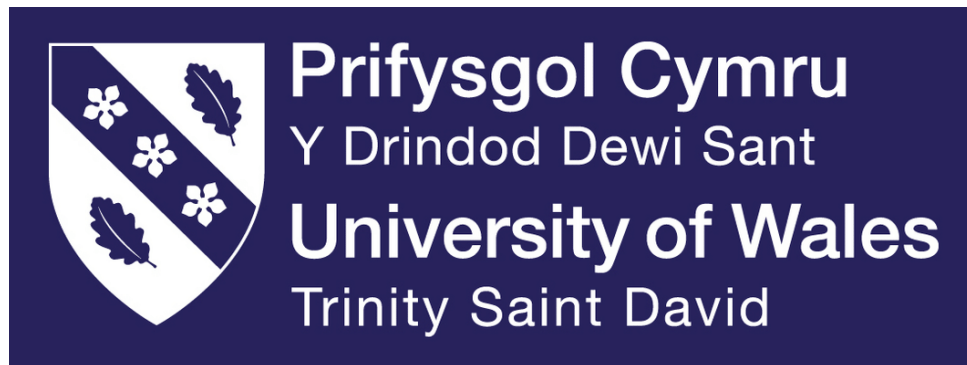




To what extent is isolation a significant aspect of the university student experience?

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I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

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3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Although university is often perceived as a highly positive and socially enriching experience, the reality can differ significantly from expectations. For young people, university is typically seen as a social period; however, many students experience isolation. This dissertation addresses the question: *To what extent is isolation a significant aspect of the university student experience?* This topic has been selected due to its relevance to contemporary student experiences, particularly among those transitioning into higher education, and it is considered to be a significant issue that many students face but may not openly discuss, particularly in their first year.

Factors such as moving away from home may influence feelings of isolation. Students often transition from spending a significant amount of time in familiar environments to relocating to a new city or town that they may not yet feel comfortable in. Additionally, the process of applying to university can create pressure to adopt a new identity or version of oneself. Another contributing factor is social expectations. Teachers and family members frequently suggest that “university will be the best years of your life”; however, upon arriving in university accommodation or attending lectures for the first time, some students experience the opposite. This disconnect is not necessarily

reflective of the individual, but rather the expectations constructed prior to entering university.

3.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND CREATIVE AIMS

This dissertation aims to examine emotional isolation and feelings of unbelonging among university students, particularly those who enter higher education with expectations of fulfilment and personal growth. The project will explore how factors such as class background, emotional inarticulacy, and institutional pressures contribute to student alienation.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

Primary research was conducted through a student questionnaire (see appendix A), which informed both the analytical aspects of this study and the practical component. In addition, literature will be used to support the research question, drawing on journals, articles, and books as secondary sources. This research explores themes including expectations of university life, lived experiences of isolation, its potential causes, and its impact on student wellbeing.

3.4 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is structured into several key sections. The literature review examines existing research surrounding isolation, particularly within the context of university students, exploring key themes and debates within the field. This is followed by a development and exploration section, which outlines the process of primary research collection and the creation of the practical work. The practical commentary then evaluates the final creative outcome in relation to the initial aims of the project. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the overall findings of the research and considers the broader implications of isolation within the university experience.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Isolation and loneliness have become increasingly significant issues within university life, particularly following the social and psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research suggests that many university students experience difficulties forming meaningful social connections, maintaining wellbeing, and adjusting to the pressures of higher education. As university life is often presented as socially fulfilling and community-driven, the persistence of loneliness among students raises important questions about belonging, communication, and emotional wellbeing. This topic is particularly relevant to performance and theatre, as performance has long been used as a medium to explore human emotion, social disconnection, and psychological experience. Through techniques such as verbatim theatre, fragmented dialogue, and immersive environments, performance can communicate experiences of isolation in ways that extend beyond traditional academic discussion.

This literature review explores the extent to which isolation is a significant aspect of the university student experience and how this can be represented through performance practice. The review focuses primarily on contemporary research surrounding loneliness, social support, coping strategies, social media use, and student wellbeing within higher education. In addition, it considers theatrical approaches associated with absurd theatre and verbatim performance in order to examine how isolation and emotional disconnection can be represented artistically.

The guiding question for this research is: *To what extent is isolation a significant aspect of the university student experience?* The review will first examine psychological and social research relating to loneliness among university students before exploring studies connected to coping strategies and social media. It will then consider performance-based literature surrounding absurd theatre and representations of isolation. Finally, the review will synthesise key themes, identify gaps within the research, and establish how these findings informed the development of the practical project.

2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the role of isolation within university life, it is important to first define the concept and its key characteristics. A general definition of isolation describes it as “the state of being separated from others, encompassing social, physical, or psychological disconnection.”. This section will explore the difference between social isolation and loneliness. Both terms are central to this study. The term “loneliness” is commonly described as “a distressing, subjective feeling experienced when social needs are unmet, often causing emotional, social, or existential pain”. This distinction is important as it allows for a clearer understanding of whether students’ experiences are characterised by social disconnection or subjective feelings of loneliness.

A useful framework for understanding isolation is provided by Irvin D. Yalom, who identifies different forms of isolation. Yalom categorises isolation into three types: existential, interpersonal, and intrapersonal isolation. Existential isolation refers to being fundamentally alone in the world. Interpersonal is where you have a lack of relationships. Intrapersonal is a feeling of disconnection within yourself. (Yalom, 1997) The framework highlights that isolation can be psychological as well as social. This is particularly relevant in the context of university students.

Loneliness is widely recognised as a significant issue affecting mental health. According to the National Health Service, loneliness can be subjective and personal. However, the NHS also identifies three different ways in which loneliness can be experienced. The first being emotional loneliness where with a close friend or partner there may be a lack of emotional attachment. Social loneliness is where there is a lack of community or the feeling that you do not share the same interests with the people you are close to. Existential loneliness is the feeling of being alone in a crowded room. (NHS, 2021) This further highlights the complexity of loneliness, particularly within university environments where social interaction does not always prevent feelings of disconnection.

Together, these perspectives highlight that isolation and loneliness are closely related but distinct concepts. While isolation may refer to being alone or feeling disconnected, loneliness is more centred around it being subjective to each individual. Within a

university context, students may experience one without the other. For example, they may have feel alone in a crowded environment yet have a close community or group of friends. This distinction is central to this study, as it allows for a more nuanced exploration of how students experience disconnection within university life.

2.3 THEMATIC REVIEW

Research into student mental health highlights several factors that contribute to feelings of isolation within university settings. A systematic review of UK university students found that social connections play a significant role in student wellbeing. A lack of social connection is associated with increased loneliness, and this is strongly linked to mental health. The transition into higher education is identified as a key period, with the academic pressure of getting the right grades contributing to stress. As well as this moving away from home comes with a lot of factors. For example, living independently and forming new networks. Social factors such as, relationship difficulties and being the first in their family to attend university also contribute to more loneliness and a poorer experience. (Cambell et al, 2022) This suggests that isolation is not caused by a single factor, but rather a combination of social, academic and environmental changes. This is particularly relevant when considering the extent to which isolation has become a significant part of university life. Whilst Campbell et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of social connection in reducing loneliness, other research suggests that social support may have more limited protective effects than previously assumed. A meta-analysis conducted by Zhang et al. (2025), which examined 210 studies on social support and mental health during COVID-19, found that although social support was associated with improved mental health outcomes, the overall effect was relatively modest. The study argues that social support alone cannot fully offset psychological distress and that there is “an urgent need for targeted strategies to enhance the effectiveness of social support”. This suggests that wider societal and environmental factors also contribute to students experiences of isolation. As a result, feelings of isolation within university settings may persist even when students have access to social support networks. Together, these studies highlight the complexity of isolation within university life. Both

Campbell et al. (2022) and Zhang et al. (2025) acknowledge the importance of social connection in supporting student wellbeing. However, whilst Campbell et al. place greater emphasis on belonging and social relationships as protective factors, Zhang et al. argue that social support alone may not be enough to fully prevent loneliness and psychological distress. This suggests that isolation within higher education is influenced by a range of social, psychological and environmental factors rather than a single cause. As a result, experiences of loneliness among university students may persist even when support systems are available.

A study of university students from Germany found that 43.6% of students felt disconnected. Disconnected in this context refers to a lack of belonging, which contributes to feelings of isolation. The source states that a lower level of loneliness can be achieved through having a higher level of engagement in university life. For example, taking part in social activities, joining a university society or club and participating in lectures would all contribute to a higher level of engagement. This source is particularly interesting as it mentions that even after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, loneliness still remained high. (Wenig, 2025) This suggests that isolation is not solely a result of physical restriction but broader social factors. During lockdown, individuals became accustomed to prolonged periods of isolation and as a result of this society has changed. This raises questions about whether aspects of university life itself contribute to ongoing feelings of disconnection. With large classes and surface level interaction this makes it difficult for students to connect. However, this raises further questions about why loneliness levels remained high even after restrictions were lifted. This is important when considering the extent of isolation in modern university life. Similar findings were identified by Diehl et al. (2018), which found that loneliness was highly prevalent among university students, with 32.4% reporting moderate loneliness and 3.2% reporting severe loneliness. The study also distinguishes between emotional loneliness and social loneliness, arguing that the quality of relationships is often more important than the number of social interactions a student has. This supports Wenig's (2025) suggestion that feelings of disconnection within university life are not solely caused by physical isolation, but by difficulties in forming meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. The study further links loneliness to increased depression and anxiety, reinforcing the

idea that isolation can significantly impact student wellbeing. As a result, the research highlights the importance of community-building and support systems within higher education.

Research also highlights the significant impact that loneliness can have on both academic performance and overall wellbeing among university students. A study by Aslan and Polat (2024) found that low social support from friends and family is associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Loneliness was found to be a negative predictor of academic self-efficacy. The findings suggest that reducing loneliness may improve academic success. This study also highlights the role of social media in shaping experiences of loneliness. In this study students use social media as a way to cope with unbelonging, and the use of social media can increase an individual's feelings of isolation as well as having a risk of depression. This suggests that when a student feels lonely, they turn to social media for support however in doing this the student may face further feelings of isolation for example, exposure to others' social interactions online. This suggests a cyclical relationship, where loneliness leads to increased social media use, which in turn may intensify feelings of isolation. This is particularly relevant in a contemporary university setting, where social media plays a significant role in shaping student interactions and experiences of isolation. Hellion et al. examined the relationship between social media addiction and academic engagement in 412 university students in Honduras, focusing on the mediating roles of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. While social media addiction had no direct effect on academic engagement, it was indirectly linked to lower engagement through increased depressive symptoms and reduced self-esteem. Overall, the findings suggest that social media addiction affects academic outcomes mainly through its impact on mental health rather than directly. Both studies link social media use to poorer academic and psychological outcomes but differ in focus. Aslan and Polat (2024) emphasise loneliness and a cyclical relationship between social media use and feelings of isolation, while Hellion et al. highlight depression and self-esteem as key mediators affecting academic engagement. However, both agree that problematic social media use is associated with worse mental health, which in turn negatively impacts academic functioning.

Loneliness can also influence how students cope with challenges and manage their daily experiences within university life. Research suggests that students adopt a range of coping strategies in response to loneliness. For example, some students seek support from friends and family whilst others may withdraw socially. To reduce distress, some students, keep themselves busy with tasks such as studying, browsing social media and activities. These are considered as more adaptive strategies. Whilst coping strategies such as socially isolating yourself to avoid rejection or uncomfortable interactions, are considered less effective or avoidant strategies. Less frequent strategies, such as passive acceptance or escapism can also be used. (Brakespear and Cachia, 2021) This suggests that coping with loneliness is not a fixed process, but that it varies depending on individual and environmental factors. In some cases, these strategies may reinforce feelings of isolation and can lead students to rely on these strategies over time. This further highlights the complexity of isolation within university life, as students are not only affected by loneliness but must also navigate how to cope with it. Another study on social media use with social well-being examines how different types of social media use relate to social wellbeing, positive mental health, and self-rated physical health in a nationally representative sample of 1,027 U.S. adults. It challenges the idea that greater social media use is inherently harmful by distinguishing between routine use and emotional connection. Findings show that routine use of social media is associated with better social wellbeing, improved mental health, and better self-rated health. In contrast, a strong emotional connection or dependency on social media is linked to poorer outcomes across all three measures, suggesting that the quality of engagement is more important than the amount of use. (Bekalu et al, 2019). Both studies recognise that social media can play a complex role in wellbeing and coping, but they emphasise different mechanisms. Brakespear and Cachia (2021) focus on loneliness in university students and highlight a range of coping strategies, including social media use, which can be either adaptive or contribute to further isolation depending on how it is used. Similarly, the wellbeing study suggests that routine use may be beneficial, while emotionally dependent use is harmful. Together, the studies suggest that social media is not inherently positive or negative; instead, its impact depends on the user's level of emotional reliance and the broader context in which it is used.

Isolation and loneliness have been widely explored within performance, particularly through theatrical forms that aim to represent emotional and psychological disconnection. Research into absurd theatre suggests that themes of loneliness are reinforced through barren settings and failed attempts at communication. In absurd theatre this is conveyed through fragmented and repetitive dialogue, where communication between characters often breaks down. In addition, barren and claustrophobic stage settings visually reinforce feelings of emotional isolation. (Waham, 2023) This suggests that isolation is represented not only through physical separation, but also through the inability to communicate meaningfully with others. This highlights the potential for performance to explore complex experiences of loneliness beyond traditional academic discussion. Hornby (2015) defines the Theatre of the Absurd as a dramatic movement that rejects traditional realism and structured storytelling in favour of fragmented, abstract forms. Plays are often set in “void-like” environments with minimal plot development, where characters function more as symbolic figures than fully developed individuals. Dialogue is frequently illogical or nonsensical, reflecting the breakdown of language as a reliable tool for communication. Instead of conventional narrative clarity, absurd theatre relies on disjointed action and subconscious expression to reveal deeper philosophical truths beneath everyday reality. The movement is linked to surrealism, particularly the idea of expressing thought without rational or moral control and aims to expose the instability of meaning in human experience. Both Hornby (2015) and Waham (2023) highlight the central role of broken communication and fragmented expression in absurd theatre, particularly in conveying isolation and disconnection. Waham (2023) focuses on how these themes are represented through performance elements such as barren stage settings, repetitive dialogue, and failed communication between characters, emphasising the emotional experience of loneliness. Similarly, Hornby (2015) explains these features at a structural and theoretical level, describing absurd theatre as using fragmented language, minimal plots, and symbolic characters to undermine realistic communication. However, while Waham (2023) emphasises the representation of isolation as a lived emotional experience, Hornby provides a broader conceptual explanation of why absurd theatre rejects realism in order to reveal deeper philosophical truths. Together, the sources

reinforce the idea that absurd theatre uses disrupted communication as a key device to explore human isolation.

2.4 SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Overall, the literature suggests that isolation is a significant and multi-dimensional aspect of the university student experience, but it is neither uniform nor solely caused by lack of social contact. Across studies, there is broad agreement that social connection is strongly linked to wellbeing, with loneliness consistently associated with poorer mental health and reduced academic engagement (Campbell et al., 2022; Diehl et al., 2018). However, the research also demonstrates that the presence of social networks alone does not necessarily prevent feelings of isolation, indicating that the *quality* of relationships and sense of belonging may be more important than the quantity of interactions.

A key contradiction in the field concerns the protective role of social support. While some studies position social connection as a central buffer against loneliness (Campbell et al., 2022), others argue its effects are limited and insufficient on their own to offset psychological distress (Zhang et al., 2025). This tension suggests that isolation is shaped not only by interpersonal factors but also by wider environmental and psychological conditions, including institutional structures and post-pandemic behavioural changes.

There is also a developing consensus that isolation persists beyond physical separation. Research by Wenig (2025) and Diehl et al. (2018) highlights that even after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, loneliness remained prevalent, suggesting more systemic issues within university life such as large-group teaching, surface-level interactions, and difficulty forming meaningful connections. However, what remains underexplored is *why* these conditions continue to produce disconnection and which aspects of university environments are most influential.

Similarly, studies on coping strategies and social media use reveal complex and sometimes contradictory effects. Social media can function as both a coping

mechanism and a contributor to loneliness depending on patterns of use and emotional reliance (Brakespear and Cachia, 2021; Bekalu et al., 2019). However, there is limited research focusing specifically on how these digital behaviours interact with the transitional experience of university students.

My project fits into this gap by focusing on how isolation is experienced and constructed within the university context rather than treating it as a single outcome of social deficit. Through a practical exploration, it responds to the need for more nuanced understandings of how environment, communication, and coping behaviours interact to shape isolation in everyday life.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The literature collectively demonstrates that isolation is a significant aspect of the university student experience, shaped by a combination of social, psychological, and environmental factors. Across the research, loneliness is consistently linked to poorer mental health, reduced academic engagement, and difficulties forming meaningful relationships. While social connection is often presented as a protective factor, the literature also highlights that support networks alone may not fully prevent feelings of disconnection. Studies exploring social media, coping strategies, and post-pandemic student experiences further reinforce the complexity of isolation, suggesting that loneliness can persist even when students are surrounded by others. Research into absurd theatre and fragmented communication additionally demonstrates how performance can effectively represent emotional isolation and the breakdown of connection.

This literature is particularly relevant to my project, as it informed both the themes and creative methods used within my practical exploration. My art installation explored student loneliness through eight monologues (see appendix C) developed from verbatim responses collected through a questionnaire (see appendix A) distributed to university students. Influenced by verbatim and absurd theatre, the work combined fragmented personal testimonies, paintings, and a soundscape composed of songs in minor keys to

communicate emotional disconnection and shared experience. The intended message of the installation was that feelings of loneliness are common within university life and that students are “not alone” in experiencing them. By combining research with creative practice, the project aimed to transform academic discussions of isolation into a more personal and emotionally accessible experience for a student audience.

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5. DEVELOPMENT, COLLABORATION AND EXPLORATION

5.1 OVERVIEW

The initial concept for this project emerged from my experiences as a university student. I knew I wanted to explore the emotional challenges of university life, including loneliness, disconnection, and isolation. I decided to focus on this as a central theme. At this stage of my degree, this theme felt particularly relevant. With deadlines looming and the stress of balancing university life with social life, I felt particularly isolated. This was not due to others, but rather the pressure that a graduating student faces.

In order to explore this theme and its connection to university students, I decided to use a questionnaire (see appendix A) to gather real experiences. This allowed me to collect a

range of personal responses from students across different universities. Initially, I intended to create a play centred around two students in accommodation, however due to time constraints and the reliance on actors, I adapted this idea. Instead, I chose to create an installation combining paintings and monologues. (see appendix D) Using verbatim material from the questionnaire allowed me to present authentic experiences of isolation and loneliness.

The development process followed several key stages. Initially, I distributed a questionnaire to university students. (see appendix A) I then researched artists who explore isolation and compiled a list of relevant paintings, which was refined down to eight. Following this, I recorded my own responses to each painting and began developing monologues, incorporating verbatim material from the questionnaire. I then designed the layout of the space and prepared the audio elements for the installation. (see appendix F) The monologues were distributed to performers with a set deadline for recording. Finally, all elements were brought together to create the installation. (see appendix D)

5.2 RESEARCH INFORMED EXPLORATION

The research explored within the literature review directly informed the development of my practical experiments and creative decisions throughout the project. Research surrounding loneliness in university students influenced my decision to focus on emotional isolation rather than physical separation, particularly the idea that students can feel disconnected even when surrounded by others (Diehl et al., 2018; Wenig, 2025). This informed the fragmented structure of the monologues and the use of individual listening experiences within the installation. In addition, theories connected to absurd theatre influenced the use of repetitive language, emotional disconnection, and minimal communication within the monologues to reflect feelings of loneliness and unbelonging. Research into verbatim theatre also shaped my use of questionnaire responses from university students, allowing authentic experiences to become central to the work. Furthermore, studies examining social media and coping strategies informed themes

explored within the monologues, particularly emotional withdrawal, comparison, and the search for connection.

5.3 PRACTICAL INVESTIGATIONS

To begin the practical investigation, I designed a questionnaire (see appendix A) which aimed to explore the extent of isolation within university students. This was split into four sections: background information, belonging and social identity, experiences of social exclusion and psychological impact. I chose open-ended questions like “Do you believe that others would notice if you stopped attending classes” rather than multiple choice questions. This was because I needed detailed and authentic responses that could be used as my verbatim material. (see appendix B) The responses revealed that many students experienced isolation in different ways, highlighting the varied and personal nature of the theme.

Following the questionnaire responses, I began developing monologues based on the material collected. Firstly, I generated ideas for each monologue by looking at each painting and constructing a narrative around them. I then incorporated suitable verbatim extracts from the questionnaire responses and developed these into final monologues. I chose to use a verbatim approach in order to reflect lived experiences and make the performance more connected to its audience. In some cases, I combined and edited responses to ensure clarity and flow, while still maintaining the original meaning. This process resulted in monologues that were grounded in real student experiences and conveyed the theme of isolation in a more personal and authentic way.

Originally, I had planned to print the monologues and have the audience read them. However, I decided that to create a stronger emotional connection and increase accessibility, voice recordings were necessary. I put out a casting call with information about the project and received responses from 11 people. From this, I selected eight participants who were the first to express interest. I then sent them the master document and allowed each performer to choose a monologue they felt most connected to. Once

allocated, I sent each performer their chosen monologue along with the corresponding painting.

I encouraged performers to interpret the material freely, while also providing clear instructions regarding tone and recording requirements. This collaborative approach allowed for a range of interpretations, adding depth and emotional variation to the monologues. One challenge I encountered was that one performer did not meet the recording deadline, which created issues when compiling the final installation. After communication with the performer, I decided to re-record that monologue myself in order to maintain consistency and meet the project deadline. Overall, the inclusion of voice recordings significantly enhanced the emotional impact of the work by presenting multiple voices of isolation. (see appendix F)

The final stage of the practical investigation involved developing the work as an installation. I researched installation artists working in similar formats and found Paulina Olowka's work, particularly *The Mother: An Unsavoury Monologue*, which informed my approach. Her use of durational painting alongside monologue, connected through physical installation elements, influenced my decision to combine visual and audio components. Using this reference, I developed the set design digitally and structured the space using a 1–2–3–2 formation of flats, with the central piece acting as the focal point. Each painting was printed on A3 and displayed with the artist's name and title, alongside the printed monologues. (see appendix D and F) During the technical rehearsal, I explored how spatial arrangement and lighting affected the visibility and interpretation of the paintings. From this, I identified two key developments: the need for a more reflective audience engagement element and a stronger sound design. In response, I introduced a sentence-completion prompt ("You're halfway through, people tend to look right through me when...") to encourage audience reflection and participation. (see appendix F) In addition, I developed a soundscape consisting of dissonant, minor-key music to create a contemplative atmosphere. This decision was informed by my understanding of how non-resolved musical structures can influence emotional response, reinforcing the themes of isolation within the installation. In addition to the installation, I created supporting materials including a poster, programme, and ticketing website. (see

appendix E and F) These were designed to frame the work as a complete experience and extend audience engagement beyond the physical space.

5.4 COLLABORATION

Collaboration was a key element of this project, involving a range of contributors including eight performers, my 1-1 tutor, and a lighting technician. These individuals contributed to different stages of the development process, supporting both the creative and technical aspects of the work.

In working with the performers, my role involved directing and guiding the interpretation of the monologues. I ensured clear communication by using the Microsoft Outlook application, where I clearly structured and sent emails containing the monologues, paintings, recording instructions, and deadlines. (see appendix G) I did not impose specific tone or emotion, instead allowing performers a degree of creative freedom in order to encourage personal connection with the material. This resulted in a range of emotional interpretations and varied responses to the theme of isolation.

One challenge that arose was a performer experiencing difficulty converting their recording into an MP3 file. To resolve this, I provided additional support by screen recording a step-by-step guide and sending it for clarity. As mentioned previously, one performer did not meet the deadline. Due to time constraints, I had to adapt by re-recording the monologue myself and communicating professionally with the performer regarding the issue.

My 1–1 tutor provided guidance throughout the development of the project by giving feedback on the concept and supporting decision-making during the technical rehearsal. This helped me refine the structure of the piece and improve the clarity of the installation. Their feedback also influenced key developments, including the integration of a soundscape, which was suggested as a way to enhance the emotional atmosphere of the work. I also worked with a lighting technician to explore how lighting could enhance the installation. As the design of the piece was relatively minimal in terms of lighting requirements, their role focused on advising on the placement of flats and ensuring visual clarity across the space. In addition, the technician supported the balancing of

sound within the installation, ensuring that the audio elements were clear and appropriately integrated into the environment. Through this collaboration, I was able to refine the atmosphere of the space, highlight the paintings more effectively, and improve audience focus. This ensured that the installation was more immersive and supported the emotional tone of isolation.

5.5 PRODUCTION PLANNING

The production of this project was structured through a clear planning process to ensure each stage was completed within the available timeframe. The work was divided into distinct phases, including research collection, development of monologues, recording, and final installation assembly. Deadlines were set for each stage in order to manage workflow effectively, particularly when coordinating with external performers.

Practical considerations were also made in relation to resources and scale. This included limiting the selection to eight paintings to ensure consistency and manageability, as well as planning the number of performers involved based on time constraints and availability. Decisions regarding formatting, such as the use of A3 prints for both visual and textual material, were made to maintain clarity and accessibility within the installation space.

Technical planning was considered in advance of the final installation, including spatial layout, lighting arrangement, and integration of audio elements. A technical rehearsal was used to test these components and refine their placement within the space, ensuring the final presentation was coherent and practically achievable.

5.6 CRITICAL REFLECTION

Overall, the development of this project was successful in several key areas. One of the strongest aspects of the process was the creation of the monologues and the use of verbatim material. I was able to quickly generate narrative ideas for each painting and organised all questionnaire responses into a single document to support efficient allocation of material. Having previously worked with verbatim theatre, I was confident

in this approach, particularly in terms of shaping emotional impact and authenticity. Another effective aspect was the development of the spatial design. By creating a digital set design prior to the technical rehearsal, I was able to approach the space with a clear vision, which supported more effective communication with both my tutor and the lighting technician.

However, there were several challenges encountered during the development of this project. One issue related to scheduling, as my original 45-minute technical rehearsal slot was moved earlier due to an email I did not initially receive. As a result, I attended the session without my materials, meaning I was unable to physically reference the paintings, monologues, and sound. However, this required me to think more spatially and visualise the installation within the space. It also allowed me to focus more closely on the layout and how the lighting interacted with the flats, which strengthened my collaboration with the lighting technician. Initially, I had planned to create a play centred around two flatmates, but this raised practical challenges in terms of rehearsal time and reliance on actors. Moving towards an installation format allowed for greater independence, improved time management, and a more achievable structure for the project. Another challenge arose during the recording process when one performer missed the deadline, which disrupted the workflow. In response, I re-recorded the monologue myself to ensure the project could continue within the required timeframe. This also meant my voice became part of the installation, which added an additional layer to the work. Further adjustments were made during the technical rehearsal, including the addition of a soundscape and a reflective audience element. Overall, these challenges improved my ability to adapt to unexpected changes, make decisions under pressure, and manage time effectively.

Overall, this project developed my understanding of installation making and how an emotional impact can be achieved without the presence of physical performers on stage. It also strengthened my knowledge and application of verbatim theatre. The project improved my skills in time management, collaboration, leadership, and organisation, and I have learned that simplicity can be highly effective. I also now understand that constraints should not be seen as limitations but can instead enhance creativity. If I were to develop this project further, I would expand the sound design beyond dissonant music

to include layered environmental sounds such as distant footsteps and crowd noise, exploring how these could be integrated within the space. This could be developed further through a more immersive audio setup, potentially using multiple speakers to enhance audience engagement. If a larger budget were available, I would also utilise a bigger space to allow for a more flexible spatial arrangement. This experience has ultimately strengthened my practice as a creative practitioner rather than solely a performer and has increased my confidence in independently developing and producing a devised piece of theatre.

6. PRACTICAL CHOICE COMMENTARY

6.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICAL PIECE

The practical element of this project takes the form of an art installation that combines visual and audio elements to explore themes of isolation among university students. The installation presents a series of paintings accompanied by recorded/printed monologues, which work together to communicate personal experiences of loneliness and disconnection. It incorporates elements of both verbatim (see appendix C) and immersive theatre, using real spoken accounts to create an emotional and reflective experience for the viewer.

In terms of style, the installation adopts a deliberately simplistic and minimal aesthetic. This decision was made to ensure that attention remains focused on the emotional content of the paintings and monologues, rather than being distracted by excessive visual complexity. The stripped-back presentation also contributes to the reflective atmosphere of the work, encouraging viewers to engage more deeply with the themes being explored.

The purpose of this piece is to communicate to the audience that feelings of isolation are a shared experience, particularly within a university context. By presenting multiple perspectives through both visual and spoken form, the installation aims to reassure viewers that they are not alone in these emotions and to encourage a sense of connection and empathy.

6.2 ARTISTIC RATIONALE

The artistic direction of this project is informed by research into student isolation, mental health, and verbatim theatre. A key theme explored throughout this research process was loneliness, particularly within a university context. Influences include the work of painters such as Sinthia Cousineau and Alejandro Javaloyas, whose practice explores emotional states through visual representation. In addition, installation works such as *The Mother: An Unsavoury Monologue* by Paulina Olowaska informed the use of monologue within the piece.

The use of a questionnaire as a primary source allowed the work to be grounded in lived experience. This ensured that the monologues reflected authentic student perspectives rather than assumptions. Collecting primary data strengthened the realism of the verbatim approach.

The combination of paintings and monologues was used to create a layered representation of isolation. This dual approach allows visual and spoken narratives to complement one another. While the paintings express emotional states visually, the monologues provide direct personal accounts.

The decision to combine these elements was also influenced by guidance from my one-to-one tutor. This suggestion helped shape the final structure of the installation and, as a result, the work developed into a more immersive and multi-sensory experience.

6.3 EVALUATION OF THE FINAL OUTCOME

The final installation consisted of four flats displaying eight paintings alongside eight accompanying monologues, as well as a reflective table designed to encourage audience participation. In addition, a soundscape composed of instrumental music in minor keys was played at a low volume in order to maintain focus on the artwork while also contributing to the emotional atmosphere of the space. Lighting was kept minimal, with only enough illumination for each painting and monologue to be clearly viewed. This

simplistic presentation supported the immersive nature of the installation by reducing distractions and encouraging audiences to engage fully with the work.

Audience behaviour throughout the installation suggested a strong level of emotional engagement and immersion. Upon entering the space, viewers became noticeably quieter and more reflective as they moved through the work. As audience members progressed between each piece, a sense of community began to emerge despite the installation exploring themes of isolation and loneliness. This became evident through viewers making physical contact with one another, such as hugging or leaning on each other while listening to the monologues. Although headphones were recommended to encourage an individual experience, many audience members instead listened collectively through phone speakers, resulting in small groups forming around the audio. While this response was unexpected, it ultimately reinforced the project's aim of reducing feelings of isolation by encouraging shared emotional experiences between viewers.

The installation also generated strong emotional reactions from audiences, further demonstrating its effectiveness. Several audience members became visibly emotional, with some crying during or after engaging with the work. Feedback included comments such as "it was the music that got me" and "I didn't know you felt like this," suggesting that viewers connected personally with the themes presented. One audience member also brought flowers following the exhibition, while others described the installation as a "beautiful piece of work." These responses indicate that the combination of visual art, monologue, sound, and atmosphere successfully created an emotionally resonant experience for the audience.

However, there were also practical challenges encountered during the exhibition process. Due to the installation being structured around a fifteen-minute time slot, the audience exceeded the allocated duration, creating difficulties in ending the session appropriately. Additionally, the reflective table initially required verbal prompting, as some audience members overlooked its purpose. However, this unexpectedly created opportunities for direct interaction between me and the audience, further contributing to the participatory and communal nature of the installation.

6.4 PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DEMONSTRATED.

The development and exhibition of this project required strong time management and organisational skills throughout. In preparation for the installation, I allocated approximately two to three weeks to writing the monologues, allowing sufficient time for drafting and refinement. The practical elements of the project, including promotional material such as posters, ticket sales, and an online programme, were completed within a short timeframe and required careful scheduling alongside the written dissertation. (see appendix F) As the practical and written components of the project closely informed one another, this allowed both areas of work to develop simultaneously and efficiently.

Organisation was also essential throughout the installation process. This included arranging the layout of the paintings and monologues within the space, managing questionnaire responses collected during the research phase, organising audio recordings within shared online folders, and preparing technical equipment such as the laptop used to play the soundscape. Although the installation itself was relatively simple to construct, the preparation and coordination of materials required attention to detail in order to ensure the exhibition ran smoothly.

Communication skills were developed through regular interaction with tutors, audience members, actors, and technical staff such as the lighting operator. Communication took place both in person and through email correspondence (see appendix G), allowing consistent monitoring of progress throughout the project. Feedback and advice from tutors were particularly valuable during the exhibition itself, especially when managing audience timing and engagement within the installation space.

The project also strengthened my leadership and problem-solving abilities through independently managing the majority of the installation process. One significant example involved making the decision to proceed without an actor who failed to submit their recording within the agreed deadline. Instead of extending the deadline, I completed the recording myself in order to maintain the project schedule. Although difficult, this demonstrated the importance of professionalism, decision-making, and maintaining boundaries within a creative working environment. This experience

highlighted the need to balance collaboration with accountability, reflecting the expectations of professional industry practice.

7. CONCLUSION

This project allowed me to develop both academically and creatively through exploring isolation within the university student experience. Through the research process, I learned that loneliness among students is far more common and complex than I had originally assumed. The literature demonstrated that isolation is influenced not only by physical separation, but also by emotional disconnection, social pressure, and difficulties forming meaningful relationships. Completing the practical work alongside the dissertation helped me understand how performance can communicate these experiences in a more personal and emotional way than academic research alone.

Although the literature review was completed after the practical performance, many of the ideas explored within the research were already present within the installation through my independent investigation into artists and themes surrounding isolation. Looking back on the project after completing the literature review allowed me to recognise stronger links between theory and practice, particularly in relation to verbatim theatre, fragmented communication, and emotional disconnection within absurd theatre. The use of verbatim responses (see appendix B and C) from university students helped ground the monologues in authentic experiences, whilst the paintings, soundscape, and immersive environment helped communicate feelings of loneliness and unbelonging.

One of the most significant things I learned throughout this project was the importance of time management and independent organisation. Creating the installation within a limited timeframe required me to manage multiple elements simultaneously, including writing monologues, organising actors, producing QR codes, designing promotional material, and setting up the installation space. Audience responses also demonstrated the emotional impact of the work, with several viewers becoming emotional during the performance. This reinforced the importance of creating theatre that allows audiences to feel seen and understood.

This project has strengthened my confidence as an independent creative and has developed skills that will support my future work within stage management and performance-making. If developed further, I would expand the installation through a larger space, more immersive sound and lighting design, and a longer running time to deepen audience engagement. Overall, the project successfully answered the research question by demonstrating that isolation is a significant aspect of university life and affects students more deeply than I had initially realised.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

• UNIVERSITY ISOLATION AND LONELINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Freya and I am undertaking research for my individual project. This study explores experiences of isolation, belonging, and social exclusion among university students, particularly during the first year. Some questions may ask about personal or uncomfortable experiences related to social rejection or exclusion. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. Responses may remain anonymous. All responses will be used for academic research purposes only. By continuing, you consent to participate in this study.

• SECTION 1

Background information

- What is your current year of study?*
 - What university are you studying in?
 - What is your living situation*
 - Are you?*
 - Age range *
- #### • SECTION 2

Belonging and social identity

- Do you feel that you "fit in" at university? Please give a reason why or why not. *
- Do you feel like an "outsider" at university? Please give a reason why or why not. *
- Do you identify strongly with other university students? Please give a reason why or why not. *

- Do you sometimes feel invisible in university/social spaces? and how does this make you feel*
- Have you ever been in a situation where you have felt judged negatively in a group setting? Please explain how this made you feel.*
- "I feel accepted by my peers" - do you agree with this statement? Please give a reason why or why not. *
- Do you feel easily replaceable in your social circles? Please give a reason why or why not. *
- Do you believe that others would notice if you stopped attending classes? Please give a reason why or why not. *

• SECTION 3

Experiences of social exclusion (Connor Waldron lens)

- Have you ever felt deliberately excluded by other students?*
- If yes, what form did this take?
- Please explain the situation/s and how it made you feel*
- Have you ever felt publicly embarrassed, dismissed, or undermined in a university setting?*
- If you chose "once", "occasionally" or "frequently", could you explain the situation/s and how this made you feel?
- What do you tend to do when you feel excluded? *
- How strongly do you agree with this statement? - "I believe my personality makes it harder to belong"*
- Please explain why you chose to agree or disagree with the above statement? *
- How strongly do you agree with this statement? - "I sometimes question my self-worth because of my social experiences at university"*
- Can you explain why you chose to agree or disagree with the above statement and how this makes you feel physically and emotionally *

• SECTION 4

Psychological impact

- How often do you feel lonely during term time?*
- Describe a moment at university where you felt most isolated *
- Do you believe first-year students are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion? Why or why not?*

- Did you find that inclusion improved throughout your university journey or worsened? Can you also explain why?*
- As part of my project I will be using verbatim, which is when you take peoples words and put them into a performance, essentially "word for word," without any changes, omissions, or paraphrasing. Would you be okay with me using your words in my performance piece? (you will remain anonymous)*
- If you answered "unsure" to the last question please leave your contact details (email, social media etc) and I can explain in more detail.
- I will also be conducting some interviews, if you would like to be involved in this please leave your contact details (email, social media) below. Interviews will remain anonymous.
- Submit

APPENDIX B: VERBATIM RESPONSES

Do you feel that you "fit in" at university? Please give a reason why or why not.

No, i feel that im not as good as others on my course and as if i dont deserve to be there

If yes, what form did this take?

Not being invited to social events

Being left out of social media group chats

Mockery or subtle humiliation

Please explain the situation/s and how it made you feel

Judged and anxious

Do you feel easily replaceable in your social circles? Please give a reason why or why not.

Not in all of them, but there are definitely times when I feel like people would prefer someone else was there instead of me

What do you tend to do when you feel excluded?

Just deal with it until I can get home and distract myself with my interests

Can you explain why you chose to agree or disagree with the above statement and how this makes you feel physically and emotionally

I put disagree rather than strongly disagree because if i'd been filling out this survey a year ago I would have perhaps put agree. But now with the experiences I have, I know I'm a good person deserving of respect and kindness and love, and when I'm instead met with the opposite it, I just see it as a reflection of that person instead. Obviously it is still important when faced with criticism to look at yourself and assess, but there are a lot of mean spirited people in the world, and insecure people projecting onto others.

Do you sometimes feel invisible in university/social spaces? and how does this make you feel

Yes, people tend to look right through me or talk over me. It makes me feel insignificant in the space, but luckily I have enough self esteem that it doesn't shatter me.

Do you sometimes feel invisible in university/social spaces? and how does this make you feel

Yes makes me feel isolated

APPENDIX C: MONOLOGUE EXTRACTS WITH VERBATIM

and I don't know whether that makes it heavier or lighter to carry. The rock doesn't move, but I still expect it to eventually reveal why it is there. That's how I think my friends feel about me, that I'm just kind of there.

My friends around me want me.

Even outside of any structured environment, that sense of separation still forms in the same way. Quietly. Without announcement. The mirrored structure on the wall reflects the space, but it doesn't fully return it.

makes me feel isolated

That thought just... sits there. Quiet. But heavy. I look around the room, and no one looks back. Not really.

People tend to look right through me or talk over me. It makes me feel insignificant in the space.

But I hold onto this —

I'm a good person deserving of respect and kindness and love.
I even have that up on my wall to remind me. Every day I look at it. And maybe one day, I won't need the reminder anymore.

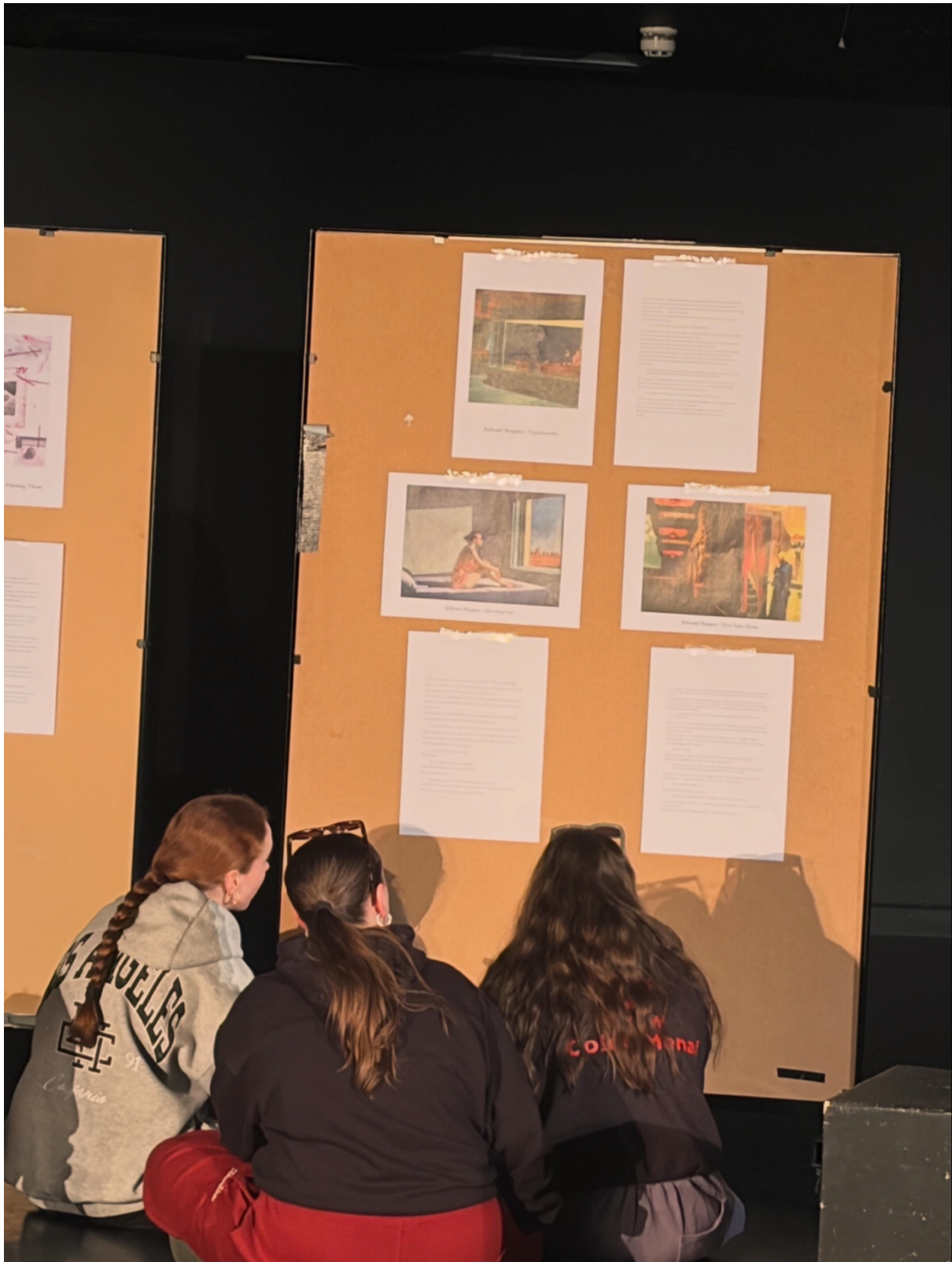
I think back to school. When everything was simple. Making friends and losing friends wasn't a big deal. But even then, there were
times when I feel like people would prefer someone else was there instead of me.

APPENDIX D: INSTALLATION PHOTOS

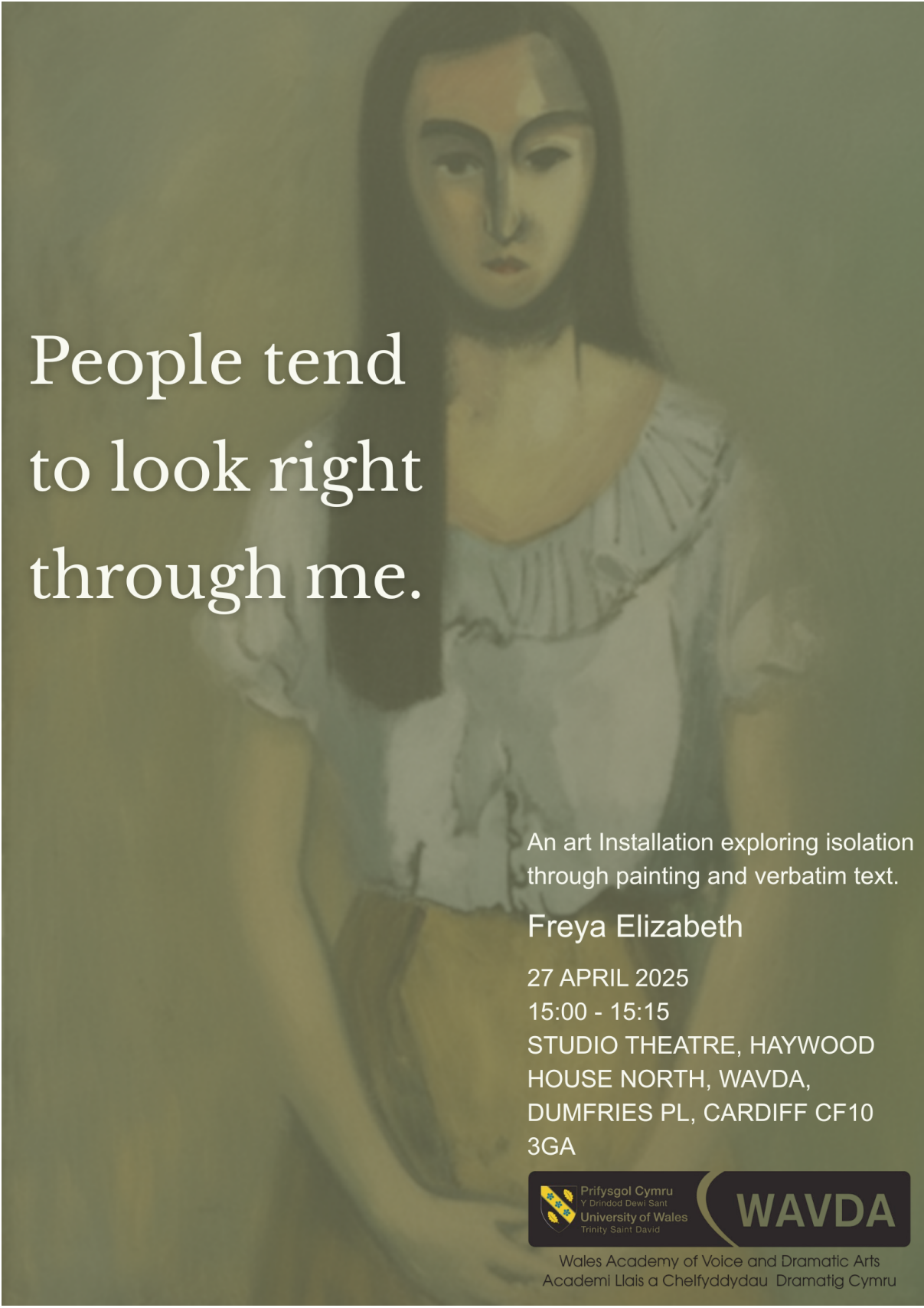








APPENDIX E: POSTER AND PROGRAMME



People tend
to look right
through me.

An art Installation exploring isolation
through painting and verbatim text.

Freya Elizabeth

27 APRIL 2025

15:00 - 15:15

STUDIO THEATRE, HAYWOOD
HOUSE NORTH, WAVDA,
DUMFRIES PL, CARDIFF CF10
3GA



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

WAVDA

Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Arts
Academi Llais a Chelfyddydau Dramatig Cymru

Who am I and why have I chosen this topic?

My name is Freya, and I am a student at the Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Arts. As part of my dissertation, I have created an art installation exploring the theme of isolation.



This topic is one that feels close to me. During my first year at university, I found the transition more challenging than I had expected. Being in a completely new environment, away from home and familiar people, often left me feeling disconnected. Even in spaces that were meant to feel social, I sometimes struggled to find a sense of belonging.

While I was fortunate to have a small support system around me, I became aware of how easily those feelings of isolation could surface—and how often they go unspoken.

This project began as a different idea entirely. I originally set out to write a play about two flatmates navigating the emotional challenges of their first year at university. Within that piece, a painting became a point of connection between the characters—something that held unspoken meaning. Over time, that element grew in importance, eventually shaping the direction of the work into what it is now: an installation where visual art and voice coexist.

Throughout my experience studying drama, I have worked with a range of styles, including theatre in education, devised work, and verbatim theatre. I have always been particularly drawn to verbatim, for its ability to centre real voices and present honest, often unfiltered perspectives.

For this project, I created and distributed a questionnaire to university students across multiple institutions. The responses I received became the foundation of this piece.

What I discovered was both powerful and unsettling. I hadn't fully realised how deeply many students experience isolation, even within environments that are often assumed to be social and connected. This installation is an attempt to hold space for those voices—voices that might otherwise go unheard.

Nighthawks
Morning Sun
New York Movie



Self Portrait (Sea)_
Self Portrait (Tears).

Just. Floating. There
Materiality and Abstraction

The Italian Woman

Artists

Artwork by Edward Hopper

Nighthawks

Morning Sun

New York Movie

Artwork by Sinthia Cousineau

Self Portrait (sea)

Self Portrait (tears)

Artwork by Alejandro Javaloyas

Just. Floating. There.

Materiality and Abstraction

Artwork by Henri Matisse

The Italian Woman (L'Italienne)

Voice actors

**Madaleine Hewett, Freya Elizabeth,
Aimee Villis, Kailyn Nieva, Elin Dafydd,
Tia Jean, Hollie Weaver, Liv Harris.**

APPENDIX F: LINK TO ALL DOCUMENTS

[General](#)

APPENDIX G: EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE



✓ **Freya Taylo...**

Tuesday, 21 April 2...

+5 more ▾



T...

[Download external images](#)

[Go to Settings](#)

Hi guys!

Please see attached doc for my monologues. If you can first let me know what one you'd like to do and a backup one incase someone has already chosen to do it that would be great! Each monologue is just on one page.

 [MASTERDOC - MONOLOGUES FOR INDY PROJ \(with word counts.titles.numbered..docx](#)



✓ Freya Taylo...

Tuesday, 21 April 2...

+8 more ▾



T...

[Download external images](#)

[Go to Settings](#)

Hiya!

If you could all let me know what one you'd like to do by tonight that would be amazing. If you could message or email me with the number/title of the piece that would be helpful. See the title in the "comment" box on the doc.

So far:

- 4. The invisible woman (Liv)
- 8. Just floating there (Tia)

Are taken.

Hollie and Elin once I get responses from everyone, I will send the final two that's left to you.

Once everyone's chosen, I'll send a screenshot of the monologue alongside the painting that it goes with, so you have an idea of the vibe!

If you can't commit to recording pls let me know asap as I will have to find other people and I want to be able to create my QR codes for the voice overs by Thursday.

Regards, Freya



Monologue

✓ Freya Taylo...

Wednesday, 22 Apr...

To: ⓘ Madeline Hewett (2415839)



Edward hopper bar.p...
1 MB



+1 more ✓

[Download All](#) • [Preview All](#)

Hi Maddy,

Attached is the monologue and painting i
have allocated to you. It's called
"Nighthawks".

Please get this sent to me by 3PM tomorrow
via MP3 file. Ensure that the recording is clear
to hear.

Thanks

Freya 😊