



# Oxford Against Cutting: Body Image Smart Phone Project

A series of workshops run with Year 12 students at Cheney School November 23 – January 24: feedback summary

## The project

This workshop series was developed to support secondary school-aged children in learning and critical thinking on how the media shapes ideas of the way bodies should look. This is the second time we have run this, following a successful pilot at another school. The project's aim is to help students think about online influences such as social media, marketing and pornography in relation to beauty 'ideals', helping them better understand where

these come from and who they aim to serve. A key aim is to empower young people to resist pressures from the media and celebrate the natural diversity of bodies, reducing negative medical health impacts.

## What was covered?

The 2-hour sessions incorporated a range of activities and learning styles including Mentimeter quizzes to encourage interaction (e.g., asking what influences our body image), case studies and discussion. Each involved an art activity, e.g. a mood board, to explore key themes and reinforce learning, and covered:

- **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** was to create design work on the overall content, with music and snacks to promote a celebratory feel for completing the project.

## Who was involved?

Workshops were delivered by Dot Pritchard (Project Manager) and Monica Majumdar (Colourism and Social Media & Marketing Specialist). Both are experienced body image facilitators who have delivered web cafes, schools workshops and podcasts on related topics.

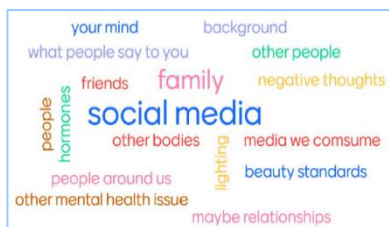
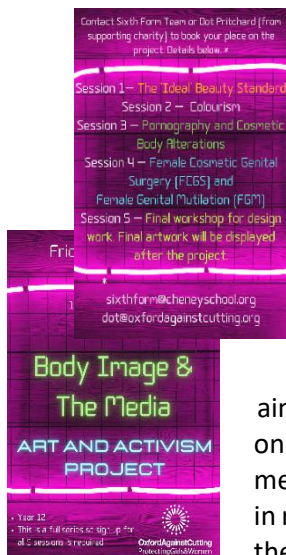
As body image issues can affect people from all backgrounds, we addressed some of the body issues faced by minoritized communities, acknowledging, and exploring the fact that these challenges can be different, e.g. with colourism, or have similarities, such as the social pressures to make non-medical body alterations. Seven young people took part, with representation of both young women and young men, allowing for differing perspectives.

## Inclusion and safeguarding

We took care to create a safe discussion space, ensure age-appropriate content, provide information on support services and links to the school pastoral team, 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 and teacher feedback

The students completed evaluation forms (except for the final workshop, which was intended



*"It was really interactive. As more sessions passed, it felt more natural and open"*

*"A completely new topic to me - very thought-provoking"*

*"I loved the atmosphere of the workshop as I felt safe and encouraged to share my thoughts and feelings"*



primarily as a creative outlet and space for reflection). These asked for their feedback on how much they had learned and how interesting and fun the material was, how empowering they found the sessions and their feelings about increased personal body confidence and celebrating individuality.

Generally, the sessions were scored positively, with an average score across all the sessions of 4.5/5. Average scores for celebrating individuality were highest (4.8/5), with those for how much they learned and how interesting they found the workshops also high (4.6/5). The lowest scoring question overall was about their body confidence, though at 4.1/5 as an average across the project this was still not particularly low (and the results for later sessions were slightly higher showing positive progression). We also asked for anything we could do to make the sessions better, and generally the answer was no! A couple of students, though, thought a little more inspiration/some ideas on what to produce would be helpful.

School staff involved in organising the sessions were extremely complimentary, and we have been asked to return yearly to run sessions for the lower sixth. Participants for this programme have already been encouraged to promote it to the younger students coming in behind them (e.g., delivering a short talk in an assembly). They also talked of returning to next year's sessions to help out, e.g., with the group discussions or artwork section.

Students were also hugely complimentary, saying, for example, that the workshops were their favourite part of the week. Moreover, a couple of weeks in, positive word-of-mouth from participants led to approaches from other curious students who wanted to take part (unfortunately, the programme had already started so we were unable to accommodate them).

Feedback on the art activities, which formed the second part of the sessions, was particularly positive. The peer-to-peer, 'casual' conversation during this part was helpful for continuing the conversation in a less formal way. The art practice also gave those who were less confident about speaking out an outlet for exploration, through channelling their ideas into their creativity,

providing an alternative way to connect with others in the group.

The small size of the group allowed for deeper conversations, which may not be the case with a bigger group. The group had mature attitudes to the material, and they were mostly comfortable discussing some contentious and difficult material which might not be the case in a wider group. Overall, it was felt that the sessions enabled the group to bond in a way that will support them in transition to Year 13.

### Facilitator feedback & learning

The facilitators really enjoyed working with the group, who were engaged and enthusiastic. The success of the project was in part down to taking on board learning points from the pilot, which included making it clear from the outset that participants opted in (rather than being co-opted) ensuring that they were 100% engaged. In addition, we attracted a diverse group by promoting the series as one of interest to students from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., mentioning the colourism session). In practical terms, by running the sessions within a specific block of undisturbed time, e.g. not straddling lunch, the students were able to maintain focus. Facilitators sharing their personal experiences, e.g., around colourism or body image issues, helps to make everything more relatable and lead to more positive engagement.

Finally, it was really positive to see the learning demonstrated in the students' conversations during the final session and the artwork and messaging they were producing. Overall they engaged brilliantly with the work and our charity, with everyone in the group following Oxford Against Cutting on social platforms to stay in touch with our activities. Some expressed interest in helping out on a stall next time we run one at a local festival and/or joining in with our next youth led web cafe series. We look forward to building on these exciting new connections and delivering more workshops of this kind in the future.

