



The Culture Project

As we cosy up in the midst of this cold winter, we're excited to share another wonderful and thought-provoking edition of The Culture Project with you. This issue takes a heartfelt look into the lives of our amazing team members, sharing their invaluable experiences and helping us all understand what it's truly like to walk in someone else's shoes.

We're kicking things off with [Nate](#), our Social Media and Communications Officer. Nate takes us on a profound journey of self-discovery and acceptance, sharing his experiences as a transgender man. His story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of being authentic and showing resilience in our lives.

Next up is [Stephen Daly](#), our talented Communities Producer. Stephen opens up about his personal experiences with mental health, giving us a beautifully written insight into how we can navigate these challenges, especially in the creative arts industry. His perspective sheds light on an often-stigmatised topic, encouraging us to support one another.

And of course, we can't forget about [International Women's Day!](#) Our inspiring Director of Audience Engagement, [Lucy Fox](#), shares her reflections on this year's theme, **Accelerate Action**. Lucy highlights what this theme means to her in both her career and personal life, motivating us all to take meaningful steps towards equality.

We truly hope you enjoy this edition as much as Nate and I have enjoyed putting it together for you! It's moments like these that help us connect and understand each other as a company on a deeper level.

Glenn & The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Access Group x

P.S. The Culture Project Resources and Toolkits can be found [here on the website](#). This includes links to information and training to support you and your understanding of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access. You can also share thoughts and ideas for future editions on our [comments board](#).

Self-discovery and Acceptance Nate Cope

Social Media and Communications officer, Nate Cope, talks about his experience as a transgender man.

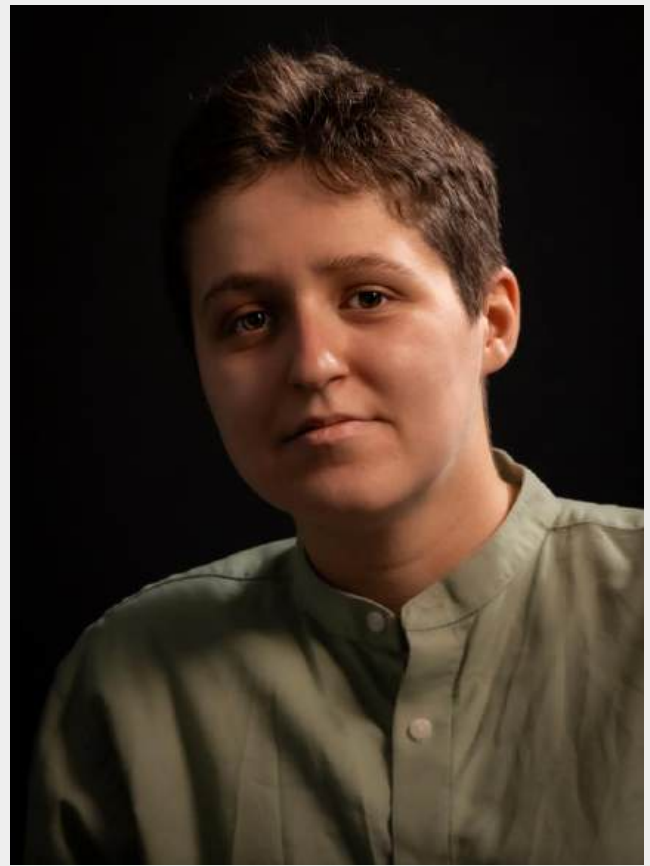
Can you share a bit about your journey of self-discovery and how you came to embrace your identity?

Prior to primary school I was actually really sure of my identity and asked my family to call me by male names and pronouns. That kind of thing can be very confusing for families, and it sort of got shut down and seen as a phase very early on. As I went into primary school, I began to hide that part of myself away more, as school wasn't a space where I felt I could be accepted as my true self. I always felt different to girls my age and struggled with fitting into those gendered social structures. For many years I repressed those feelings of difference, as I didn't have that crucial safe space to explore my identity. When I was 16, I began to give myself that space to explore my identity and came out as queer.

Towards the end of my time at university I began to question my gender. I came out as trans when I was in my third year at university and was so lucky to have a group of friends around me who supported me through changing my name and pronouns. Crucially, I think that space away from my home allowed me to explore my gender, revisit those feelings from early childhood and finally accept myself as a transgender man.

What were some key moments or experiences that shaped your understanding of who you are?

I went through a really rough period of mental health in my second year of university; a combination of Covid, and the struggle of coming to terms with my identity was a challenge. I think it got to a point of something has to give, and I decided that living miserably and untruthfully to myself was not a path I wanted for my life. Amid the prospect of losing the support of my family, who I had begun to distance myself from anyway for fear of getting rejected, I made the decision to come out. Writing this now is



the only time I have ever allowed myself to acknowledge the bravery in that, but at the time it felt like a necessity.

I think this is an experience that many trans and queer people face, and the toss-up between not coming out and living untruthfully, or coming out and potentially losing people, can often feel like being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

What have been some of the biggest challenges you've faced as a trans person, and how have you overcome them?

Coming out to my parents hit them hard. We have always been an incredibly close family, and I think having to shift how they thought of me and referred to me was tough. My Dad particularly, who has always been my fiercest champion and at times my biggest rock, shut down as he just couldn't come to terms with the change. In the pain, I pulled away and our communication broke down.

For anyone who has a child or a family member who comes out as trans or queer to them, I would urge you to open up those communication pathways, and don't be afraid to ask hard questions. I am lucky that both my family and I have worked so hard to build a much stronger relationship than ever before and worked through a lot of discomfort to get there.

This experience has taught me all that I will ever need to know about unconditional love, as my grandparents committed to learning and becoming more accepting. Their immediate reaction of 'we don't care, you are just you' was one of the most affirming moments of my life and gives me immense respect and admiration for them. I know this isn't a reality for all transgender people, and I think now more than ever it is important to acknowledge that.

Aside from huge things like that, there are smaller day-to-day things that can be a challenge. Being misgendered is a common and difficult experience. If I go to the doctors, I may give my name and then get asked "but where is he?". When I go to a restaurant I may get called 'ma'am' repeatedly. A member of staff in a shop once told me that they were "wondering what I was". These things are really common occurrences and are upsetting and frustrating to experience. In terms of how I might deal with something like this, it is always a split-second decision that I have to make: is it safe to correct this person?

What misconceptions about being transgender do you wish more people understood?

It is ok to ask questions! If you are unsure how someone identifies or their pronouns, it is absolutely okay to ask. Also, I know this is likely not the case for all trans people, but I am personally super happy to answer any questions, and find being open about my experiences feels important to me to advocate for trans experiences.

The other thing I would say is that the day-to-day experience for trans people can wildly fluctuate. Some days can feel really dysphoric, or some days you can feel more comfortable. Especially for someone who is not yet on testosterone, often I can feel uncomfortable in my body, and hugely, my voice can be a massive problem for me, and many other transgender people can feel the same. Being misgendered can throw a curve ball on an entire day and is a really draining experience. For me, this

completely changes how I walk into a room or approach a situation with people who I don't know, as I often try and mitigate the chance of getting misgendered by consciously altering my mannerisms, which can also be draining.

Why do you think visibility and representation for the trans community are so important?

It is so necessary for trans people to be visible and integrated in all aspects of society, more so now that we are facing eradication and persecution at an alarming rate. It often feels like an act of defiance to be a visible, unashamed trans person existing loudly and proudly.

At times it can be frustrating and upsetting to exist in this space, and it is not possible to feel empowered all of the time, but I think it is important to recognise the resilience it takes for all trans and queer people to walk out of the door every morning in the world we currently live in.

Can you share a story of when you felt truly empowered or supported in your identity?

A landmark moment for me in my transition was taking my parents to see Swan Lake, and my Dad being so proud of seeing my name in the programme after finding my name change so hard to come to terms with. That pride and love transcended everything, and that moment for me is so representative of everything I have worked for both professionally and personally in the past 2 years.

'It is one of the great privileges of my life so far to be able to live authentically and to feel supported in my existence'

Who are your biggest inspirations or role models in the trans community?

For me, a life changing piece of art was *Cowboys*, a play by trans playwright, Charlie Josephine. For the first time, I felt I saw myself onstage, and I felt I was seeing an authentic and relatable portrayal of the trans experience. For me, seeing the lead role being played by a transmasculine performer, Vinnie Heaven, was life changing. As someone who is so passionate about theatre, but felt I never had a space in the performance world because of my transness and my disconnect with my body, this was such a powerful and moving performance to watch.

My answer more broadly is that I am endlessly inspired by all trans performers who often must be so vulnerable in the work that they create.

What do you think allies can do to help create a more inclusive and understanding environment for transgender individuals?

Amplify our voices and our work. There is so much space for trans art and trans creatives in the industry. It is so important to support stories about trans people written by trans people! I think also that knowing sometimes we get out of bed already fighting a battle, whether that be of dysphoria, or of hopelessness at the treatment of trans people in society, some days can be tougher than others.

I, like many other trans people, are scared for the future. Will we have access to gender-affirming care? Will we be able to keep our passports and identification under the correct names and gender markers? These are all things that generations of queer and trans people before us have fought for, and that we continue to fight for every day. In a time when things are being widely compromised, supporting, amplifying and standing by trans voices is more important than ever.

To end on a positive note, it is one of the great privileges of my life so far to be able to live authentically and to feel supported in my existence. There is so much joy in transness and getting to share this joy with those around me is important! I realise that feeling this way is a privilege, and to get to a point where this is a given and not a privilege is so important for the trans community.

Resources and More Information

The Mermaids

The Mermaids are one of the UK's leading trans-focused charities. They provide services directly to trans people, and work to educate and inform professionals and organisations who want to be part of a society where trans children and young people are safe, included and empowered to be their best selves.

[Find out more here.](#)

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is a nonprofit organisation founded in 1998. Focused on suicide prevention among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth.

[Read their guide to being an ally here.](#)

The LGBT Foundation

The LGBT Foundation are a national charity that work to create safe spaces, amplify voices and work with partners and allies to drive positive change. They aim to create a world where queer hope and joy flourish.

[Find out more about what they offer here.](#)

TransActual UK

TransActual work to share reliable information about trans and non-binary people's lives and about trans rights in the UK, as well as dispelling common myths. They aim to educate people about trans and non-binary people's lives and the issues we face.

[Find out more here](#)

When the Show Can't Go On

Stephen Daly, Photographer, Writer, and New Adventures Community Producer, shares his valuable insights on the importance of mental well-being, particularly in the context of overcoming professional challenges within our workplace. Find Stephen's work on Instagram at [@stphendalyphotography](#) and [@stephendwriter](#)

The pressure at my temples pushes my head back on my pillow. I try to blink the sleepiness away, but a fogginess remains. I force myself to turn on the bedside lamp, but a heaviness claws at my face and my eyes are weighed down by un-cryable tears. I fall back defeated. My body; too heavy, too weak, too burdened, sinks into the bed searching for peace.

It's a depression day.

I was diagnosed with depression and general anxiety disorder in 2021. I'd gone to my GP after months of being drained of energy, foggy and I had aches in my joints. Dr Google convinced me I had long Covid and so I was horrified when she told me I was describing the physical symptoms of depression. I tried to argue back - I'd done therapy, I talked about my feelings, I was an open book. But a voice at the back of my head said, 'and yet some days you can barely force yourself to put the kettle on'. We talked more about my dizziness and the possibility of having anxiety. Again, with gentle questions we discovered that my constant state of fear and hyper alertness was not typical.

I had a mental health condition.

It was a strange feeling as I walked away. Like I finally knew myself a little more. I had spent so much time working on myself, but there were always these bits of me that I just couldn't change. The days when no matter how much I wanted to, I just couldn't seem to function like other people seemed to. How I could multitask, and problem solve one day and the next be completely overwhelmed by the smallest of requests. How I could be surrounded by people I love and feel isolated, scared and just wanting and needing to be alone.

I had words for that now. I had a lens through which to look at it. My brain has depressive days and at other times it can't distinguish between a simple work request and being chased by a killer clown in a hall of mirrors.

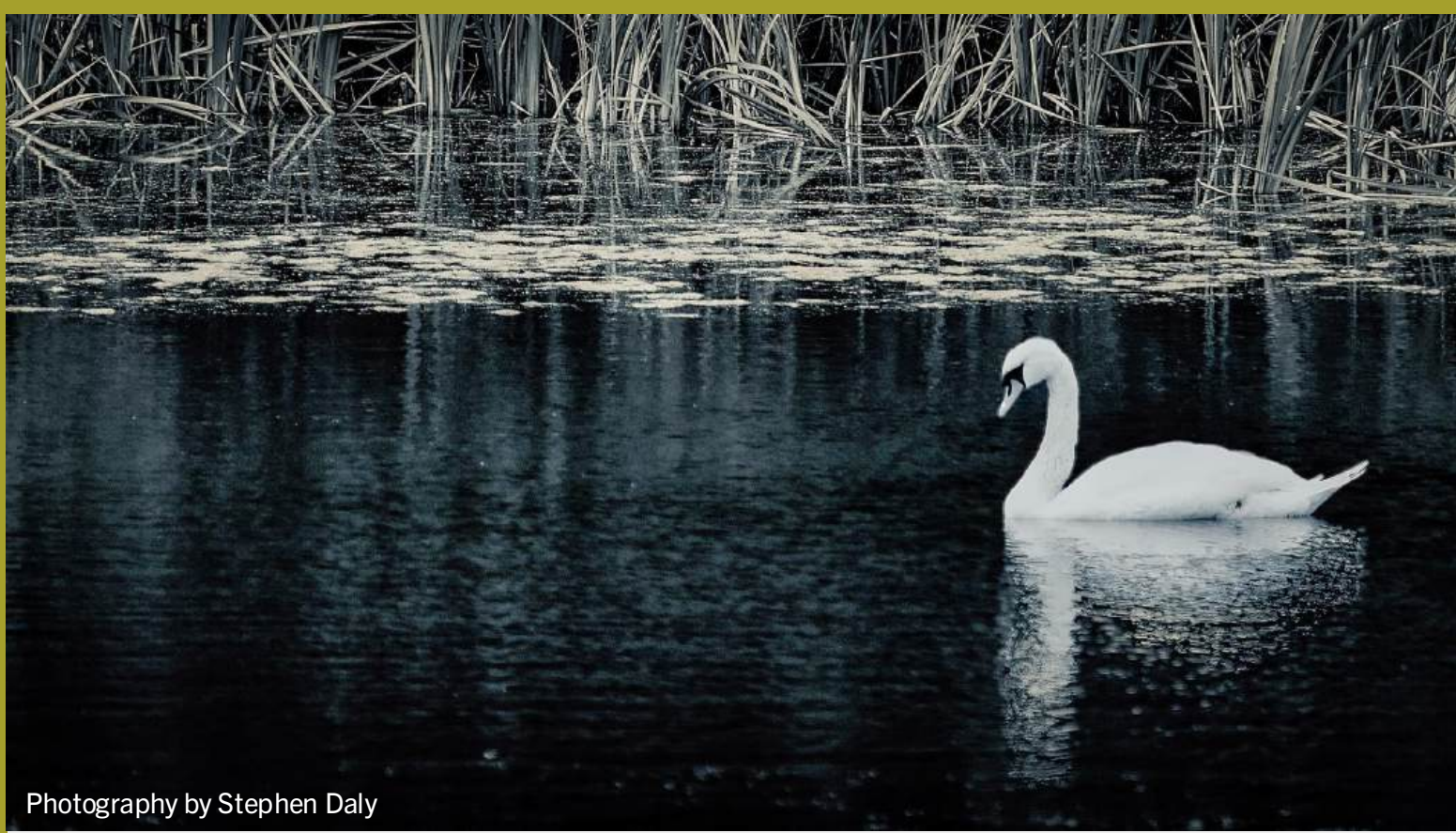
I had depression and anxiety.

I had always been like this, my fear of failure in school led to anaemia and psoriasis. I would have sleepless nights worrying about every conversation I'd had that day and everyone that I might have the next. I could see the patterns, years of being terrified of the future and finding myself stuck.

I have no doubt the pandemic exacerbated it because, for the first time in my life, I had no distractions; it was just me, my brain and its faulty ways of protecting me from the dangers it perceived.

I was relieved to finally make sense of these patterns, and I was able to talk to friends who I knew had similar experiences. It helped, we helped each other, and it normalised my lived experience. We talked about medication and talking therapies, what worked for them and how they were doing. They helped me take those steps and ask for the help I needed.





Photography by Stephen Daly

I was incredibly grateful but as I began to return to work, including coming back to do freelance work at New Adventures, the fear began to bubble again, because I couldn't possibly bring this part of myself to work.

I didn't want to be seen as weak.

I've only ever worked in theatre. I love that we live in this world where a group of artists come together and work crazy hours for the love of what they do. It's a bubble, yes, but a glorious one, and it's all I've known. People train and devote their life to creating work – the show. We are hardwired to put the show first, and there's historically been a mentality that if someone can't handle the lifestyle then they are at fault, and there are plenty waiting in the wings to take their place. So, I had always pushed through. I went into work hours before I was meant to. I would reply to emails late at night. Weekends were for normal people, because if the show was on then I was contactable. Holidays were a myth, if I could afford one, as I would still be checking show reports and texts would come and I would reply.

I'd burned myself out and left West End and touring theatre behind me, but now I wasn't sure how I could handle myself knowing the price of that burn out.

I was relieved to see that New Adventures did offer a lot of support and were trying to be a change in the industry. I'm glad they are because I know that dance is demanding, and, more so than any other artists I have worked with, dancers are trained to carry on. It's been such a privilege to see that in practice and also to work with a company that realises that there is a lot of pressure put on dancers in particular to not voice their needs.

Last year, following two bereavements, I had to ask for help, and I took time off as I could not do my job. My mind and brain were not able to do what they normally could. I had constant brain fog; my short-term memory was reduced.

New Adventures was so supportive, but I found it horrible. Why was it still difficult to ask for help and say that I couldn't do my job?

'The greatest gift you can give someone who is struggling is the space to not be okay.'

If you have worked with me on a project, you will know that I am people first. You as a performer, stage manager, creative or colleague are more important than the show. But when it comes to advocating for myself, I have always struggled. Why? Is it because, despite not consciously adhering to any ideas of maleness, I had imbibed the idea that men don't show their feelings? Was I afraid of looking weak? Am I such a people pleaser that the idea of letting anyone in fills me with a cold dread as I am prone to hinging my self worth on the way others view me?

All of the above I reckon.

So, what can you do?

I am not an expert but if you are struggling, put your wellbeing first. It's okay to reflect, and step away. Life in our industry forces us into close proximity with people and it's a wonderful thing but we can take that time. We don't need to be on all the time. Take space. We all need different things. Being able to carve out the time I need in social situations is a work in progress and the same goes for work.

Find your flock. Find the people that can handle it. Ask for help. Let people you trust know what help you might need.

How can you support others?

I learned from my time as a Samaritan that the greatest gift you can give someone who is struggling is the space to not be okay. To not have to pretend they are fine or worry how they might be judged for being in a dark place. Be a good mental health ally and don't judge people who need to take that time – actively try to remove a culture that makes people afraid to ask for help.

Why is it important?

1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England. How many artists and theatre workers are struggling right now around you and how many do we lose because the world can't handle their mental health. What would happen if we made the industry we work in more equitable for those that struggle with the organ that they rely on to navigate the world?

We can all struggle at times. Take care of your own mental health and work on your internalised stigmas so that people who are struggling can ask for their needs to be met without the fear of being seen as incapable or less.

I'm still on a journey with my mental health but what I am sure of today, and why I wanted to write this piece, is that I believe we have to say that it's okay to not be okay. Some days I can't think of anything good. That's okay, now that I know that is just how I feel in that moment. I do gratitude lists etc, but the goal is no longer to feel happy all the time - the goal is to heal and be okay with who I am and where I am at.

And if I can offer just one piece of advice it would be this - be kind to yourself, because you matter.

Resources and More Information

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

<https://www.thecalmzone.net/>

Mind

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mind Out (Mental Health – LGBTQI+ Charity)

<https://mindout.org.uk/>

The Mix (Support and advice for under 25s)

<https://www.themix.org.uk/>

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>

Rethink Mental Illness

<https://www.rethink.org/>

Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

Employee Assistance Programme

The employee assistance programme offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counselling, referrals, and follow-up services for employees. EAP counsellors may also work in a consultative role with managers and supervisors to address employee and organisational challenges and needs.

<https://www.healthassuredeap.co.uk/>

International Women's Day 2025



International Women's Day is celebrated annually on the 8th of March as a focal point in the women's rights movement. It gives focus to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and violence and abuse against women. It was spurred by the universal female suffrage movement, and was first established in 1911 when votes for women was one of the biggest domestic political issues of the day. It wasn't recognised by the United Nations until 1977, when they marked it as an event.

This year's theme, **Accelerate Action** emphasises the importance of taking swift and decisive steps to achieve gender equality. It calls for increased momentum and urgency in addressing the systemic barriers and biases that women face, both in personal and professional spheres. Crucially, at the current rate of progress, it will take until 2158, which is roughly five generations from now, to reach full gender parity, according to data from the World Economic Forum.

International Women's Day 2025: Accelerating Action in Theatre

As the stage lights rise on International Women's Day 2025, the global theme "**Accelerate Action**" takes centre stage, urging industries, communities, and individuals to push forward in the fight for gender equality. For those working in theatre, where storytelling has the power to challenge, inspire, and transform, this year's call to action is particularly significant.

Theatre has long been a battleground for representation, with women historically fighting for visibility both on and off the stage. While strides have been made, progress remains too slow. According to the World Economic Forum, gender parity is still over a century away. But in an industry that thrives on immediacy, connection, and collaboration, the time to **Accelerate Action** is now.

Spotlighting Women's Voices

One of the most powerful ways to drive change is through storytelling. Theatre has the ability to shape culture, and increasing representation in narratives, both onstage and in leadership, ensures diverse perspectives are heard and celebrated. This International Women's Day, consider:

- **Programming more female-led productions** – Elevate stories written and directed by women.
- **Championing women in technical and leadership roles** – Encourage mentorship and support networks.
- **Creating safe spaces** – Establish policies that protect against discrimination and harassment, ensuring all women feel valued and respected.
- **Advocating for pay equity** – Conduct salary reviews and commit to closing gender pay gaps.

The Curtain Rises on Change

Theatre is a reflection of society, but it also has the power to shape it. By embracing the spirit of **International Women's Day 2025: Accelerate Action**, the theatre industry can fast-track the changes needed to create a more inclusive and equitable future.

In this short film, movement director and choreographer, Anjali Mehra, shares her experiences as a South Asian woman working in the theatre industry. Anjali choreographed 'Hum' for the Doorstep Duets 2024 tour, and here explores how her background and experiences shape her work. She delves into how being a mother has shifted her perspective, and the struggles and the joys of working within the industry.

[Watch the short film here](#)

Accelerating Action with Lucy Fox

Director of Audience Engagement, Lucy Fox shares the significance of this year's International Women's Day theme, Accelerate Action, in her career, and in her personal life.

What does International Women's Day mean to you personally, and how has its significance evolved for you over the years?

It's been on my radar as someone that works in Comms because it's a day that we think about as an opportunity to celebrate either the work of an organisation or the work of an individual.

As I look to International Women's Day 2025, I think about the world we're living in today and how women's rights are being eroded 100 times faster than they were won. It's frightening.

I am afraid for my children and what this means of their future. So probably more than ever International Women's Day feels like a very important moment to mark. To understand where we've got to, and the challenges that we're now facing and that feeling of going backwards.

As a female leader, what challenges have you faced in your career, and how have you overcome them to reach your current role?

I don't feel like I ever felt I couldn't be who I wanted to be because I was a woman. Perhaps if I'd wanted different things, maybe there could have been challenges, but for me personally, I don't think I've been held back by being a woman, but I do think I've had experiences that feel unique to being a woman.

At the beginning of my career in advertising, I did a project on the importance of inclusivity and diversity in the workplace for ad agencies. I explored the social and business case for this, considering the impact on communities, workplace culture, creativity, audience reach and ultimately sales. I sat in a boardroom, surrounded mainly by men, and presented the project and my findings. Not only was this project very important to me, I also had a very good case. I had done a lot of research, speaking to



experts in London, NYC, Dallas and Miami only to be patronised in the meeting. I felt very much like I was being entertained as a woman and not taken seriously, as though it was a very female subject or area of interest. I do always think, had I been a man in that room, would I have been received differently?

Several years later, I had an issue with a client who acted inappropriately. I found myself in a situation where I started questioning whether I had done a good job, or if that person was just interested in me rather than impressed and confident in my abilities. And that knocks your confidence, and I think more women have to deal with those kinds of situations. Fortunately, my company really backed me up and supported me through that so although it didn't affect my career development it affected me and my confidence in my abilities. As I've moved into more senior roles, I've felt respected for who I am and what I bring as an individual rather than as a man or a woman.

How do you define "Accelerate Action," and what does this theme inspire in your work and personal life?

One area that has been relevant to me is around maternity leave and paternity leave. Because of the gender pay gap, women tend to be the ones that have to take the parental leave, because they can't afford to lose the income. This is an area that could be supported by employers and the government through policy and in turn accelerate action.

Thinking about accelerating, my kids are growing up in a world where women have more opportunities, and there is more parity than when I grew up in the 80s, and early 90s. However, I've noticed that our children are extremely gendered in what they consume. Children do seem to experience a much more traditionally gendered childhood now, and I'm not sure what that means for the future and the expectations that those children have.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the dance industry? Was it always a dream of yours, or did your journey take an unexpected turn?

I don't think I knew that I could have a career in the dance industry when I was considering what my career might be. I didn't know if I was good enough to be a professional dancer, and I was afraid of risk. Then I didn't really know about other roles in the industry, and school wasn't very helpful in asking you what you really enjoy doing and helping you explore different opportunities.

At that time, if you were good at school, you could go to university. My parents didn't go to university so this was an exciting prospect in itself so I didn't really question it. I'm just not sure it was the right choice for me. Now I would talk to my kids about it, ask what is it you really love doing, and how can you find a way to integrate that into your career?

So, I didn't get into working in dance until much later, I think I was about 31 or 32. It's odd, because I've always felt like a dancer, even though I've not done it professionally. It's so in me and my makeup and a fundamental part of who I am, and maybe that's because it was something that I was in my most formative years. That's kind of how I identified, that was everything to me, and I spent all of my free time doing it.

Initially, I went into a career that was similar to that of my dad's career in advertising; it didn't feel very risky to me, because I'd grown up with it it is a world that I feel comfortable with. And I was doing well, but it didn't fulfil me in a way that I needed work to. It is important to me that I have some crossover between my interests and passions and what I spend most of my life doing.

I realised it was very important to me at about 30, and I felt really fortunate that I realised I needed to shift my career, and that I had people around me that encouraged me to do so and ask the right questions that maybe I should have asked myself at 18.

I am envious of those people who seemed to work it out for themselves and I wonder why I didn't feel able to at that time in my life. There was definitely an element of fear of failure. As I get older, I am more confident and able to question the things that feel laid out for you or that you're expected to do. I'd love to support more young people in finding career paths that build on their passions.

I love working in dance. I live for the creativity, the precision, and the determination it takes both on stage and off. And, as we are talking about International Women's Day, a special shout out to all the wonderful and powerful women that I get to work with everyday!

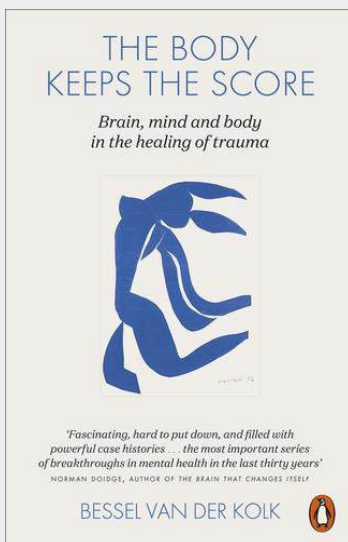
Breaking Barriers in Theatre

Women in theatre still face significant hurdles. Whether it's the underrepresentation of female directors, playwrights, and designers, the gender pay gap, or the lack of safe and equitable work environments, the industry must do better. The **"Accelerate Action"** theme isn't just a call for incremental change, it's a demand for immediate and impactful transformation.

Books

1. The Appendix: Transmasculine Joy in a Transphobic Culture - Liam Konemann

In April 2019, Liam Konemann idly began work on what he thought of as 'the appendix' - a record of ongoing transphobia in the UK that he came across. But when his mental health began to spiral, he turned his attention to a different topic instead: how do we find beauty in transmasculinity? And how do we maintain it in a world stacked against us?

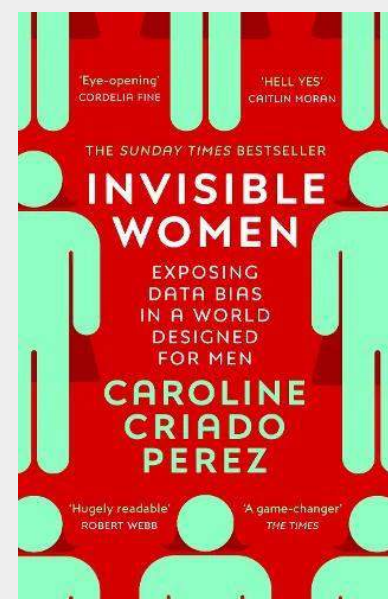


2. The Body Keeps Score - Bessel Van Der Kolk

The Body Keeps the Score is the inspiring story of how a group of therapists and scientists, together with their courageous and memorable patients, has struggled to integrate recent advances in brain science, attachment research, and body awareness into treatments that can free trauma survivors from the tyranny of the past.

3. Invisible Women - Caroline Criado Perez

Invisible Women shows us how, in a world largely built for and by men, we are systematically ignoring half the population. It exposes the gender data gap – a gap in our knowledge that is at the root of perpetual, systemic discrimination against women, and that has created a pervasive but invisible bias with a profound effect on women's lives.



Note: these books are available to borrow from the New Adventures office library, please contact office@new-adventures.net if you would like to borrow any of the books suggested by The Culture Project