

Oxford Against Cutting: Body Image Smart Phone Project

A series of workshops run with sixth form students at Oxford Academy, September – November 2022: feedback report.

The project

This project was developed to support secondary school-aged children in Oxford in learning and critical thinking in relation to how the media shape ideas of the way bodies should look. The aim was to help students think about online influences such as social media, marketing and pornography in relation to beauty 'ideals', helping students better understand where these ideals come from and who they aim to serve. The project aimed to empower participants to resist pressures from the media and celebrate the natural diversity of bodies, in turn reducing the negative impacts of the media on mental health.

What was covered?

The sessions were carefully planned to incorporate a range of activities and learning styles including quizzes, polls, films, case studies and discussion. Each involved an art activity, eg a mood board, to encourage positive thinking and exploration of each session's key themes, with the final session having music and snacks to promote a celebratory feel for completing the project. Each session was planned to run for two-hours. The sessions were:

- **Workshop 1:** The 'Ideal' Beauty Standard (14 girls and eight boys attended).
- **Workshop 2:** Colourism (14 girls and one boy).
- **Workshop 3:** Pornography and Cosmetic Body Alterations (16 girls and two boys).
- **Workshop 4:** Female Cosmetic Genital Surgery (FCGS) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (14 girls and one boy).



Workshop 5:

A final workshop to create design work related to the project content, which was displayed in the sixth form common room (12 girls and one boy).

Who was involved?

Workshops 1-3 and 5 were delivered by Dot Pritchard (Project Manager) and Monica Majumdar (Facilitator and Social Media & Marketing Specialist), both experienced body image facilitators who have delivered web cafes, workshops and podcasts on related topics. For Workshop 4, Dot was joined by Hauwa Suleiman, Gender Specialist and also an experienced facilitator.

We recognise that body image issues can affect people from all communities, and the workshops involved and reached young people from a variety of backgrounds. In particular, we addressed some of the body issues faced by minoritized communities, acknowledging and exploring the fact that these challenges can be different, eg with colourism, or have similarities, such as the pressures to make non-medical body alterations. No formal categorisation of ethnicity was kept, though the groups were visibly diverse in this respect.

Inclusion and safeguarding

A risk assessment (completed 29/9/22 and shared with all involved in the project) identified the



possibility (albeit low) of some emotional upset in the content both for the attendees and their parents/carers. Extra care was therefore taken to create a safe discussion space, ensure age-appropriate content, provide information on support services and links to the school pastoral team, ensure the presence of two facilitators so there were sufficient to deal with an upset student, and to conclude sessions with uplifting content. Similarly, any issues arising from apps or mobile phone use were considered and content/guidance developed to address these possibilities. Consent forms were obtained from the students for their pictures to be taken and their artwork used, to be posted on social media.

Student feedback

During the sessions, we used Mentimeter to introduce key topics and questions, and to initiate student engagement. Some results are shown below. The students who fully engaged with each session also completed evaluation forms (except for the final workshop, which was intended primarily as a creative outlet and space for reflection). These asked for their feedback on how much they had learned and how interesting the material was, in addition to how empowering they found the sessions and their feelings about increased



personal body confidence and celebrating individuality.

Generally, the sessions were scored positively, with scores for learning (4.2/5) and celebrating individuality (4.3/5) being high. The lowest scoring question across all four sessions was on increases to their own body confidence (2.9/5). This may reflect that this is highly personal, and it is likely to take more sustained change to tackle any internalised issues. In addition, one participant stated that she is “already confident”, so did not feel she had to improve on this scale.

Facilitator feedback & learning points

The facilitators really enjoyed working with the group, who were generally engaged and enthusiastic. To help with preparing similar projects in the future, some learning points and comments have been collated below:

- When reviewing the promotional materials for the workshops, it was noted that there was no specific encouragement of diverse groups to join in. This will be featured in materials for similar projects.
- The evaluation measurement of body confidence should be redesigned, as we cannot presuppose levels for the students. Future evaluations could perhaps give them a 1-10 scale to ‘take the temperature’ after each session rather than ask about incremental improvements (which may not be necessary).
- Establishing early guidelines around respect, phone use, etc worked well and it was important to be inclusive (eg, recognise that not all those taking part would have a smartphone so may need to share the Mentimeter polls).
- There were issues with the boys who attended, in particular that most stated they had not wanted to be there (having preferred, but not been able to, attend another session on sport and/or feeling that they had no choice). This led to some disruption, with the majority of the boys withdrawing after the first week despite encouragement and attempts to connect from the facilitators. Those who remained did not fully engage. For future projects it should be made clear that participation is optional. We would also explore the possibility of specific sessions for boys and/or involving a male facilitator who would hopefully be more relatable and better able to engage boys in the sessions.
- Facilitators sharing their personal experiences, eg, around colourism or body image issues, helps to make them and the material more relatable and build rapport which led to more positive engagement. The engaged students, who generally had mature attitudes to the material, quickly became



used to discussing uncomfortable subjects with the facilitators.

- On occasion, teachers in attendance spoke for a significant amount of time, which was an issue for facilitation as the sessions were limited in length. For future sessions, a pre-briefing for those in the room may be appropriate to allow time for all the material.
- The time available for the sessions was limited by a number of factors, leaving insufficient time for delivery on some occasions. For example, the school did not

factor time in for students to have their lunch, they had to leave for other lessons and had to be 'retrieved' later to complete the materials. On one occasion, there was significant delay to accessing the classroom leading to problems with setting up in time for the session and on another the students left without warning to go to a pre-planned meeting. For future projects, firmer boundaries are needed to ensure that the sessions are delivered according to plan.



Finally, it was particularly positive to see the learning demonstrated in the students' conversations during the final session and the artwork and messaging they were producing. We look forward to building on this work to deliver more workshops of this kind in the future.



Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the University of Oxford Small Community Grants Scheme for their contribution towards this project. Thanks also to the staff and students from Oxford Academy who contributed so much to the workshops, and without whom this project could not have happened.

Feedback report prepared by: Dr Kate Clayton-Hathway, Director of Research and Evaluation, @Oxford Against Cutting, February 2023

Appendix - student evaluation forms

Body image art project evaluation
The 'Ideal' Beauty Standard

How much did you learn about the 'ideal' beauty standard today (where 0=nothing at all and 5=I learned a lot)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How interesting did you find the workshop and presentation (where 0=not at all interesting and 5=extremely interesting)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How much fun was the workshop (where 0=no fun at all and 5=loads of fun)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How would you answer the following statements, following today's workshop?

I feel more empowered to question unrealistic expectations on body image in the media (where 0=I don't feel more empowered 5=yes, I feel really empowered)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

I feel more confident with my own body (where 0=I don't feel any more confident 5=yes, I feel much more confident)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊



I recognise that we can celebrate individuality in our bodies (where 0=I don't recognise that at all 5=yes, I see how individuality is something to celebrate)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

What was the best thing about the workshop for you? Give one sentence:

Could we do anything to make it better?

Many thanks for your help ☺️

Body image art project evaluation
Colourism Workshop

How much did you learn about colourism today (where 0=nothing at all and 5=I learned a lot)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How interesting did you find the workshop and presentation (where 0=not at all interesting and 5=extremely interesting)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How much fun was the workshop (where 0=no fun at all and 5=loads of fun)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How would you answer the following statements, following today's workshop?

I feel more empowered to question colourism in the media (where 0=I don't feel more empowered 5=yes, I feel really empowered)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

I feel more confident with my own body (where 0=I don't feel any more confident 5=yes, I feel much more confident)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊



I recognise that we can celebrate individuality in our bodies (where 0=I don't recognise that at all 5=yes, I see how individuality is something to celebrate)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

What was the best thing about the workshop for you? Give one sentence:

Could we do anything to make it better?

Many thanks for your help ☺️

Body image art project evaluation
Female Cosmetic Genital Surgery (FCGS) and
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

How much did you learn about female genitalia (incl. diversity & function), Female Cosmetic Genital Surgery (FCGS) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) today (where 0=nothing at all and 5=I learned a lot)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How interesting did you find the workshop and presentation (where 0=not at all interesting and 5=extremely interesting)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How much fun was the workshop (where 0=no fun at all and 5=loads of fun)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How would you answer the following statements, following today's workshop?

I feel empowered to question ideas relating to female genitalia (incl. diversity & function), Female Cosmetic Genital Surgery (FCGS) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (where 0=I don't feel I can question this 5=yes, I feel I can question these much more)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

I feel more confident with my own body (where 0=I don't feel any more confident 5=yes, I feel much more confident)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊



I recognise that we can celebrate individuality in our bodies (where 0=I don't recognise that at all 5=yes, I see how individuality is something to celebrate)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

What was the best thing about the workshop for you? Give one sentence:

Could we do anything to make it better?

Many thanks for your help ☺️

Body image art project evaluation
Pornography and Cosmetic Body Alterations

How much did you learn about pornography and its influence on body image (including pressure to alter our bodies) today (where 0=nothing at all and 5=I learned a lot)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How interesting did you find the workshop and presentation (where 0=not at all interesting and 5=extremely interesting)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How much fun was the workshop (where 0=no fun at all and 5=loads of fun)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

How would you answer the following statements, following today's workshop?

I feel more empowered to challenge how pornography and cosmetic body alterations represent us in the media (where 0=I don't feel more empowered 5=yes, I feel really empowered)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

I feel more confident with my own body (where 0=I don't feel any more confident 5=yes, I feel much more confident)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

I recognise that we can celebrate individuality in our bodies (where 0=I don't recognise that at all 5=yes, I see how individuality is something to celebrate)?

☹️ 0 1 2 3 4 5 😊

What was the best thing about the workshop for you? Give one sentence:

Could we do anything to make it better?

Many thanks for your help ☺️

