

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.
- **Workshop 2:** Colourism.
- **Workshop 3:** Pornography and Cosmetic Body Alterations.
- **Workshop 4:** Female Cosmetic Genital Surgery (FCGS) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- **Workshop 5:** A final workshop to create design work related to the project content.



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, schools 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.



Inclusion and safeguarding

Care was 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. The students 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.

Facilitator feedback & learning points

The facilitators really enjoyed working with the group, who were 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).
- 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.



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

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