within the wider field of verbatim theatre discourse to this thesis. Halba and Young's chapter "Verbatim Theatre as an Artistic Intervention in Post-Trauma Situations: *Hush – A Verbatim Play about Family Violence*" (2014) and Young's chapter "The Ethics of the Representation of the Real People and Their Stories in Verbatim Theatre" in *Ethical Exchanges in Translation, Adaptation and Dramaturgy* (2017) give insight into their dramaturgical techniques and ethical practice. Their publications served as inspiration to undertake this research, in which I aim to further explore Halba and Young's discussion of ethics and dramaturgy in verbatim theatre.

## 2.1. VERBATIM METHODOLOGY: NODAL TECHNIQUE

Young (2017) states: "probably the most significant dramaturgical strategy used in fact based theatre is to interweave the various speakers and their testimony throughout the play" (p. 30). This idea of interweaving different interviewees' testimony is encapsulated in the 'nodal' technique used to create *Aftershocks*. To construct *Aftershocks* Brown created "what he calls 'nodes', moments of intersection between separate stories where the spectators address the same

subject matter from different or complementary perspectives” (Mumford, 2010, p. 42). These moments of intersection between different interviewees’ responses were woven together to form the basis of ‘scenes’, and the technique was a useful way to identify moments of connection and potential moments of interaction between participant stories.

In *Aftershocks* (as in most verbatim plays), monologues are combined into nodal scenes which interweave fragments from different interviewee speeches. The end result is something akin to but, distinct from, dialogue, with characters seeming at once isolated and even lonely, and yet connected with a community of listeners. (Mumford, 2010, p. 46)

## 2.2. VERBATIM METHODOLOGY: MOMENT WORK

Kaufman’s Moment Work is similar but distinct to Brown’s nodal technique. Moment Work is a process the Tectonic Theater Project use to create many of their theatre works, including their influential verbatim play *The Laramie Project*. Moment Work aims to give theatre makers and actors “the freedom to create individual, self-contained theatrical units (Moments) and then sequence these units together into theatrical phrases or sentences that will eventually become a play” (Tectonic Theater Project, n.d.).

Moment Work is a dramaturgical process that incorporates multiple theatrical elements in the construction of its dramaturgy. The Tectonic Theater Project website states that “Moment Work™ explores the theatrical potential of all the elements of the stage (props, sound, architecture, lights, costume, etc.) in order to create strong theatrical and dramatic narratives. The technique is our attempt to...‘write performance’ as opposed to ‘writing text’” (Tectonic Theater Project, n.d.). In the preamble to the published play script of *The Laramie Project* Kaufman elaborates on how Moment Work was used to create the play.

When writing this play, we used a technique I developed called moment work. It is a method to create and analyse theatre from a structuralist (or tectonic) perspective. For that reason, there are no scenes in this play,

only moments. A moment does not mean a change of locale or an entrance or exit of actors or characters. It is simply a unit of theatrical time that is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning.

(Kaufman & Tectonic Theater Project, 2001, p. xiv)

There are many memorable 'moments' that demonstrate the "theatrical potential of all the elements of the stage" that debuted in the original production of *The Laramie Project* that have since been recreated in subsequent productions. The set design for the original production incorporated the use of projections and screens to present images of locations, landscapes and vast Laramie skies. Projections and screens have since been used in countless productions of *The Laramie Project* around the world.

Perhaps one of the most famous and striking images associated with the play is a picture captured by Ken Friedman of the 2001 production of *The Laramie Project* at the Berkley Repertory Theatre (see Figure 1). It depicts Matthew Shepard's funeral with the ensemble of *The Laramie Project* dressed in black, some with umbrellas in their hands, seated on wooden chairs with their backs to a projection of the expansive Laramie sky. The simplicity of the contrast between the actors clad in black with funereal umbrellas aloft against the projected orange sky creates an image that is striking and powerful. The actors are dwarfed by the vast scale of the sky. The expanse of the projected sky represents the overwhelming almost cosmic impact of Matthew's death while the prospect of hope for the people of Laramie is simultaneously encapsulated in the light shimmering through the clouds. This 'moment' is masterful, and is achieved through the use of multiple stage elements including projection, lights, costume and architecture. Without any spoken text the dramaturgy of this 'moment' offers the audience a myriad of meaning and honours the emotional tone of the verbatim material gathered about Matthew's funeral. This is perhaps why this 'moment' has been replicated in many subsequent productions and has become an ingrained part of the global performance text.

### 2.3. VERBATIM METHODOLOGY: RECORDED DELIVERY

Alecky Blythe is renowned for the way she uses the Recorded Delivery technique to create, rehearse, and stage her verbatim theatre. After participating in a workshop run by actor and director Mark Wing-Davey, Blythe was inspired to create her own verbatim theatre. She states “as a result of Mark’s inspirational workshop, I have now made a total of seven shows, and currently have three more in the pipeline” (Blythe, 2008, p. 79). Blythe created her theatre company and named it Recorded Delivery after the technique that has defined her verbatim practice and career.

Blythe’s Recorded Delivery technique is similar to what Wake refers to as ‘headphone verbatim’ and was influenced by the work of Anna Deavere Smith.

Anna would record interviews with people and then learn them word-for-word, appropriating the speaker’s cadences and patterns of speech in very fine detail. She learnt the interviews by listening to them, phrase by phrase, through earphones, and then repeating each phrase exactly as it had been said, immediately after she had heard it. (Blythe, 2008, p. 80)

The Recorded Delivery technique replaces traditional line learning and requires the actors to wear headphones during rehearsal and performance through which the recorded audio of the original interview is played. The actors hear their lines live as they speak which enables them to repeat them as exactly as they were originally said, with the same inflection and rhythm. The nature of the Recorded Delivery technique means that Blythe often does not rehearse with a written script, she instead creates a kind of ‘audio script’. This involves editing together various fragments of audio from the original recorded interviews into the sequence of the play.

## 2.4. VERBATIM METHODOLOGY: HILARY HALBA AND STUART YOUNG

Blythe's Recorded Delivery technique was adopted and further explored by Halba and Young when creating their verbatim works *Hush: A Verbatim Play about Family Violence* and *Be / Longing*. Halba and Young explain how their use of the recorded delivery technique differs to Blythe's.

Whereas in Blythe's productions, the cast listens to the one recording of the whole script, our actors hear their own edited lines on individual players, which gives actors greater autonomy over their performance and provides a more nuanced theatrical rhythm. (Halba & Young, 2014, p. 109)

When conducting her verbatim interviews Blythe only audio records the interviewees' voices. Young comments that some recording devices "are so discreet you of course forget they're there" (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018). The discreet nature of modern recording devices suits Blythe's 'reporter' and 'detective' verbatim theatre making persona. Young acknowledges that "she (Blythe) slightly wants to disguise the presence of the interviewer. Also she gives the actors license to do what they like physically" (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018). Halba and Young take the Recorded Delivery technique a step further by video recording all of their interviews in addition to audio. Young elaborates:

because we wanted to get the physical score, we filmed the interviews. The first time we just had one camera on the person being interviewed. When we did the *Be / Longing* interviews we had the cameras on the interviewers as well. (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018)

Young poses the question "do makers of fact-based theatre have a responsibility to acknowledge the paralinguistic elements of the testimony?" (Young, 2017, p. 34). That is, if actors have access to the paralinguistic details of an interview by way of video recordings do verbatim theatre makers have a responsibility to

encourage the exact emulation of the 'physical testimony' of the interviewee? Young (2017) states that "we seek to re-present as fully as possible all aspects of the original testimony, including both vocal and gestural delivery" (p. 36). The replication of the 'physical scores' of the interviews aims to present more accurate re-presentations of the interviewees. Young argues that the accurate replication of interviewees' "vocal and gestural delivery" can strengthen the emotional impact of the testimony. "Although the spectator might read the physical score less consciously than the verbal, both scores combine to generate meaning, and very specific physical actions add potency or poignancy to the oral testimony" (Young, 2017, p. 37).

Halba and Young describe how they worked with a dramaturg when creating *Hush*.

We were mindful not only of such conventional playwriting principles as identifying strong narrative arcs, breaking the routine, and positioning characters and stories in relation to one another in order to highlight points of both commonality and contrast. Our dramaturg Fiona Graham asked us to identify those pieces of testimony that had stuck with us as well as particularly memorable verbal and gestural details accompanying the telling of those stories. Consequently, from the outset of the writing process we were mindful of performative features such as physical action and rhythm, not simply the oral archive. (Halba & Young, 2014, p. 105)

Analysis of Halba and Young's verbatim practice suggests that consideration of the paralinguistic details and kinesics of interviewees' testimony could inform a verbatim theatre maker's ethical practice. Halba and Young's mindfulness of "performative features such as physical action and rhythm" exhibits a desire to develop a more accurate re-presentation of interviewees and their testimony, and an acute ethical awareness. Consideration and re-presentation of both the oral and physical elements of the interview aims to capture the essence of the interviewees in their entirety, as opposed to treating their interview contributions as simply part of the greater "oral archive". Ethically this indicates

a profound desire to honour and respect not just the interviewees' words, but the interviewees as real and embodied individuals.

### 3. DRAMATURGY

#### 3.1. TRADITIONAL DRAMATURGY

Halba describes the dramaturg for verbatim theatre as a kind of guide and travelling companion.

The dramaturg helps to see another route, clarify the route, walk alongside, read the map, turn the map another way, chop the foliage back to help us see where we are and what we've got, asks questions that make us see with our hearts as well as our heads, lets taste and preference be part of it, honours the participants (whoever they are). (Halba as cited in Graham, 2017, p. 127)

Halba's analogy depicting the dramaturg as an intrepid explorer endows the dramaturg with a sense of physical agency in a physical world. This embodied description of the dramaturg's role liberates them from the parameters of traditional dramaturgy, in which the dramaturg (and dramaturgy) is often confined to the literary realm.

Traditionally the dramaturg, "sometimes called a literary manager" (Kennedy, p. 387 as cited in Luckhurst, 2006, p. 8), acted as a literary advisor whose work was grounded in research and analysis of pre-existing play texts. They were responsible for the translation of texts, "obviously, a lot of the work dramaturgs do is in other languages or with ancient texts" (Chemers, 2010, p. 110). A traditional dramaturg would also be aware of how plays have been presented and received in the past. "Artistic directors, directors, designers, and actors all devour production histories with great relish, not only because it helps them properly contextualize their own work but also because it gives them a sense of being part of theatrical history" (Chemers, 2010, p. 111).

The traditional dramaturg can "be defined as the controlling power of the theatre.... the guard of the institution (a kind of 'police') or the advocate of the

text (a 'literary adviser') or the advocate of the audience" (Lehmann and Primavesi, 2009, p. 4). The prioritising of text in traditional dramaturgy generates a hierarchy within the creative and artistic team and the theatrical elements of the stage, a hierarchy in which the dramaturg and the text are at the top.

Chemers (2010) suggests that the dramaturg is "a member of the artistic team of a production who is a specialist in the transformation of a dramatic script into a meaningful living performance" (p. 5). While this may be the role of the dramaturg in many theatrical endeavours, this definition does not account for devised theatre work or verbatim theatre, where there may be no 'dramatic script' already in existence for the dramaturg to transform. It is in these instances that something more than a traditional text based dramaturgical approach is required.

### 3.2. PHYSICAL DRAMATURGY

Physical dramaturgy can be described as simultaneously embracing and departing from traditional dramaturgy. "With so many definitions and descriptions, we start with the idea that physical dramaturgy is the process of embodying traditional dramaturgy. Physical dramaturgy acts as the bridge between traditional dramaturgy and the performer – between the text and the audience" (Bowditch, Casazza and Thornton, 2018, p. 5). Bowditch et al (2018) elaborate on the binary of physical and traditional dramaturgy, stating that "traditional dramaturgy is the 'what' and physical dramaturgy is the 'how'" (p. 5). This suggests that the traditional dramaturgy is the text and the physical dramaturgy is how that text is communicated to the audience.

Physical dramaturgy inherently demolishes the traditional hierarchy of roles and elements in the theatre. Lehmann and Primavesi believe the dramaturg should be more than a "literary adviser" and more of a negotiator. When they are no longer "defined as the controlling power of the theatre...the dramaturg may instead become a negotiator for the freedom of theatrical experimentation and

risk” (Lehmann and Primavesi, 2009, p. 4). In physical dramaturgy the text becomes an encapsulating term for all the elements that contribute to the communication of the work to an audience. The play text becomes considered not just as “a flat work of literature, not a description in poetry of another world, but is in itself another world passing before you in time and space” (Fuchs, 2004, p. 6).

References to time and space are often included in practitioner’s definitions of physical dramaturgy. Schirle (2018) states “physical dramaturgy simply acknowledges the world as it is...in which everything is conditioned by space, by the laws of nature concerning growth and tension in interaction with the spatial environment” (p. 219). Physical dramaturgy is concerned with the physical environment, space, time, bodies and how meaning can be made from the avoidance, collisions and relationships between these elements.

Perhaps this is the definition of physical dramaturgy—how space and proximity become emotional, how pattern becomes story, how gesture reveals the imagination, how video and bodies on stage become dialogue, how narrative is revealed, layer after layer, just like skin and muscle and bone. (Lerman, 2018, p. 75)

Verbatim theatre is often comprised of the testimony of multiple interviewees, each bringing with them their own independent “other world”. Halba and Young could be considered to incorporate physical dramaturgy into their verbatim practice to aid the engaging and accurate representation and communication of the interviewees and their “other worlds”. Kaufman defines physical dramaturgy as “creating narrative with the actor’s body” (Bowditch, 2018, p. 213). Halba and Young’s verbatim practice is built upon creating narrative and meaning with actors’ bodies. The act of video recording their interviews enables the actors to honour the interviewees physically. It is through the physical dramaturgy created by actors’ bodies in space that the “other worlds” of the interviewees can be effectively communicated and understood.

### 3.3. DRAMATURGY AND EPIC THEATRE

By considering the specific dramaturgical processes undertaken by verbatim practitioners such as Kaufman and Blythe it is evident that many verbatim practitioners adapt and use epic theatre conventions in their dramaturgy. In the introduction to *The Laramie Project* Kaufman directly cites Brecht and his model of epic theatre as an influence for the dramaturgical construction of the play. He states that at the time of Matthew Shepard's death, when he was considering creating *The Laramie Project*,

I also happened to run across a Brecht essay I had not read in a long time, "The Street Scene." In it Brecht uses as a model the following situation: "an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place." He goes on to build a theory about his "epic theatre" based on this model. The essay gave me an idea about how to deal with this project, in terms of both its creation and its aesthetic vocabulary. (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater Project, 2001, p. vii)

"'Epic' is the description most commonly applied to Brecht's theatre" (Brooker, 1994, p. 187). Epic and Brechtian are often used interchangeably to describe the "aesthetic vocabulary" of the theatre form. John Willett, a notable translator of Brecht's work and author of the influential text: *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A study from eight aspects*, states that "strictly speaking 'epic' is an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative that is 'not tied to time'" (Willett, 1977, p. 168).

Brecht indicates that a key difference between dramatic and epic theatre is that dramatic theatre focuses on "plot that implicates the spectator in a stage situation" (as cited in Willett, 1977, p. 170), while epic presents a "narrative that turns the spectator into an observer, but arouses his power of action" (Brecht as cited in Willett, 1977, p. 170). The structural elements associated with epic theatre also differ to those of dramatic theatre. Brecht proposes that in dramatic theatre "plot" is achieved when "one scene makes another" and presents the notion of "Growth" (as cited in Willett, 1977, p. 170), while the epic narrative

structure presents “each scene for itself” and utilises “montage” (Brecht as cited in Willett, 1977, p. 170).

Another notable convention of epic theatre is the *Verfremdungseffekt* or ‘v-effect’. Brooker (1994) claims the v-effect is “the central concept of ‘epic theatre’” (p. 193). The “*Verfremdungseffekt* is usually translated as ‘alienation device’... However, the terms ‘defamiliarisation’ or ‘estrangement’... give a more accurate sense of Brecht’s intentions” (Brooker, 1994, pp. 192-193). Eddershaw (1994) offers an alternative definition stating the *Verfremdungseffekt* “is better translated as ‘distancing’ than alienation’ effect (p. 255). Regardless of the precise translation, the purpose of the v-effect is to create epic theatre’s infamous “doubling dialecticising function” (Brooker, 1994, p. 197). This “doubling dialecticising function” can be understood as the notion that “the process of showing must itself be shown” (Willett, 1977, p. 172). This is the idea that the construction and ‘mechanics’ of theatre are exposed. The audience are aware that they are watching a play and are invited to observe not simply the narrative and characters, but the act of theatre itself.

Brecht states in his seminal text, *The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre*, that “the element of rehearsal in the acting and of learning by heart in the text, the whole machinery and the whole process of preparation: it all becomes plainly apparent” (Brecht, 1938, p. 1). Blythe aims to make “plainly apparent” the “process of preparation” in the dramaturgy of her work through the Recorded Delivery technique. Cantrell (2013) identifies that Joe Hill-Gibbins, the director of the premiere production of *The Girlfriend Experience*, “was concerned with alienating the audience, and attempted to achieve this through the use of headphones” (p. 168). The actors continual wearing of headphones onstage aimed to serve as a constant visual reminder to the audience that they were observing actors, who were re-presenting the real voices they were hearing through the headphones, thus creating a kind of Brechtian alienation or distancing effect. The headphones act as a “reflexive and de-familiarising technique that highlights the inherently complex nature of representation in

documentary and verbatim theatre, whereby the original speaker is simultaneously a presence and an absence” (Halba & Young, 2014, pp. 109-110). In *The Girlfriend Experience* the actors’ wearing of headphones aimed to act as a physical representation of the absent interviewees.

There are identifiable similarities between the actors’ approach to both verbatim and epic theatre. Often the role of the actor in verbatim theatre is to re-present the voices and characteristics of real life individuals, not to become a character. Megan Goldsman, an actor from *Strong Female Characters*, offers advice to other actors embarking on verbatim theatre projects and states “I feel that this idea is the most important...to portray the ‘essence’ of each character. Not trying to become them, as when this happens, the performance immediately loses truth” (M. Goldsman, personal communication, April 26, 2019). Similarly the Brechtian actor

while not eliminating emotion altogether in his or her performance, would simulate the audience to feel emotions that were not the same as those ‘felt’ by the characters. For example, if the character were ‘sad’, the audience might experience ‘anger’ at the circumstances which made the character feel that way. (Eddershaw, 1994, p. 255)

Brecht states that in theatre “the puzzles of the world are not solved but shown” (as cited in Brooker, 1994, p. 189). Similarly Hammond and Steward (2008) state:

We turn to verbatim theatre because we feel that it is somehow better suited to the task of dealing with serious subject matter. The world seems to have become a more serious place, and we want our theatre to help us understand it. (p. 11)

“The plays that Brecht wrote for his epic theatre were intended to serve a socio-political function and therefore, he argued, required a different kind of performance style” (Eddershaw, 1994, p. 255). Similarly Kaufman created *The Laramie Project* because he was interested in the potential social and political impact and power of verbatim theatre. To his theatre company he posed the

question: “is theatre a medium that can contribute to the national dialogue on current events?” (Kaufman & Tectonic Theatre Project, 2001, p. vi). Brecht’s epic theatre conventions were conceived to have a socio-political function, because of this they are keenly embraced by verbatim theatre makers, and used as tools to construct verbatim theatre that similarly seeks to have a social and political purpose.

## 4. ETHICS

A primary aim of the thesis is to examine the intrinsic ethical considerations of verbatim theatre. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what 'ethics' could mean. Ethics is from the realm of moral philosophy and can be defined as "a branch of philosophy that asks fundamental questions about right and wrong, good and bad" (R. Anderson, 2011, p. 2). We use ethical theory as a means to discern the good or ethical action and inform moral decisions and judgements. However, "ethics is very often not about choosing between a right action and a wrong one (things are rarely that simple), but between two competing 'rights' or even between two 'wrongs'" (R. Anderson, 2011, p. vii). The idea of "competing rights" illustrates that making an ethical decision is often through evaluation and negotiation. It is perhaps ethics' complex nature that makes it challenging for theatre makers to state explicitly what ethical practice in verbatim theatre could be.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis when working on verbatim theatre "the dramatist must abide by some sort of ethical code if their work is to be taken seriously" (Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 10). If ethical practice is understood to be a process of questioning what is right or wrong an "ethical code" cannot definitively exist, as the act of questioning is inherently concerned with discovering something new. Also a 'code of ethics' would be different for each person, as their judgement of what is 'right or wrong' will be unique and specific to themselves. The subjectivity of ethical thinking makes defining what an ethical code could consider difficult.

While theatre makers are unable to provide an absolute ethical standard for creating verbatim theatre, verbatim theatre researchers such as Gibson and Paget provide insight into the nature of the ethical responsibilities theatre makers have to their interviewees. Gibson (2011) states "there are ethical responsibilities when verbatim theatre is created, especially to those from whom

stories are mined...verbatim practitioners have, at the very least, responsibilities to negotiate with the subjects who provide the source material for their productions” (p. 2). Similarly Paget (1987) states that “verbatim shows have that element of interaction with a community which brings with it certain pleasures and certain responsibilities - responsibilities towards the real people whose thoughts and feelings have been sought for the show's material” (p. 329). The idea of ‘responsibility’ is echoed by Duggan (2013) who identifies that verbatim practitioners

have a responsibility to handle that material with care – not because of some sense of political correctness or fear of offending, but because to misappropriate such material is to run the risk of belittling it by denying the particulars of its original context. (p. 155)

Young is conscious of the potential for damage and distress should misrepresentation or misappropriation occur, he states in relation to *Hush - A Verbatim Play about Family Violence*:

The scope for damage is not only in the survivors telling of the story in an interview, but also, and perhaps more so, in the theatrical retelling of that story: if a participant feels that his testimony has been misrepresented, or if he feels betrayed, he may be doubly wounded. (Young, 2017, p. 26)

Analysis of these statements suggests that ethical practice in verbatim theatre is firmly predicated upon the correct representation of interviewees and their words. Considering this, ethical practice in verbatim theatre could be understood as questioning and making decisions that support the correct representation of the verbatim subjects.

Many verbatim theatre makers acknowledge some kind of ethical agreement between theatre maker and interviewee. This contract may be evident in an implicit understanding between theatre maker and interviewee. Or, as is customary, it may be a physical contract in the form of a signed information sheet and consent form. Regardless of the exact nature of this agreement, it is

built upon the understanding that the theatre maker will strive to accurately represent the interviewee and treat them and their words with integrity, honour and respect. It is this obligation that verbatim theatre makers have to their interviewees that sets verbatim theatre apart from other theatre forms ethically.

British verbatim theatre practitioner David Hare states “it does seem to me if you stand up on a stage and represent somebody you do have a duty to them to get it right, and for them to be at peace with how they are represented, it is different from fiction in that way” (as cited in National Theatre Discover, 2014). His statement similarly identifies that a primary ethical concern of the verbatim theatre maker should be the prioritising of the correct or ‘right’ representation of interviewees and the cultivation of a representation that the interviewees are “at peace with”.

By reviewing different verbatim practitioners’ perceptions and understanding of ethics in verbatim theatre, it is clear that some form of ethical consideration and deliberation is expected of the theatre maker when creating verbatim theatre. This thesis aims to further explore ethical practice in verbatim theatre and the different ways that theatre makers could acknowledge and accommodate ethical thinking into their dramaturgical processes and construction of their work.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

### 5.1. ARTS RESEARCH

The creation of verbatim theatre and academic research are often both processes of exploration and experimentation. The terms 'experiment' and 'laboratory' may be traditionally more evocative of scientific research and discovery. However, these terms are also attributed to the work of contemporary theatre practitioners such as Forced Entertainment, whose work is "often described as being experimental or innovative" (Forced Entertainment, 2019).

Nelson describes the way Forced Entertainment create their work as a rigorous process.

It is a rigour functioning in a different conceptual framework from that of logical argument based in reason as traditionally perceived. Its aim is to discover 'what works' or what invites critical insights through a dialogic engagement, rather than what is true adjudged by the criteria of scientific rationalism. (Nelson, 2009, p. 121)

The kind of experimentation used by Forced Entertainment exemplifies the idea that knowledge can be collaboratively constructed through experience. The process of many performative research and art-based methodologies, similar to creating theatre, is a process of questioning and discovery.

Perhaps a defining quality of art-based researchers is their willingness to start the work with questions and a willingness to design methods in response to the particular situation, as contrasted to the more general contemporary tendency within the human sciences to fit the question into a fixed research method. (McNiff, 2008, pp. 33-34)

Academic research often falls into one of two general categories: qualitative and quantitative. Brad Haseman offers a third paradigm called performative

research, which can be used as an alternative category for arts based research. In performative research the creative practice serves simultaneously as the expression of the research and the research itself. “In this third category of research — alongside quantitative (symbolic numbers) and qualitative (symbolic words) — the symbolic data work performatively. They not only express the research, but in that expression become the research itself” (Haseman, 2006, p. 102).

Haseman’s construction of performative research as a third research paradigm aims to better accommodate arts research, specifically postmodern and post-structuralism methodologies such as practice-based and practice-led research. A key facet of performative research, post-modernism and post-structuralism alike is the shift away from positivist research aims, that is, quantitative research methods and the desire to prove truths. Performative research is more concerned with the collaborative exploration and the construction of knowledge through experiences.

Post-structuralism fosters a sceptical and radical mode of thought which resonates with experimentation in arts and practices insofar as play is a method of inquiry, aiming not to establish findings by way of data to support a demonstrable and finite answer to a research question, but to put in play elements in a bricolage which afford insights through deliberate and careful juxtaposition. (Nelson, 2009, p. 121)

## **5.2. PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH, PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH, PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH AND ACTION RESEARCH**

Within the paradigm of performative research practice-as-research can be used as an umbrella term for arts research methods such as practice-based research and practice-led research. Practice-based and practice-led research are similar insofar as both methodologies incorporate creative practice into the investigation of research inquiries. However, distinctions must be made between

them to effectively categorise and make clear the research methodologies used for this thesis.

Smith and Dean (2009) state “if a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based” (p. 64). Practice-based researchers view the creative practice as *both* the contribution to knowledge and dissemination of research, while practice-led researchers use creative practice with the aim to produce new understandings about their practice which *inform* their contribution to knowledge and dissemination of research. “If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led” (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 64).

In conjunction to practice-led research this research draws from action research methodologies. Action research can be described as a research method that acknowledges that the researcher is intimately involved in the research, and affects the outcomes. In action research, such an involvement is the only reason such research can even take place. It is conducted by the practitioner(s) in whatever profession he is involved and it is research that seeks to bring about change in practices - changes, obviously, for the better. (Trimingham, 2002, p. 59)

Action researchers can be described as ‘insider researchers’.

They see themselves as part of the context they are investigating, and ask, individually and collectively, ‘is my/our work going as we wish? How do we improve it where necessary?’ If they feel their work is already reasonably satisfactory, they evaluate it and produce evidence to show why they believe this to be the case...The kind of theory they produce is dynamic and developmental and communicated through their actions as well as their words. (McNiff, 2017, p. 10)

A typical methodology for action researchers is the “action-reflection cycle” which consists of six stages: “observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify - move

in new directions” (McNiff, 2017, p. 12). Parallels can be made between the “action-reflection cycle” and ethical and dramaturgical processes used when creating theatre. I employed the same steps of observation, reflection, action, evaluation and modification when constructing and rehearsing *Strong Female Characters*. This thesis incorporates both practice-led research and action research as key methodologies<sup>3</sup> as both practice-led and action research are “concerned with the nature of practice” (Candy, 2006) and usually involve an exploration of existing working practices (Candy and Edmonds, 2018, p. 65).

This thesis and the creation of *Strong Female Characters* is firmly predicated upon an exploration of the process of creating ethical verbatim theatre. Therefore, *Strong Female Characters* was created solely to enable the exploration of the verbatim theatre creation *process*. I acknowledge that undertaking this theatre making process as a researcher conducting a theatre making experiment places me in somewhat of a privileged position, as the work of other verbatim practitioners must function independently from its creation process and as part of the wider social context. Consequently, these other verbatim theatre practitioners must have a greater consideration and awareness of the quality of their verbatim theatre as a product that could be marketed to a public audience. It was the acknowledgement of this tension, explored in more

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<sup>3</sup> While the key research methodologies guiding this research are practice-led and action research, I am aware that “the similarities between verbatim theatre and performance ethnography are striking” (M. Anderson, 2007, p. 89). The creation of verbatim theatre is inherently ethnographic as exemplified by *The Laramie Project*. The play has inadvertently produced ethnographic research on the cultural phenomena of how a town, a nation and ultimately the world reacts to a specific tragedy such as the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard. While I acknowledge that there are implicit elements of performance ethnography in the creation of *Strong Female Characters*, this thesis is not an ethnographic research project. *Strong Female Characters* was created to examine the ethical construction of verbatim theatre and its creation functions as a research method, not as an ethnographic report of findings.

detail later in this thesis, that inspired the approach to make *Strong Female Characters* to concentrate on process alone.

While ‘practice-led research’ can refer to the work of art as a form of research (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 7) my research does not ask the quality of *Strong Female Characters*, as an independent product, to be interrogated beyond what is necessary to consider my ethical and dramaturgical practice. The script is included as an appendix in this thesis (see Appendix 2) as it is a result of my research, and serves as evidence of the ethical and dramaturgical processes I undertook as a researcher investigating the ethical process of constructing verbatim theatre.

### 5.3. PHASES AND DESIGN OF THIS RESEARCH

The structure of this research incorporates and reflects the identifiable phases and processes of both practice-led and action research. Action research scholar Dr Dorothy Valcarcel Craig identifies that there are “three phases in completing an action research study” and acknowledges that “several research-based tasks take place during each phase” (Craig, 2009, p. 14). These three phases are “pre-study planning, implementation and analysis, and post-study action planning” (Craig, 2009, p. 14).

Candy and Edmonds (2018) offer a brief description of what is usually involved in a practice-led research project. Practice-led research

usually involves an exploration of existing working practices and, through studies and reflections, aims to produce new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice...the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative work, although documentation of that work may form an important part of the presentation of the ideas. (p. 65)

The “pre-study planning” phase of this research encapsulates the review of literature and discourse on verbatim theatre and involved the exploration of the existing working practices of different verbatim practitioners. The application process I undertook to the University of Waikato’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences’ Human Research Ethics Committee to gain ethical approval to conduct this research can also be considered to be a crucial “research-based task” of this phase. This application process required a description of the anticipated structure and trajectory of the research which involved the solidification of my research questions, aims and creative intentions. The process of gaining ethical approval was a crucial stage of my research as it equipped me with the necessary tools to ensure that this research considered ethics at every stage.

The second “implementation and analysis” phase of this research is dominated by my creative practice and the construction of *Strong Female Characters*. The recruitment of interview participants, conducting of interviews, transcription, construction of the performance text, rehearsal and performance of *Strong Female Characters* are all part of the “implementation” aspect of the second phase of this research. In practice-led research “where the primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice, such research includes the “process of practice” as an integral part of its method” (Candy & Edmonds, 2018, p. 65). Thus a written “process of practice” serves as a crucial chapter in this thesis. The analysis and discussion of my practice combined with the examination of the ideas and practice of others presented in subsequent chapters of this thesis embodies the “analysis” aspect of this research phase. All of the research conducted in the second phase serves to inform the third phase of this research and the construction of the manifesto.

The final “post-study action planning” phase of this research is encompassed in the creation of the manifesto. Candy and Edmonds (2018) state that the research outcomes and any knowledge gained through practice-led research projects “may be shared in the form of principles, models, frameworks and guidelines” (p. 65). My manifesto aims to present ethical principles and dramaturgical

techniques that could be considered by others interested in making verbatim theatre. Nelson (2013) states in practice-led research that “the aim of complementary writing is absolutely not to transpose the artwork from its own medium into that of words...By way of completing the practice, writings assist in the articulation and evidence of the research inquiry” (p. 36). The manifesto is not a transposition of the creation process of *Strong Female Characters*, rather it is *informed* by the creative process and practice.

## 6. PROCESS – CREATING STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS

### 6.1. OVERVIEW OF PROCESS

*I'm a writer I write you know that's what I do in my job as a curator and you, you have to consider -actually you have to consider people's feelings. You do. And so I, I feel the responsibility to um to honour those who identify as women. (Appendix 2, p. 138)*

This is the first line spoken in *Strong Female Characters*. This statement opens the play because this interviewee's reflection on her job as a curator aptly articulates the felt responsibility of verbatim theatre makers. The ideas of "considering people's feelings" and "honouring those who identify as women" presented by this interviewee accurately encompass the ethical thinking that informed the construction of *Strong Female Characters*. From the conception of this research and throughout the construction and rehearsal process of *Strong Female Characters* I strove to always prioritise ethical verbatim practice, which for me meant aiming to always treat the interviewees and their testimony with honour and respect.

To begin the process of creating *Strong Female Characters* I had to first complete a rigorous and thorough application to the University of Waikato's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (see appendix 1). Once granted approval by the Ethics Committee to conduct my research I began the process of recruiting interview participants and conducting interviews. I conducted a total of nine interviews with 12 local Hamilton women with the youngest interviewees being two 18 year old school girls and the oldest my 98 year old grandmother. The interviews ranged from 15 to 50 minutes in length and with the interviewees' permission I recorded the audio of all the interviews, and in all but one interview video as well. I ultimately accumulated over four and a half hours of recorded verbatim material. I began transcribing the interviews,

word for word, while still in the interview phase of my research. The entire process of interviewee recruitment, interviewing and transcription took just over nine weeks to complete.

Once I had completed transcribing the interviews I sent all the interviewees an electronic copy of their transcript and asked them to indicate, after reviewing their transcript, if there was anything they did not want considered for inclusion in the play script. Once I had permission from all of the interviewees to use anything from their transcripts I began the process of condensing the hours of collected verbatim material down into one hour of performance material. This was a challenging ethical and dramaturgical task as all of the interviews provided an abundance of vibrant and engaging testimony.

To begin the processes of distilling the collection verbatim material I first reviewed all of the interview transcripts and collated all the material I thought may potentially be used in the script. I printed out all of the transcripts and got my actors involved. Together the actors and I cut the transcripts into smaller self-contained chunks and then laid them out in long lines and piles all over the floor in an attempt to map our way through the play. This physical mapping out of possible progressions through the testimony enabled the creation of our first working draft of the play script. We then began our rehearsal process which was very much a collective workshopping of the script on our feet. Throughout the three month rehearsal period the actors and I continued to experiment with the sequencing and structuring of the script.

## **6.2. GATHERING THE VERBATIM MATERIAL: INTERVIEWS, TRANSCRIPTION AND ANONYMITY**

### **6.2.1. INTERVIEWS**

*Strong Female Characters* was created entirely from verbatim material collected from electronically recorded semi-structured interviews. In action research semi-

structured interviews refers to when “you ask specific questions but invite the participant to give more extensive answers and record or keep notes” (McNiff, 2017, p. 177). My interviews were open discussions that were guided by a series of 14 qualitative questions (Appendix 1, p. 134). The structure of the interview allowed for myself (as the interviewer) and the interviewee to initiate further discussion or ask supplementary questions out of interest or for clarification. The interview questions invited participants to comment on their own personal experiences and thoughts on identifying as a woman.

I intended to show care and sensitivity to the interviewees by devising questions that were minimally explicitly or implicitly harmful. The questions were qualitative and open ended, there were no polar questions (yes/no questions) which intended to minimize the risk of harm or distress, as interviewees were in control of how they interpreted and answered the questions. Interviewees were able to answer questions in as much or as little detail as they desired. I also stated on the participant information sheet (Appendix 1, pp. 130-131) given to all interviewees before their interview that they were under no obligation to answer all the questions, and they were welcome to indicate any questions they did not wish to be asked in advance of the interview.

As an ethical researcher and verbatim practitioner I strove to be an active and empathetic listener during the interviews. Active and “empathetic listening in an interview, similar to the engaged way that we listen to music, is open, present, following closely and caringly, attending to nuanced qualities” (Bresler, 2008, pp. 230-231). McNiff (2017) states in regards to action research that the interviewer should “aim to listen more than you speak. Learn to accept silences. Demonstrate empathy and be patient” (p. 178). With this in mind and in order to foster an attentive and supportive interview environment I always gave the interviewee my full and undivided attention. Blythe (2008) states “it is important that they [the interviewees] do not feel judged, so I always try to understand the interviewee’s point of view” (p. 87). While I wanted to empower my interviewees by letting them speak freely without interruption I did not want my attentive

listening to feel like I was aloofly judging their responses. Therefore, throughout the interview I would verbally engage with the interviewees and the ideas they presented. This affirmed my attentiveness and was a simple and subtle way of reassuring them that they were doing a good job and that I was actively engaged and “trying to understand their point of view”.

An interview is an inherently unnatural and performative setting that is constructed upon a potentially unequal power dynamic. In the interview there will always be both conscious and subconscious performative elements enacted by both the interviewer and interviewee. Belfield (2018) identifies that “the quality of your interviews will have a direct relationship to the quality of your verbatim piece” (p. 22). An awareness of “the quality of the interview” may incite interviewees to present themselves in a certain way. They may be concerned with making a ‘good impression’ or being ‘interesting’. Or they may behave in a way that they think is pleasing to the interviewer. Ultimately in the highly orchestrated and ‘unnatural’ environment of the interview you will only ever get the version of the interviewee that they wish to present in that moment.

The theatre maker’s ethical practice also impacts “the quality of the interview”. It is common ethical practice for the verbatim theatre maker to gain informed consent from interviewees (often in writing) to conduct the interview. This consent usually affirms that the interviewee understands why they are being interviewed, how their responses will be used and that they agree to the interview being recorded. While this consent process is ethically necessary and considerate, it gives the interviewees the opportunity to prepare their responses. This may result in interviewees bringing in written responses to the interview questions that they have prepared in advance, which means their responses may not be as dynamic, immediate and unmediated as anticipated.

Regardless of how the interviews are structured the inherent power dynamic of an organised interview will always impact the interviewees’ responses. If the interviews are structured by questions the nature of the questions will implicitly

guide the answers. If the interview is not structured by a series of pre-planned questions but instead the interviewees are encouraged to talk about whatever they want, they are likely to share the information that they think will be interesting, truthful or relevant to what they think you as the theatre maker wants.

It is important for the verbatim theatre maker to keep in mind that from the moment you decide to make a piece of verbatim theatre it becomes a contrived and deliberate process. Belfield (2018) advises the verbatim theatre maker that “your decisions about who to interview, what to edit out, and ultimately what makes it onto the stage will all demonstrate your opinion and your agenda” (p. 39). The act of choosing a topic, gathering people to interview and drafting interview questions influence the direction and outcome of the work while simultaneously reflecting the opinion and agenda of the theatre maker.

#### 6.2.2. TRANSCRIPTION: AN ETHICAL AND DRAMATURGICAL TASK

Transcription is a time consuming but beneficial process for the verbatim theatre maker. The act of listening and transcribing an interview provides the theatre maker with the opportunity to attentively re-experience the interviews. While transcribing the interviews for *Strong Female Characters* I made note of potential nodes, or moments of intersection between different interviewees’ testimony. I transcribed all of the words spoken in the interview by the interviewee and myself as the interviewer. The transcription of both the questions asked by me as the interviewer and the interviewees’ responses ensured that when the interviewees received copies of their transcripts to review they were able to contextualize their responses within the frame of the interview as a whole.

Young (2017) identifies that

The editing out of the interviewer’s contributions in the subsequent dramatic and theatrical representation of the testimony is deeply problematic: it suggests the subject’s autonomy...and it may create the

illusion that the testimony comes un-mediated and even spontaneously from the source's mouth. (p. 27)

My contributions to the interviews influenced the interviewees' responses. Therefore, to edit out of my contributions to the interview would deny the 'truth' of the situation.

It was during the transcription process that I made the decision to include the verbatim words of myself (Missy) in the play. When embarking on the creation of *Strong Female Characters* I was inspired and influenced by the kind of verbatim theatre I admired, which is verbatim theatre that makes explicit its creative, dramaturgical and ethical construction. Influenced by the work of Blythe and Kaufman who both include themselves as 'characters' in their plays I was open to the possibility of including a Missy 'character' in *Strong Female Characters*. However, I did not anticipate that Missy would feature so prominently in the play.

As I was transcribing one of the first few interviews I had conducted and listening to a particularly engaging section of the interview I remember thinking to myself "this is definitely going in the play. I just wish I hadn't talked as much as the interviewer". This moment marked an important realisation. I realised that I had been viewing my contributions to the interviews as an unfortunate but necessary means to obtain interviewee responses. I had been viewing my voice as the interviewer as something that needed to be edited out. When in fact to neglect my participation in the interview and influence on the interviewee's responses was to effectively exclude half of the interview.

The inclusion of myself in the play was simultaneously an ethical and dramaturgical decision. Dramaturgically, having Missy the interviewer and theatre maker present throughout the play created a subtle and 'natural' kind of *Verfremdungseffekt*. The created distancing effect was 'natural' insofar as opposed to creating a narrator or interviewer 'character' I was able to utilise my own organic involvement in the original interviews. Often the Missy lines used in

the play would include the interview questions which aimed to remind the audience that they were watching a play comprised of verbatim content that was gathered by me through recorded interviews.

Ethically, by including myself and my verbatim testimony in the play I drew attention to the play's construction and to my ethical practice when conducting the interviews. My ethical practice as the theatre maker was showcased and presented along with the interviewees' testimony in a way which invited the audience to observe and scrutinise my method of working. Missy was no longer an aloof and absent theatre maker, but had become a continual presence in the play that took responsibility for my ethical practice. The inclusion of myself as the interviewer in the play was also a way to acknowledge that my position within the field was not that of an experienced theatre maker, but that of a researcher who is focusing on the ethical construction process of theatre, and consequently was primarily concerned with conducting an 'ethical interview' over gaining the 'best material'.

### 6.2.3. TERMINOLOGY

Another ethical action I took when beginning the process of creating *Strong Female Characters* was to analyse the terminology I was going to use, as the way in which something is referred to implicitly and assigns it a definition and value. The first aspect of terminology I explored was how I was going to refer to myself and my role in the process. In this project I am simultaneously a student, researcher, interviewer, director, dramaturg, editor and arguably a writer or playwright. While many verbatim theatre makers refer to themselves and are referred to by others as playwrights, to me the term 'playwright' has connotations of ownership and the creation of fictional material. While there are many similarities between the processes of verbatim theatre makers and more conventional writers, a key difference is that the verbatim theatre maker is working with verbatim material that is not theirs. It is the lives of real people that lies at the heart of verbatim theatre. While the theatre maker may claim

ownership of the overall composition of a piece of verbatim theatre, how can they claim to own the words, stories and experiences of others?

Kaufman states that “the idea of constructs/constructions lie at the centre of my work, for what is the stage but a construct of a certain reality? And what is a playwright-director but a construction worker?” (Svich, 2003, p. 72). I believe the title of ‘construction worker’ more accurately and ethically encapsulates the role of the verbatim theatre maker than ‘playwright’. Similarly to the way a construction worker might manipulate the physical materials they are given to create architecture, buildings and physical structures the verbatim theatre maker works with the verbatim testimony they are given to construct dramaturgical architectural structures such as verbatim performance texts. Inspired by Kaufman throughout this process I did not refer to myself as a writer or playwright but as a construction worker.

Contrastingly Blythe refers to herself as a ‘writer’. Blythe often includes herself in her plays and has even performed onstage as herself in productions of *Little Revolution* (2014). The opening scene of *Little Revolution* includes Blythe trying to recruit interview participants for the play. One of her first exchanges is with a girl who is anonymously named in the script as “girl who says no”. Blythe asks “I don’t s’pose I can speak to any of you? I make documentary plays, and I record conversations on here” (Blythe, 2014, p. 14). She then approaches another potential interviewee who she refers to as “Romanian man” and has the following exchange:

ALECKY. Can I talk to you? I make plays. I’m a writer.

ROMANIAN MAN. Sorry?

ALECKY. I’m a play- I write for the theatre” (Blythe, 2014, p. 15).

Within this opening scene Blythe endeavours to make clear her intentions by referring to herself as both someone who makes documentary plays and a writer. “I make documentary plays” is potentially the more accurate description of Blythe’s role, as she famously does not physically ‘write’ plays. Instead

preferring her Recorded Delivery technique, where she works by digitally editing audio clips from recorded interviews together to create an audio script.

The terminology Blythe uses to refer to her interviewees in this opening scene of *Little Revolution* serves to preserve her interviewees' anonymity. Instead of using their names, she refers to them as "Romanian man" and "girl who says no". While these pseudonyms protect their identities because the "girl who says no" only appears in this one scene of the play the only information the audience know about her is that she "says no" to being interviewed. She becomes defined by the fact that she refused to be interviewed. While Blythe (2008) aims not judge her interviewees, stating "it is important that they do not feel judged" (p. 87), referring to her as the "girl who says no" as opposed to the "girl who said no" could be considered as inferring an inadvertent element of judgement. The unintentional sense of 'character' that is created by Blythe of this individual could imply that she always "says no". Examination of this beginning scene serves as an example to illustrate how different verbatim practitioners' ethical practice is subjective. The play begins with the presentation of Blythe's ethical participant recruitment process, where she approaches potential interviewees and asks them if they would like to be interviewed. However, Blythe's ethical consideration could be considered to be essentially undermined when she appears to disregard their answer and include their words, albeit anonymously, in the play even if they are the "girl who says no".

*Strong Female Characters* begins similarly to *Little Revolution* with a scene in which Missy as the theatre maker explains the project to interview participants. In contrast to *Little Revolution* this scene includes participants consenting to the interview and for their words to be used.

MISSY (Megan<sup>4</sup>): um just checking, for the record that you have received and understand um, received the information sheet understand like the purpose of this research-

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the actor's names (Megan, Cian and Kelly) are used here to indicate which actor spoke which Missy line.

MISSY (Cian): why I'm interviewing you-

MISSY (Kelly): what I'm going to do with your interview.

MISSY (Cian): you don't have any questions?

DEB: No, I'm all good. Yes I've read the information sheet I'm fully informed and give my consent to this process. (Appendix 2, p. 139)

Contrasting to Blythe, in *Strong Female Characters* I was in a position where most of the interviewees had given me permission to refer to them by their first name e.g. "Deb". I asked interviewees multiple times throughout the process how they wished to be referred to in the play script and performance programme. The majority of the interviewees consented to being referred to by their first name. Others such as K and A wished to preserve their anonymity and preferred to be referred to by their first initial.

Throughout the process I encouraged Kelly, Megan and Cian (the actors) not to refer to the interviewees as 'characters' but by their preferred title, be that their first name or initial. Belfield (2018) suggests that the verbatim theatre maker asks themselves "who do you consider to be lead voices and who are supporting voices? (I am deliberately trying to avoid calling them 'characters' as that term carries with it the connotations of being fictitious)" (p. 25). Belfield's idea of the term 'characters' carrying with it the connotations of being fictitious is useful for the verbatim theatre maker to consider as the voices in verbatim theatre are not those of fictitious 'characters' but real people.

Kelly Petersen, one of the actors in *Strong Female Characters*, comments on the rehearsal process:

The rehearsal process was different to non-verbatim theatre projects. I feel that the biggest difference is that you are playing a person that has already been determined; you are not creating your own "character" in the way you can in other shows. You cannot twist the words to mean different things, or add subtext that wasn't in the interviews like you can in non-verbatim theatre. Your goal is to stay as true as possible to the

original meaning and delivery of the text. (K. Petersen, personal communication, April 30, 2019)

In Kelly's opinion the goal of the verbatim actor is "to stay as true as possible to the original meaning and delivery of the text". Referring to the interviewees by their name or approved anonymous title helps the actor to do this. Using the interviewee's real name or initial instead of an invented 'character name' such as "girl who says no" helps both theatre makers and actors think of the interviewees as more than just content, or sources of material, but as multi-faceted and 'real' people. I believe it is also a sign of honour and respect to refer to the interviewees by their names. It is usual to acknowledge playwrights, directors and actors by name therefore it seems appropriate to refer to those who literally gave the text of the play by name.

#### 6.2.4. ANONYMITY

Because the majority of the interviewees included in *Strong Female Characters* were happy with being identifiable, some of the identifying elements from their testimony were included in the script. One instance in *Strong Female Characters* in which the interviewees were highly identifiable were the scenes including testimony from the group interview I conducted with my mum, twin sister and grandmother (Celia, Hannah & Mary). Some of the testimony from this interview that appears in play includes them referring to one another by name.

Throughout their interview they also routinely made reference to my presence behind the camera as the interviewer in such a way that makes them recognisable as my family.

While my family had consented to being identifiable in the play there were many instances during interviews where interviewees would refer to other important people in their lives by name such as their husbands, boyfriends, friends and colleagues. Instances such as these force the verbatim theatre maker to make an ethical decision. That is, should interviewees' testimony that mentions others be

included in the play? Perhaps because these 'others' have not given consent to be included in the play it is unethical to use any testimony that refers to them, unless the theatre maker subsequently gains their consent. Considering this, the exclusion of any such material would preserve the anonymity of 'others' referred to by interviewees and therefore could be considered to be the most ethical course of action. However, removing all mention of them may require a more vigorous process of editing which while protects the 'others' identity, could potentially compromise the veracity of the original testimony and misrepresent the interviewee. This scenario exemplifies the idea that deciding the most ethical course of action can sometimes be a process of questioning and negotiation.

In my own practice when interviewees would refer to 'others' by name, if it would not compromise the sense and coherency of the testimony, I would remove the name entirely. Alternatively I would replace the name with phrases such as 'my husband' or 'my ex-boyfriend' or completely change the name. While these methods do not completely erase all possibility of the 'other' being identified, it aimed to lower the chances. Ultimately when verbatim theatre is performed back to the community from whence the testimony came there is always a possibility that audience members may be able to identify interviewees and the 'others' they mention.

In the performance of *Strong Female Characters* in many of the instances when interviewees would quote 'others' in their lives I would direct an actor to present an embodied representation of this other person. One example of this was when an interviewee (Briar) recounted an argument she had had with her ex-boyfriend. While Kelly was voicing Briar Megan was physically representing the ex-boyfriend. Megan reflects on the ethical considerations she had to navigate in this moment. She states

In one scene I portrayed the ex-boyfriend of a participant, and was reminded in rehearsal not to overact and portray the boyfriend in such a negative light, as the person was not there to 'stand up' for themselves. As an actor, I then really had to focus on how the participant portrayed

this person in their story, doing no more than what they gave in their interview, in order to remain in some degree unbiased. (M. Goldsman, personal communication, April 26, 2019)

Megan's reflection suggests that ethical practice in verbatim theatre requires both the director and actor to consider the testimony of interviewees impartially and unbiasedly. In the 'ex-boyfriend' moment I advised Megan to not villainise Briar's ex-boyfriend in her embodiment of him. It is not our job as theatre practitioners to cast a judgement on interviewees or the 'others' they mention and refer to. Briar's testimony already presents her ex-boyfriend biasedly and to 'overact' the representation of the 'ex-boyfriend' would have presented him with an unnecessary and unethical element of judgement.

### 6.3. CONSTRUCTION AND REHEARSAL PROCESS

The construction of *Strong Female Characters* was first a process of distillation. To begin the process of condensing the hours of verbatim material I had collected down into an hour long performance text I first used my instinct. Blythe advises verbatim theatre makers to "trust your instincts – if you have a connection with an interviewee, if they make you laugh or move you to tears, then chances are they will do the same to the audience" (Belfield, 2018, p. 157). Similarly Young reflects on Fiona Graham's work as dramaturg for *Be / Longing* (2012). He states

One thing in particular she did with us which I remember being very helpful. So we'd been watching the interviews concertededly and she just said to us "ok now tell me what you remember. What stands out for you from the interviews?" Her point was having done an interview, before you then go back and revisit the interview, if you just stop and think a day or two later "oh what do I remember? What stands out?" It can be really helpful to register. They may not be the points that you end up using or highlighting in the play but the chances are they're a very good cue. (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018)

Both Blythe and Young allude to the idea that the bits of testimony that stay with you after the interview are more likely to resonate with others. This idea informed my initial selection for what would be included in *Strong Female Characters*. It was at this point that I began to get the actors actively involved in the process. In preparation for my first session with the actors I allocated each actor three of the nine interviews to watch and/or read the transcript of. When we got together I asked them each to identify the sections of the interviews that had resonated with them. In every instance the sections that the actors identified were the same as mine, which solidified my dramaturgical ‘instincts’. The pinpointing of memorable and resonating moments from the amassed testimony could be considered the first step of Kaufman’s Moment Work. The identification of these independent moments of testimony was the starting point from which we began the process of constructing the work. This was a process of identifying and positioning different moments next to one another to try and create a theatrical narrative.

For our next ensemble session I brought in physical printouts of all of the interview transcripts which we physically cut up, and inspired by Paget, separated the material into three piles.

The mass of material begins to resolve itself into three piles, each accorded a priority: one of material which the company believes must be included in the show; another of material about which the company are undecided; and the final pile of material of no further immediate use.

(Paget, 1987, p. 329)

After this preliminary organizing of the verbatim material, together the actors and I were able to begin constructing a tentative working script. We began by working with the material from the pile of testimony we collectively agreed “must be included in the show”. We laid all the cut out chunks of transcript on the floor and experimented with physically moving and sequencing different voices and fragments of testimony together (see figures 1 & 2). Inspired by Brown’s nodal technique we identified moments of intersection and contrast

between different interviews. We created loose nodes and identified the overarching themes and ideas emerging from the material.



Figure 1: Kelly Petersen, Missy Mooney & Megan Goldsman constructing the script of *Strong Female Characters*. (Cian Gardner, 2018).



Figure 2: Megan Goldsman, Missy Mooney & Kelly Petersen constructing the script of *Strong Female Characters*. (Cian, Gardner, 2018).

The embodied exercise of physically mapping our way through the play, while more time consuming than digitally editing, gave the testimony and by proxy the interviewee, a physical form and presence in the rehearsal room. We were able to physically see “the implications that positioning moments next to other moments has for creating narrative” (Hopkins, 2011, p. 16). Deleting text in a word document does not feel as momentous as physically placing a piece of paper with an interviewee’s words into the ‘not using’ pile. Physically handling the testimony made the editing process tangible and tactile and helped to keep us continually conscious of the interviewees’ absence and the fact that we were holding real people’s words and experience in our hands. Through this physical sequencing of the play we created our first working draft of *Strong Female Characters* and began rehearsing on our feet.

#### 6.4. ETHICS IN THE DRAMATURGICAL CONSTRUCTION AND REHEARSAL OF *STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS*

The dramaturgical construction and rehearsal process of *Strong Female Characters* was influenced by several key ethical principles, values and ideas, some of which include kindness, honour, respect and empowerment. The notion of honour is one of the ethical principles at the heart of this verbatim practice. To hold in honour can be defined as: “to respect highly; to treat or regard with honour or respect; to feel or show respect or admiration for” (“Honour”, n.d.). Young similarly states of his and Hilary Halba’s verbatim practice that “a principle of our work and kind of our mantra is that you're always seeking to respect and honour the person that you're representing and their testimony” (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018). Throughout the construction and rehearsal process of *Strong Female Characters* I aimed to foster a working environment that placed ethics and the principles of honour and respect at the forefront. Kelly, Cian and Megan all took the responsibility they had as the actors in *Strong Female Characters* very seriously, seeking to always honour and respect the integrity of the interviewees and their testimony.

As we collectively constructed the dramaturgical structure and progression of the piece we were simultaneously continually defining and evaluating our ethical practice. Kelly reflects on her involvement in the project:

Missy was very conscientious about being ethical to her participants and the way we treated their words. Missy's emphasis on the ethics of verbatim theatre made me feel very aware of the responsibility and privilege I had when sharing another person's words and opinions with an audience. (K. Petersen, personal communication, April 30, 2019)

Cian similarly states that

Ethics should be at the forefront of the verbatim process. It is important that the actor understands that to perform this theatre form they need to approach it without ego, and understand that they are not the most important thing; that in fact sharing the words that have been given by the interviewees is. (C. Gardner, personal communication, April 22, 2019)

Cian offers useful advice for any actor embarking on a verbatim theatre project. By identifying "sharing the words that have been given by the interviewees" as the "most important thing" Cian implicates the actor in a crucial role in the preservation of ethical practice.

The collective act of honouring and respecting interviewees united everyone working on *Strong Female Characters*. We became an ensemble and equal contributors to the work. Robinson states that "the collective method of doing verbatim shows seems to remove the difference between performers, directors, sometimes designers...Some of the warmth of the generosity of the stuff that's been given to you passes into the rehearsal room" (Paget, 1987, p. 318). The idea Kelly presents of feeling "privileged" to share the verbatim material with an audience resonates with Robinson's ideas of "generosity" and "warmth". Working with verbatim material does create a unique sense of "privilege" and "generosity" in the rehearsal room. Young (2017) states that verbatim or "fact based theatre not only explores worthy causes, but it is also potentially empowering and liberating, for audiences as well as participants" (p. 25). One of

the goals of *Strong Female Characters* was to empower and liberate the women whose stories we were telling. However, through the experience of collectively, ethically and respectfully constructing the play we, the theatre makers, also felt a sense of liberation and empowerment.

“The process of rehearsal is a process of meaning making; it is the process of putting together pieces from the field that were not necessarily collected together” (Hopkins, 2011, p. 13). One of the key ideas explored in this thesis is the idea that the process of constructing verbatim theatre and putting together pieces of narrative collected from different interviews is both an ethical and dramaturgical task. Creating *Strong Female Characters* was very much a collective ethical task, in which the three actors and I all played a crucial role. Megan reflects that

As an actor with input during the creative process of *Strong Female Characters* I had firsthand experience of the role of ethics in creating verbatim theatre. From the perspective I have post-performance I feel I can truly say that the ethical obligations of verbatim theatre completely shape the creative work, from interview to stage. Every undertaking in *Strong Female Characters* came from a point of ethical consideration, from the selection of material, representation of voices and people (in a rehearsal, script, and performance situation), and the structural development of the piece. (M. Goldsman, personal communication, April 26, 2019)

During the rehearsal process we realised that the actor’s precise rendering of the interviewees’ vocal patterns and physicality was not always enough to ethically honour and respect the interviewees and their testimony. There are multiple instances throughout the play when one actor is presenting an interviewee’s monologue in direct address to the audience. We experimented with what the two other actors onstage should be doing when they are not ‘actively performing’. In many instances it was appropriate for these ‘inactive’ actors to passively exist in the individual ‘world’ and physicality of the interviewee they

were next representing until they next spoke. However, there were some instances where it became evident that it was ethically important for the passive actors to be more visibly engaged in the focal action onstage. One such moment was when Megan delivered an interviewee's story detailing the adversity she had faced as a trans woman when trying to get a life insurance policy.

We initially experimented with Cian and Kelly existing in the individual world of their respective interviewees, so they appeared not to be actively aware of Megan delivering Kodee's monologue. This dramaturgical strategy had been ethically appropriate for other monologues in the play, as it more accurately recreated the original interview environment, in which only Kodee and I had been present. However, for this section of testimony it felt both ethically and dramaturgically wrong. In this monologue Kodee states "if they took two seconds to actually hear me as a person, as a human, not as a woman or a male, but as a person, and actually see where I'm coming from" (Appendix 2, p. 158).

Considering this, we made the decision that the actors would look at Megan when she was delivering Kodee's testimony. This was a way of putting all of the attention on Kodee, and aimed to signify that the actors were listening to her struggles and were "hearing her as a person". This moment serves as one example of how an ethical dramaturgy in verbatim theatre could be achieved.

## 6.5. PERFORMANCE AND REFLECTION

*Strong Female Characters* was performed to a small audience comprised of the interviewees and a small number of invited guests and colleagues. The performance was well received and many of the interviewees contacted me after the performance to express that they enjoyed the play and were pleased with their representation. One of the interviewees that contacted me with some feedback on the performance stated in her email: "I'd love to meet for feedback. There were a couple of bits I said that I wasn't sure about you using if the play was to be done again". When I met with this interviewee to discern exactly what

she wanted altered she identified two sections of testimony where she wanted to change the wording to make herself less identifiable.

I assumed that one of these changes would be the removal of the section in the play where one of the other interviewees (Hannah) refers to her by name and directly identifies this interviewee as her boss. However, to my surprise, she was adamant for that section to stay. She was proud to be Hannah's boss and was moved by what Hannah had said about her. The changes she wanted to make were references to previous work projects she had been involved in that may identify her. I asked her why she wanted those changes but was still happy to be identified by name in the script. She replied that when she watched *Strong Female Characters* she felt that these particular sections of testimony, within the context of the piece as a whole and in the company of the other interviewees testimony, made her feel like she was bragging about her career achievements. Young states that "it's quite interesting how the ethics extend beyond what you immediately think of" (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018). This interviewee's requested alterations to script exemplify this idea. I had not anticipated this kind of rationale for requesting edits to the script. I subsequently sent this interviewee an email with suggested alterations which she approved. In order to ethically honour this interviewee the version of the script that appears as Appendix 2 in this thesis is not the performance script, but the version of the script that includes the interviewee's requested changes.

When making these small alterations to the script I tried to disrupt the original testimony as little as possible. Wherever possible I preferred to remove words instead of changing or adding new words to the testimony. My rationale for this tactic being that the addition of new words felt to be a more dramatic and invasive act of editing. It would be like literally putting words in the interviewee's mouth. Also the construction of *Strong Female Characters* had been a process of distillation through a series of careful removals, so to begin adding words at this late stage would be a shift in dramaturgical and ethical practice.

While I was initially disappointed that this interviewee was not 100% happy with how they were represented in the inaugural performance of *Strong Female Characters*, I am immensely grateful that I was able to rectify the situation. This experience was unexpected and presented an important learning opportunity that I would not have had, had I not used practice-led and action research methodologies. This experience produced a meaningful realisation that will inform my ethical practice should I create any more verbatim theatre. I would advise verbatim theatre practitioners to always, where possible, give a preview performance of the piece to the interviewees before the work is presented to the public. This gives the interviewees the opportunity to see the final product before it is truly final. They are able to see their testimony within the context of the work as a whole and see how it is received by others.

Another interviewee contacted me after the performance and stated

It was my first taste of verbatim theatre and I didn't know how it would work but it flowed so well and was so interesting...The actors were amazing and the actor that did my lines freaked me out because even though she didn't see me saying those words she really sounded and acted like me! Which was so wicked. I had so much fun being a part of your process.

This interviewee had preferred for their interview not to be video recorded and was also made anonymous and referred to only by her first initial in the play script. This meant that the actors did not know the name of this interviewee or what they looked like. All they had to inform their performance was the audio recording and transcript of the interview. The actor representing the voice of this interviewee found capturing the essence of this interviewee more difficult than others, as she did not have the paralinguistic details of the interview or a visual point of reference to build a physical score for her performance.

Belfield (2018) states that in rehearsal “the director’s role is to support the actors’ efforts to faithfully replicate the voices from your research” (p. 130). As I had met this anonymous interviewee to conduct the original interview I helped

the actor develop an appropriate physical performance based on my memory of the interview. Both the actor and I were ethically conscious of not misrepresenting this interviewee by presenting an inappropriate physicality that either made the interviewee too identifiable or was too contrived and completely inaccurate. The actor representing this interviewee and I were pleased to receive the interviewee's positive response post-performance that indicates her approval of our representation of her in the play. The actor was amazed that she was able to give such an accurate performance without ever meeting the interviewee. This illustrates the power of spoken verbatim testimony. While the physical score of an interview is immensely helpful in informing the actor's physical performance, the audio recording of an interview offers a considerable amount of insight into the person.

## 7. FINDINGS

### 7.1. DRAMATURGY

“The process of transforming fragmentary materials into a complete piece of documentary theatre is really more of a dramaturgical task than it is one of playwriting” (Chemers, 2010, p. 140). Halba and Young (2014) comment on the process of creating *Hush* and state that “our dramatic and theatrical interventions took two principal forms: the first was the dramaturgical task of creating the play itself; the second was its particular theatrical expression” (p. 105). Similarly Kaufman states that “whenever we do a play, we have two interests in mind: form and content” (R. Brown, 2005, p. 51). Kaufman, Halba and Young suggest that there are two interests central to the dramaturgical construction of verbatim theatre. These interests are firstly the “content” of the play or the “dramaturgical task of creating the play itself” and secondly, the dramaturgical processes of developing the “form” or the play’s “particular theatrical expression”.

The idea of having “two interests in mind” could also be used to encapsulate the potential struggle verbatim theatre makers face trying to acknowledge the dual responsibilities they have to their interviewees and audience when constructing their work. Blythe (2008) remarks “I am always faced with the same struggle between remaining faithful to the interview and creating dramatic narrative” (p. 94). The findings presented in this section of the thesis aim to offer examples of how an ethical dramaturgy that remains faithful to the interviewees and has an engaging dramatic narrative could be constructed through consideration of dramaturgical techniques such as simultaneous montage and physical dramaturgy. Blythe articulates the tension between the process and the product. My findings offer some suggestions from the comparatively luxurious position of being able to craft *Strong Female Characters* with my main focus being creating an ethical dramaturgy and minimal focus on a product.

Some verbatim practitioner's methodologies, such as Kaufman's Moment Work, are influenced by multiple 'types' of dramaturgy such as epic theatre and physical dramaturgy. Both epic theatre and physical dramaturgy are built upon a horizontal structure of theatrical elements in which "the text becomes an equal element of theatrical performance rather than the dominant element" (R. Brown, 2005, p. 53). Verbatim theatre practitioners perhaps embrace dramaturgies that challenge the traditional vertical hierarchy of theatrical elements as they can be better suited to navigating the unique ethical obligations and considerations of verbatim theatre.

Eugenio Barba while an influential figure in contemporary dramaturgy contrastingly views his dramaturgy in a 'vertical dimension'. "It [the dramaturgy] was a way of observing the different layers or levels of the work, independently from the performance's meanings. I distinguished these levels and developed them separately, as if they were unrelated" (Barba, 2010, p. 9). Barba uses the terms "levels" and "layers" not in a hierarchical sense, but to capture the idea of simultaneous dramaturgy. In the context of verbatim theatre Barba's notion of "different layers or levels of the work" could be representative of the different interviewees and their testimonies, which need to be developed separately "as if they were unrelated" before they can be juxtaposed and interwoven to create the performance text.

Barba (2010) states "when I made different events simultaneous, I composed a story which was articulated according to the rules of space instead of those of time" (p. 102). The simultaneous juxtaposition of events meant that Barba could "relate independent events and situations when their only bond was to be contained within the same space. It was simultaneity which connected the different events" (Barba, 2010, p. 102). This action "can be thought and realised as a *simultaneous montage* of different components which, by interacting, provoke unforeseeable and diverse feelings and meanings for each spectator" (Barba, 2010, p. 101). Barba's concept of simultaneous montage was a valuable dramaturgical tool I used when creating *Strong Female Characters*. The play's

dramaturgy was constructed upon the “independent events and situations” of different interviewees existing in the same performance space.

The utilisation of simultaneous montage also prevented *Strong Female Characters* from turning into simply a “random collection of monologues” (Soans, 2008, p. 26). The majority of the interviews I conducted for *Strong Female Characters* involved only two people, myself and the interviewee. Therefore an accurate recreation of the interview would have resulted in the actors delivering monologues directly to the audience who are subsequently ‘cast’ as the attentive but silent interviewer. Soans recognizes this as a common and anticipated dramaturgical characteristic of verbatim theatre. He states that “the quintessence of verbatim theatre is group of actors sitting on chairs, or cardboard boxes or a sofa, talking to the audience, simply telling stories” (Soans, 2008, p. 21). While a considerable portion of *Strong Female Characters* was the actors sitting on chairs and couches “simply telling stories” I was aware that “the verbatim play must be more than a random collection of monologues if it is to sustain interest over a whole evening” (Soans, 2008, p. 26).

One instance in *Strong Female Characters* which incorporated simultaneous montage was ‘Scene 1’ which the actors and I also referred to as the ‘fertility scene’. This scene is primarily composed of the verbatim testimony of two interviewees, who in their interviews each discussed their respective struggles with fertility. When initially constructing the script I first experimented with simply placing each interviewee’s respective ‘monologue’ one after another. However, this structuring did not respectfully capture these women’s individual struggles with fertility, and instead made the play and the testimony seem repetitive. I wanted to organise the testimony in such a way that acknowledged the interviewees’ individual struggles with fertility while simultaneously acknowledging fertility struggles within the wider social context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Considering this, I then experimented with creating a kind of ‘fertility montage’, in which I broke up the interviewees’ individual monologues into smaller sections and interwove them to form a ‘moment’. Inspired by Barba I

then directed the two actors to still focus on their respective testimony “as if they were unrelated”.

This montaging made evident that the scene was composed of two individuals’ different experiences and testimony while simultaneously illustrating the similarities between these women’s struggles. Fertility New Zealand (2019) state that “infertility will affect 26% of New Zealanders at some stage of their life”. The presentation of these two different interviewees’ struggles in the same space using simultaneous montage created a sense of community among the interviewees and spectators. The interviewees were no longer alone in their struggle. The use of simultaneous montage in this scene not only made the presentation of the testimony more dramaturgically dynamic but it also felt like a more nuanced and thoughtful way to represent and honour not just the interviewees, but others who have struggled with fertility.

Introductory discussion of dramaturgy in earlier sections of this thesis identifies that dramaturgy is rooted in constructing the cultural identity of a nation and inherently concerned with the enlightenment and education of audiences (Lehmann & Primavesi, 2009, p. 5). Considering this, in order to enlighten and educate audiences the dramaturg should perhaps not only be aware of what is happening narratively within the play text, but they must also acknowledge the cultural and social narrative of the world around them. Using simultaneous montage in the ‘fertility scene’ enabled me to acknowledge and address the social and cultural narrative surrounding fertility in Aotearoa New Zealand. The dramaturg must also embrace the zeitgeist which can be defined as “the defining spirit or mood of a particular period, esp. as reflected in the prevailing ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of the time; the social or cultural trends prevalent at a particular time” (“Zeitgeist”, n.d.). The zeitgeist should impact the ‘aesthetic architecture’ or the dramaturgy of a piece of theatre. Turner and Behrndt (2008) refer to the postmodern and contemporary dramaturg as a “map-maker and compass-bearer” (p. 176). This analogy requires the dramaturg to not only have their destination in sight, but they must be able to read the signs and recognise

the landmarks, which could be understood as the cultural and societal trends surrounding them.

Barba's simultaneous montage can be used to both give directors more control and give the audience more autonomy. Barba (2010) remarks on "the alternation between pre-arranged hierarchy and a free hierarchy" (p. 102). This is the relationship in the performance space between the

main actions and secondary actions, and was one of the rhythms on which I concentrated in every scene. It was a dance in which at times the author of montage -the director- was intent on guiding the spectator's attention. At other times the spectator was free to decide the montage according to the rhythms of his own choices. (Barba, 2010, p. 102)

While my use of simultaneous montage for the 'fertility scene' was "intent on guiding the spectator's attention" there were 'moments' in *Strong Female Characters* where I aimed to not tightly guide the audience's attention, and allow the audience more autonomy. This was most evident in the more physical and choreographic sequences of the performance.

The beginning of *Strong Female Characters* is an example of a physical and choreographic sequence. The performance began with the actors performing nonverbal sequences of movement accompanied by a guitar piece specifically composed for *Strong Female Characters* played live. Each of the actors performed a short independent sequence of movements inspired by me (Missy) preparing to conduct an interview. Megan's movement sequence involved packing and unpacking a back pack. Kelly's was inspired by checking the camera was working and Cian's movement incorporated picking up her keys and Dictaphone then walking forward. The actors performed their movement sequences simultaneously in a loop three times. This movement sequence exemplifies simultaneous montage, as the actors were clearly existing in their individual worlds and performing independent choreography, and yet they were united and meaning was created by their independent actions being presented in the same performance space. In this choreographic sequence the actors'

movements are not immediately perceivable as directly tied to the play's narrative and the audience are given the opportunity to freely focus on whatever they like.

This movement sequence is followed by what the actors and I referred to as the 'Missy Montage'. This refers to when all three actors simultaneously represent me as the interviewer. The montage is comprised of bits of my testimony from the beginning of each recorded interview, such as stating the date, introducing myself and explaining my research. This use of montage aims to contextualise the play within the frame of an interview and immediately draw attention to my ethical practice as an interviewer. One audience member commented on this opening scene in a personal communication with me post-performance. They state:

the opening scene, with all 3 women playing you conducting your interview was a particularly nice moment. I feel, in some cases, it seems as if verbatim theatre tries to put all of the interviews and research into a "this all happened over a day" type story. I felt that your opening scene moved away from that, in order to bring more truth to the play. You also included yourself in a way that felt natural to the story.

Barba offers a warning to theatre makers who incorporate simultaneous montage in the construction of their work. He states

a performance which is based on the simultaneity of situations which have nothing to do with each other can easily fall into meaninglessness and boredom resulting from arbitrariness. It must prove that it is able to live in the spectator in spite of its deliberate unintelligibility. (Barba, 2010, p. 105)

Taking heed of Barba's advice, I deliberately sequenced the 'Missy Montage' immediately after the potentially "unintelligible" opening choreographic sequence to prevent it from becoming "meaningless" and "arbitrary". I also interpreted Barba's warning in an ethical sense, and understood it as advising

the verbatim theatre maker to take care when disrupting and reordering verbatim material. A too vigorous deconstruction of the testimony for the sake of montage could result in the verbatim work becoming too far removed from its original context. My acknowledgement of the 'original' interview context in the construction and presentation of *Strong Female Characters* was positively praised as being a particular triumph of the piece by audience members. An audience member stated in feedback to me after the performance that "the edit and organising was impressive. I especially liked the meta-verbatim context, where the idea of verbatim theatre and the interview context was reflected".

The successful use of simultaneous montage in the dramaturgical construction of *Strong Female Characters* was achieved through working collaboratively with my actors. Collaboration and co-operation can be understood as an inherent aspect of dramaturgical practice. Graham (2017) states "the work of a dramaturge<sup>5</sup> is primarily about artistic collaboration. Dramaturges do not work alone because their role is to develop the work of others" (p. 2). This is especially relevant to the construction of a verbatim theatre, as the foundation of verbatim theatre is the development of the words of others. In the same way that the interviewing and collection of verbatim material is often done by a group of theatre makers or actors, as exemplified in the Tectonic Theater Project's creation of *The Laramie Project*, it may be that the dramaturgy is not the responsibility of the single dramaturg but a collective activity of all those involved in the work. "In devising, dramaturgs might be specifically assigned or in the form of true collaboration everyone might serve as dramaturg just as everyone serves equally as writer, musician, composer, actor, dancer, or in short creator-performer" (Stankiewicz, 2015, p. 195).

Physical dramaturgy is often achieved through collaboration and many poignant 'moments' in *Strong Female Characters* were discovered through the

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<sup>5</sup> Note that Graham's spelling of 'dramaturge' differs to 'dramaturg' which is used throughout this thesis. Both are accepted spellings of the term and are used based on individual preference. As I am directly referencing Graham I acknowledge her preferred spelling.

collaborative exploration of physical dramaturgy. One such moment was 'Scene 11' which the actors and I also referred to as 'Walking at Night'. This section is comprised of the verbatim testimony of three different interviewees who all talked about the fear they feel when walking to their car alone at night. They explain, because they are afraid of getting attacked, that they always hold their keys in their hand so that if they were suddenly attacked they would have some kind of weapon to defend themselves with. In rehearsals we initially approached this section with the intention to precisely capture the interviewee's vocal and physical delivery of the testimony. However, it soon became apparent that this approach was not working and didn't feel 'right'. We realised and collectively agreed that in order to honour these sections of testimony we needed to do more than precisely replicate the speech and body language of the interviewees. We needed to find a way to acknowledge and make legitimate the fear they feel when walking alone at night.

In order to achieve this I explained to my actors that I wanted to try and create an environment that the audience experienced physically, an environment in which the interviewees' fear was tangible and therefore potentially more comprehensible for the audience. This was ultimately achieved by the manipulation of multiple theatrical elements. Firstly, by dimming the lights to an almost black out level in which the actors used their cell phone torches to provide some illumination on stage. This darkness intended to disrupt the primal sense of comfort and safety we get from being able to see our surroundings. The darkness also sought to destabilise the established power dynamic in which the audience are placed in a position of observational power over the actors, and unite actors and audience by collectively depriving them of their sight. The interviewees' fear was also acknowledged and re-presented through the way in which the actors related to one another and to the architecture of the performance space. When delivering the testimony, the actors with keys clutched in their hands, would glance over their shoulders into the expansive blackness as if checking to see if anyone was following them. This physicality was

inspired by the interviewees' recorded testimony of the behaviours and precautions they take when walking at night.

Ultimately the actors' physicality transformed the performance space from an environment that was comfortable and familiar into a space that was dark and unnerving. In this situation the narrative was made comprehensible through the actors' bodies in space, which could be understood physical dramaturgy. In the 'Walking at Night' scene the actors' distance from one another helped create a sense of isolation, but the presence of all three actors onstage also created a sense of unity in their isolating fear. I felt that the physical dramaturgy of this 'moment' was an ethical, respectful and honourable way of representing the interviewees and their fears.

*In Aftershocks* (as in most verbatim plays), monologues are combined into nodal scenes which interweave fragments from different interviewee speeches. The end result is something akin to, but distinct from dialogue, with characters seeming at once isolated and even lonely, and yet connected with a community of listeners. (Mumford, 2010, p. 46)

In 'Walking at Night' I aimed to legitimise the interviewees' fears by presenting their testimony in a nodal montage. This dramaturgical decision united the initially isolated testimony of individuals in the communal performance space, which in turn validated the fears of individual interviewees, as they are able to see that others have the same fears, and that they are not alone in their fear. Furthermore their fears are acknowledged and listened to by an audience who become an attentive "community of listeners".

## 7.2. ETHICS

The "shared intellectual responsibility" (Stalpaert, 2009, p. 123) that is cultivated through a physical dramaturgy could be translated into a verbatim context as 'shared ethical responsibility'. In verbatim theatre the construction of the dramaturgy is an ethical task. Therefore, the collective construction of the

dramaturgy is simultaneously a collective construction of ethical principles. Hopkins (2011) states that “defining a code of ethics is a function of rehearsal” (p. 13), which is a continually evolving and developing process. As identified earlier in this thesis, ethics can be understood as a way of thinking that asks fundamental questions about right and wrong (R. Anderson, 2011, p. 2). Considering this, ethical practice in verbatim theatre could be understood as a process of thinking, questioning and consideration of different ethical principles and ideas.

Belfield (2018) urges the verbatim theatre maker to “be careful – as in ‘full of care’. You are the custodian of this testimony; look after it and treat it with respect” (p. 162). Belfield’s presentation of the verbatim theatre maker as “custodian” is apt, as it evokes notions of guardianship and protection. While the verbatim theatre maker can be considered the primary custodian of the verbatim material ‘care’ could be perceived as an important ethical principle to be considered by all those involved in the verbatim work. An actor echoes the idea of guarding the verbatim material and reflects that “you end up coming away with a tremendous respect for the thing that somebody has told you. You tend to guard it...you want to be as true to the spirit of that as you possibly can be” (Paget, 1987, p. 330). Similarly British actors Hilary Maclean and Paul Thornley reflect on acting in verbatim theatre. Thornley remarks that “it’s your job to say it as they said it, as much as you possibly can” (Belfield, 2018, p. 114). Maclean identifies a connection between the specificity of vernacular language found in verbatim theatre and the work of British playwright Harold Pinter. She states when reflecting on performing in Richard Norton-Taylor’s verbatim play *The Colour of Justice* (1999): “it’s sort of Pinteresque in that way...You chuck an ‘um’ in and it’s wrong, that little gap, that little pause will say something which is incorrect; it might give an intention which is incorrect” (Belfield, 2018, p. 119).

From considering ethics in verbatim theatre from the point of view of both theatre makers and actors it is evident that both parties feel an ethical obligation to protect and accurately represent the verbatim subjects and their testimony.

Therefore, the ethical protection and re-presentation of verbatim testimony could be understood to be a collective task of everyone involved in the work. Similarly, the development of ethical principles to guide the construction of a piece of verbatim theatre is a collective task.

Belfield (2018) states that when creating verbatim theatre  
in order to navigate through the grey mists of ethics, we need to ensure that our agenda is in check and continue to ask ourselves: ‘are my choices being made in the best interest of telling the story in the clearest, most engaging way possible; whilst at the same time retaining integrity towards its subject?’ (p. 110)

This statement is helpful to verbatim theatre makers as it illustrates the dual responsibilities verbatim theatre makers have to their interviewees and presents the idea that ethical practice is a continual process of self-questioning. However, the construction of Belfield’s statement could be considered to potentially prioritise the audience over verbatim subjects, simply because retaining the subject’s integrity is mentioned secondary to “telling the story in the clearest most engaging way possible.”

The notion of prioritising of the communication of the story to the audience over the integrity of the ‘subject’ could be interpreted as being influenced by consequentialist theory, specifically the utilitarian “greatest happiness” principle. Consequentialism is a prominent ethical theory often discussed in moral philosophy. “The term consequentialism was devised to describe a view that says that the moral character of an action is determined solely by its consequences” (Benn, 1998, p. 60). Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialist theory that suggests the desired consequences that should inform our moral or ethical decisions should be overall or maximum good, happiness or pleasure. Significant classical utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill argues that “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote pleasure or happiness” (as cited in Benn, 1998, p. 61). Fellow utilitarian Jeremy Bentham states that in utilitarianism “the

greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation” (as cited in R. Anderson, 2011, p. 27).

In a verbatim theatre context the “greatest number” could be understood as the audience. Therefore, considering the utilitarian model, producing the “greatest happiness” of the audience could be a key ethical concern of the theatre maker. David Hare states that “what all playwrights address is the event between the stage and the audience” (Hammond, 2008, p. 59). This is the idea that theatre is dependent on the engagement of the audience. Similarly Belfield (2018) urges verbatim theatre makers to consider their audience, advising that the audience “should be central to your decision at every stage...take them into consideration from the beginning” (p. 15). This consideration of the audience could be understood as contemplation of what an audience wants from the theatre experience. Blythe (2008) states that “an audience wants to be entertained, and this means being gripped by a story” (p. 101). Verbatim theatre makers do have a responsibility to their audience and may therefore honour this responsibility by aiming to create the “the greatest happiness in the greatest number”. However in verbatim theatre the theatre maker has an obligation not only to their audience, but a profound ethical obligation to their interviewees’ as well. Blythe similarly acknowledges this tension.

I do feel a responsibility to present them [the interviewees] in a way that they are happy with. At the same time I have a responsibility to the audience to present them with a good evening’s theatre. A successful play will strike a balance between the two. (Blythe, 2008, p. 94)

“Presenting a good evening’s theatre” could be understood as presenting theatre that has an engaging and entertaining ‘theatricality’, which could be considered as a way of cultivating the “greatest happiness” of the audience. Peters (2017) comments that “often verbatim theatre relies on reflective stories and is therefore stereotypically deemed un-theatrical” (p. 121). In order to combat this “un-theatricality” and entertain his audiences verbatim theatre director Max Stafford-Clark exclaims that he’d “always go for theatricality” (as cited in

Cantrell, 2013, p. 48). Cantrell (2013) goes on to state that Stafford-Clark's statement "meant that he privileged a workable dramaturgy over a precise rendering of the interviewee" (p. 48). Stafford-Clark's consideration of "theatricality" suggests that he is conscious of how the work will be received by the audience, and that "theatricality" will result in a more engaging and entertaining dramaturgy that will maximize audiences' "happiness". Considering the utilitarian model, Stafford-Clark could be morally justified in prioritising a more theatrical representation of the verbatim testimony over a faithful rendering of the interviewee. However, the utilitarian paradigm does not consider the ethical obligations verbatim theatre makers have to their interviewees. While it is necessary for the verbatim theatre maker to consider the responsibility they have to their audience, the prioritising of 'theatricality' over an accurate and considerate re-presentation of the interviewees and their testimony could be potentially damaging and distressing for interviewees, especially if they feel that they have been exploited or misrepresented.

Halba and Young also comment on the notion of "theatricality" when creating verbatim theatre. They state that "in making *Hush*, we were conscious of a range of ethical and moral considerations, and the project was carried out according to the University of Otago's strict ethical protocols." (Halba & Young, 2014, p. 104). While ethics was at the forefront of the creation process of *Hush*, they identify that they initially found that they were drawn to present the verbatim material with an unsuitable level of "theatricality". They reflect on *Hush's* creation process stating "our first draft of the play did not work at all: we re-arranged elements of the testimonies and their narratives in a way that presumptuously added an inappropriate layer of interpretation and theatricality" (Halba & Young, 2014, p. 106).

They state that in that first draft of *Hush* "we initially identified one of our interviewees, Doug, as a perpetrator and only subsequently traced the abuse he had suffered as a child. Our (re)ordering of the elements of Doug's story failed to honour the trauma he had experienced" (Halba & Young, 2014, p. 106). The re-

ordering of Doug's testimony, while initially may have presented as potentially more 'theatrically' engaging and entertaining for the audience, did not ethically honour Doug. On realising that they may not have honoured Doug Halba and Young (2014) state that "we duly started "writing" all over again, registering that we needed to respect the way in which our participants had told us their stories...accordingly, *Hush* now tells Doug's story largely as he did" (p. 106). Halba and Young's dramaturgical and ethical treatment of Doug's testimony exemplifies how ethical practice in verbatim theatre is often a process of questioning and re-evaluation. Their ultimate presentation of Doug's testimony could be understood as prioritising the ethical representation of him and his testimony over the "greatest happiness of the greatest many".

This interrogation of utilitarianism when applied to the verbatim theatre process suggests that consideration of the "the greatest happiness" principle alone may not be enough to inform appropriate ethical care and consideration of both the audience and verbatim subjects. The misrepresentation of interviewees and their testimony, even for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number", could be considered as inappropriate and unethical. The notion of an act being intrinsically inappropriate or wrong is encapsulated in deontological philosophy. Deontology is another ethical theory discussed in moral philosophy that "gives pride of place to rules or duties" (R. Anderson, 2011, 15). Deontology determines that actions can be inherently wrong regardless of their consequences. A deontological verbatim theatre maker would always prioritise the accurate and appropriate representation of an interviewee, as they would acknowledge that the act of misrepresentation is always ethically 'wrong', regardless of the potential for engaging dramaturgy or "theatricality".

Renowned deontologist Immanuel Kant created the 'categorical imperative' which "he divides into three formulations or maxims" (R. Anderson, 2011, p. 42). The second formulation<sup>6</sup> holds particular relevancy to the verbatim theatre

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<sup>6</sup> I reference the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative as I believe it contributes to discussion of different ethical principles that can inform the verbatim theatre making process.

maker. It instructs “act in a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant as cited in R. Anderson, 2011, p. 44).

Anderson (2011) goes on to explain that

Kant means that we should never treat others *simply* as tools or instruments in the pursuit of our own goals or desires...We must always simultaneously recognize them as free, independent individuals – (‘ends’) like ourselves – and ensure that in some sense they have consented to being ‘means’. (p. 44)

When applied to the context of ethics in verbatim theatre this maxim could be understood to mean that interviewees need to be treated as more than just the means to the theatre maker’s theatrical end. Instead the interviewees should be treated with dignity and not simply as useful sources of information to be mined. Anderson notes the importance of ensuring “in some sense they have consented to being a ‘means.’” In verbatim theatre this could be understood as providing interview participants with information sheets and letting them know exactly how their verbatim material will be used. Interviewees are only able to consent to being the ‘means’ to the ‘end’ if they are aware of exactly what the ‘means’ and ‘end’ are.

The re-presentation of real people’s words, thoughts and feelings in a theatrical setting is a unique ethical situation and challenge. One of the ideas under exploration in this thesis is the idea that while the editing of verbatim material into a performable script is obviously a dramaturgical task, it is equally an ethical task. Because I was able to construct *Strong Female Characters* uniquely as a

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The other two maxims, while part of Kant’s categorical imperative, are not as relevant to this discussion. The first maxim dictates that one should “act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (R. Anderson, 2011, p. 43). The third maxim could be understood as the idea that every person must act as if they were always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends. Anderson (2011) elaborates that “for Kant the ‘Kingdom of ends’ is a kind of utopian vision of a society which all the participants follow the first two formulations – free individuals who both make and obey rational universal law” (p. 45).

research experiment I did not have the same responsibilities and obligations as more experienced theatre makers. My research provided me with a depressurised platform from which I could purely focus and explore different ethical ideas and principles and how they can impact dramaturgy without the tension of having to engage and sustain the interest of a 'real' audience. However, through this theoretical examination of utilitarianism and deontology within the verbatim theatre context it is evident that perhaps an amalgamation of elements and aspects from both utilitarianism, deontology and alternative ethical theories could be incorporated into the verbatim theatre maker's ethical practice.

Regardless of the exact ethical theory used to underpin a verbatim practitioner's work it is apparent that ethical practice in verbatim theatre is founded on re-evaluation. Ethical practice is not static and fixed; it is situational. Ethics in verbatim theatre is not just a set of specific processes to follow; it is a way of thinking. This is the idea that ethics is not something that 'is' but something that is created, developed and collectively agreed upon through continual asking of questions. Hopkins states in relation to ethical guidelines when conducting performance ethnography: "the role of ethical guidelines...is to provide tools for researchers to approach and understand problems" (Hopkins, 2011, p. 14). It is important for verbatim theatre makers to acknowledge and understand ethics as not simply rules and regulations, but as a tool. A tool that can be continually applied, incorporated and used to build and shape their dramaturgy and theatre making practice.

### 7.3. TRUTH

Verbatim theatre is often perceived as being the 'truth'. Writer and theatre director Patrick Sandford states "verbatim theatre is about telling the truth" (Belfield, 2018, p. 158). The title of Belfield's book *Telling the Truth: How to Make Verbatim Theatre* implies that the creation and presentation of verbatim theatre is an act of 'truth telling'. Belfield (2018) states that "with verbatim

theatre we are aiming to present truth” (p. 75). Hammond and Steward (2008) similarly acknowledge verbatim theatre’s claim to ‘truth’.

The claim to veracity on the part of the theatre maker, however hazy or implicit, changes everything. Immediately, we approach the play not just as a play but also as an accurate source of information. We trust and expect that we are not being lied to. (p. 10)

In the last piece of testimony from Father Rodger Schmit included in *The Laramie Project* he implores the verbatim theatre makers of the Tectonic Theater Project to “just deal with what is true. You know what is true. You need to do your best to say it correct” (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater Project, 2001, p. 66). Father Schmit’s statement could be understood to mean that he is urging the theatre makers to re-present exactly the words of the interviews with a ‘true’ level of accuracy, thus making the play ‘truthful’ and ‘correct’. Alternatively, his remark could be understood as imploring the theatre makers to consider not just the words they have collected, but the townspeople of Laramie they have met and the way they are going to represent not only the individuals, but the town as a whole. He states “don’t make matters worse....I would resent it immensely if you use anything I said, uh, you know, to—to somehow cultivate that kind of violence” (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater Project, 2001, p. 66).

In this comment Father Schmit exemplifies an awareness of the power the theatre makers have and asks that they do not misuse his words. He is aware that the theatre makers will use the testimony they have collected to construct a play that presents a version of the truth, a version of the truth that is built upon what the theatre makers believe or decide to be true. Considering this, it is evident that being ‘true’ in verbatim theatre may not be as simple as presenting an accurate rendering of the interviewees’ vernacular speech. Soans comments on the idea of truth in verbatim theatre, stating that “a literal truth would rely on an exact replication of the research in its entirety - a tiresome and practically impossible undertaking. My sense of ‘truthfulness’ to the interviewee puts the emphasis on representing them truthfully in spirit” (Soans, 2008, p. 41). Father

Schmit is perhaps urging the theatre makers to re-present truthfully not just the people of Laramie's words, but their "spirit" too.

It is evident from examination of Father Schmit's statement that truth is both a central and complicated notion in verbatim theatre. Therefore, it may be beneficial for the verbatim theatre practitioner to have some kind of rudimentary or fundamental understanding of what truth could mean. The concept of truth has been challenging philosophers for centuries. What is truth? And is the understanding of truth that we employ in our real and everyday lives meaningfully different from the idea of truth in theatre? Philosopher Pascal Engel (2002) states that "truth is a central philosophical notion, perhaps *the* central one" (p. 1). An understanding of truth informs our behaviour in everyday life and the way we perceive and experience the world. Engel (2002) goes on to state that:

Many other important philosophical notions depend upon it or are closely tied to it [*truth*] : thought; belief (to believe something is to believe that it is *true*); knowledge (if one knows a proposition, then it is *true*); reality (reality is what our *true* statements, beliefs and theories are about); existence or being (can we talk *truly* about non-existents?); fact (facts are what make our statements *true* in all possible worlds?); and many other kindred notions such as proposition, sentence, statement, assertion and so on. (p.1)

Many have a general understanding of the notion of truth. For example most people understand the difference between telling a truth and telling a lie. However truth and lies are subjective. For a truth or a lie to exist it must be *understood* to be so. Therefore, truth is not something that *is* but something that *is understood*. So perhaps such a thing as 'the truth' does not exist. Alexis and John Burgess present the idea of different truths as opposed to one objective truth, and the idea that no one truth is more important than the other. This solidifies the idea that there is no such thing as *the truth* but rather multiple and subjective truths.

Inquiry, it is said, aims at the truth. Yet it's doubtful there is any such thing as the truth. So it might be better to say that inquiry aims at truths, and better still to say that different inquiries from archaeology to zoology aim at different truths from archaeological to zoological. (Burgess & Burgess, 2011, p. 11)

Stanislavski states

Not all the truths we know in life are good for the theatre. Truth in the theatre must be genuine, not glamourized. It must be purged of unnecessary, mundane details. It must be true in a realistic sense but made poetic by creative ideas. (As cited in Cantrell, 2013, p. 46)

Stanislavski's statement firstly acknowledges the idea of multiple "truths" and secondly, begins to articulate and encapsulate the central tension at the heart of verbatim theatre making practice. That is, the challenge verbatim makers have to build a dramaturgy that is simultaneously "true in a realistic sense but made poetic by creative ideas" (Stanislavski as cited in Cantrell, 2013, p. 46). This could also be understood as the potential conflict verbatim theatre practitioners face when navigating between the ethical obligations they have to interviewees in honouring their individual and subjective 'truths' and their desire to present the audience with an engaging theatrical narrative.

Carol Martin (2006) states "what makes documentary theatre provocative is the way in which it strategically deploys the appearance of truth, while inventing its own particular truth through elaborate aesthetic devices" (p. 10). Verbatim theatre and documentary theatre are terms that are often used interchangeably. However, the term 'documentary' has connotations that it is a factual source of information and therefore appears to have more of a "claim to veracity" than works of fiction. Belfield identifies "like with documentary films or news items, when something is presented as truth, an audience will more often than not receive it as such" (Belfield, 2018, p. 105).

There are obvious similarities between documentary films and verbatim theatre. Both often use interviews to collect material and similarly to verbatim theatre, “the documentary [film] tradition relies heavily on being able to convey an impression of authenticity” (Nichols, 2017, p. xii). A convention used in both verbatim theatre and documentary films is direct address. In documentary films “direct address occurs when individuals speak directly to the camera or audience; it is rare in fiction, where the camera functions as an invisible onlooker most of the time” (Nichols, 2017, p. 6). Direct address is a convention commonly used in verbatim theatre. Soans reflects on the actor’s experience performing verbatim theatre, “ten percent of the time you interact with your fellow actors on stage, but ninety percent of the time your attention is directed towards the audience” (Soans, 2008, p. 21).

Direct address “is a voice that addresses us directly; it lays out its point of view explicitly” (Nichols, 2017, p. 53). Verbatim theatre practitioners use direct address to present different interviewees’ points of view and showcase the unique vernacular ordinary people use in everyday life. Blythe (2008) states “everyday speech is often more mundane and ‘everyday’ than anyone dares to invent. This is what gives the ring of truth” (p. 82). Similarly verbatim theatre director Ivan Cutting states “often something someone says comes out in an odd construction, which you shouldn’t clean up too much, as no writer would ever write it like that and that’s what gives it its magic” (Belfield, 2018, p. 64). The ‘mundaneness’ of everyday speech gives verbatim theatre its distinct appearance of ‘truth’. Cutting states “Peter Cheeseman was right when he said it [verbatim testimony] does have a sort of ‘tang’ to it, like salt in stew, that tells you this is authentic” (Belfield, 2018, p. 64).

In her verbatim play *The Girlfriend Experience* Blythe aims to capture the “fantastically rich multi-layered messiness of real speech” (Blythe, 2008, p. 94). *The Girlfriend Experience* centres around four women working in a Bournemouth brothel and presents a microcosm of sex work in Britain. Blythe does not claim that *The Girlfriend Experience* presents *the truth* of what it is like for all sex

workers, the play instead presents the specific experiences and subjective truths of the four women interviewed for the play. It is the distinct lack of generalisation exemplified in *The Girlfriend Experience* that makes it engaging. The voices in verbatim works that are compelling, amusing, moving and interesting are not always the correct or the 'true' voices but the most individual. Arguably we do not create verbatim theatre to re-present popular and objective truths. Soans (2008) states "surely, if we want real insight into any situation, we shouldn't listen only to those with an academic overview" (p. 31). This is the idea that it is not always the knowledge, ideas or truth that makes an interview 'good' or appealing, but the person who has that knowledge, idea or truth and the way in which they share it. Soans (2008) goes on to state that "from the main body of the interview I will select the material that is idiosyncratic, personal and emotional" (p. 39). He is not looking for the most eloquent testimony, but the testimony that gives the most insight into the essence or "spirit" of the individual it came from.

When gathering testimony for *The Girlfriend Experience*, in order to maximise the amount of verbatim material she was able to amass, Blythe had the women record themselves. Blythe (2008) states "when I'm unable to be in the parlour myself, the girls have agreed to record themselves in my absence. This is the ultimate way of creating a non-pressurised, non-interview environment" (p. 93). Having the women record themselves without Blythe present could be perceived as an ethical consideration and decision. Blythe's absence could be viewed as a deliberate way to neutralise the inherent power imbalance of an interview and take the pressure off the interviewees.

Often interviewees are aware and critical of the information they give and feel a pressure to be 'interesting'. In my own verbatim theatre making process one of my interviewees states at the beginning of their interview "oh this could end up being so boring for you" (Appendix 2, p. 139). I have included this exclamation in the script of *Strong Female Characters* firstly, as a way of explicitly signposting the fact that the material the audience are consuming is from an interview, and

secondly because it shows how the interviewee is already critically examining their contribution to the play before they have even started their interview. The relationship between the audience and the actors presenting the verbatim work is very similar to the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer. Similarly to the way an actor wants to impress, please, entertain and engage the audience the interviewee wants to be interesting to the verbatim theatre maker.

Another one of the interviewees for *Strong Female Characters* expressed a similar sentiment in response to reviewing their interview transcript via email. She stated “I think I gave the most boring interview! Since then I’ve been thinking of lots of other interesting things to say.” This illustrates the interviewee’s desire to be ‘interesting’. While this interviewee did not perceive herself as interesting in her interview the actors and I found this particular interview extremely interesting, and her testimony became a central point of the play. In her interview this interviewee was extremely honest in the way she presented herself, she was unashamedly her. She appeared to answer the questions in a genuine way which made her testimony idiosyncratic and engaging. She stated during the interview “yeah actually...this is not something I thought I was gonna end up talking about” (Appendix 2, p. 140), which exemplified that she was existing, responding and sharing ‘in the moment’ and reacting genuinely to the situation.

The acquisition of verbatim material that is genuine, ‘in the moment’ and uncensored by the interviewee could be considered as a goal or challenge of the verbatim theatre maker. Blythe aims to achieve this by making her recording devices as discreet as possible. Young states that “part of her strategy is she doesn't film her people because she wants her interviews to be as discreet as possible” (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018). Blythe comments that “cameras may present something closer to actual reality, but audio allows for greater access to underground worlds” (Blythe, 2008, p. 84). By recording only the audio of her interviews Blythe is not encumbered with a camera and the interviewees are less likely to fixate on the fact that they are

being recorded. Blythe (2008) states “Mark Wing-Davey had often encouraged me to interview people while they were in the midst of some sort of activity, something that distracts them from the microphone and takes their mind off the fact that they are being recorded” (p. 92). Similarly in the introduction to the play text of *Little Revolution* Blythe explains

I like to get material which is lively and spontaneous rather than sitting down in a situation which is set up more formally. I often feel that I get my best material in an event, when people are not so focused on the fact that there’s someone with a microphone in front of them. (Blythe, 2014, pp. 5-6)

It is evident from *Little Revolution* and *The Girlfriend Experience* that Blythe’s discreet recording method enables the collection of verbatim material that is lively, organic and engaging. When constructing *Strong Female Characters* I aimed to conduct my interviews in the most ethical way possible, and I explain and ethically justify my interview and recording methods in earlier sections of this thesis. However, because *Strong Female Characters* was constructed as a research experiment and was only ever intended to be performed back to the interviewees I didn’t have the same responsibility to consider my audience. The practice-led design of this research enabled me to self-indulgently focus on the ethical acquisition and representation of verbatim testimony with little consideration of how this might impact on the play as a marketable product. I acknowledge that established verbatim theatre practitioners such as Blythe are unable to occupy such a hedonistic position when creating their work, as they have a greater responsibility to present their audience “with a good evening’s theatre” (Blythe, 2008, p. 94).

From my unique position within this research and verbatim theatre making process, Blythe’s subtle method of verbatim material collection could be perceived at times as potentially unethical. For example when she was creating *The Girlfriend Experience* she only recorded material in one room of the seaside brothel and every so often one of the women would leave to answer the door to

one of the male clientele. Unbeknown to the male client and potentially initially unbeknown to Blythe, the recording device captured what was being said in the adjacent hallway. Some of this overheard conversation appears in the play and these moments have a genuine and natural quality because the men were not performing or presenting themselves for the recording, because they did not know that they were being recorded.

“The male clientele did not know that they were being recorded, and thus did not give their permission, and yet their testimony appeared in the production” (Cantrell, 2013, p. 144). It appears that the men were never given the opportunity to give consent to be recorded or invited to review their testimony. This meant that they had no input or control over how they were represented in the play. Blythe did preserve the men’s anonymity by referring to them only by the nicknames the women gave them. However, this resulted in a one dimensional presentation of these men and their character where their identity is constructed solely upon the fact that they are engaging with sex workers.

The men were a source of ridicule and derision in the play. They are known by the women’s nicknames such as Dick-brain, Groper, Viagra Man and God’s Gift. Whilst this may provide anonymity, their nicknames indicate Blythe’s agenda, which was clearly to evoke sympathy for the women and to deprivilege the men, depicting them as pathetic caricatures. (Cantrell, 2013, p. 144)

Blythe comments that one of the incentives for creating *The Girlfriend Experience* was that she wanted “the audience in the theatre to experience what I experience – an intimate encounter with an otherwise secret world” (Blythe, 2008, p. 86). Blythe presents the women’s verbatim testimony in a way that honours the women as individuals and simultaneously remarks on female sex work within the wider social context. A strength of *The Girlfriend Experience* is the way it manages to humanise and destigmatise female sex work through the preservation and re-presentation of the women’s individual and subjective truths. In regards to the inclusion of the men in the play it appears Blythe was so

primarily concerned with ethically honouring and respecting the women that she unintentionally created a bias against the men, subsequently enforcing the stereotypes surrounding men who engage with sex workers.

This instance presents a complex ethical decision. Blythe's primarily ethical responsibility was to honour the women and their testimony. The inclusion of references to the men in their lives can be considered as part of honouring the women, as the very reason that they were interviewed for the play was because of the nature of their work and their relationships with men. Considering this, to remove all the references to the men could potentially alter the testimony in such a way that became over edited and too far removed from its original context, thus potentially denying the 'truth' of the women's interviews.

Ultimately the ethical decision of including the men's testimony in *The Girlfriend Experience* is further evidence of how the ethical considerations that impact dramaturgical decisions are part of an evolving and unpredictable process. This instance also highlights how the ethical decisions made by verbatim theatre makers will be different in each unique situation.

Some of the 'best' or 'truthful' material may be gathered accidentally. Someone may interrupt the interview or join in the conversation without knowing that an interview is taking place. However, it could be considered the verbatim theatre maker's ethical duty to stop the interview. Young comments on such an interruption.

In the course of an interview (for *Gathered in Confidence*) that one of our students did, she interviewed someone in a Vincent De Paul shop, in the back room. In the course of that interview another person working in the shop wandered in and started having a chat, and then registered, "Oh, sorry, you're..." It was such a fantastic moment that we went back and got her permission to include her in the play too. (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018)

When interviewing for *Strong Female Characters* I interviewed two 18 year old students at their school during their lunchtime. The interview took place in a backroom of the drama department. As it was lunchtime other students kept walking in and out. Each time we were interrupted I paused the interview and explained that we were recording, after which they all apologised and left. Near the end of the interview the school bell rang signalling the end of lunchtime. I immediately asked the interviewees if we needed to stop so they could go to class. They assured me that they had been given permission to be late to class in order to participate in the interview. Then the teacher who I had organised the interview with entered and the interviewees proceeded to have a discussion with the teacher imploring her to let them stay and finish the interview, a request she ultimately obliged. When transcribing this section of the recorded interview I was tempted to include the students' conversation with the teacher in the play, as it was so immediate and 'real'. However, I did not have the teacher's consent to include her words in the play so I felt it would have been unethical to do so. As an ethical compromise I did not transcribe the teacher's words, only the student's responses. Part of this section is included in *Strong Female Characters*, but the way in which it appears makes it seem as if the conversation is only happening between the interviewees and myself. I do not think audiences/readers will be able to discern that the teacher was ever present. So although I have compromised the 'truth' of what actually happened I have preserved the anonymity of the teacher and acted in an ethical way.

Blythe experienced a similar situation when creating her first verbatim play *Come Out Eli*. She was trying to secure an interviewee for the project and had a number of phone conversations with this potential interviewee which she recorded without them knowing. She then included parts of this telephone conversation in the play. She states "to protect myself from legal repercussions I only included my side of the telephone conversations, because he didn't know that I was recording it" (Blythe, 2008, p. 89). As I did with *Strong Female Characters*, Blythe only included her half of the conversation in the play. However, Blythe knew that she would potentially get some engaging verbatim

material from the phone conversations, so while only recording her responses “made sure that my half of the conversation would make clear to an audience what he had been saying at the other end of the line” (Blythe, 2008, p. 89). Though this seems like a ‘truth seeking’ exercise on Blythe’s part, it could be argued that the testimony she gathered is still manipulated and contrived, as Blythe had to craft and construct her responses so they encapsulated both sides of the conversation. While Blythe’s ‘undercover’ technique has the potential to reveal more ‘genuine truths’, insofar as the material comes from someone who is not consciously editing their responses, because they are unaware that that they are being recorded, it raises ethical questions about how the material was acquired.

Examination of the nature of truth in verbatim theatre has established that verbatim theatre does not present ‘the truth’ but subjective truths. It has also become evident that the nature of these subjective truths is profoundly influenced by the way theatre makers record and gather their testimony. Consideration of truth and other ethical principles impacts the theatre maker’s dramaturgical decision making. The beginning of this section briefly discusses the idea that truth is not something that *is* but something that is *understood*. Truth is constructed and therefore can only be realised when it is collectively understood. It is through the dramaturgical construction of verbatim theatre that ideas of truth and ethics can be explored, contained and shared.

I have alluded to the idea of construction frequently throughout this thesis, as the word construction has proved useful in multiple contexts associated with verbatim theatre. Truth is a construct, theatre is a construct, dramaturgy is constructed, and ethics is constructed. So much of the human experience is constructed. Therefore ‘reality’ or ‘real life on stage’ can only ever be constructed. Thus perhaps an ethical and truthful dramaturgy for verbatim theatre is one that acknowledges its own construction. Moisés Kaufman states that “identity is a construct [...] community is a construct. The idea of constructs/constructions lies at the centre of my work, for what is the stage but a

construct of a certain reality? And what is a playwright-director but a construction worker?" (Svich, 2003, p. 72)." This is what a verbatim theatre maker does. They construct a shared reality through the amalgamation of individual and subjective truths and an awareness of these tensions between ethics, truth and 'theatricality' can support the verbatim theatre maker in their ethical and dramaturgical processes.

## 8. MANIFESTO



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The photos included in this manifesto are the property of Missy Mooney.



## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MANIFESTO

*A manifesto can be defined as “a public declaration or proclamation, written or spoken; esp. a printed declaration, explanation, or justification of policy issued by a head of state, government, or political party or candidate, or any other individual or body of individuals of public relevance, as a school or movement in the Arts” (“Manifesto”, n.d.).*

I title this document a manifesto as it aims to be more than a guide. It is my “public declaration” and explanation as a researcher and verbatim theatre maker of how I believe ethics could be considered when creating verbatim theatre. This manifesto differs to other verbatim theatre making guides as it prioritises an examination of ethical principles during the process of creating verbatim theatre over discussion of verbatim theatre as a product.

This manifesto shares some of the main findings from the construction of *Strong Female Characters*; a process-led research project in which I aimed to place ethical considerations as the focus of my dramaturgical process. A key aim of this manifesto is to discuss the idea of an ‘ethical dramaturgy’ and exemplify that ethical practice in verbatim theatre is a process of continual questioning and re-evaluation. This manifesto details the ethical principles and dramaturgical techniques I discovered and employed in the construction, rehearsal and performance of *Strong Female Characters* and provides examples of how ethical principles can be used to inform ethical thinking and action throughout the verbatim theatre making process.



## ETHICS IN VERBATIM THEATRE

Ethics can be defined as “a branch of philosophy that asks fundamental questions about right and wrong, good and bad” (R. Anderson, 2011, p. 2).

Questioning and re-evaluation lie at the heart of ethical thinking. Ethical practice in verbatim theatre is more than a static set of rules to follow. It is a process and a way of thinking that is developed and collectively agreed upon through continual questioning and reflection. Verbatim theatre makers work in a range of different contexts with differing pressures, obligations and considerations. Therefore, individual theatre makers are likely to be faced with unique and unpredictable ethical decisions during the process of constructing and rehearsing their piece of verbatim theatre. Considering this, it is perhaps impossible to present a categorical “ethical code” or standard to inform the ethical construction of verbatim theatre. It is perhaps more useful for the theatre maker to identify ethical principles that could be considered by all those working on the piece of verbatim to inform their ethical and dramaturgical decision making. These ethical principles should be understood not as a fixed set of rules or regulations to follow, but as tools that can be continually used to inform appropriate ethical thinking throughout the verbatim theatre making process.

Some of the key ethical principles and ideas that informed my practice throughout the construction, rehearsal and performance of *Strong Female Characters* include:

- KINDNESS
- CARE
- HONOUR & RESPECT
- EMPOWERMENT
- MANAAKITANGA/DIGNITY
- AUTONOMY
- KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE
- TRUTH

Consideration of these principles helped me prioritise the well-being of my interviewees and ensure that they were free from harm, distress and exploitation and were empowered by their participation in *Strong Female Characters*.

## ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

*“the role of ethical guidelines...is to provide tools for researchers to approach and understand problems” (Hopkins, 2011, p. 14).*

### KINDNESS

Kindness can be shown to verbatim subjects by being considerate, friendly, thoughtful and understanding. Being non-judgmental of verbatim subjects' testimony, ideas and opinions is also a way theatre makers can show kindness. Blythe states “it is important that they [the interviewees] do not feel judged, so I always try to understand the interviewee’s point of view” (Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 87).

### CARE

Belfield (2018) aptly articulates what care could mean in a verbatim context. He states “be careful – as in ‘full of care’. You are the custodian of this [verbatim] testimony; look after it and treat it with respect” (p. 162).

### HONOUR & RESPECT

Honour and respect are often used synonymously, as to hold in honour can be defined as: “to respect highly; to treat or regard with honour or respect; to feel or show respect or admiration for” (“Honour” n.d.). Honour and respect could be understood as fundamental ethical principles to be considered when constructing verbatim theatre. Young cites honour and respect as a tenet of his and Halba's verbatim practice, stating that “a principle of our work and kind of our mantra is that you're always seeking to respect and honour the person that you're representing and their testimony” (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018).

### EMPOWERMENT

Constructing verbatim theatre places the theatre maker in a position to potentially empower others. For verbatim subjects having someone listen to them tell their stories and express their thoughts and opinions can be intrinsically empowering. Blythe states “because we don’t listen to each other enough in daily life, when someone offers an attentive ear, people grab the opportunity to talk – even about highly personal information. . . People are flattered that someone wants to listen” (Blythe, 2008, p. 82).

The re-presentation of verbatim subjects' stories onstage to an audience who function as an attentive "community of listeners" (Mumford, 2010, p. 46) can be an additional method of empowerment. Young (2017) states that verbatim or "fact based theatre not only explores worthy causes, but it is also potentially empowering and liberating, for audiences as well as participants" (p. 25). Sharing onstage the thoughts and opinions of ordinary people and those who may not get the opportunity to have an active voice in society has the potential to create a sense of empowerment in verbatim participants, directors, actors and audiences alike. Considering empowerment as an ethical principle in verbatim theatre could be understood as acting in a way that maximizes the potential for verbatim participants to feel liberated and empowered.

#### MANAAKITANGA / DIGNITY

Dignity can be defined as "the quality of being worthy" ("dignity" n.d.). In a verbatim theatre context this definition could be further understood as the idea that everyone is worthy of and deserves to be treated with care, honour and respect. This notion of dignity is encapsulated in the principle of manaakitanga. "The minimum standard for manaakitanga acknowledges a person's inherent dignity and the responsibility that people have to act in a caring manner towards others" (Hudson, M., Pūtaiora Writing Group, & Health Research Council of New Zealand. 2010, p. 10).

#### AUTONOMY

In a verbatim theatre context interviewees' autonomy can be respected by observing and acknowledging their wishes regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Continually consulting interviewees throughout the theatre making process and giving them control over which sections of their testimony are included in the play gives them an active and autonomous role in the process. Gibson (2011) alludes to the notion of respecting participant autonomy through the idea of "negotiation". She states "there are ethical responsibilities when verbatim theatre is created, especially to those from whom stories are mined. . .verbatim practitioners have, at the very least, responsibilities to negotiate with the subjects who provide the source material for their productions" (p. 2).

### KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

The second formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative is particularly useful for verbatim theatre makers to consider. The maxim instructs "act in a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end" (Kant as cited in R. Anderson, 2011, p. 44). Anderson (2011) explains that

Kant means that we should never treat others simply as tools or instruments in the pursuit of our own goals or desires. . . We must always simultaneously recognize them as free, independent individuals – ('ends') like ourselves – and ensure that in some sense they have consented to being 'means'. (p. 44)

In a verbatim theatre context Kant's second maxim could be understood as recognising interviewees' autonomy and not treating them and their words simply as a source of theatrical capital to be mined.

### TRUTH

To be truthful in verbatim theatre can be understood as the honouring of interviewees' individual, subjective and potentially contradicting truths. Ultimately in verbatim theatre there is no such thing as 'the truth', only subjective and multiple truths. Part of considering truth in verbatim theatre is having an awareness of the fact that the interviewee can only ever offer their subjective truth, that is, they can only offer that which they understand or believe to be true. They may even present what they decide or wish to be true as 'the truth'. Often verbatim theatre makers aim to achieve a sense of truthfulness by directing their actors to faithfully re-present exactly the interviewees' vocal and physical characteristics and idiosyncrasies. Young (2017) states that "we seek to re-present as fully as possible all aspects of the original testimony, including both vocal and gestural delivery" (p. 36). The concept of truth in verbatim theatre can also be understood to mean 'true to the spirit'. An exact 'truthful' replication of the interviewee and their testimony may not always be achievable, therefore the actor can alternatively aim to be as "true to the spirit of that [interviewee's testimony] as you possibly can be" (Paget, 1987, p. 330). Hansen, an actor, similarly states that in verbatim theatre "you are aiming to find the essence of him in yourself" (as cited in Cantrell, 2013, p. 32).

When creating *Strong Female Characters* I video recorded (with the interviewees' consent) all but one of the interviews. This enabled the actors to watch the interviews and gain a stronger sense of the person they were representing. The video footage gave the actors an account of not just what the interviewees said but how they physically said it. They were subsequently able to re-present them onstage with a greater level of 'truth'. I often directed the actors to try and re-present exactly the interviewees' vocal and gestural delivery of the testimony. This aimed to honour and respect the interviewees, as an inappropriate physicality could be considered just as misrepresentative and ethically inconsiderate as inaccurately speaking an interviewee's words.



## WHAT IS AN ETHICAL DRAMATURGY

*Dramaturgy is a concept (a play has a dramaturgy) as well as a process (you can do dramaturgy). Dramaturgy is at once the shape of an event, and the process to get you there. A dramaturg is a facilitator of that process.*

(Prior, 2017, para 4)

If we accept Prior's rudimentary definition of dramaturgy, an ethical dramaturgy could be fundamentally understood as a dramaturgy and dramaturgical process that is underpinned and informed by the dramaturg's consideration, understanding and application of ethical principles and ideas. In a verbatim theatre context an ethical dramaturgy could be understood as prioritising a respectful, honourable and accurate representation of interviewees and their testimony over "a workable dramaturgy" (Cantrell, 2013, p. 48) or theatricality.

Many of the dramaturgical decisions made by the theatre maker in verbatim theatre are simultaneously ethical decisions. Considering this, ethical dramaturgy in verbatim theatre is perhaps a dramaturgy that makes evident its ethical decision making and construction while acknowledging the tension between ethics/ethical principles and the development of an engaging dramaturgy.

Included in this manifesto are examples of some of the dramaturgical techniques I used in *Strong Female Characters* to construct a dramaturgy that prioritised the ethical consideration and honouring of the interviewees and their testimony.

### DRAMATURGICAL TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

- DIRECT ADDRESS
- CHORUS OF VOICE
- PHYSICAL DRAMATURGY
- MONTAGE
- THEATRE MAKER AS 'CHARACTER'



## ETHICAL DRAMATURGICAL TECHNIQUES

### DIRECT ADDRESS

Direct address is a common convention used in verbatim theatre. It is a “voice that addresses us directly; it lays out its point of view explicitly” (Nichols, 2017, p. 53). Direct address can be a useful dramaturgical tool to engage and capture an audience’s attention, and ethically can highlight sections of testimony that are particularly meaningful to the interviewee.

An example of the effective dramaturgical and ethical use of direct address in *Strong Female Characters* was the re-presentation of a poignant section of Kodee’s testimony. This section of testimony described the adversity she faced as a trans woman when trying to organise an appropriate life insurance policy. Kodee states “if they took two seconds to actually hear me as a person, as a human, not as a woman or a male, but as a person, and actually see where I’m coming from” (Appendix 2, p. 158). In performance the actor representing Kodee, delivered this in direct address to the audience. The dramaturgy of this moment and use of direct address resulted in the audience giving their full attention to Kodee’s testimony. This aimed to ethically honour, respect and empower Kodee and give her the opportunity to be ‘heard as a person’ by a community of attentive listeners.



### CHORUS OF VOICE

In contrast to direct address, chorus of voice is a non-naturalistic dramaturgical technique. Multiple times throughout *Strong Female Characters I* directed the three actors to speak words or sentences of testimony simultaneously, resulting in a chorus of voices. We often used this convention when different interviewees had unknowingly made the same comments in their respective interviews. For example 'Scene 11' begins with "I don't know, walking at night" (Appendix, 2 p. 159). In performance all of the actors said "walking at night" in chorus, as multiple interviewees had said those exact words in their interviews. Ethically the use of chorus of voice aimed to empower and honour the interviewees by giving their testimony a stronger and more resonant and powerful voice.

### PHYSICAL DRAMATURGY

Verbatim theatre typically involves actors sitting on chairs talking to the audience, simply (re)telling interviewees' stories (Soans, 2008, p. 21). A static dramaturgy, primarily constructed upon direct address, is expected by verbatim theatre audiences. However, when constructing *Strong Female Characters I* I was aware that the play must be more than a random collection of monologues to sustain an audience's interest (Soans, 2008, p. 26). Therefore to try and create an engaging and dynamic dramaturgy I interspersed moments of physical dramaturgy between sections of direct address.

One example of physical dramaturgy from *Strong Female Characters* was when one of the interviewees was commenting on the photo-shopped and airbrushed representation of women in magazines. While the actor voicing this interviewee faithfully repeated her words, the other two actors stood slightly upstage of her and physically adopted poses representative of the models on the magazine covers the interviewee was referring to. As the story developed and the interviewee described the inferiority she felt in comparison to the models, the actors altered their physicality to reflect the dissatisfaction the interviewee felt about the dark rings under her eyes. The physical dramaturgy of this 'moment' was engaging and disrupted the flow of direct address while simultaneously still honoured and respected the interviewee and the poignancy of their testimony.



I remember the first time I ever understood, I was about 14 possibly slightly older, the first time I ever understood that those beautiful magazines, those glossy magazines that my friends mothers would buy, that the women on those covers were airbrushed. I spent my teenage years thinking there was something wrong with me cos I had dark rings under my eyes. But in fact those bitches on those covers had those bloody dark rings airbrushed out. I mean just something as basic as that has a profound effect on how a child would see herself. (Appendix 2, pp. 143-144).



### MONTAGE

Similarly to chorus of voice I used Eugenio Barba's concept of simultaneous montage as an ethically considerate dramaturgical tool. Simultaneous montage can be understood as the juxtaposition of independent events and situations when their only bond is to be contained within the same space. It is simultaneity which connects the different events (Barba, 2010, p. 102). In *Strong Female Characters* I used simultaneous montage to honour interviewees' differing experiences, ideas and opinions while concurrently illustrating the similarities between their testimonies. I often combined this convention with direct address and the inter-cutting and interweaving of different interviewees' testimony resulted in a kind of kaleidoscopic montage of different interviewees' voices and opinions.

One example of montage is in 'Scene 3' (Appendix 2, pp. 142-145) which is comprised of testimony from seven interviewees about the pressures they feel as women about their physical appearance. The act of re-presenting the individual struggles different interviewees have with their appearance in the same scene and performance space served to acknowledge the interviewees' independent struggles while simultaneously making evident that many women feel "a lot of pressure to be perfect" (Appendix 2, p. 145). The use of montage strove to honour, empower and give the interviewees a sense of community, and communicate that they are not alone in their pressures and worries.



### THEATRE MAKER AS 'CHARACTER': INCLUSION OF MYSELF IN *STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS*

The inclusion of myself as the interviewer in *Strong Female Characters* aimed to cultivate an ethical dramaturgy by making evident the play's construction and dispel the illusion that the testimony the audience are hearing came un-mediated and spontaneously from the interviewees (Young, 2017, p. 27). The Missy lines used in the play were often the interview questions such as "do you think women have equal rights with men?" (Appendix 2, p. 164). Dramaturgically the presence of the interviewer asking the interview questions throughout the play created kind of a *Verfremdungseffekt*, as every time Missy spoke the audience were reminded that the play was constructed from recorded interviews. Ethically the recurrent references to me as the interviewer aimed to make evident my intrinsic influence on the interviewee's testimony and make clear to the audience that the interviewees' responses were not spontaneous and unmediated, but the answers given in organised interviews that were structured by a set of predetermined questions designed by me.



## MANIFESTO CONCLUSION

Verbatim theatre has the power to give a "...'voice to the voiceless'..." in society (Heddon, 2008 as cited in Gibson 2001, p. 4). This brands verbatim theatre as "a remarkably democratic medium" (Hammond & Steward, 2008, p. 12). The democratic nature of verbatim theatre often means that the voices of ordinary people take centre stage and essentially anyone can be a 'character' in a verbatim play.

This manifesto proposes that the democratic, liberating and empowering potentiality of verbatim theatre can only be truly achieved through the cultivation of an ethical dramaturgy through consideration of ethical principles. Verbatim subjects put their faith in theatre makers and trust that they will use their verbatim material ethically and considerately. To disregard that trust for theatrical capital could be considered to be potentially both unethical and a betrayal. The verbatim testimony used to create verbatim theatre captivates audiences because it is vulnerable and unavoidably 'human'. To protect, honour, respect and work with the words, truths and lives of others is a privilege, a privilege that theatre makers and actors should not take for granted. While constructing and navigating an ethical dramaturgy in verbatim theatre can be unpredictable and challenging, consideration of ethical principles and ideas can result in a piece of theatre that is engaging, transcendent and empowering for interviewees, actors and audience members alike.



## 9. CONCLUSION

*Theatre can be a secular temple of social and spiritual union not with a mystified, mythologized higher power, but with the more prosaic, earthbound, yearning, ethical subjects who are citizens of the world community, who need places to connect with one another and with the fragile, necessary wish for a better future. (Dolan, 2005, p. 137)*

While Dolan is speaking generally of all kinds of theatre, she perhaps here encapsulates the nature and purpose of verbatim theatre. “Many verbatim plays are born out of a sense of moral injustice – a need to right a wrong, set a story straight or give voice to the voiceless” (Belfield, 2018, p. 110). Verbatim theatre’s unique power is perhaps its ability to provide a space where “ethical subjects who are citizens of the world community” can “connect with one another”. Verbatim theatre has the capability to unite individuals and transform audiences into a “community of listeners” (Mumford, 2010, p. 46). The potential power of verbatim theatre is great, and with great power comes great responsibility. In the context of verbatim theatre this ‘great responsibility’ could be understood as the ethical obligations and responsibilities theatre makers have to their verbatim subjects.

Through consideration and examination of the practice of different verbatim theatre practitioners combined with an evaluation of my own ethical and dramaturgical practice when constructing *Strong Female Characters*, it is clear that theatre makers and actors feel an ethical responsibility to their verbatim subjects and their testimony. Young states “it’s quite interesting how the ethics extend beyond what you immediately think of” (S. Young, personal communication, December 5, 2018). The verbatim theatre maker’s ethical considerations will continue to evolve and extend beyond what is immediately thought of, as the different ways in which ethics impacts the dramaturgical processes and construction of verbatim theatre are unpredictable and numerous.

This thesis concludes that ethical practice in verbatim theatre is not the adherence to a fixed set of rules or standards, but a subjective process of thinking that is predicated upon continual questioning, evaluation and re-assessment of creative and ethical decisions. This research proposes that ethical thinking in verbatim theatre is the consideration of ethical principles which can be used as tools to help navigate unforeseeable creative and ethical decisions as they arise. The consideration of these ethical principles during the construction of verbatim theatre can be understood as performing an 'ethical dramaturgy', which can be defined as a dramaturgy and dramaturgical process that is underpinned and informed by the dramaturg's consideration of, understanding and application of ethical principles and ideas.

Through this research I have been able to thoroughly investigate the ethical and dramaturgical process of creating verbatim theatre. I hope that my findings have some form of "operational significance" for others, and that my experience of reflecting on this process will provoke questions and the need for constant evaluation within a set of ever changing parameters.

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## Appendix 1: Approved Ethics Application

Human Research Ethics Committee  
**Te Kura Kete Aronui**  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
Phone:  
E-mail:



**Before applying for approval applicants must familiarise themselves with the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations in the University Calendar** <http://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/ethicalConduct.html>.

Use this application if your research project involves the collection, use, and/or reuse of human data. This form is to be completed by staff and students doing research **prior to** the collection of any data from human participants.

Upon completion of this form please submit to/or email to your Faculty/School Human Research Ethics Committee [HREC]. Health Research and Health, Sport & Human Performance applications should be submitted to the central HREC ([humanresearch@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:humanresearch@waikato.ac.nz)).

### Checklist

**A positive answer to one or more of the questions below indicates the need for review by the HRC accredited Human Research Ethics Committee. Health Applications should be submitted by email to [humanethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@waikato.ac.nz).**

- Are you investigating a topic that concerns health, disability or well-being?
- Are you using an instrument intended to assess health, disability or well-being?
- Is referral to a health service provider a potential outcome of participation?
- Are participants being recruited in their capacity as DHB employees?
- Is the researcher intending to collect tissue samples (e.g. bloods, saliva, urine) from healthy individuals?
- Is the researcher intending to utilize interventions related to exercise and nutrition?

**Submit this application form when the checklist and the Application Cover Sheet is complete and has been signed.**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Personal details (on Application Cover Sheet) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Academic Details (on Cover Sheet) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent Form (attached)                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Signatures (where required)       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information Sheet (attached)                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research Instruments (attached)   |

Human Research Ethics Committee  
 Te Kura Kete Aronui  
 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Private Bag 3105  
 Hamilton 3240  
 Phone:  
 E-mail:



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
 Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Miriam (Missy) Mooney

**School / Faculty / Institute:** FASS (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences)

**Email address:** missmoosoph@gmail.com

**Phone number:** 0277104268

**Office:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student ID (if applicable):** 1238013

**Proposed start date of field research / data collection:** As soon as possible after the ethics application and approval process is complete.

**This is an application for approval of: (please tick as many as apply)**

Staff research project involving human participants

Master's degree research

PhD research

Other

**Name of degree / paper (if applicable):** THST594-18C

**Supervisor's name (if applicable):** Laura Haughey

**Supervisor's approval (signature):**

**Funding sources:** N/A

**Project sponsors (e.g. equipment sponsors):** N/A

**Associated Applications (record the associated application code and title):** \_\_\_\_\_

I request approval for this research or related activity and attach all relevant documentation necessary for evaluation under the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations.  
<http://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/ethicalConduct.html>

I have read and complied with the University's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations.

**Principal Investigator's signature:** M. Mooney

**Date:** 30/08/18

## Project Overview

Please provide us with basic information about your project.

1. **Project Title:** Towards Ethical Dramaturgy in Verbatim Theatre (a tentative title, not confirmed)
2. **Briefly state the research topic, research questions and/or research objectives.**

My master's thesis is focused on the creation process of verbatim theatre. Verbatim theatre is a kind of documentary theatre in which the words of the script that the actors speak onstage, are taken word for word from interviews with real people. Hammond and Steward (2008) state that verbatim theatre "is not a form, it is a technique; it is a means rather than an end" (p. 9). This statement reflects and guides my research because my research emphasizes and values the creation process (the means) over the final creative/artistic product (the end). Through my research I intend to investigate the various phases of creating verbatim theatre from the conception of themes and ideas, interviewing participants, transcription of interviews, rehearsing with actors and the ultimate performance. Throughout this overall process I want to identify the distinct dramaturgical processes and ethical considerations unique to verbatim theatre, and how dramaturgical decisions may be influenced and underpinned by the ethical duties associated with representing and re-creating real people's words, stories and lives onstage.

Some of my key research questions include:

1. What is the process of creating verbatim theatre and how do ethical obligations influence this process?
2. What is the role of a dramaturg for verbatim theatre?
3. How do you make verbatim theatre that is both ethical and dramaturgically effective?

In order to make my research topic and study intentions clear I offer clarification and basic definitions of the terms 'verbatim theatre' and 'dramaturgy'.

The term 'verbatim theatre' was first coined and defined by Derek Paget in 1987. His definition is a useful preliminary explanation of the term. He states verbatim theatre is "firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary' people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material" (1987, p. 317).

The role of a dramaturg and the definition of dramaturgy is subjective and ever evolving. The word 'dramaturgy' derives from the Greek *dramaturgia*, which can be understood as the composition of a play (Turner & Behrnt, 2008, p. 19). A further definition proposed by Adam Versenyi defines 'dramaturgy' as "the architecture of the theatrical event, involved in the confluence of components in a work and how they are constructed to generate meaning for the audience" (as cited in Turner & Behrnt, 2008, p. 18).

The objective of my research is to evaluate the theories, techniques and verbatim theatre practices used by multiple verbatim and documentary theatre practitioners, primarily from New Zealand, Australia, Britain and the United States. I will use an amalgamation of these verbatim theatre techniques, methods and practices to create my own piece of verbatim theatre. The piece of verbatim theatre that I intend to create will be focused on the experience of those who identify as a woman. I will use an inclusive definition of "woman" and "female" and will welcome the input of cis-women, trans women, genderqueer women, and non-binary people who are significantly female-identified. The interview questions (see appendix 4) I will ask are broad and ask participants to reflect on their own experiences of identifying as a woman. Some themes implicit in my research questions are the representation of women in media and the role of woman in society, feminism and gender equality.

I will document the entire creation process and at the end of the project I will be able to analyse and reflect on the process. I then hope to use the theoretical knowledge and practical experience I have gained to

create a manifesto or guide detailing what I think (justified by my research) to be appropriate dramaturgical and ethical practice when creating verbatim theatre. This guide will offer a possible method of working underpinned with what I believe to be appropriate and necessary ethical and dramaturgical principles that should be considered when creating verbatim theatre. My research could then be used as an example, guide or starting point for other verbatim practitioners.

#### References

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### 3. What research activities are you planning to undertake?

- *e.g. semi-structured interviews of 12 FASS academic staff members about their experiences of xxx*
- *e.g. anonymous online survey of all University of Waikato staff members about xxx*

Semi-structured interviews with 10-20 local Hamilton women about their experiences of and thoughts on identifying as/being a woman. I use the term 'semi-structured' here to mean that I will "ask specific questions but invite the participant to give more extensive answers and record or keep notes" (McNiff, 2017, p. 177). The interviews will be structured and guided by a list of questions (see Appendix 4) however there may be unplanned supplementary questions asked, discussion or comment by either the researcher or participant for the sake of clarification. I will then transcribe the interview responses and use the transcriptions to create a play script/text that will be able to be performed by actors.

I will then facilitate the rehearsal/workshopping of this verbatim piece with actors. I will explore and analyse various methods used by different verbatim practitioners such as the 'Recorded Delivery' technique which can be used during rehearsals and performance. The Recorded Delivery technique is when the actors wear headphones during performance through which they listen to the audio of the original recorded interviews. This allows them to repeat the testimony as precisely as possible, which enables them to preserve and more accurately capture the interviewees' vocal mannerisms, pauses and individual vernacular. This technique is used by Alecky Blythe, Anna Deveare Smith, Stuart Young and Hillary Halba among others. Ultimately there will be a closed performance/presentation of the piece, open only to the participants who gave interviews. It is common for verbatim theatre pieces to be performed back to the people or communities from whence the stories came. Stuart Young (2017) states "we also invited our subjects [*participants, those who gave interviews*] to attend a rehearsal of their scenes, so that they could get a sense of the performance of those scenes" (Italics are mine, p. 28). *The Laramie Project* was also performed to an audience comprised of those who had been interviewed for the play, "when the company went back to Laramie in November 2000 to perform the play for the people they interviewed, they received a two-minute standing ovation" (Wake, 2010, p. 26).

I also plan to conduct interviews with New Zealand-based verbatim theatre practitioners and researchers in order to gain first hand insight on their verbatim practices. I would first approach them via email and ask if they would be willing to respond to a few questions (see appendix 4) about their verbatim practice. Then with their consent use their responses as evidence and discussion points in my thesis.

#### References

Wake, C. (2010). The Laramie project: Performing the play in the United States of America and Australia. In P. Brown (Ed.), *Verbatim: Staging memory and community* (pp. 25-36). Sydney, Australia: Currency Press.

McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. London, England: Sage.

Young, S. (2017). The ethics of the representation of the real people and their stories in verbatim theatre. In E. O'Toole, A. P. Kristić & S. Young (Eds.), *Ethical exchanges in translation, adaptation and dramaturgy* (pp. 21-42). Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Rodopi.

**4. To justify your project, provide a summary of the research, its methods, anticipated benefits, value and/or its contribution to the field.**

A large component of the examination of verbatim theatre focuses on understanding the purpose for the creation of verbatim theatre. The didactic nature implicit to verbatim theatre and how it is often used as a way to unite communities and address complex and serious social issues is prevalent in various forms of scholarship. Verbatim theatre often gives a voice to the 'voiceless' and can offer profound insight into different societies, communities and cultures. Carol Martin elaborates on this idea in *Theatre of the Real* (2013) and *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* (2010). Both make reference to verbatim and documentary theatre from a range of cultural perspectives, and give insight into how verbatim theatre is performed and used in other cultures. Hammond and Steward (2008) state that "we turn to verbatim theatre because we feel that it is somehow better suited to the task of dealing with serious subject matter. The world has become a more serious place, and we want our theatre to help us understand it" (p. 11).

I believe that my verbatim theatre project focused on woman falls under the ethos of verbatim theatre. This is the idea of 'giving voice to the voiceless' as women have been, at times, voiceless throughout history. As I stated earlier in my application one of the themes of my research/interview questions is the representation of those who identify as women. I intend for this piece of verbatim theatre to accurately represent women, their experiences, opinions and thoughts in a truthful and interesting way. I believe that my topic is relevant and relatable to my community. Although for this research project I do not intend facilitate a public performance of my verbatim piece I believe that if I did it would have a positive impact on the Hamilton community and theatre scene.

Verbatim theatre is a theatre form that is defined by its creation process. Therefore the majority of the literature on the genre briefly describes and discusses, usually retrospectively, how verbatim plays are made and the various techniques and technologies used by verbatim theatre makers during the creation (interviewing and scripting), rehearsals and performance. This includes discussion of different interview, transcription and data collation techniques and how technologies influence verbatim theatre practice. Many resources, especially those that feature interviews or excerpts from interviews with verbatim and documentary theatre practitioners offer some detail into the creation process of verbatim plays. Books such as Hammond and Steward's *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre* and the prefaces to some verbatim/documentary plays such as Robin Soans *Talking to Terrorists* and Miranda Harcourt, William Brandt and Stuart McKenzie's *Verbatim, Portraits* include interviews with directors/practitioners of verbatim theatre (who were all personally involved in the creation/scripting of their plays) about the direction/creation process of their plays.

Tom Cantrell identifies in his book *Acting in Documentary Theatre* that often discourse on verbatim theatre is from the perspective of the director and/or the audience. His book aimed to fill a gap in the field and is primarily concerned with the actor's perspective when working on verbatim or documentary theatre. He discusses the unique demands verbatim theatre offers to the actor and how the actor's experience in documentary theatre may differ to other forms of theatre. Although Cantrell's primary concern is the actor's experience he does detail the actors involvement in the creation and rehearsal process for four different British verbatim plays. This is useful to my enquiry as he touches on the ethical and dramaturgical methods of these four different verbatim theatre makers during the interviewing and scripting process. From Cantrell's book insight can be gained from the actors who have performed in verbatim/documentary theatre on how they navigated the ethical obligations associated with representing real people on stage.

Within the field of research on verbatim theatre there is very little scholarship specifically from the perspective of the dramaturg, even though "the editing of the material into an overall composition is clearly a dramaturgical task requiring some sensitivity and self-awareness" (Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p. 190). This may be because the creation of verbatim theatre is often not a solitary act performed by a single playwright. Rather, it is more often an act of collaboration between researcher and community, between writers,

directors and actors. Therefore the dramaturg's role and duties are often absorbed and shared by the director, creators, and actors/research team. However, verbatim theatre practitioners such as Stuart Young, Hilary Halba and Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project mention the use of a dramaturg during the creation of their respective verbatim works.

Through my research I intend to expand on the scholarship surrounding the role of the dramaturg in the creation process of verbatim theatre. To gain insight on ethical dramaturgy in verbatim theatre I will look to accounts from prominent directors, writers and actors. Specifically, I will examine (or explore) how dramaturgical choices such as the scripting or structuring of verbatim plays may be influenced by the necessary ethical considerations of verbatim theatre. I intend to expand on the ideas surrounding the relationship between ethics and dramaturgy presented by Cantrell in *Acting in Documentary Theatre* and Stuart Young in his chapter "The Ethics of the Representation of the Real People and Their Stories in Verbatim Theatre" in *Ethical Exchanges in Translation, Adaptation and Dramaturgy*.

In my search and review of literature on verbatim theatre and its creation process I have yet to find any formalised manifesto, distilled method or guide that details in depth the different phases of the creation process and how dramaturgical processes and ethical obligations/considerations are navigated during this process.

*Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community* edited by Paul Brown is a useful reference point for my research and is close to where I would locate my proposed research within the wider field of research on verbatim theatre. This book is primarily concerned with verbatim plays that are part of the Drama Curriculum in NSW Australia. It is specifically targeted at school students, and therefore offers a broad and concise discussion, but it is still a useful reference point for my research. The book features contributions from notable Australian verbatim theatre practitioners and theorists such as Paul Brown, Roslyn Oades and Caroline Wake. This book also contains insightful appendices which include sample interview release forms and discussion on interview technique. Brown briefly discusses ethics and issues of ownership/authorship of a verbatim material and grounds his discussion in his experience of creating *Aftershocks* an Australian verbatim play about how the Newcastle Workers Club was impacted by the 1989 Newcastle earthquake. I wish to expand on some of the ideas identified in *Verbatim: Staging Memory and Community* by providing a more detailed discussion of the ethics of verbatim theatre and offer my own sample release/consent forms and interview techniques.

Notable verbatim practitioners and plays I intend to reference in my investigation include: *The Laramie Project* a key American verbatim play created by Moises Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theatre Project. *The Girlfriend Experience* by British verbatim playwright Alecky Blythe and *Aftershocks* created by Australian theatre maker Paul Brown. Some prominent New Zealand verbatim theatre practitioners whose work is relevant to my inquiry include Stuart Young and Hilary Halba (*Hush*); Cindy Driver, Suzie Lawless and Stuart Young (*The Keys are in the Margarine*); And Miranda Harcourt, William Brandt and Stuart McKenzie (*Portraits* and *Verbatim*). I will examine these plays as they all differ dramaturgically. They each exemplify different structural and scripting approaches and make different presentational decisions though casting and integration of technologies.

My thesis will be a combination of practice and written submission. To build a strong insightful argument and discussion on the dramaturgical process implemented during the creation of verbatim theatre, I will approach the research from the perspective of a verbatim theatre maker/practitioner and dramaturg. My research will be practice-led and I will create my own piece of verbatim theatre. I intend to document the creation process and my dramaturgical decisions. I will use the knowledge from that experience to support my research and analysis of other verbatim practitioners, their plays and dramaturgical decisions/methods.

My research is a form of Action Research which can be described as a "hermeneutic-interpretative research method; that is, it acknowledges that the researcher is intimately involved in the research, and affects the outcomes. In Action Research, such an involvement is the only reason such research can even take place. It is conducted by the practitioner(s) in whatever profession he is involved and it is research that seeks to bring about change in practices - changes, obviously, for the better" (Trimingham, 2002, p. 59). Action researchers can be described as 'insider researchers'.

They see themselves as part of the context they are investigating, and ask, individually and collectively, 'is my/our work going as we wish? How do we improve it where necessary?' If they feel their work is already reasonably satisfactory, they evaluate it and produce evidence to show why they believe this to be the case...The kind of theory they produce is dynamic and developmental and communicated through their actions as well as their words (McNiff, 2017, p. 10).

A typical methodology for Action researchers is the 'action-reflection cycle' which consists of six stages: "observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify - move in new directions" (McNiff, 2017, p. 12). My proposed research certainly fits into this cycle and adheres to the main purpose of Action Research and encapsulates the idea that Action Researchers are "taking action for improving practices" (McNiff, 2017, p. 18). I will use the 'action-reflection cycle' to take action to improve the practice of creating verbatim theatre.

Falling within the general area of Action Research is 'practice-led research' (Candy, 2006). Practice-led research projects are undertaken and often used by practitioners and researchers in the creative arts. Practice-led research is similar to action research, and "is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice" (Candy, 2006). Like Action Research, in practice-led research practice is an integral part of the methodology.

Practice-led research is useful for creative arts projects as both the creative artefact and the process of its creation are considered to be legitimate research and a contribution to knowledge. "In using practice-led research, we are referring *both* to the work of art as a form of research and to the creation of the work as generating research insights which might then be documented" (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 7). The processes of a creative practice generates unique knowledge and innovation that cannot be discovered through other research styles and methods.

As I state earlier in this application, verbatim theatre is defined by its process. I believe that in order to best analyse the verbatim process and take action to improve practices I must undertake the process myself. By creating my own piece of verbatim theatre I will gain insight and knowledge that could not be gained from a solely theoretical study of others work. My creative practice will enrich my thesis exegesis and will give me insight and practical experience that will enable me to contribute to the wider field of knowledge and research on verbatim theatre. The manifesto or guide that I make from the information gained from my creative practice will offer a possible method of working grounded in appropriate ethical conduct for creating verbatim theatre. My research could then be used as an example, guide or starting point that could be beneficial and useful to other verbatim theatre enthusiasts and/or practitioners.

#### References

- Candy, L. (2006). *Practice based research: A guide*. Report from Creativity and Cognition Studios, Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497\\_Practice\\_Based\\_Research\\_A\\_Guide](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497_Practice_Based_Research_A_Guide)
- Hammond, W., & Steward, D. (2008). Introduction. In W. Hammond & D. Steward (Eds.), *Verbatim verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre* (pp. 7-13). London, England, Oberon Books.
- McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. London, England: Sage.
- Trimingham, M. (2002) A methodology for practice as research. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 22(1), 54–60. <https://doi.org/10.1386/stap.22.1.54>
- Turner, C., & Behrndt, S.K. (2008). *Dramaturgy and performance*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

## The Researcher(s)

Please tell us about your research team.

**5. List all members of the research team and briefly describe their roles within the research project:**

I (Missy Mooney) will be the only researcher. I will be the only person conducting and then transcribing the interviews. The actors involved in the project will have access to the interview transcription and audio or video recordings with the participant's consent only after they have been reviewed by the participant. The actors will receive their own 'actor information sheet' and 'actor consent form' that is different to those given to interview participants. Please see Appendices 5 and 6.

**6. Outline your qualifications to undertake this research. Include such things as prior experience, training in relevant research methods, and/or personal knowledge of the subject.**

I have been heavily involved with recreational and professional theatre for most of my life. In the past five years I have been involved in over 30 theatre productions in a variety of onstage and offstage capacities. Some of these roles include actor, deviser, stage manager and various other technical roles. I have worked with numerous local Hamilton theatre companies including *Musikmakers*, *Playbox*, *Stories and More*, *Blackbox Creative*, *Bold Theatre*, *Carving in Ice Theatre Company* and the *Hamilton Operatic Society*. I have undertaken dramaturgical duties and responsibilities for multiple *Stories and More* productions and am the dramaturg for their upcoming production of *The Magician's Nephew* which will be staged at the Meteor Theatre in October 2018.

I have personal knowledge and practical experience in creating verbatim theatre. In 2016 I was part of the interview team, writing team and performed onstage in Carving in Ice Theatre Company's verbatim play *Life Music*. *Life Music* was performed in the English Flower Garden as part of the 2016 Hamilton Garden's Arts Festival and again at the University of Waikato on the Lakeside Stage. *Life Music* was received positively by audiences with a reviewer stating 'the work is evident: trawling through hours of footage and transcripts, the collective have pulled together golden threads of the human soul and woven them together so eloquently, so richly' (Francevic, 2016).

In the creation of *Life Music* I assisted with the drafting and composition of the interview questions and was present and helped conduct over 25 interviews with local members of the Hamilton community about how they use music in their daily life. Through the interview process I gained experience in interviewing both participants I knew (friends and peers) and members of the public unknown to me.

**References**

Francevic, J. M. (2016). *Nuanced truth with style*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=8885>

**7. What, if any, discipline-specific codes of ethics or professional standards will guide your research?**

In conjunction to the University of Waikato's *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* and *Student Research Regulations* my research will be guided by an amalgamation of ethical practices undertaken by other researchers and verbatim theatre practitioners. To my knowledge there are no ethical codes or professional standards specific to the creation of verbatim theatre. However Hammond and Steward (2008) state "the dramatist must abide by some sort of ethical code if their work is to be taken seriously" (p. 10). There are general and collectively acknowledged ethical responsibilities on the part of the theatre makers when creating verbatim theatre. Gibson (2011) states "there are ethical responsibilities when verbatim theatre is created, especially to those from whom stories are mined...verbatim practitioners have, at the very least, responsibilities to negotiate with the subjects who provide the source material for their

productions" (p. 2). I will implement this idea of 'negotiation' by having participants review their interview transcripts so they have control over what information is used in the play script. After reviewing their interview transcripts they have the opportunity to change their mind and 'edit' and delete parts if their testimony. Participants must approve and be comfortable with their contribution to the play. Young states in reference to his verbatim play *Hush – a Verbatim Play about Family Violence* that "where people requested any changes (deletions or rewording), we obliged. We also invited our subjects to attend a rehearsal of their scenes, so that they could get a sense of the performance of those scenes" (Young, 2017, p. 28). He then goes on to discuss the importance of correctly representing participants in *Hush*. "The scope for damage is not only in the survivors telling of the story in an interview, but also, and perhaps more so, in the theatrical retelling of that story: if a participant feels that his testimony has been misrepresented, or if he feels betrayed, he may be doubly wounded" (Young, 2017, p. 26). With this in mind I will strive to value and prioritize accurate representation of participants and staying faithful to their interview over building a dramatic narrative or theatricality. British verbatim theatre practitioner David Hare states "it does seem to me if you stand up on a stage and represent somebody you do have a duty to them to get it right, and for them to be at peace with how they are represented, it is different from fiction in that way" (as cited in National Theatre Discover, 2014).

#### References

- Gibson, J. (2011). Saying it right: Creating ethical verbatim theatre. *NEO: Journal for Higher Degree Students in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4, 1-18. Retrieved from [https://www.arts.mq.edu.au/documents/hdr\\_journal\\_neo/neoJanet2011\\_2.pdf](https://www.arts.mq.edu.au/documents/hdr_journal_neo/neoJanet2011_2.pdf)
- Hammond, W., & Steward, D. (2008). Introduction. In W. Hammond & D. Steward (Eds.), *Verbatim verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre* (pp. 7-13). London, England, Oberon Books.
- National Theatre Discover. (2014, April 29). The ethics of verbatim theatre. [Video File]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39JSv-n\\_W5U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39JSv-n_W5U)
- Young, S. (2017). The ethics of the representation of the real people and their stories in verbatim theatre. In E. O'Toole, A. P. Kristić & S. Young (Eds.), *Ethical exchanges in translation, adaptation and dramaturgy* (pp. 21-42). Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Rodopi.

## The Participants

Please provide the following information about your participants:

### 8. Broadly, who will they be? (Indicate the population, not the names of participants)

I intend to interview members of the Hamilton community who identify as women ideally varying in age and cultural identity. Participation in my research is open to significantly female-identified people. As I state in my response to question 2, I will use an inclusive definition of "woman" and "female" and will welcome the input of cis-women, trans women, genderqueer women, and non-binary people who are significantly female-identified.

### 9. How many participants will there be? Provide an estimate if you are unsure of exact numbers.

I estimate to interview between 10-20 different women.  
The number of interviews conducted is ultimately dependent on the amount of women interested in participating. My research is not dependant on having a specific number of participants. However, I state that 20 would be the maximum amount of participants I would need. I want to include segments of testimony from every participant's interview in the verbatim script. Therefore if I interviewed more than 20 people it may become difficult to include something from everyone's interview without the script becoming too long. I also believe 20 interviews to still be a manageable transcription work load. For *Life Music* we interviewed 27

participants and I did most of the transcription (a time consuming task) and had enough time to do this without spending (what I believe to be) an extortionate amount of time.

**10. How will you recruit participants? Summarise your process.**

I intend to approach women I already know who I believe may be interested in contributing to this project. I will use contact details I already possess to email, instant message or talk to in person with these women and invite them to participate in this project. I also want to try and recruit participants I do not know. In order to recruit participants I do not know I will put a call for participants in local Hamilton newspapers such as the Hamilton Press and various public Facebook pages such as 'The Hamilton Actors Group'. My Recruitment Facebook Post, Email message or Newspaper advertisement (appendix 2) contains my email address and phone number that potential participants can use to contact me and express their interest in participating.

**How will you inform them about the project and their part in it? Summarise your process.**

Once they have contacted me via email or phone and expressed interest in participating I will now possess their email address and will be able to inform potential participants about the project via email. This email will contain the information sheet detailing information about the project and my research intentions. I will also supply them with my proposed interview questions and consent form so they can review these before they commit to being interviewed. I will also encourage them to ask me any questions they may have about my research and their participation before they agree and commit to participating. If they do not have access to email I will arrange to talk to them on the phone and personally deliver the information sheet, consent form and questions.

My selection of participants is based on the principle of 'first come first served' unless I get over 20 participants. If I were to get over 20 people wanting to participate and be interviewed I would prioritise my selection of participants on the basis of wanting to experience and gain a 'snapshot' of society, of different ages and cultural identity and perspective. I would inform any potential participants who would not be included in the 20 participants needed by email (or whatever means of communication they contacted me). I would thank them for expressing interest and explain that I have a limit of 20 participants and that I already have 20 participants.

***Attach** a copy of the information sheets for participants. Ensure that the content of the information sheet is written in language suited to the relevant participants. See a sample information sheet and guidelines [here](#).*

***Attach** a copy of any recruitment emails, posts, posters or similar.*

**See Appendices 1 and 2.**

**Are the participants vulnerable?**

[See *Section 2.3 Vulnerable Participants*, *Section 8.3 Ethical considerations when working with children*, and *Section 8.5 Ethical considerations around the disclosure of illegal behaviours through research* for guidance].

**If yes, then**

**In what ways are they vulnerable?**

**Why do you need to involve them in your research?**

**How will you protect them from harm?**

No, I do not believe that my selected group of participants are particularly vulnerable. I only intend to interview participants who are capable of understanding my intentions and giving consent. Therefore I will only interview people over the age of 18.

**11. Will you select participants on the basis of their ethnicity, iwi, culture, gender, sexuality, religion, ethical belief or disability?**

Yes, I will select participants based on the gender they identify as. I intend to interview those who identify as female/ a woman.

**If YES, then specify the basis for selection, and state how you will tell participants about the selection criteria.**

As I state earlier in my application (question 4) a large proportion of the examination of verbatim theatre focuses on understanding the purpose for creating verbatim theatre. Verbatim theatre is often used as a way to give a voice to the 'voiceless' and to tell stories that that might not otherwise be told. Hammond and Steward (2008) state that "we turn to verbatim theatre because we feel that it is somehow better suited to the task of dealing with serious subject matter. The world has become a more serious place, and we want our theatre to help us understand it" (2008, p. 11).

The basis for my participant selection is that the topic I wish to discuss and examine is the experience of identifying as a woman. My topic is intentionally broad. The precise content of the play will be based on the responses I get from my proposed questions from participants and the stories they bring to the interviews. If really strong specific topics or themes emerge from the participants' responses this may narrow down the topic to more specific facets of being 'woman'.

For this project I am primarily interested in exploring the woman's experience from the female perspective. Although those who identify as genders other than female would be able to offer meaningful insight I am not including them in this research project.

I will inform participants of the proposed topic of my verbatim play and the selection criteria when I approach potential participants. It will be stated on the recruitment notice, it will also be included in the information sheet.

**References**

Hammond, W., & Steward, D. (2008). Introduction. In W. Hammond & D. Steward (Eds.), *Verbatim verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre* (pp. 7-13). London, England, Oberon Books.

**Are your participants likely to be from a particular ethnic group or other distinct population even if you are not selecting them on that basis?**

It is possible that participants may be from different ethnic, cultural or other distinct population.

**What cultural and other competencies do you have to work with your selected participant group (e.g. language, membership, professional training)?**

As I state earlier in this application (in response to question 6), I have prior experience in interviewing and working with members of the community both known and unknown to me for the purpose of creating verbatim theatre. Also as someone who identifies as a woman I can relate to my selected participant group and will likely have a shared understanding and potentially have similar experiences relating to being a woman.

**12. Do you have any type of relationship with your participants already (e.g. employer/employee, supervisor/worker, personal relationship)?**

At this stage I have not approached any participants. However I may ask members of my family and/or friends to participate, and it may be that by advertising for participants people I know may wish to be involved.

**If yes, then you will have a dual role in the research, both as researcher and, for example, as friend or family member. How will your pre-existing relationship affect your role as a researcher?**

Due to pre-existing relationships it may be that participants may be more willing or less willing to share information with me during interviews, as I have knowledge of them and their character and we will likely see each other outside of this research. Therefore they may feel like they do not want to say or do anything that could potentially jeopardise or influence my opinion of them or effect our relationship. As the researcher I am aware that when interviewing people I already know I may be tempted to take advantage of our pre-existing relationship. This could result in the 'exploitation' of a family member or friend's trust by probing or trying to get them to divulge more personal information, or talk about experiences that they might not have to a researcher they didn't know. I intend to minimise this risk by using a pre-prepared set of questions that will be the same whether I know the interviewee or not (see appendix 4). I will follow up topics of conversation that the participant brings up, enabling them to be in charge of the direction the conversation goes in. I will also remind them before we start the interview that they will have the opportunity to review what has been said, and decide how their story is represented.

I am aware that participants with whom I have a pre-existing relationship may feel coerced to participate, I will endeavour not to use explicit or implicit coercion to obtain participation agreement from my friends and/or family members.

**Consider potential ethical issues associated with your pre-existing relationship. How will you address these issues in your project?**

By interviewing family and friends and then using their responses in a script, the pre-existing expectations involved in friendships and family relationships and concerns on how friends and family view each other may influence the process and participants emotional well-being.

There is the possibility that if friends and/ or family members who were interviewed view the performance and feel that they have been misrepresented this could result in greater potential distress than if it had been done by a practitioner they had only met during the formal process.

By clearly explaining the nature of verbatim theatre and my intentions and by participants reviewing their interview transcripts this will hopefully decrease the likelihood of participants feeling misrepresented. They can see exactly what they have said and can retract anything that they believe is an inaccurate representation.

**13. Will participants receive any form of compensation or incentive for participation? (See guidelines on compensation, and note that reimbursement for travel expenses can be stated, but does not need justification.)**

No.

**If yes, what will they receive? (e.g. vouchers, prizes, shared refreshments, course credits etc.)**

## **Consent**

**Please provide the following information about consent processes**

**14. How will you gain informed consent from your participants?**

After reading the information sheet, interview questions and consent form participants will be asked to indicate in writing by signing the consent form and stating verbally (at the beginning of the interview) that they give informed consent.

**Who will gain consent from participants? Note that where dual roles exist (Q.12 above), coercion to participate may be avoided by asking a third party to undertake the informed consent process.**

I (the researcher) will gain consent from the participants.

**When will participants give their consent?**

Participants will give written consent before the interview takes place and before we meet. This will give them time to consider what is being asked of them, the information they have been provided with, and ask any questions or request any clarification. Having them consent in their own time, in advance of the interview, as opposed to face to face just before the interview is an attempt to try to ensure that they do not feel pressured or rushed into committing to the project.

**How will you record their consent?**

I will keep every participants physical signed consent form. Participants will also be asked verbally if they give informed consent at the very beginning of the interview. Thus their consent will be recorded electronically and will be part of the recorded interview transcript.

***Attach a copy of the consent forms for participants. If you intend to seek oral consent, include a procedure sheet to describe the process by which consent will be negotiated.***

**See Appendix 3**

**If vulnerable, are your participants able to give informed consent? [See Section 2.3 Vulnerable Participants for guidance.]**

**If no, then:**

**How will you obtain consent from their proxy?**

**What steps will you take to ensure that their participation is voluntary at all times?**

**15. With the exception of participants who are anonymous to the researcher, participants have the right to withdraw entirely or in part from the research. Please provide the following information:**

**How long will participants have to withdraw? (e.g. three weeks after data collection, or receipt of a transcript)**

Participants will have up until two weeks after they have received their interview transcript to withdraw in part or entirely from the research.

**How will they withdraw? (e.g. by informing the researcher)**

To withdraw participants will need to inform the researcher. Participants will be supplied with the contact details for the researcher and researcher's supervisor, to make this process as simple as possible for each participant.

**16. Data collection activities may be planned for off-campus locations. Please list all off-campus location where you will engage in data collection.**

At this stage I do not have any off-campus interviews/data collection planned.

I intend for all interviews to take place at the University of Waikato campus in Theatre Studies Meeting Room (4<sup>th</sup> floor of I block). Interviews will only take place in an off-campus location if participants are unable to travel to campus. Such an instance may occur if a participant has unique mobility abilities/concerns and is unable to leave their residence. When creating *Life Music* we had such an instance where the interview team went to a retirement village as the participants were unable to travel to campus to be interviewed.

**17. Do you need consent or permission from any organisation, community representative, or anyone other than the individual participants?**

No, not that I am aware of.

**If yes, list all the required permissions, consents, or approvals.  
How and when will you gain these?**

***Attach** any statements, letters, or emails of permission or approval that have been secured in advance of your application to the Human Research Ethics Committee.*

## Research design

**Please tell us about what you will be asking your participants to do.**

**18. What will participants be doing?**

**How long will each activity take?**

**Please provide these details for all of the items on your list in Q.3.**

Participants will be involved in a semi-structured electronically recorded interview where they will be asked a series of 14 questions about their own personal experiences and thoughts on identifying as/ being a women and issues that surround the female experience.

The attached questions (appendix 4) are the final versions of the questions, however as I state in Q 3 the interviews I conduct will be semi-structured. By this I mean the interviews will be structured and guided by the list of questions provided, but there may be supplementary questions asked or discussion initiated by either the researcher or participant for the sake of clarification.

I am trying not to be manipulative with my interview questions and intend for my interviews to be a reasonably open discussion on what it means to identify as a woman, guided by my questions. I am not trying to get specific opinions/responses or viewpoints on specific social, cultural or political issues but rather, genuine and honest responses that may resonate with others. The questions are starting points that may lead to other topics of discussion. Participants are in control of the interview and may digress from the questions if they wish. There may be aspects that are important/relevant to their experience as a women that I have not addressed in my questions that they may desire to share.

Participants will participate in interviews that will last approximately 20 minutes. The length may change depending on how much the participant contributes. This is stated on the participant information sheet.

I anticipate that it will take me 1 - 1 and half months to conduct and transcribe all the interviews. Then a few weeks to create the initial working script for actors to begin rehearsing. It is likely that the script will be revised during the rehearsal process. The length of the rehearsal period will depend on how often I can rehearse with my actors (subject to their availability). However I predict a rehearsal period of between 2 to 3 months with the presentation of the piece being February/March 2019.

***Attach** all research instruments that you intend to use to collect data. (e.g. interview schedules, questionnaire/survey items). Indicate whether the research instruments are drafts or final versions. The final versions of research instruments must be lodged with the committee prior to data collection.*

**See appendix 4**

### 19. How will participants benefit from their involvement in the research?

Many verbatim theatre practitioners state that the people they interview for their plays find it an enjoyable and beneficial experience. Alecky Blythe states "audiences are often amazed at how willing people are to tell their stories. Because we don't listen to each other enough in daily life, when someone offers an attentive ear, people grab the opportunity to talk – even about highly personal information...People are flattered that someone wants to listen, and in our celebrity obsessed times, the idea of being a character in a play can be an exciting prospect" (Blythe, 2008, p. 82). Anyone can be a character in a verbatim play, in a way "verbatim theatre is a remarkably democratic medium" (Blythe, 2008, p. 12).

#### References

Blythe, A. (2008). Alecky Blythe. In W. Hammond & D. Steward (Eds.), *Verbatim verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre* (pp. 77-102). London, England, Oberon Books.

### 20. Could participants be harmed in your research? [see Section 2 for guidance.]

**If YES, please describe all potential harms to your participants.**

**How will you minimize the risk of these harms occurring?**

**What will you do if a participant is harmed?**

**Is it likely that concerns could arise regarding the health and wellbeing of your participants, through their participation in your project? How will this be managed?**

I do not think that it is likely that participating in my project will cause concerns regarding the health and wellbeing of my participants.

I believe the risk of harm is minimal, however, as with any interview situation there is the risk of psychological harm and distress to occur. The questions I propose are personal, they ask participants to talk about their opinions, and their past experiences. Therefore there is the risk that the telling or retelling of certain stories could be traumatic or emotionally impactful/stressful.

I tried to show care and sensitivity to participants by devising questions that are minimally explicitly or implicitly harmful. They are qualitative questions that are open ended, there are no polar questions (yes-no questions). This minimizes the risk of harm and or distress as participants are in control of how they interpret and answer the questions, they can decide how much detail or personal information they wish divulge. I also state on the information sheet that they do not need to feel obliged to answer all the questions, and that they are welcome to indicate any questions they do not wish to be asked in advance of the interview.

As the researcher I will treat all the interviewees with respect, sensitivity and care. I will strive to be empathetic and not judge the participants or their responses, "it is important that they do not feel judged, so I always try to understand the interviewee's point of view" (Blythe 2008, p. 87). McNiff (2017) states in relation to interviewing for Action Research projects that the interviewer should "aim to listen more than you speak. Learn to accept silences. Demonstrate empathy and be patient" (p. 178). Empathetic listening in an interview can be described as "similar to the engaged way that we listen to music, the researcher is open, present, following closely and caringly, attending to nuanced qualities, much as an accompanist is present for the soloist" (Bresler, 2008, pp. 230-231).

If during the interview a participant was harmed or I perceived that the participant was at risk of harm I would stop the interview and inform the participant why I had stopped. I would then, working collaboratively with the participant, evaluate whether we could/ should continue. If there was an emergency or I felt unable to assess or manage the situation I would seek assistance from appropriate health professionals.

#### References

Blythe, A. (2008). Alecky Blythe. In W. Hammond & D. Steward (Eds.), *Verbatim verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre* (pp. 77-102). London, England, Oberon Books.

Bresler, L. (2008). The music lesson. In J.G. Knowles, & A. L. Cole, (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 226-238).  
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226545>

McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. London, England: Sage.

#### **How will you analyse the data that you collect from your participants?**

"I will use the interview responses to create the script for a play, which is a creative process and a dramaturgical exercise. One could state that the act of deciding which interview sections are included in the script is a form of 'data analysis'.

However, I cannot state at this stage exactly what will guide my decisions for including or excluding certain interview responses/sections of responses in the script. It is a creative process that is dependent on the responses I get, which I cannot anticipate. However, to guide my processes, I may draw from scripting methods and techniques used by other verbatim practitioners. Some of which include a 'nodal' technique used by Paul Brown when creating Australian verbatim play *Aftershocks*. We also used this technique when creating *Life Music*. Brown would create "what he calls 'nodes', moments of intersection between separate stories where the spectators address the same subject matter from different or complementary perspectives" (Mumford, 2010, p. 42). These moments of intersection or commonalities between interview responses can form the basis of 'scenes' and can be a useful way to find potential moments of interaction between participant stories. "In *Aftershocks* (as in most verbatim plays), monologues are combined into nodal scenes which interweave fragments from different interviewee speeches. The end result is something akin to but, distinct from, dialogue, with characters seeming at once isolated and even lonely, and yet connected with a community of listeners" (Mumford, 2010, p. 46).

I may also draw from Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Company who used a technique called 'moment work' when creating their verbatim play *The Laramie Project*. Kaufman states in the preamble to the play script "when writing this play, we used a technique I developed called moment work. It is a method to create and analyse theatre from a structuralist (or tectonic) perspective. For that reason, there are no scenes in this play, only moments. A moment does not mean a change of locale or an entrance or exit of actors or characters. It is simply a unit of theatrical time that is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning" (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater Project, 2001, p. xiv). A common theme shared by Kaufman and Brown in the 'nodal' and 'moment' techniques is the notion of 'juxtaposition' of stories or responses to create meaning.

Narratively there are many possibilities, verbatim plays often have more than one overarching narrative strand. Very rarely is it just one story that is being told. More often it is the intersecting stories of many that make up a community or microcosm of society. Therefore the 'plot' is often non-linear and open. Verbatim plays are never the full story or the whole truth but rather a 'snapshot' of time, culture and society. Part of my research is discovering what I believe to be a good method of creating a verbatim script that is both ethically considerate and dramaturgically interesting. I state on my participant information sheet (appendix 1) that "potential participants should be aware that only parts of your interview will be used in the final script or may not be included at all. The script is likely to be structured in such a way that your responses/sections of your responses may appear in a different order or context to the original interview."

#### References

Mumford, M. (2010). *Aftershocks: Voices from a shaken community*. In P. Brown (Ed.), *Verbatim: Staging memory and community* (pp. 37-48). Sydney, Australia: Currency Press.

Kaufman, M., & Tectonic Theater Project. (2001). *The Laramie project*. New York, NY: Vintage books.

**21. Will your research involve comparing one group to another? [suggest moving up to Q.11]**

No.

**If yes, then, explain how the comparison will be done.  
How are the participants categorized into specific groups?  
Why is it important to do this?**

**22. Does your research involve any deception of participants?**

No

**If yes, then describe the deception.  
Why is it necessary to deceive participants? How and when will participants be told of the deception?**

**23. Will the true identity of the researcher(s) be concealed from participants at any time during the researcher? (Such research is called 'covert research'.)**

No

**If yes, then describe the concealment.  
Why is it necessary?  
How and when will participants be told of the concealment?  
If never, then, explain why the concealment will not be disclosed to participants.**

## Cultural safety

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, the University of Waikato, through its official *Charter*, has an explicit commitment to partnership with Māori, to kaupapa and tikanga Māori, and to the interests of New Zealand-born and Island-born Pacific people.

Through the *Ethical Conduct and Human Research and Related Activities Regulations*, researchers are required to respect the **cultural, social and language preferences and sensitivities** of participants. When applying for ethical approval, researchers should demonstrate an awareness of social and cultural difference, consult advisors regarding the appropriate conduct of their research, and present the outcome of consultation in their ethics application.

Two resources that are particularly relevant to research at the University of Waikato are *Te Ara Tika – Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics* and the *Pacific Health Research Guidelines*.

**24. Does the research project have particular relevance or potential implications for Māori, or for other social and cultural groups?**

I do not believe that my research will have particular relevance or potential implications for Māori, or other social and cultural groups. However, by interviewing different Hamilton based women it is possible that I may have participants from different cultural and social backgrounds including New Zealand Māori or Pacific cultures.

By consulting *Te Ara Tika – Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics* and applying my research project to Appendix C: *Characteristics of Māori research* my research fits into the category of 'Research Involving Māori'. This is described as "research where Māori are involved as participants or subjects". The table goes on to state that for this level of research Māori participation is minor and research methods/tools are contemporary – mainstream, with mainstream analysis.

*Te Ara Tika* states that "a mainstream approach refers to research that may or may not have direct relevance to Māori and where Māori engage as research participants. In these situations researchers are expected to protect the rights and interests of Māori although there is little real involvement in the research process or outcomes" (p. 9). I will uphold manaakitanga and Mana Tangata which are defined below.

"The minimum standard for manaakitanga acknowledges a person's inherent dignity and the responsibility that people have to act in a caring manner towards others." (p. 10)

"Mana Tangata (autonomous individual), in the context of this framework, refers to individuals that choose to participate in research and their right to be appropriately informed of risks to their individual or collective mana...and recognising the place of oral consent in some Māori settings is integral to demonstrating respect for the mana of Māori participants"(p. 13).

Throughout my research I intend to encapsulate Māhaki (respectful conduct) and be mindful and respectful of Tikanga (protocols and practises) of different cultures. I believe my research practices incorporate and adhere to the values and principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; partnership, participation and protection. I will abide by *Te Ara Tika – Guidelines for Māori Research* and *The Pacific Health Research Guidelines*, by being mindful of four important Pacific cultural values stated in the guidelines. These include "communal relationships, reciprocity, holism, and respect" (p. 6). Values that will guide my research include mana akiaki (empowerment) and aroha (love, care).

#### References

Hudson, M., Pūtaiora Writing Group, & Health Research Council of New Zealand. (2010). *Te ara tika : Guidelines for Māori research ethics : A framework for researchers and ethics committee members*. Auckland, New Zealand: Health Research Council of New Zealand on behalf of the Pūtaiora Writing Group.

**If YES, then please provide the following information about your consultation processes.**

**Who are the stakeholders? (That is, whom do you have to consult?)**

**What are the results of your consultation with them so far? (e.g. advice taken on appropriate procedures and approaches to research, decisions made about appropriate ways to return research findings)**

I do not believe that I have any stakeholders with whom I need to consult about my approach to this research and the return of research findings.

**Do you have at least one cultural advisor for this project? Please provide their name(s) and specific role(s).**

My supervisor (Dr. Laura Haughey) is very experienced at working on large scale community theatre projects and working cross culturally with different cultural groups. Similarly to my proposed research she is experienced in creating theatre from real individual's personal experiences and stories. She can support and advise me throughout the project.

**25. Describe how you will show respect and sensitivity towards participants (e.g. having support persons present during interviews, having an interpreter if you are not fluent in the language, being vouched for by elders, using appropriate gestures, dressing inoffensively, or participating in cultural ceremonies or rituals).**

Participants are able to have a support person present during the interview. The presence of the support person and any response they give will not be included in the final script unless they request to be included. If they do request to be included they will then have to read the information sheet, consent form and questions in order to be able to give informed consent before the interview commences.

The University of Waikato does not have a uniform or a dress code but as I am representing the university I will dress in a dignified, culturally inoffensive and appropriate manner.

**26. How will the identities of participants (and their communities and/or organisations where relevant) be represented in the research?**

Participants will be asked to indicate how they wish to be identified/represented in my research on the participant information sheet and will be asked during the interview so that there is recorded (video and/or audio) evidence of their decision. This will then be included in the transcription of their interview that will be sent to them so that they can review their level of anonymity when reviewing their interview responses. Due to the nature of my project participants can request different levels of anonymity. If they do not want their real name to be used in the script and attributed to their interview response I will use a pseudonym. Alternatively they could be referred to by only their first name, which could make them less identifiable.

They may wish to be acknowledged by name for their contribution and interview but don't want to be accredited to their responses. In this case, I would thank them for their contribution in a preface to the script and then refer to them by a pseudonym in the actual script/play text.

Participants may also wish to be acknowledged by name in my thesis but wish to remain anonymous in the play text and vice versa, this of course will be accommodated.

There is the possibility that participants may recognise/identify other participants. In this instance I cannot guarantee 100% anonymity. However in order to prevent such an instance occurring participants have the opportunity to review their interview transcript. Therefore they have the opportunity to request for any identifying content to not be included in the script. They have veto power over what I use from their interview. I have also informed the participant in the information sheet that there will be a performance to which only interviewees are invited. I will explain this verbally at the interview and also explain the risk of identification by other participants. It is just one of the 'risks' of participation. If participants do request anonymity and I am thinking of including a particular story or comment from their interview in the script that may potentially identify them despite a pseudonym I would contact the participant and explain my perceived risk of identification and double check that they would be happy with me using that section of interview.

**27. Is it important to maintain the confidentiality of participants (and their communities/organisations where relevant) in the research reporting? YES / NO**

**If YES, how will you preserve confidentiality?**

Yes, it is important if the participant wishes for their identity to remain confidential. Once I have ascertained the level of confidentiality the participant desires I will then act accordingly. I will be the only person who will have access to the complete original recording of the interview.

**28. In addition to the lead researcher(s), who else will see information provided by the participants? Will any of the shared information be linked to the participants' names, or will it be anonymised before sharing?**

The actors who will perform in the final piece will see the interview transcripts only after they have been reviewed by the participants. They will only see information that has been approved by the participant, and only the information that will be used in the script. The actors will not see the whole transcribed interview. If the participant has requested anonymity the information will be anonymised before the actors see it.

*It may be appropriate to ask additional parties (e.g. student researchers, transcribers) to sign a confidentiality agreement. **Attach** the confidentiality agreement that you intend to use.*

**See Appendix 6**

**29. How and where will the data be stored and protected during the research project?**

The original recordings and transcriptions will be stored on the researcher's (Missy Mooney's) private password protected computer. Any physical copies of transcriptions, the video camera and audio recording devices will be kept in a lockable room and only Missy will have access to them.

## *Research Reporting*

**30. List all the anticipated research outputs for the project (e.g. thesis, conference papers, journal articles, other sorts of presentation, book, media release, pedagogic materials).**

- Master's thesis
- Possible pedagogic material
- Possible presentations/lectures
- Possible journal articles

**31. What provision is there to provide participants with information about the outcomes of the research?**

It is stated in my participant information sheet the purpose of my research and its possible uses. I will inform participants of all the outcomes of my research.

**32. Research data must be stored for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of a research project.**

**Where and how will you store your data after the project has been completed? (Supervisors are responsible for storing research data on behalf of their students.)**

**If archiving is appropriate for your project data, where will you archive the data and under what conditions?**

**If you do not intend to store your data indefinitely, how will you ensure that your data is safely destroyed?**

I will store my data (the recorded interviews) indefinitely in a password protected folder on a password protected external flash drive. This will be kept in a safe location that only I have access to.

## *Legal Issues*

**33. Ownership of Human Research Data**

**It is usual to state that participants own the data that they provide, and that the researcher will use the data for the specified purposes, with the consent of participants. Please explain any variation from this arrangement.**

Participants own the content of their interviews, however the final play script will belong to Missy Mooney, as the dramaturg/playwright as she has constructed the play out of participants' responses. However it will be acknowledged by Missy, perhaps even in the play's title, that the content of the play is not hers, but that it is comprised of participant's stories, of which they are the owners. Participants can request to have themselves acknowledged as contributors to the play text if they wish.

**34. Copyright**

The researcher's ownership of scholarly publications and other forms of research outputs is governed by the University of Waikato's Intellectual Property Rights Policy. Crucially the policy states in Clause 8 that, "*the University recognises and endorses the traditional academic freedom of staff to publish research and scholarly documents and to produce creative and artistic works without restriction; the University does not assert ownership of copyright of such works (e.g. books, journal articles, conference papers, art works and musical recordings) unless specified in clauses 12-18 of [the] policy.*"

**Please explain any variation from this policy.**

Clause 9 states that, "*When dealing with intellectual property that includes Mātauranga Māori, and in the context of the WAI262 claim report, the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi will be applied by the University*". Please indicate if intellectual property is subject to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

**35. Other legal or ethical issues**

**Describe any other legal or ethical issues related to this project. Consider particularly relationships between members of the research team, and project funders, sponsors, or other stakeholders.**

I do not foresee any other legal or ethical issues related to this project and I will not vary from the text provided.

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## APPENDIX 1

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Missy Mooney and I'm a postgraduate student at the University of Waikato studying towards a Master of Arts in Theatre Studies. My thesis is focused on the creation process of verbatim theatre. Verbatim theatre is a kind of documentary theatre in which the words of the script are taken word for word from interviews with real people. As part of my research I want to create my own piece of verbatim theatre. I hope to use the knowledge and experience I gain to create a potential guide to creating both ethically considerate and theatrically engaging verbatim theatre.



To create this piece of verbatim theatre I intend to interview members of the Hamilton community who identify as women. I will then transcribe these interviews word for word and arrange the responses into a script, which will be able to be performed by actors. I intend to preserve the interviewee's words throughout the scripting process and keep the words intact and unedited. I aim to include the responses of 10-20 women therefore potential participants should be aware that only parts of your interview will be used in the final script or may not even be included at all. The script is likely to be structured in such a way that your responses/sections of your responses may appear in a different order or context to the original interview.

#### **What will you be doing?**

In agreeing to participate you are consenting to take part in a semi structured interview comprising of 14 questions relating to the experiences and thoughts of identifying as a women. By 'semi-structured' I mean that I will ask you specific questions, but will invite you to give extensive answers. You will get a copy of the list of questions in advance of consenting to participate. Please do not feel pressured to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You can end the interview at any time. If there are any questions you do not wish to be asked feel free to let me know in advance of your interview. The interview will be approximately 20 minutes in length and will take place at the University of Waikato in the Theatre Studies Meeting Room, unless another location needs to be organised for reasons such as accessibility.

You are welcome to have a support person present at your interview. Please let me know in advance if this is the case.

#### **Recording of interviews**

All of the interviews will be audio recorded so that they can be accurately transcribed word for word. Preferably, the interviews will be recorded with both audio and video as then the actors can review the video footage which will enable them to learn not only the exact words that were said, but the exact way in which you said them.

Only I and the actor that is speaking your words will see the video recording.

If you would rather not be video recorded you can request to only be audio recorded.

You are asked to indicate your decision on your consent form.

It is University of Waikato policy that data is held for five years. The recorded interviews will be stored on a password protected computer. The only people who will have access to these recordings will be myself (Missy Mooney) and the actors involved in the project.

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### **Transcripts**

Your interview will be transcribed by me, I will be the only person with access to your interview in its entirety. You will then be sent a copy of your transcript to review. You will have up to 2 weeks after receiving this transcript to review what you said and indicate if there are any parts of your interview that you would like to withdraw from inclusion in the play script. Or withdraw from the research entirely.

### **Confidentiality**

Participants are asked to indicate how they want to be acknowledged their contribution to this project. If you do not wish to be identified by name you can request anonymity and a pseudonym will be used instead of your real name. You may wish to be acknowledged by name for your contribution but don't want your name to be linked to your specific responses. In this case you will be thanked for your contribution in a preface to the script and then be referred to by a pseudonym in the actual script/play text. You can request different levels of anonymity such as only being referred to by your first name. Or you may be happy with your name being used in my thesis, but would prefer to remain anonymous in the script. You will be asked to indicate how you wish to be identified on the consent form and in person during your interview, you may change your decision after reviewing your interview transcript.

### **Results**

The result of this theatre making process will be a live theatre performance that is NOT open to the general public. Only the participants (those who gave interviews) and some invited guests such as academic staff and colleagues from the University of Waikato (such as my supervisor) will be invited to attend this performance. The venue for this performance is yet to be confirmed but it may be at the University of Waikato or a small local event/performance space such as the Meteor theatre. The date has yet to be confirmed but participants will be informed of and invited to the presentation of the piece. Reference to this research process will also appear in my thesis, which will be presented both in print and online. My research may also be used for other research outputs such as presentations or other written publications.

### **Your rights**

- You will be sent your interview transcript to review and asked to indicate if you wish for any material to not be included in the performance script.
- You are able to withdraw your entire interview or sections of your interview from inclusion in the performance script no later than 2 weeks after you have received your interview transcript.
- You can request to view the video recording of your interview as well as the transcription.

### **This Information Sheet**

Please keep this information sheet. It contains the contact details for myself and my supervisor. There is also the contact details for the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Waikato. Do not hesitate to contact them if you have any questions about the ethical conduct of this research or wish to make a complaint about the conduct of this research.

If you have any questions about this research please feel free to contact me (Missy Mooney) or my supervisor.

#### **Missy Mooney**

missmoosoph@gmail.com

#### **Laura Haughey**

laura.haughey@waikato.ac.nz

*"This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz), postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240."*

## APPENDIX 2

### Participant Recruitment Facebook Post, Email message or Newspaper advertisement

Hello, my name is Missy Mooney and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Waikato studying towards a Master of Arts in Theatre Studies.

I am looking to interview 10-20 individuals who identify as a woman.

My thesis is focused on the creation process of verbatim theatre. The objective of my research is to evaluate the theories, techniques and practices used by multiple verbatim and documentary theatre practitioners (primarily those from New Zealand, Australia, Britain and the United States). I will draw from a multitude of these techniques, methods and practices and use them to create my own piece of verbatim theatre.

The piece of verbatim theatre I intend to create is focused on woman. I want to interview a variety of different women and ask them about their own personal experiences and thoughts on identifying as/being a woman. I will then transcribe these interviews word for word and arrange the responses into a script, which will be able to be performed by actors. The performance script will be created verbatim, or word for word from the recorded interviews.

If you are interested in being interviewed or would like more information on my research and what participating would involve please contact me via email using [missmoosoph@gmail.com](mailto:missmoosoph@gmail.com).

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**APPENDIX 3**  
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**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

**Name of person interviewed:** \_\_\_\_\_

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time up to 2 weeks after receiving the interview transcript.

During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.

<b>Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I consent for my interview to be video recorded as well as audio recorded.		
I wish for my identity to remain confidential in <b>all</b> presentations of the research findings (the play script and thesis etc.) and to preserve my anonymity request the use of a pseudonym.		
I am happy to be identified by my real name for <b>all</b> presentations of the research findings (the play script and thesis etc).		
I wish to have different levels of anonymity for the <b>different</b> presentations of the research findings (play script and thesis)		

**If you request different levels of anonymity for the play script and thesis (and other research outputs such as presentations & other written publications) please state how you wish to be identified for each:** *i.e. I am happy to be identified by name in your thesis and other research outputs but prefer to remain anonymous in the play text/script.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Participant :	_____	Researcher :	_____
Signature :	_____	Signature :	_____
Date :	_____	Date :	_____
Contact Details :	_____	Contact Details :	_____
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

## APPENDIX 4

### Interview Questions

1. What did/do you want to be when you grow up?
2. Do you have a favourite quote by a woman? If so what would it be?
3. Who are some famous and influential women you admire and why? (These could be celebrities, filmmakers, authors, musicians, activists, humanitarians, politicians etc.)
4. Do you have any thoughts/ feelings about how women/females are portrayed and/or represented in films, books, video games, theatre etc.?
5. Are there any fictional women/girls from films or books etc. that you admire/identify with or believe are positive role models and representations of women?
6. Do you have a favourite poem, speech or song written and/or performed by a woman?
7. Who is an important woman in your life?
8. Do you think that there are any pressures or struggles specific to being a woman? If so what are these?
9. What could be some pros and cons to being a woman? (What are the best and worst parts of being a woman?)
10. Do you think the role of women and/or what it means to be a woman has changed over time? How has it changed? What are some of these changes?
11. What is sexism?
12. Do you think women have equal rights with men?
13. What does 'feminism' mean to you?
14. Is there anything else relevant to this discussion that you want to add/talk about?

### Interview Questions for New Zealand-Based Verbatim Theatre Practitioners and Researchers

1. What is the role of the dramaturg for a verbatim theatre project?  
What are some specifics of the role and how does the experience of being a dramaturg for verbatim theatre differ to that of non-verbatim/documentary theatre projects?
2. Do the ethical responsibilities verbatim theatre makers have to those they interviewed impact their dramaturgical process/decisions? If yes, how so?
3. Do you have any dramaturgical 'inspirations'? That is methods and/or theatre practitioners whom you use/draw from in your verbatim/documentary theatre work.



## APPENDIX 5

### ACTOR INFORMATION SHEET

I, Missy Mooney am a postgraduate student at the University of Waikato studying towards a Master of Arts in Theatre Studies. My thesis is focused on the creation process of verbatim theatre. Verbatim theatre is a kind of documentary theatre in which the words of the script are taken word for word from interviews with real people. The objective of my research is to evaluate the theories, techniques and practices used by multiple verbatim and documentary theatre practitioners. I will draw from a multitude of these techniques, methods and practices and use them to create my own piece of verbatim theatre. I hope to use the knowledge and experience I gain to create a potential guide to creating both ethically considerate and theatrically engaging verbatim theatre. My research could then be used as an example, guide or starting point for other verbatim practitioners.

The piece of verbatim theatre I intend to create is focused on women. I intend to interview members of the Hamilton community who identify as women. I will then transcribe these interviews word for word and arrange the responses into a script, which will be able to be performed by actors. I intend to preserve the interviewee's words throughout the scripting process and keep the words intact and unedited. I aim to include the responses of 10-20 women therefore potential participants should be aware that only parts of your interview will be used in the final script or may not even be included at all. The script is likely to be structured in such a way that your responses may appear in a different order or context to the original interview.

#### **What will you be doing?**

By participating as an actor in this project you are consenting to take part in the rehearsal process and performance of an original piece of verbatim theatre. This requires commitment to attending all rehearsals you are called for, and participation in some verbatim workshops/ exercises during rehearsals. You will be required to study the interview recordings of the people you are presenting and memorise your lines. You may be asked to document your thoughts after each rehearsal and create a kind of 'rehearsal log/diary'. You would not be expected to work on this outside of rehearsal time. I would schedule time for this task at the end of each rehearsal. It would only need to be a brief comment or feedback on the rehearsal which I may reference in my written thesis. You will be required to perform in a closed presentation of the verbatim piece that is NOT open to the general public. Only those who gave interviews and some invited guests including academic staff from the University of Waikato (such as my supervisor) will be invited to attend this performance. The date and venue for this performance is yet to be confirmed but it may be at the University of Waikato or a small local event/performance space such as the Meteor theatre.

#### **Using the recorded interviews**

All of the interviews will be audio recorded so that they can be accurately transcribed word for word. Preferably, the interviews will be recorded with both audio and video as then the actors (you) can view the video footage. By studying the video recording of the interviews you will be able to capture the physical gestures, body language and mannerisms of the interviewees.

Participants have been assured that only I (Missy Mooney) and the actor that is speaking their words will see the video/audio recording of their interview. Therefore you must not share the recording or discuss the content of the interview/ recording with anyone outside this project.

#### **Transcripts**

The interviews will be transcribed by me. A copy of the interview transcript will be sent to the participants for them to review. Participants are asked to review what they said and indicate if there are



any parts of their interview that they would like to withdraw from inclusion in the play script. I will then use these reviewed transcripts to craft the performance script.

#### **Duty to participants/interviewees**

In verbatim theatre it is the actor's duty as well as the dramatist to uphold the dignity and integrity of the real people who have shared their personal experiences, opinions and thoughts. The importance of correctly representing participants is paramount. Young states "the scope for damage is not only in the survivors telling of the story in an interview, but also, and perhaps more so, in the theatrical retelling of that story: if a participant feels that his testimony has been misrepresented, or if he feels betrayed, he may be doubly wounded" (Young, 2017, p. 26). As the theatre maker I will strive to prioritize accurate and truthful representation of participants over building a dramatic narrative or theatricality. As an actor in my verbatim project you too must strive to prioritize accurate representation of the people you are portraying. British verbatim theatre practitioner David Hare states "it does seem to me if you stand up on a stage and represent somebody you do have a duty to them to get it right, and for them to be at peace with how they are represented" (Hare, 2014).

#### **Confidentiality**

It is our duty to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. They are trusting us with their words and real life experiences and we must not betray that trust. Therefore you are not to discuss the identity of participants with anyone who is not Missy. As an actor participating in my research you may be referenced in my thesis and may prefer not to be referred to/ identified by name. You will be asked to indicate how you wish to be identified on your consent form.

#### **Results**

Additionally to the presentation of the piece, reference to this research process will also appear in my thesis, which will be presented both in print and online. My research may also be used for other research outputs such as presentations or other written publications.

#### **This Information Sheet**

Please keep this information sheet. It contains the contact details for myself and my supervisor. There is also the contact details for the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Waikato. Do not hesitate to contact them if you have any questions about the ethical conduct of this research or wish to make a complaint about the conduct of this research. If you have any questions about this research please feel free to contact me (Missy Mooney) or my supervisor.

#### **Missy Mooney**

missmoosoph@gmail.com

#### **Laura Haughey**

laura.haughey@waikato.ac.nz

*"This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz), postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240."*

#### **References**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

**APPENDIX 6**

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO  
FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

**ACTOR CONSENT FORM**

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

I have received a copy of the Actor Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation.

By signing this consent form you are promising to show respect and aroha (love & care) to the individuals you are portraying and uphold the integrity of their words and character when portraying and presenting them in rehearsal and performance.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
I agree to uphold the confidentiality of the interview participants. I will not discuss the identity of participants or the content of their interviews with anyone who is not Missy Mooney or another actor in the project.		
I am happy to be identified by my real name for <b>all</b> presentations of the research findings (thesis or other research publications presentations, articles etc).		

***If you tick 'no' you will be referred to as 'the actor' in all presentations of the research such as my thesis etc.***

Participant/Actor :	_____	Researcher :	_____
Signature :	_____	Signature :	_____
Date :	_____	Date :	_____
Contact Details :	_____	Contact Details :	_____
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

## Appendix 2: The Script of *Strong Female Characters*

### STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS

A verbatim play constructed by Missy Mooney

**Cian Gardner:** MISSY, LEAFA, ANNE, HANNAH, LU

**Megan Goldsman:** MISSY, DEB, MARY, KODEE, A

**Kelly Petersen:** MISSY, K, CELIA, BRIAR, LE

In performance the 'Missy lines' were divided between the three actors.

An ellipsis (...) indicates a pause in speech.

"ALL" refers to when a line is spoken by all three actors simultaneously.

#### PROLOGUE

**LEAFA:** I'm a writer I write you know that's what I do in my job as a curator and you, you have to consider -actually you have to consider people's feelings. You do. And so I, I feel the responsibility to um to honour those who identify as women.

**MISSY:** Yeah I think it's going ay? Imagine if I didn't record it. Don't even joke though.

**ALL:** Right. So my name is Missy Mooney.

**MISSY:** And this is an interview for my Master's research um on verbatim theatre.

**CIAN:** I've gained ethical approval from the FASS Committee of Human Research um, the Ethics Committee to conduct this interview.

**MISSY:** The date is the 21st of September 2018.

**MISSY:** So it's the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2018.

**MISSY:** Right and um it's the 3rd of October.

**MISSY:** Cool, and this is just a voice one (*recording device*) just so -I like to have two just in case (*turns on Dictaphone*). I'll just put that (*recording device*) there.

**MISSY:** Sweet. Um-

**ALL:** What's the date?

**MISSY:** The 12th -it's the 12th of October 2018 and I'm about to do an interview.

**MISSY:** Today is the -ha the Thursday- is Thursday the 18th of October 2018.

**MISSY:** It's the 29th of October 2018.

**ALL:** I'm here with-

**MISSY:** I'm about to start an interview.

**MISSY:** I am here about to do an interview. I don't know why I said I'm here...Anyway um just before we start the interview um both of my participants have read the information sheets and completed their um (*LE waves at the camera*)...Who you waving at G?

**LE:** The camera (*laughs*).

**MISSY:** Could you state your name, please.

**MISSY:** Umm so I'm Missy Mooney and it's the 9th

**LEAFA:** Hi Missy.

**MISSY:** Hello! It's the 9th of October 2018 um I, I'm about to conduct an inter-interview. Could you introduce yourself?

**MISSY:** Um just before I ask you the questions.

**ALL:** I just need to check-

**MISSY:** Um just checking for the record that you have received and understand um, received the information sheet understand like the purpose of this research-

**MISSY:** Why I'm interviewing you.

**MISSY:** What I'm going to do with your interview.

**MISSY:** You don't have any questions?

**DEB:** No, I'm allgood. Yes I've read the information sheet. I'm fully informed and give my consent to this process.

**K:** Oh this could end up being so boring for you (*laughs*).

**MISSY:** (*Laughs*) I'm sure it won't be.

**ALL:** We'll see.

**MISSY:** So I'm studying. So I'm making a piece of verbatim theatre.

**K:** Yeah.

**MISSY:** So it's focusing on the theatre. Verbatim meaning, word for word. So I'm interviewing people, and how they speak word for word will make the, ah, the script.

**K:** *(Laughs)*. Ok. I should have written stuff down. Who's gonna have to be me? They'll be like "fuck that bitch mate."

**MISSY:** *(Laughs)*.

**K:** She's gonna be like "Fuck Miss why'd you give me her." *(Laughs)*.

**MISSY:** Nah she'll be like "Awesome!"

**K:** She'll be like "was that just one person? Or was it 5? Like whaaa?!" *(Laughs)*.

### SCENE 1

**LEAFA:** Your fertility and your- Whether you have children or not, whether you have terminations or not. Everyone's got an opinion on it. Um you know what I mean? I had 6 kids. And people have an opinion on that.

**DEB:** I struggled to become a mother and I think fertility issues and struggles are, those obviously, you know those are quite specific to being a woman.

**ANNE:** Yeah actually...this is not something I thought I was gonna end up talking about but um...I, I couldn't have children.

**DEB:** Um and I think fertility is something that you, you know, you spend a lot of your life hoping that you don't get pregnant, and then some people spend a whole lot of their lives really wanting to become pregnant. And I, I think that the whole idea of biological clocks ticking and um and motherhood is um increasingly fraught. Um not really as natural and easy as you would, you know, necessarily expect.

**ANNE:** I-I couldn't have children and ah I didn't know I wanted children until it was all a bit too late. And um and I then, I went through a humongously difficult time where whenever I'd go anywhere with my husband's family ah every fucking person who was a woman in that family was either the child of a woman or you know, every- like Charlie's sisters, his nieces and nephews you know. And everyone that I was connected with through his family had borne children. And that, that sort of was like *(sigh)* yeah walk into a room and I'm like hmmm "one

of these things is not like the others” and that, that took quite a long time for me to work through and not have it sort of destroy me.

**DEB:** Or um, all your friends are finding it really easy and what's wrong with you when you can't?

**ANNE:** So I think, think this expectation of...what, what is being a woman is actually being a mother. When, when you've been denied access to that role it's quite challenging in terms of well what am I then?

**DEB:** When you're wanting to have a child and you can't you do question your- are you a real woman if you can't have a child?

**ANNE:** I'm not a mum, I'm not a grandmother, I'm not an auntie ahhh yeah OK.

**DEB:** If you do have children the whole struggle of being a working mother and the guilt that you feel when you're not at work and the guilt that you feel when you're not with- you know not looking after your child. So that's kind of a constant, daily struggle for a lot of woman.

**CELIA:** I think the best part of being a woman for me-

**HANNAH:** Oh I know what this is gonna be.

**CELIA:** For me is being a mother. Being a mother, being able to...rear children, spend time with children. I love that so much. And our, the way in which our children have come to us has not all been um through giving birth. We've adopted some. And um, yeah just being able to do that is such a privilege. For me being able to be pregnant and have children was such a precious special thing

**MARY:** I don't believe in any, I mean I, I, I don't believe in a lot of what's happening now, with day-care with children. I, I think it's, I think it's sad.

**CELIA:** I think that-

**MARY:** Children being pushed around all over the place.

**HANNAH:** Gran like but like, someone- I want that. Like I want- so I want equal rights as a man. So I would like to go out and work full time, get same, get paid the same you know, be the same. And so if putting you know, my hypothetical child in day-care is the way that I can do it I will do it.

**MARY:** Well I don't know, I -probably because I didn't want to do it. Or probably never had a chance to do it.

**HANNAH:** You're getting a phone call. Do you wanna answer it?

## SCENE 2

**KODEE:** I think that I am incredibly lucky um to get to become a woman. I love the power that women hold. And it's that kind of power I strive for and -but in a positive way.

**K:** Um so this idea that we've been more empowered like "you can do whatever you wanna do" and that's a message that I tell anyone. I have a friend from China, Betty, and then she came to New Zealand. She was very timid and she had to do what her husband said, and she had to do what her mother-in-law said, and I'm like "no. You're in New Zealand now. We kiwi girls do anything we want."

**KODEE:** Um, just realised how that sounded. But yeah, it's, it's definitely rewarding being a female and being able to change the world in small doses. And there is nothing more rewarding than that.

## SCENE 3

**CELIA:** I used to love watching old movies and there was one old movie, and I forget the name, but it had a woman um, who was heavily into her beauty routine. And the little ditty or song that goes with it (sings) "keep young and beautiful. It's your duty to be beautiful. Keep young a beautiful if you want to be loved. Take care of all your charms if you want to be in someone's arms. Keep young and beautiful if you want to be loved." And it went on with many verses, and that portrayed the need for woman to be accepted, was that they had to be beautiful. And I grew up feeling that. And it was only as an older adult in my 20's that I started to realise that "hey perhaps this isn't true."

**HANNAH:** Yeah I think that's what I, what I meant when I was talking at the start. Ah there's this theory it's like, you look at old movies and you, you look at women, women characters, female characters in movies and you're like: "can it be replaced with a sexy lamp?" And so, you know, in early, like older films, you look at this woman and she's basically there just to be someone, you know, young and beautiful. So I think now it's very much, well it's getting better, in the

sense that you know, characters in movies and TV shows they're strong and they have a role and they have a character and they have their own like subplots. It's not just the sexy lamp. Like if you watch the first Transformers movie, poor Megan Fox. Like it's just, you know, she's literally just there to be some sexy chick standing next to a car you know? So I pride myself on my Netflix watch list suggestions being like um "shows with strong female characters."

**K:** Oh what I did want to be when I grew up was to be a like a singer, actress, musician like famous model whatever all those things. Yeah. That's what I did wanna be when I grew up. And now what I wanna be when I grow up is I want to be happy. I just want to have a good life and have my family around me and having some money would be awesome as well (*laughs*). But um I want to- what I want to be when I grow up is a good person, who does good stuff and helps people. That's what I want to be when I grow up now.

**MARY:** Well I mean a lot of um, a lot of the things that I grew up with have gone now. But the things that I think about and it's, it's odd. When I see some of these youngsters going up and down here to school, wiggling their bottoms and, and, and hardly any clothes on. What, what would have been said about them when I was- they're asking for it.

**BRIAR:** Like my grandma she's like -she doesn't like me lifting because she thinks it's gonna make me manly. And I told her that I was gonna quit lifting and become a stripper and she said "good. At least it's feminine." (*Laughs*) I was like "yeah, but dignity." But aww she doesn't quite see the fact that lifting makes me stronger and more confident in myself. Like yes it will give me a physique that's different to models and books and movies and magazines and whatever but I enjoy it, makes me confident, makes me stronger physically, mentally yeah.

**ANNE:** Um, but I do, I do have concerns for, for your general person about- in particular young people about how the images of women- what that means for those kids. Like I remember the first time I ever understood, I was about 14

possibly slightly older, the first time I ever understood that those beautiful magazines, those glossy magazines that my friends' mothers would buy, that the women on those covers were airbrushed. I spent my teenage years thinking there was something wrong with me cos I had dark rings under my eyes. But in fact those bitches on those covers had those bloody dark rings airbrushed out. I mean just something as basic as that has a profound effect on how a child would see herself. So I think there's some incredible role - female role models, awesome images of women, you know girls, but then there are also equally some really...I dunno, not positive, not great representations. As I say, super sexualized that, that kind of concerns me too.

**A:** And everyone, everyone gets a tan, like everyone. Well the people in my friend group. They all want to look beautiful so they- they are beautiful, but they spend a lot of money on, on it. Um and, and for myself I feel that pressure a lot but I don't wear a lot of make-up. Like I'm not wearing any now, which is why I didn't want to be recorded. Ha.

**HANNAH:** Um...I feel like it's, it's getting better. But you know, pressures to appear a certain way. And to you know, so to you know, to be skinny and be hot and always have makeup on so you look flawless. I mean I don't abide by any of those in the sense that I don't wear make-up and I don't you know, I wear what I want and you know, eat what I want and all of that.

**CELIA:** I think that um...As Hannah said the idea that you have to look a certain way to be appropriate as a woman um, I find abhorrent. I have found as I've got older I can be more comfortable about ignoring those things. Like wearing makeup and being a certain shape or size, dressing fashionably. But the one bug bear I have, and it drives me bonkers, is the idea that to look acceptable we should shave our legs and our armpits. I find-

**MARY:** You show your what?

**HANNAH:** Shave.

**CELIA:** Shave your legs and our armpits.

**MARY:** What for?

**CELIA:** To look nice. People think that if you're a woman and you have hairy legs you don't look right.

**MARY:** Fancy that, I never knew.

**LU:** And also for me as like a black, black woman I feel like people always expect me to have like a huge butt or something, I don't know like *(laughs)*. I dunno there's all those things and...This is like a more culture one. I feel like there's no pressure whatsoever for guys in my culture to be like almost perfect or anything. Guys can just be guys and that's- whereas for us you know expected to get those good grades, expected to come home and do the cooking all those types of thing. Whereas guys can just do whatever they want. Kinda sucks but it is what it is and I just got other things to be focused on really.

**A:** *(laughs)*. Um and I yeah, so, so a lot of pressure to be perfect.

**LEAFA:** Yeah well there are so many things related to that. For the most part there are two aspects that kind of irk me most of all. One is the misrepresentation of women that...you, you know, the sexualized body. And secondly the fact that all of these sexualized bodies are not brown. Or black. Or usually Chinese. Well depending on which industry, you know. So I would say um the fact that I have not been represented, even in a sexual way really um, ah in film, media, television you know those kinds of things in the last, you know, throughout art history even. Except for you know, as a, a, the other kind of like dusky maiden or some shit like that. Um which I'm so not. Um, yeah those representations of women not, they're not accurate for just about any woman.

#### SCENE 4

**A:** Um the bad thing about being a woman ha. I'm sure a lot of people have said, um periods. I hate them. They can die.

**LU:** Oh my god.

**MISSY:** Oh am I right?!

**LU:** Yes that's expensive.

**LE:** You've probably heard this answer quite a lot.

**MISSY:** Oh nah.

**LE:** No?

**MISSY:** No. I mean a little bit.

**LE:** You know the pharmacy here? *(Accidentally hits LU's elbow when pointing in the direction of the pharmacy.)* Sorry. It's \$10 for a pack of pads.

**MISSY:** Daylight robbery.

**LU:** Yeah cos they've reduced it now at Countdown or something to \$2.

**MISSY:** Yeah I think at Countdown's they do it, but it's like the budget ones or whatever.

**LU:** Yeah it's the real budget ones and they're not even that good.

**MISSY:** It's like what's this gonna do? This'll be 10 minutes you know?

**LE:** Yeah.

**LU:** I guess if you're like, like cos I've heard of like girls not going to school because...they can't. That's really sad.

**MISSY:** Nah it's super lame cos like half the population just doesn't have to worry about it. So it's just really not fair. Do you guys need to go to class?

**LE:** No

**LU:** I've got study but-

**MISSY:** Are you sure?

**LU:** I just need to go and get my name marked of but Mrs K knows that I'm here cos my bag's there.

**MISSY:** Ok so we can keep going?

**LE & LU:** Yeah/Yep

**MISSY:** Are you sure?

**LE:** I have level 2 physics, I'm a level 3-

**LU:** Yeah nah, nah you don't wanna be going, I did level 2 physics last year.

**MISSY:** Ok I don't want you getting in trouble now.

**LE:** It's Miss T she-

**LU:** She's cool

**MISSY:** Oh yeah she's cool... I don't know her... *(All laugh)*

## SCENE 5

**BRIAR:** What is sexism? That's the just because. Just because you're a guy. Boys will be boys. Again, like you're strong, for a girl. You can't change a tyre if you're a female. It's the assuming you can or can't like, you can't do something or you should do something just because of your gender. Like I shouldn't do power lifting because I am a female. And I also shouldn't be able to be a good driver because I'm female. Biggest argument I had in my last relationship was about changing tyres. I got a flat tyre, pulled up at my ex-boyfriend's house um and I was like "I've got a flat tyre. Gotta change it. Be right back" kinda thing. And I rung dad so like, I was just like, cos he'd talked me through it like a while ago, and I was like "just making sure I'm doing the right thing rwar rwar rah". And then um boyfriend at the time, he came out and he was like "oh you shouldn't be doing that, like you don't know how blah blah blah" and I was like "I do know how and my dad's talking me through it. Like I'm doing it. I'm being independent like it's fine". And then he kinda tried to pull me away. But he couldn't change the tyre. He didn't know how to change the tyre. He was gonna get one of his flatmates to do it and I was just like- I got so angry and I ended up screaming at him cos I was just like "leave me alone! Blah blah blah". Changed the tyre another mate came round and he's like a mechanic and he was like "oh nah you did it perfectly." I was just -it drove me nuts, Yeah. Don't know if that that's sexism or just my ex being an asshole.

**HANNAH:** So you know, I was at work and I poured this guy a wine and he told me I was a "good girl" and I'm like "why would you say that?!" You wouldn't say that if a man poured you a wine. You'd just say thank you.

**DEB:** I remember when I- so when I came back from university I was- started a café and um it was very early on, I think it was in the first 6 months. And we had this- we employed this guy who was doing dishes and I was working out the front at the counter. And this um real estate agent came in and obviously wanted to talk about moving premises or something. Anyway, I was standing there and he

went “oh is it ok if I go and talk to the boss out the back?” Cos he could see the guy washing dishes. And I was like yeah, sure, go on (*laughs*). It was one of those moments where it, it was like, you know, like I didn't want to be the boss, but it was just his assumption that the guy that was doing the dishes, even though he was doing the dishes he was the dude.

**MISSY:** Cos he was a guy he had to be the boss...

**DEB:** Because he had a penis. Yeah.

**CELIA:** I recall a time when I felt a real victim of sexism was when my dad died. And when my dad died, my dad was Welsh, and the community that we were in was Welsh, and the church where his funeral was held was Welsh. And that particular group of people, and this is going back um about 24 years ago something like that. It wasn't considered appropriate or encouraged for women to go to funerals. And I was strongly advised that I wouldn't, you know, it would be appropriate not to go. But I chose to go. And I'm so glad that I went. Um, but it was the norm for women not to go, and the reason behind it was that um it was so upsetting. It was protecting them from the pain and the raw emotion of such an event. Um, but I felt that that was sexist and I've never forgotten that.

**MARY:** Yeah. But I wouldn't have thought that was sexist particularly because I would have thought it was part of the, the um environment in which that was happening. Where the church, the, the elders were the, the leaders of the church.

**CELIA:** What sex were the elders?

**MARY:** Men.

## SCENE 6

**DEB:** I guess my um my paternal grandmother was a really important woman in my life. She died when I was 13 so, but she is a mythical figure within our family and she was a fairly... Um she was a woman who charted her own course in life. Um she was overly dramatic and a real grudge holder and she had lots of bad qualities but she was very strong. Um and she probably died at a time in my life when I was quite impressionable. Ah but she, she was an important woman in

my life, in terms of ah being always independent. She was divorced from my grandfather at a time when it wasn't really done and um she always worked. She took up karate at 60 and she was you know-

**MISSY:** Epic.

**DEB:** Yeah she was a, she was a real- um she was very well read and beautifully spoken and um she was quite caring but she wasn't a, she wasn't a homely grandmother, yeah. She was a go getter. Yeah.

**CELIA:** Well the actual um important women in my life um, I'm mirroring exactly what um mum said because it's my mum. And I wouldn't be who I am without her. And our daughters Hannah and Missy, Miriam, because they keep me...Whole. They keep me full of love and they continually re-educate me all the time. Um, yeah, so those 3 women. I don't think my life would be-

**MARY:** You mean they say "oh mum you can't say that".

**CELIA:** *(Laughs)*. Sometimes. But I couldn't imagine my life without those three women in it.

**MARY:** An important woman in my life?

**HANNAH:** Yep.

**MARY:** Oooh I don't know. I've got 3. My daughter and my granddaughters. They're all important. One, two, three. They couldn't do without the other.

**HANNAH:** Yeah no I would, I would probably say-

**MARY:** And the other, the other important woman in my life is little Olive.

**HANNAH:** Your great - granddaughter.

**MARY:** My yeah. Little Olive.

**HANNAH:** Um yeah I'm, I should have gone first I don't wanna get all choked up. But um, yeah no, you're on the list.

**MARY:** Oh, I'm glad I'm on the list.

**HANNAH:** Um mum is also on the list. Oh I can feel it! Um...Yeah and obviously Missy, she's my best mate. Um, I guess I can't count my cat? Fat cat.

**CELIA:** I was just thinking Puss Puss. Yeah.

**HANNAH:** She's my best mate. But um, ah my boss, Deb. Um, recently you know, she's been telling me how like, you know, boss and badass I am. You know, ah

and you know, it really meant a lot you know, coming from her and saying that you know, telling me how awesome I am and that I'm a strong woman and you know, that I'm...cool um, but yeah.

**MARY:** Very good.

**HANNAH:** Yeah. Got a bit chokey, chokey Mcchoked up there.

**MARY:** No well, I, I couldn't imagine. And, and this little, as I say Olive, she's got a, she's got a very sweet smile. And I can think of her now coming into the hospital and Tracey saying to her "granny's got a poorly foot" and she climbed up onto the bed and kissed my Ugg boot.

**HANNAH:** Your moon boot. Mooney boot.

**MARY:** Yeah. You know she got up onto the bed and kissed it.

**ANNE:** See it's those kinds of questions that drive me nuts cos it's like oh god I dunno. I've got important *women* you know? So I would say my friends you know. Friends really are what um contributes to my kind of feeling of power and connectedness in the world.

**K:** Umm I guess my mum. My sister. Yep but my mum. My daughter. My- but my mum. It's. it's got -like when I think of the, if I have to name the most important woman I have to name the person, the woman that...made me out of her body (*laughs*) cos without her- I'm sure there's no one more important. Otherwise I wouldn't be here.

**MISSY:** True.

**ALL:** Mine's my mum too.

**BRIAR:** I bet, I bet everyone says that. Does everyone say that?

**MISSY:** Ahhhhh no, not everyone. Some people have. Some people said their grandmother?

**BRIAR:** Yep. Well mum and grandma. Like they just- I dunno my mum just kinda takes everything on board and like goes with the flow. And she's had like a bit of a bad run with like health and stuff and there's all um lots of crap going on and

ahh, like family. And she kinda deals with it. And she's the first person I go to when I've got a problem. *(Mimes talking on the phone)* "Muuuum."

**A:** Hi mum.

**MISSY:** She's probably not gonna see this... *(Laughs)*

**A:** Dammit!

**MISSY:** Or hear this.

**A:** Um my mum. She's probably the strongest woman that I know. My mum's very important and she lives in Dunedin now. So um, ah she used to live in Melbourne so she's a little bit closer.

**MISSY:** Well that's actually quite a lot closer. Same country. Different Island.

**A:** That's true. Maybe \$100 less to go on a plane to see her.

**MISSY:** Yeah and kinda less of a fun holiday.

**A:** Yeah. Dunedin is cold! But I love Dunedin for anyone who is from Dunedin.

**MISSY:** *(Laughs)* who are you talking to?

**A:** *(Laughs)* the people. The actors *(more laughter)*.

## SCENE 7

**HANNAH:** Do you know what you wanted to be when you grew up Granny?

**MARY:** Well I- when, when I left elementary school when I was 14 I went to the county technical college to do a commercial course. So I assume that was what I wanted to do.

**HANNAH:** You assume?

**MARY:** I assume.

**HANNAH:** What's a commercial course?

**MARY:** It, um it was shorthand, typing, bookkeeping, English.

**HANNAH:** Yep

**MARY:** And ah preparing for office work. So I assume that, thinking back, cos I went there that was what I must of wanted to do. But I mean we're thinking back a lot of years.

**CELIA:** I wanted to be a children's nanny.

**MARY:** Yeah I know. *(CELIA and HANNAH laugh)*. I know.

**CELIA:** Which, ah a children's nanny is um somebody who goes into other people's homes and lives with them and takes care of their children from new b, new-born until they no longer require that-

**HANNAH:** So you wanted to be Mary Poppins.

**CELIA:** Of course. Yes. And that was what I wanted to do. I always knew I wanted to work with children yep.

**LU:** Ok so I always wanted to be a doctor. And then hmm I kinda got to high school started doing stuff that would *(both laugh)* make me want, like be a doctor ah I was like "no that's not for me at all" and so now I'm actually going into finance um cos I really enjoy accounting and economics and stuff.

**MISSY:** Did you say you really- did you just say really enjoy accounting?

**LU:** I actually really enjoy, I'm not even kidding, it's fun! So yep that's what I want to do now. But also, side job, um I do wanna like be an ambassador to the United Nations.

**MISSY:** Oh yeah.

**LU:** But like of either my home country Zambia or like New Zealand. Um, yeah. Either one of those would be fantastic to represent.

**MISSY:** That's really cool. I didn't have any kind of aspirations like that ay. That's great. What about you?

**LE:** Um ever since I was 6 I wanted to be a police officer. I still do. And now I'm just gonna study vet nurse for 3 years as like a back-up plan for if I wanna stop in the police force and yeah, that's about it.

**MISSY:** Who is the most important woman in your life?

**LU:** My mum.

**LE:** Yeah same.

**LU:** Because she's not like you know famous or anything crazy like that. She like just does things on her own. She was like pretty much while my father was studying over here in New Zealand she was like a single mum. Like working pretty much 24/7 just to make sure that we got the best out of life. It was, it was so selfless. And she -oh she's just amazing. She's really beautiful too *(laughs)*. Yeah pretty much. I love my mum.

**LE:** It's quite inspiring cos my mum used to be in the police force in Belgium. She was in there for like 12 years and ah she was the first woman to become um a police force, a police officer in the dog force in Belgium. So she was the first woman to be in that specific...I don't know how to say it, um specific section of the police force, so that was cool. She was like in the newspaper and all that.

**MISSY:** Wow.

**LE:** She kept the paper.

**LU:** Wow. I didn't know that about your mum.

**LE:** That's why I want to become a police officer.

**MISSY:** Would you be on the dogs?

**LE:** Definitely.

**KODEE:** No my mum has been there through thick and thin. It's not always easy your 14 year old son coming up to and going "mum I wanna be a woman". But um she took that on whole heartedly and um yeah she's always been fighting my court. Um I've had a lot of fake people in my life and mum has always been there and stuck up for me, and continues to be there for me and, I dunno she's, she's my wonder woman. She runs a company and had 6 boys to run around and I never knew how she did it. And she continues to fight no matter how she's feeling. No matter how sick she is she still drives the kids to school and its, it's that kind of thing where she really is my super woman and I would not be where I am today without her. And yep, but I don't mean that in a sappy way. It's more like you know, I'm overseas "mum I need \$600." "Oh yeah ok I'll put it in your account". And it's like I don't deserve that, but I get it. But she is there no matter what. I think that it is a shame that some people don't have an important woman in their life. And I think it's so important, especially for young teenage girls, to have that female role model in their life. Um, cause if we leave it all to men we'll never get anywhere (*laughs*). There's a reason I jumped ship (*laughs*).

## SCENE 8

**HANNAH:** Oh yep um Jacinda Ardern. Um-

**MARY:** Who's that? Oh-

**HANNAH:** The Prime Minister.

**MARY:** -Oh yes.

**HANNAH:** Um...Ah because you know she did the same degree, degree as me at university and know she's Prime Minister, and I just think that's gangst. And like she you know had a baby and everyone's being, being shady at her but she's you know, cool as.

**MARY:** Yeah.

**BRIAR:** Well I'm- I think the, probably the most relevant one at the moment would be Jacinda. She's busy like breaking barriers and she's like a massive hit overseas. Like everyone loves the fact that we've got a young new mum as Prime Minister. And everyone wants her because she's just busy breaking down boundaries.

**LEAFA:** Ok. Ok so really, to be honest, one of the most influential people ah I'd say as I was becoming more aware of ah critical, political um...problems I guess, you know general, you know racism, sexism, homophobia all of that kind of thing. One of the- back in the 90's when I first read about Professor Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, who we are so lucky to have here. That is one person who I thought "I wanna be like that person." Which is clever, super intelligent, clever. Um also unapologetic for her brown woman stance and ah...Yeah she's just very ah strong and eloquent woman.

**CELIA:** Um, and I like the Queen.

**HANNAH:** I was waiting for that. I'm like she's gonna say the Queen. Either the Queen or Diana surely.

**CELIA:** Yeah (*laughs*).

**CELIA:** Well the Queen, the Queen because the Queen has in, in the same way that I have grown up at a time when the world for woman was quite different from the world we know now. The Queen has gone back even further than me and she has elegantly gone through the transition of our...climate of being a woman for her whole life, and her whole reign. And there are very few people

who have lived their life in the public eye as long as she has. And I think she has always been very gracious and has helped a lot of people, especially in the commonwealth.

**DEB:** I think the quality that they have is that in some way they are all pioneering. I like women that go out and forge a new um, a new thing in the world. Form their own sort of personality and their own perspective. Um that's something that I- that's a quality I admire. People who take themselves and their work, or their political ideas, or their passions and make them real. Yeah.

**ANNE:** One woman who is now popping into my head as someone who was quite heroic to me, is a woman called Jodie. I used to flat with her and she is a, from a really working class family, and she had the most incredible sense of right and wrong, and was very good at being assertive. She ended up working as a union organiser, perfect role for her, in supported accommodation which is where she, she, we both worked there. She was able to be clear with someone who'd worked there for a long time who had some quite unhealthy practices that were 'kind' but actually smothering. She was able to stand up to that very long term staff member and challenge that person and go actually "this women here wants to watch lesbian videos in her room"- oh she lives in the supported accommodation. She is someone who has the right, if she wants, as an adult to get some lesbian movies and watch them. Sure, other people in the house don't necessarily want to see them, they shouldn't have to. So why don't we arrange it so that this person, we'll call her Sally, wasn't her name, can have the television in her room for a special afternoon or whatever and watch these things. I know that sounds small but to me it was just so big that, that this, this women Jodie was able to cut through all this kind of years of institutional-ism and just be clear about what that individual's rights were and advocate for them. And I thought, I, I didn't have the, the bloody brains or the, or the freakin ability to do it and I so admired Jodie. And she- there were other things she did that weren't- they were assertive, they *weren't* aggressive, but they were clear and really strong

boundaries. And that to me was- people that, that, that are able to do that, irrespective of their gender (*gives 2 thumbs up*).

### SCENE 9

**A:** Well the first person that pops up into my head is-

**A & MISSY:** Emma Watson.

**A:** I love her so much I want to marry her.

**MISSY:** That's- She's Hermione.

**LU:** Yeah I love-

**A & LU:** Hermione Granger

**LE:** Why?

**MISSY:** Cos she's like smart and she's not- you know, she's described as being like annoying and not really pretty or anything but she's like a super, like she's a hero.

**LU:** Yeah.

**MISSY:** And she's like you know people wanna be like Hermione, not because she's pretty, not because she gets the guy but because she's smart and determined and brave. And it's kind of like "hey look reading books is cool" you can be smart and powerful and a girl and it's still fine, you know?

**K:** Ahhh...

**MISSY:** Other people have said um Hermione from Harry Potter.

**K:** (*Laughs*). Ah yeah ok. Yeah her. Hermione from Harry Potter.

**MISSY:** (*Laughs*) nice original answer.

**K:** She's really good cos she's so clever she just does whatever she wants. I should read more books. I haven't read books for ages. (*Laughs*). Movies, films. Who's kickass that I love?... Oh I do, I do like, in general, so I can't think of anything specific, but I do like watching a movie about a women that can like just fucking deal with her shit. Like oh! Like the lady with the dragon tattoos.

**LEAFA:** Mmm well...Fictional. Um, yes have to say I really love Pippi Longstockings.

**MISSY:** Oh yeah, classic.

**LEAFA:** Cos Pippi for me was like me- I was an atypical girl. I wasn't very, I wasn't really- I think if you're brown or if you're an 'other' kid and you're not a white kid then you feel different anyway, so any character like that you'll go like "that's me!" even if they're white. And Pippi Longstockings was what Swedish or Norwegian or, I can't even remember. But um –Finnish? No. Anyway I'll shut up about that. Um and she was so cool. She rode a horse. She was not scared of anything. She ate nails in her soup. She had a monkey for a pet. Her house was a mess but she always had you know tons of money to just chuck around and she had buddies. And she was just strong. She was never afraid, she was live- she lived all by herself as a little kid.

**MISSY:** Was she the chick- she had the like (*Gestures to indicate Pippi Longstockings hair*).

**LEAFA:** Yep. Not that stupid Americanized one (sings) "Pippi Longstockings" I hate that version. It's just...It's just not right. The original was just- she was really just real hard case. She looked like she hadn't washed in 5 years or something, maybe her whole life. And her teeth were kind of (*gestures to indicate gnarly teeth*) and she had freckles and she was, she was unusual and I could relate to her.

## SCENE 10

**KODEE:** Um I spose me, pressures and struggles specific to being a woman. I don't associate with a hell of a lot. Like yes I have identified as a woman for over 4 years now, but I spose I wouldn't have the same pressures and struggles as any other woman would. Um, for obvious reasons, but I find that I still identify with the pressures and struggles that females have. My brain still works like a female so I can understand where they're coming from. Um and yeah it's tough being a woman. It's tough.

**LEAFA:** I dunno. I've never been anything else. Although in saying that, as a woman I, I don't look like many women. Like my aesthetic. I don't appear- everyone makes this assumption that I'm gay just because my hair is shaved. But

also people make assumptions that I'm angry. People make assumptions that I'm real- so staunch and rawherr.

**KODEE:** I've had issues with my bank. I applied for life insurance. Just a standard life insurance policy. Um and I was denied until I got gender reassignment surgery. And that was gutting to me because that is all self-funded. So um I was denied point blank from the bank and they said the reason behind it was because I had a 'planned surgery'- is how they saw the legality of it. Um so I went in guns blazing, cos I was very upset and found that very discriminatory. Um and demanded to know why it was denied and when she said it was a planned surgery I pretty much said to her "well what's a planned surgery?" I don't know any surgeons names, I don't have any dates of a surgery, I don't know what age I'll be when I get the surgery, and I don't even know what country I'm having it done in. So who are you to say I have a planned surgery coming up? And that was my point. So that got sent away to be reopened the case and investigated a bit further. Um and then I had zero communication from anyone from the insurance department of the bank. And I received a text one day saying that "your life insurance has been approved, your all good now, your first payment is of blah blah blah." And I went well why did it get accepted in the end? To me what it seems like is there's a CEO man sitting up in the top office and he's seen my investigation come across his desk and gone "oh she's transgender don't touch her with a barge pole. Give her what she wants. That'll shut her up." So what they've done is I've received a letter in the mail and they have gone and legally changed my gender to female and now I am on a female insurance policy rate. Um which yes- it's a real tough one because yes, I want to be accepted as a female. I want people to use female pronouns. I would like my letter to come from the bank saying Miss Kodee not master, and yes I want these things but the legality of it. If they took two seconds to actually hear me as a person, as a human, not as a woman or a male, but as a person and actually see where I'm coming from. Because now I'm faced with the issue before I get the surgery I'm on a female life insurance policy. If I was to get testicular cancer and die my family cannot claim my life insurance, because testicular cancer is not on a

female life insurance policy. And then they will be seen as claiming a fraudulent life insurance. So I have these constant battles to try and be who I wanna be and I keep getting knocked back by people I think are helping me and it's constant struggles but I feel like women go through very similar things.

## SCENE 11

**HANNAH:** I don't know-

**ALL:** Walking at night.

**HANNAH:** Um you know, cos I'm a woman, if you're a dude you know, still you wouldn't really want to walk around a dodgy area at night. But if you're a dude, if you're a big dude, people aren't gonna mess with you. Whereas if you're a chick you know, goodness knows what's gonna happen.

**BRIAR:** On Facebook there was like a social researcher guy and he'd ask like guys "what do you do to avoid being sexually assaulted?" And the guys are just like "I dunno" and the girls, there's like a list miles long. And I was like "that's just stuff I do naturally." Like if I'm walking to my car I hold my keys in my hand.

**A:** I think that's a really sad thing. That I'm afraid to walk at night by myself without having like my keys in my hand for protection. Being, being mindful or scared if you're walking and there's a male walking behind you or, or coming towards you. Um I think that's really sad. But we have to watch where we are unfortunately because it happens so much, that people get attacked and, and raped.

**BRIAR:** I don't go walking round at night time by myself. Um I make sure my friends and family know where am all the time. If I'm meeting someone for the first time it's like: public space. But guys don't have to worry about that and I think that, that this kind of stuff's just built into being a girl.

**A:** We also kinda get ridiculed for what we wear as well. Like if you're wearing a short skirt you're asking for it. Maybe I just wanna wear a short skirt cos I like what it looks like on me.

**BRIAR:** And like getting, getting cat called it's like...shhth I don't know if you're trying to flatter me, get my attention but yeah, shouldn't need to. And it's like when you're walking past someone and, and say, cos I'm wearing quite short gym shorts at the moment, if I'm walking past like building site or whatever I'll like I'll pull them down a little bit so they're not as short. Why do I have to do that? I shouldn't need to. Like I shouldn't need to cos it should just be safe. It should be safe for women.

**DEB:** But still you know domestic violence is a major factor and I spose that's one of the cons of being a women, is that you know you're often a victim of domestic violence. When um- at an event there was someone from the Whakaruruhau talking about um how they take the- they take an approach towards domestic violence where they include the men in the solution. Because they're part of the problem they include them in the solution. She was talking about getting a work release party from Waikeria of men who were inside who'd had protection orders against them or who had domestic violence as part of their history. And taking them out to practically repair some of the houses where women had been beaten up in. And talking about watching them in this gradual realization as they got into these houses and they were sort of fixing the walls and they were like realizing what the actual holes in the walls meant and sort of putting their fists in. And, and she could see that the process that was going- where they were thinking "oh um that's what I did as well" and how that was a really beneficial thing for them. I found that quite um interesting. Mmmm.

## SCENE 12

**LEAFA:** feminism is just a word to me. It means stuff all. It's actually a western word which I can't really relate to. And I relate it to one type of feminism which is really the kind of elite white feminism that also excluded me, you know? For a

long time. So it really has bad connotations for me. So what does it mean to me? It means that...there is an active group of ah, part of society, that um will put pressure in the right places where there is definite inequality. That is feminism to me. Not just sitting on your butt and going "ah it's alright. Another day. I don't mind if I don't shine. You go on men, go on. You shine." I'm just being stupid now.

**DEB:** Ah feminism means to me ah...that ah women are equal to men and have a voice that's equal to men's and have a right to be heard. And um that it lifts us all up if those voices are heard alongside men's. Yeah, so feminism means to me the right to be heard. I guess.

**HANNAH:** Do you have anything to add?

**MARY:** I'd forgotten what the question was now, now she's been talking.

**CELIA:** What is the next-

**MARY:** What was the question love?

**HANNAH:** How do you think the role of women and/or what it means to be a woman has changed over time?

**MARY:** Well it has. It, it, it-

**CELIA:** How do you think it's changed?

**MARY:** Well it's changed in that women can do anything now. Women's lib is all about women's lib, doing what they want. I mean if they want to be engineers or coal miners well let them be so. But don't make it sound as though if you're an engineer or a coal miner and you're a woman you're very special. You know, should be the norm. If that's what they want to be.

**ANNE:** Ok my husband's a nurse, psych nurse, he's um, he's 17 years older than me. He, you know in terms of things you do around home ah load sharing. He does more cooking, he does more washing, he quite possibly cleans the toilet more often, you know. He, he does the shopping. He doesn't like me doing the shopping cos I buy too much (*laughs*). Ah, and so I experience living with him most of the time has been pretty equal. However, he struggles with the concept

of feminism a bit. You know that, that *word*. And so interestingly his sister who's ah about sixty fff 67 now she was a deputy principal at a high school in- up north. She rang up one day, I said "oh hi, we're just having an argument about feminism." Expecting her to, you know, be on my side and she, her response suggested that if she was there she'd be arguing against feminism too. And I was quite shocked. I was like "OooooK moving on" and I was like "what the Fuck?!" You're the fricken deputy principal of a bloody high school. "Hello! Aren't you embodying feminism?" But the word, the word was problematic. And that's how I experienced my husband. I experience my husband in a pro female, positive, uplifting role in relation to me but discussing that *term* causes trouble.

**DEB:** I think that it's great that you're doing this type of thesis study in this year at this time. And it does feel to me like um a page has turned. It does feel to me like it is getting better and it is getting um we are getting more equal and feminism. What I think is cool- that for a long time you know feminism was an ugly word that's- I don't know if this is the 3rd wave of feminism I think they call it? But um it's great that it's not a dirty word anymore, when it has been for a while. Um yeah so I think it's- it feels positive to me. I'm optimistic about the future.

### SCENE 13

**LEAFA:** Being a woman hmmm. I dunno I'm just a woman, I mean I'm just me.

**K:** the biggest thing for me, the biggest pro about being a woman is being a mother. So that's my most favourite as thing in the world and, and having um to have um 5 children. So that's such a pro and then at the same time that's a con to my body (*laughs*). Um cos there is shit that happens to your body that no one ever fucking tells you. You don't find out till you're 30 your like "is that a fucking thing! Oh my God!" (*Laughs*). "Why didn't anyone tell me that could happen?!" Arrgh" (*Laughs*). I can get into details there but you might not want to know ok? So yeah, yeah pros yeah, for me, being a mother. Cons, the consequences it does to your body sometimes, maybe (*laughs*). Yeah.

**DEB:** At the age I am now I see my friends growing into themselves, you know when you hit your sort of late 40s early 50s that sort of middle age you become, you become, you kind of realise that a whole lot of what you carried around about yourself as being a woman about you know, how attractive you were or are. Or, or, or how relevant you were or are or whatever, they become kind of little non, non-issues. Like you realise- you just kind of grow into yourself and you realise who you are as a person and you become a lot more confident and you, your life kind of gets better. I love that Michelle A'Court joke that she has about women suddenly starting to feel like they look- they're happy with their looks and that they look alright just about the time that they start to look like shit. Um so I often think of that. Ah so I guess I see myself and my friends of a similar age growing into ourselves as women, which is a good thing. Um whereas I see a lot of the men my age getting a little um 'mid-life-crisissy' and increasingly seeing, wondering- they start to have those "am I relevant? Am I good enough?" kind of questions. So that's a good thing about being a woman, aging is a good thing, even though when you're older you become more invisible to society as an old woman.

#### **SCENE 14**

**ANNE:** In the 7th form at school um we we had a common room that we you know spent time in. The guys, there were fewer guys than girls I seem to recall at, at that level, but the guys decided that they'd play, play with their rugby ball inside that common room. So, you know, you'd walk in, I think I got hit in the head by a rugby ball one time and I felt really, really powerless about the fact that- I think I asked them "hey can you take that outside? You know it's shit. Can you not throw this ball around inside?" But you know they were blokes and they were tall and they just thought that they could do what they liked. So I made a- I wrote a comic strip. I don't know if it was for an assignment or just cos I felt like it and it basically transformed that event so instead of- and I drew myself. I did it at university that's right. So I re-visioned that, that story so instead of- you know it showed me walking into the classroom getting hit by the ball for the 3rd time

that week and you know my eyes went red and started doing that roundy thing and I turned into this giant. And then I squashed the boys and I took the ball and um and I think what that did was actually just claim some power in that situation. So instead of repeatedly having our physical space being dominated by, by a bunch of people, the minority, um I was able to reverse it and make a better story. So there we go, there's a fictional woman, woman that I identified with (laughs). Still got that pencil drawn cartoon reversing a shitty situation. Hmmm there you go.

### EPILOGUE

**MISSY:** Do you think women have equal rights with men?

**BRIAR:** I'd like to say yes but-

**ALL:** No.

**BRIAR:** But I'm hoping...that like when the kids I teach are slightly older that my girls aren't having to hold their keys in their hand when they walk to their car at night time and worry about how short their shorts are when they're walking past a building site. Mmm. Fingers crossed.

**ALL:** Mmm fingers crossed.

**ANNE:** (*sigh*). No there's still a long, a good long way to go.

**K:** No. And men don't want us to cos they- wouldn't they be terrified that we might treat them the same way that they treat us? (*Laughs*). Faaa Mother Fuckers. In my mind and in my life I've tired- pretended I do, and think that I do, and I act like I do, but in general I don't think it happens.

**KODEE:** Um, yes and no. I don't think we're quite there yet. The world is improving, and the world is getting there, and it's all about the awareness. And if we don't fight for what we want we're not gonna get it. If you sit there and you never fight for what you want you're not gonna get it.

**LEAFA:** Of course. We do.

**DEB:** Absolutely they have equal rights with men.

**LEAFA:** Whether they're enacted in actual society, but there's no question. No question. Just cos some people refuse to ah recognize the rights of um women that doesn't make it not so.

**DEB:** Do you mean do I think that they have equal rights with men now? I think that we do have equal rights but I don't know if we have equal opportunities yet.

**ALL:** Yet.

**MISSY:** Right well. That's all my questions. So-

**MARY:** Have you finished?

**HANNAH:** Yeah.

**MISSY:** Is that alright? Right I'll just turn off my recordy things-

**MISSY:** Cool. Well that concludes our interview.

**MISSY:** *(Laughs)* Sweet so we'll call it a day.

**MISSY:** Umm yeah. But I think we're done.

**MISSY:** *(laughs)* No that's cool. Sweet. Thank you very much for your interview.

**MISSY:** thank you very much.

**MISSY:** Thank you very much.

**ALL:** Thank you very much.

# **STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS**

A VERBATIM PLAY CONSTRUCTED BY MISSY MOONEY

## **CAST**

**Cian Gardner:** Leafa, Hannah, Anne & LU

**Megan Goldsman:** Deb, Mary, Kodee & A

**Kelly Petersen:** K, Cecilia, Briar & LE

**Music:** Liam Hinton

**Lighting Operation:** James Smith

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

Laura Haughey, Alec Forbes, Ashton Ledger,  
Gaye Poole, Hannah Mooney, Mum, and Dad.

A huge thank you to my interviewees for your time and words.

Endless thanks to my supervisor Laura and my actors: Cian, Kelly  
and Megan, for your commitment, patience and support.

## **WARNING**

Mentions of sexual and domestic violence



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## **ABOUT THE PLAY**

After over 4 hours of interviews, countless hours of transcription, months of rehearsals and 5 versions of the script *Strong Female Characters* was created. This verbatim play was created as a practical component of my Master's thesis. My research is focused on the creation process of verbatim theatre and how the ethical obligations verbatim theatre makers have to their interview participants influences the dramaturgical processes and construction of their work. After gaining approval from the FASS Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct my research I interviewed 12 local Hamilton women aging from 18 to 98. I asked them a series of 14 questions relating to their experiences of identifying as women. I digitally recorded these interviews, transcribed them word for word, and then sent each interviewee back their interview transcript. The interviewees were asked to review their transcript and indicate anything they didn't want to be considered for inclusion in the play. I then began the process of selecting the material from the transcripts to make the play script. The actors and I spent multiple hours working with these transcripts to try and find the right 'sequence' for the play. I collected over 4 hours of verbatim material which has been condensed down to an hour of performance. It has been a joy working with Cian, Kelly and Megan and the inspiring and empowering material provided by the 12 interviewees.

**Missy Mooney 27<sup>th</sup> February 2019**