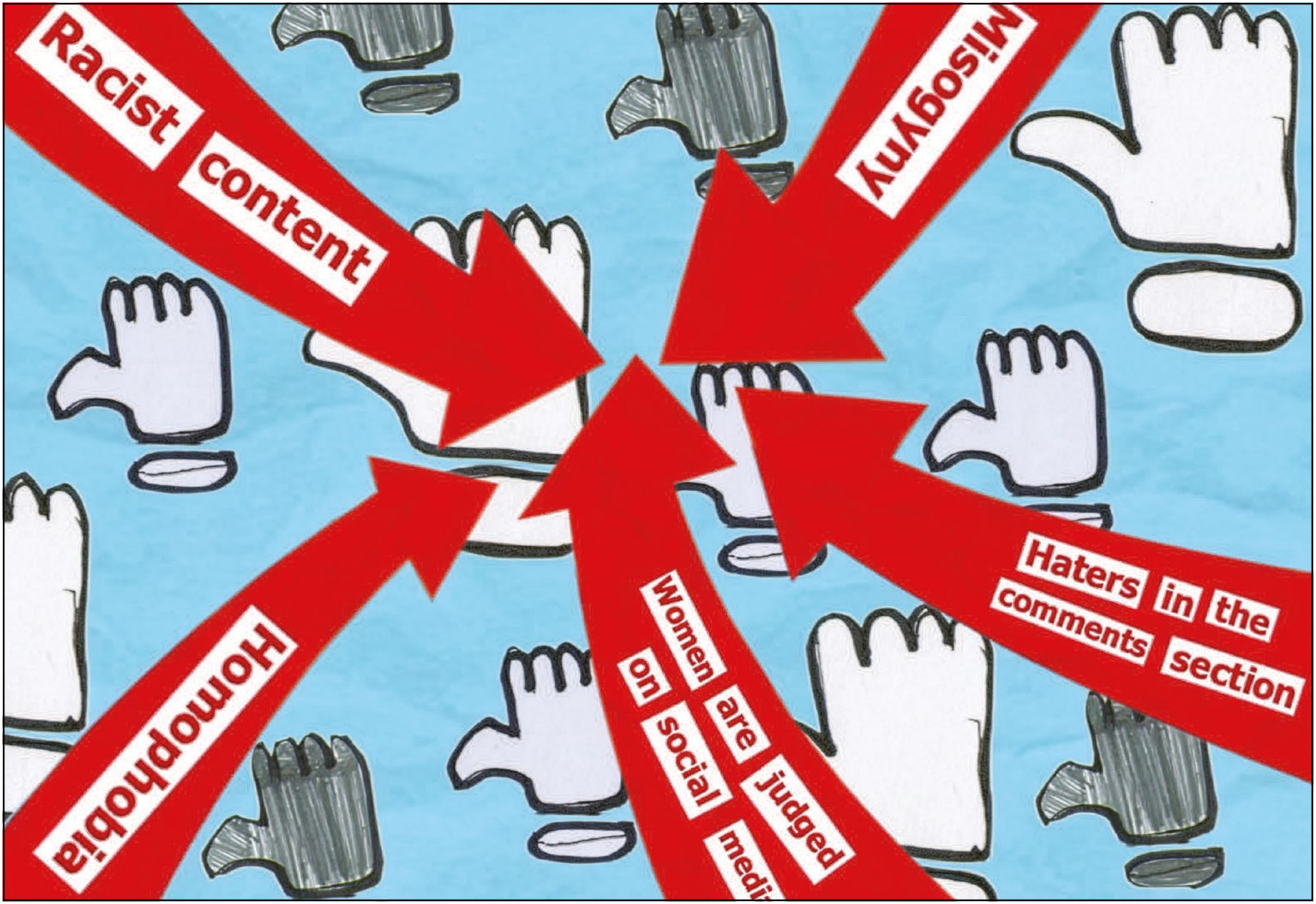
Online Objectification

Exploring barriers to digital civic participation through an anti-objectification intervention

Authors

Dawn Woolley
Sally Dibb
Magdalena Zawisza
Katie Thompson
Margot Q. Lefevre

THE INCLUSIVE DIGITAL ECONOMY NETWORK+
Getaway Girls
LEEDS ARTS UNIVERSITY EST. 1846
a.r.u. | Anglia Ruskin University
Manchester Metropolitan University


Racist content
Misogyny
Homophobia
Women are judged on social media
Haters in the comments section

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Introduction

What the Project is About

Objectifying and demeaning content is one of the top ten harms experienced by girls and young women online.[1] This interdisciplinary project brought together academic and non-academic expertise to examine experiences of objectifying content on social media platforms, to think about how to mitigate against them, and to develop an accessible civic action, in the form of an animation co-produced with girls. It centres the voices, experiences and creativity of girls, values that are at the heart of Getaway Girls, our community partner.

This research was undertaken by Dr Dawn Woolley (Project lead, Leeds Arts University); Professor Sally Dibb and Dr Katie Thompson (Manchester Metropolitan University); and Associate Professor Magdalena Zawisza and Margot Q. Lefevre (Anglia Ruskin University) in collaboration with youth workers and participants at Getaway Girls in Leeds.

Thanks to the participants, Flavia Docherty (CEO) and the youth workers at Getaway Girls for making this project possible and to Paulette Morris, Denetta D3 Copeland and Marcia Brown for leading creative workshops with participants.

The project design and outputs have benefitted from the expert advice of our advisory panel; Mavis So, Helen Routledge, Tom Collins, Kate Davis, Petros Lameras, Beth Duggleby and Paulette Morris. We are grateful for the time and effort they contributed.

Thanks also to Include+ for funding this project. Include+ is a network exploring how social and digital environments can be built, shaped and sustained to enable all people to thrive. It is funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Project Highlights

"Thank you for working in partnership with Getaway Girls".

"It was a fantastic opportunity for girls and young women to share their lived experience and ideas through the research, interactive workshops, producing the resource including voice overs and the exhibition. It was an example of real partnership and co production with excellent facilitators including Dawn, Paulette, Marcia and Denetta. Getaway Girls have loved being part of the whole process and the opportunity to amplify young women's voices and influence change. We are excited to see the final resource and exhibition".

Flavia Docherty
CEO, Getaway Girls

"Working on the online objectification research project was an eye-opening experience".

"Hearing the young women's stories from interviews to the workshops allowed us to understand some of the pressure they face online. This in turn has helped inform the way I work with young people to have a deeper background on the issues they face. I helped to support some of the workshops and it was great seeing the young women get creative and really engage in the activities, creating poems and artwork. Visiting the exhibition with a group of our young women to see all those weeks of work come to fruition and seeing it displayed was great".

Navrita Ranu
Youth Worker, Getaway Girls

"Culturally diverse communities are deemed as hard to reach".

"This project gave a voice to those who are often left out of research projects. I am in my 60's I learnt so much from the girls who took part in the project".

Paulette Morris
Workshop lead and project advisory panel member

Key Insights

Girls and young women feel under constant surveillance on social media and routinely encounter objectifying and demeaning content; however, experiences differ according to their religious and cultural backgrounds (See page 14 Stage 2 interviews).

Co-creation with the community using creative participatory methods produced an intervention that was effective in supporting resilience to this content, in the form of a short animation (page 24 Stage 2 workshops).

Using civic engagement to involve girls and young women in the co-creative process to produce the animation increased the authenticity of the intervention.

Sharing experiences with others about online content and social media is found to be important in building resilience and supporting civic engagement (page 24 Stage 2 workshops).

Experimentally testing the intervention with girls and young women showed it was a highly effective educational tool in increasing resilience to unwanted objectifying and demeaning content on social media (page 30 Stage 3).

Developing girls' and young women's knowledge and literacy skills around objectifying and demeaning content is shown to be important, as is offering supportive spaces and resources to increase their resilience (page 34 Stage 4).

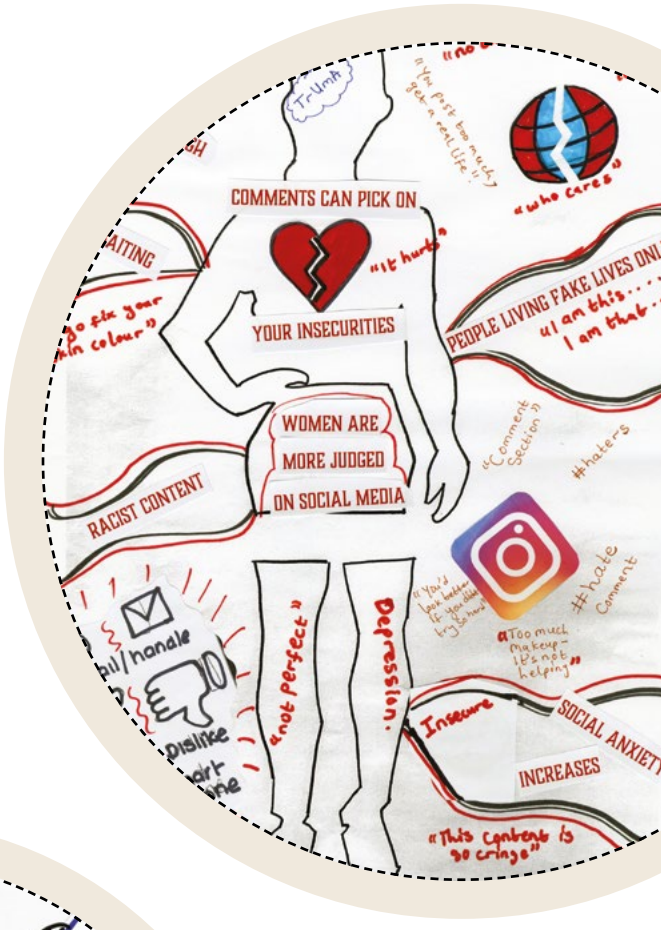
The girls and young women think that social media platforms are not doing enough to prevent or remove objectifying and demeaning content (page 38 Recommendations for policy and practice).

Defining Project Concepts

Objectification refers to the tendency to perceive girls and women through their appearance rather than their full self resulting in many negative outcomes for women (Objectification Theory[2 3]). Here it has been defined as: inappropriate sexually objectifying content either experienced or observed by the social media user (e.g., explicit pictures, sexual comments, objectifying comments, demeaning comments about looks, harassment) on social media platforms.

Resilience in the context of exposure to online objectifying content can be understood as readiness to report problematic content. Therefore, our research examined experiences of exposure, different responses to exposure, attitudes to reporting, sense of personal control in reporting, beliefs that closest family and friends support reporting and behavioural intentions to report unwanted objectifying content encountered online.

In a research context, an **intervention** is an active process consisting of assessment, planning and action used to improve or prevent a (social, educational, health etc.) problem. One of the aims of this project was to develop an intervention that would effectively remediate the impact of exposure to objectifying content experienced by young women on social media platforms. The intervention took the form of an animation (See page 29) which provides information that can empower the viewer to identify and report objectifying content. When the animation is shared on social media platforms it is also able to intervene in those digital spaces, raising awareness and prompting change in attitudes and behaviours. In the remainder of the report, the terms 'intervention' and 'animation' are used interchangeably.



Why It Matters

In 2023, Ofcom's Online Nation report found that 56% of online harm is experienced on social media platforms and that 'content or language which objectifies, demeans, or otherwise negatively portrays women' is one of the top ten most recent harms experienced by women and girls.[4] Girls as young as 15 '[...] frequently feel objectified, dehumanised and disgusted by the hate towards women [they] see online', feel 'disheartened and unhappy about being a girl' and as a result feel 'deeply uncomfortable in [their] own body'.[5] Seven in ten teenagers have encountered objectifying content online.[6] Twenty-five per cent of girls aged 13-17 reported being exposed to stigmatising content about body types, 19% to content promoting unhealthy eating/exercise and group shaming, 23% to misogynistic content, and 17% to eating disorders content.[7]

In response, online harms are at the forefront of current political debate: Australia banned children under the age of 16 from using social media platforms in December 2025, France banned social media for under 15s in January 2026 and the UK government is now consulting on children's social media use to inform future regulations and policies. In April 2026, a Los Angeles jury found that Meta and YouTube are deliberately designed to be addictive and contributed to a young woman's mental health struggles. In the same month, a New Mexico trial found Meta guilty of failing to protect young users from child predators.[8] These court cases have set a precedent that could force change and greater accountability on social media platforms. In the meantime, as harmful online content remains prevalent, measures to understand and mediate against the impact of social media platforms are vital.

Existing research shows that viewing objectifying content can induce anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and shame, leading to lower performance and aspiration in women.[9] [10] [11] This content also reduces women's well-being and social self-esteem.[12] Objectification itself reduces the extent to which women are perceived as competent and human [13] [14] [15], intelligent[16], warm[17], socially appealing[18], agentic[19], driven[20], or worthy of respect[21].

Young women are also often blamed for how they are perceived.[22] Although online harm exposure decreases as users age, the experiences of negative content remain high among marginalised groups, particularly those defined by gender, race, sexuality, disability, or socioeconomic status.[23]

At the same time, only 35% of 13-year-olds and older users report generally harmful or objectifying content.[24] The key barriers against reporting in adults include 'not see[ing] the need to do anything', 'not [being] directly impacted', or not believing 'it made a difference'. These concerns appear well-founded, with only about a third of the content reported by teenagers being removed.[25] Frequent exposure to sexual content is also known to make teenagers less sensitive and bothered about such content, potentially hindering reporting behaviour.[26] While frequent exposure to objectifying content has been associated with fewer collective actions and behavioural intentions to report.[27] A further concern is that self-objectification decreases gender-based activism in women.[28]

Despite these issues, participation on social media platforms has a beneficial role to play in building community activities and exposing harmful content and hostile social media users. Social media platforms are also reported to have positive effects on mental health for marginalised people. For example, they can reduce loneliness, anxiety, depression, and paranoia in LGBTQI+ people.[29] We know too that strong online social support systems can improve on- and off-line life by increasing resilience against negative experiences.[30] This suggests that new effective online interventions are needed to increase girls' resilience to harmful content to support community-building and civic empowerment.

Project Design

Following the INCLUDE+ funding process, this interdisciplinary project was designed to 'take tiny and mindful steps towards digital equity', by gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of girls when navigating and participating on social media platforms. It sought to understand what civic participation means for girls and young women and reveal the barriers they face by focusing on their experiences of objectifying and demeaning content.

Using an intersectional approach, the Online Objectification project investigated girls' lived experiences of viewing harmful social media content to understand these accumulating vulnerabilities and how wellbeing is compounded by inequalities.

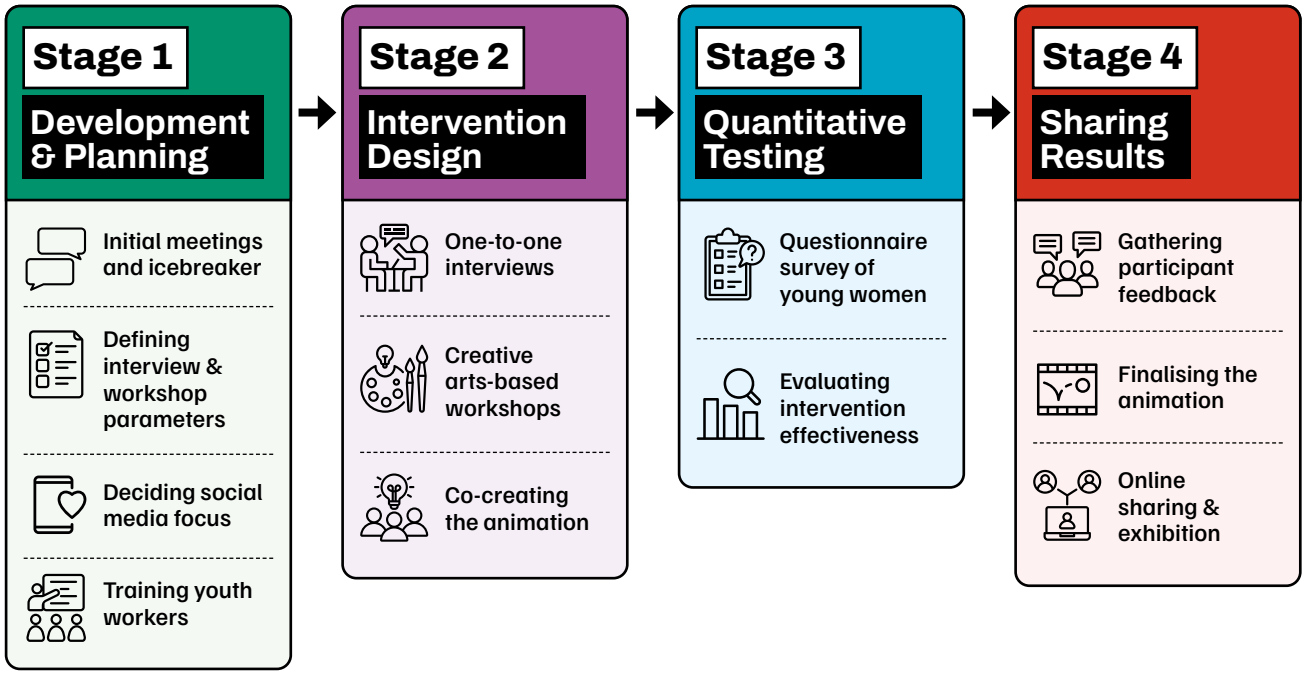
The project centred the voices, experiences and creativity of girls, values that are at the heart of our community partner. Getaway Girls is a charity based in South Leeds that aims to empower girls and young women to lead safe, healthy and fulfilled lives. Since 1987 they have supported over 20,000 girls and young women to learn new skills, build confidence, resilience and aspiration. Getaway Girls focuses on empowering girls and young women to support each other through recognising their talents and lived experience.

https://getawaygirls.co.uk

The project followed an intervention design. The research began with interviews with the girls at Getaway Girls, who were then involved in creative workshops to co-create potential actions and interventions that could empower users to report objectifying content and support other women online, to increase digital equality and inclusion. This content was developed into an animation-based intervention, which was subsequently refined through further workshops with the young women. The effectiveness of the animation in building resilience was then tested through a questionnaire survey with a larger group of girls.

From the outset, the project was co-designed and co-created with participants, workshop leads and youth workers at Getaway Girls. Through conversations with participants and Flavia Docherty (CEO Getaway Girls), we devised the focus of the interviews and workshops. We developed a list of prompting questions and trained youth workers to complete the interviews, resulting in open and informal conversations that produced rich data. Further examples of what the girls told us and of the co-design process are outlined in the interview and workshop sections.

The research project followed 4 stages:



Who We Are

Dr Dawn Woolley, Leeds Arts University, is a researcher and visual artist with expertise in site-specific art on Instagram and photography theory on gender politics in selfies. This project continues her work using creative methods to increase visual literacy around gender stereotypes and co-create queer visual languages for selfies with groups of LGBTQI+ young people.

Magdalena Zawisza, Associate Professor in Consumer & Gender Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge holds several prestigious grants, is Chair of Psychological Ethics Committee and a reviewing editor of Sex Roles and Frontiers in Sex, Sexuality and Gender. Her research has informed 2019 policy changes by the Advertising Standards Authority on harmful gender stereotypes.

Sally Dibb, Professor of Marketing & Society, Manchester Metropolitan University, has an extensive publishing and research record in consumer behaviour, digital vulnerability and social marketing. She brought her experience of working with communities and of managing interdisciplinary research to the project.

Dr Katie Thompson is a lecturer in Marketing at Manchester Metropolitan University with expertise in digital consumption, digital harms and consumer identity. In her PhD research she explored experiences of embodiment and surveillance within the context of selfie-editing. She has qualitative research methods expertise, including interviews, projective techniques, and Netnography.

Margot Q. Lefevre, Research assistant at Anglia Ruskin University, is an MSc Social Psychology graduate (Distinction) with experience working in academic labs in the UK (University of Kent, Anglia Ruskin University, Bournemouth University) and France (Université Paris Nanterre). Her research interests centre on gender equality communication, intergroup relations, and behaviour change, using experimental methods and advanced quantitative analyses.

Flavia Docherty, is CEO of Getaway Girls and a dedicated charity leader, passionate about social justice. She has 23 years' experience of management within the third sector, the last 14.5 of which have been spent as CEO of Getaway Girls, an award-winning, values-driven charity. Winner of the National Youth Worker of the Year Award in 2014.

Paulette Morris is a singer and songwriter. She is also co-director of Leeds Young Authors Youth Poetry Slam, a youth mentor, social activist and LDVS Voices Engagement Worker.

Denetta Copeland (D3) is a professional artist and founder of D3 Creations, dedicated to helping individuals and communities find their unique voices through creative writing and workshops. She lives the art she teaches, bringing authentic, real-world experience to every session to unlock confidence and creativity.

Marcia Brown is an exhibiting artist, community practitioner and qualified art teacher with a Masters in Contemporary Fine Art, trained at Leeds Arts University and Leeds Beckett University, and working from her own art studio. She is also a recipient of the Edna Lumb Travel Scholarship, with work held in public and private collections.

Marcia also created the female figure artworks used in the workshops, animation and this report.

We were supported by our amazing advisory panel of experts who offered invaluable suggestions throughout the project.

Stage 1 - Development and Planning

On receiving ethical approval from the ethics committee at Leeds Arts University (LAUDW6780027) the project team established the advisory panel and held scoping meetings with Getaway Girls staff and the creative workshop leads.

Advisory Panel

The advisory panel comprises academics, creative practitioners, community experts and representatives from Ofcom.

Mavis So is a Senior Research Manager at Ofcom with over a decade of experience in market research, and a specialised focus in the past five years on online safety. Her professional journey bridges both industry and academia, having previously engaged in psychological research that gave her exposure to both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Helen Routledge is the CEO of Totem Learning, a company that specializes in creating serious games and simulations designed to support behavioural change. Her professional background is rooted in psychology and behavioural sciences, which informs her approach to designing interactive learning experiences.

Tom Collins is a Senior Lecturer in Game Design at Leeds Arts University, where he leads the undergraduate programme in game design. His academic and professional interests lie in the intersection of interactive media, education, and creative technology, with a particular focus on how games can be used to explore and influence behaviour.

Kate Davis is a Research Associate at Ofcom, where she works alongside Mavis So, specializing in online safety research. Her work primarily supports Ofcom's protection of children and media literacy programmes and she co-led a creative research project exploring user engagement with the manosphere, offering critical insights into how young people interact with harmful online content.

Petros Lameras is an Associate Professor at the Research Centre for Postdigital Cultures, Institute for Creative Cultures, Coventry University. His research interests span the areas of games science research in general and within the research strand of investigating how learning and teaching in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) may be enhanced with the use of games.

Beth Duggleby is a lecturer at Leeds Arts University, a researcher and illustrator of comic books and visual diaries. She is particularly interested in authorial illustration, narrative and storytelling and how illustration can be used for positive social purpose. Through this research, she is looking to understand 'the compassionate' image, its origins and its potential uses within wellbeing narratives.

Paulette Morris is a youth mentor, social activist and LDVS Voices Engagement Worker. As Leeds City Council's Women and Girls' Hub coordinator she a has a strong relationship with a variety of community groups in Leeds that support girls and young women. She also has in-depth knowledge of Getaway Girls and has worked with them on numerous creative projects in the past.

The advisory panel met with the project team online four times during the project. At key stages we shared processes and findings to gain expert feedback. This included discussing the training process and prompt questions for Getaway Girls youth workers prior to the interview stage, reviewing key findings from the interview stage when developing the workshop content, refining the wording of the survey for stage 3 and giving developmental feedback about the animation at various points in its development. The input of the advisory panel members has been invaluable in the successes of this project.

Initial icebreaker: Meeting the Getaway Girls

Woolley led collage workshops with three groups at Getaway Girls to meet potential participants, tell them about the project and answer questions. She asked them: what social media/networking platforms do you use, what types of content do you look at and what types of content do you post and/or respond to?

In the workshops we used collage, drawing and creative writing activities as a process of reflection, creative speculation and analysis. In collage, visual elements are given new meanings through their placement in relation to each other. Collage can be used for cultural critique because it enables materials from different spaces and discourses to come into conversation and decentre dominant views.[31] It is also an embodied practice that expresses the personal meanings and experiences of the person or group that creates them[32 33] and materialises unconscious connections through intuitive arrangements of forms.[34] This is particularly pertinent when using collage to examine intersectional identities and affective experience.[35]

For example, during the icebreaker session participants made collages that expressed how they use social media. One participant collaged together multiple pairs of eyes facing in different directions to represent their experiences of being visible on social media. The two masculine appearing pairs of eyes look directly at the camera/audience whereas the three feminine pairs of eyes look elsewhere. The men appear confrontational and in control, whereas the women seem unaware they are looked at or unable to manage the gaze of others. When viewed together, the eyes appear omniscient, viewing all angles at once. We see this as an apt visual metaphor for surveillance on social media. Another participant placed a large male figure overlapping a smaller female figure. The scale and placement imply gender imbalance, which is reiterated by the word 'inequality' written next to the collage.

The collages made during the icebreaker session informed the interview prompt questions and workshop design in Stage 2.

Stage 2 - Intervention Design: Interviews with the girls

Introduction to the interviews

We recruited participants from Getaway Girls in Leeds, focusing on their youth club (11-16 years old) and members of their Vocal Girls group (15-18 years old). This part of the study was led by Dibb, with assistance from Woolley and Thompson. We were assisted in this phase by youth workers at Getaway Girls who we trained to carry out the participant interviews with the girls.

Youth workers Adele Connor, Chloe Mead, Raquel Losa-Hicking, Cherise Hofmann, and Navrita Ranu who conducted the interviews were already known to the girls and were very experienced in talking to them about sensitive issues. To support the youth workers, Dibb led a training session to explain the interview method and explore with the youth workers the practicalities of collecting data in this way. During the session, the interview materials – including the interview question checklist (see page 40), the project information sheet and the ethics consent form – were shared. Each element was discussed in detail and practical tips shared about how to conduct the interviews. For example, each line of the interview checklist was examined, to consider any possible questions that could be asked. After the training session, the scheduling of the interviews was determined, and regular check-in points were agreed to respond to issues or questions that arose. Dibb and Woolley also reviewed the early interview transcripts to provide further tips about how best to conduct the interviews. Where permission was given, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. For the few interviews that were not recorded, detailed interview notes were taken. In total, 20 interviews were completed.

During the interviews, the girls were asked whether any social media content made them feel uncomfortable; how negative content affected them; and how they typically responded to it. This was a safe space, where they were able to talk with people they knew and trusted about their social media experiences. All the girls spoke about having encountered objectifying content online. They talked about the harms caused, their own bad experiences or those they had witnessed involving others.

Quotation marks and italics are used throughout what follows to indicate the use of direct quotations from the interviews.

Most of the girls seemed to clearly understand the concept of online objectification and that it was a particular problem for girls and young women, as one of them explained:

> *"For me it would be seen as objectification because you shouldn't be like pointing out different features about me in that kind of way. Whether it's how my body looks and stuff like that. Even if my body looked really nice and their eyes and stuff like that, in the way that they'll say it and stuff, it just seems quite objectifying".*

In online spaces, the interviews revealed that objectification shows up in several key ways: 1) body shaming, 2) sexualisation, 3) unwanted attention and voyeurism, and 4) gender stereotypes and misogyny.

An overarching thread underpinning all the issues discussed in the interviews was the assumption commonly expressed by the girls that they were being watched and criticised online. One participant described feeling, *"...like women are more judged on social media"*. This heightened judgement and surveillance was experienced negatively by the girls, as one shared: *"It makes you feel bad because you think, oh, there's all these people judging me out in public, and there's so many of them"*. While some described being under scrutiny from people they did not know, others expressed awareness that family members might not approve of what they were posting on social media, which sometimes led them to keep their accounts private.

These experiences negatively affected the girls' wellbeing, from more immediate emotional impacts to longer term effects to mental health and feelings of disempowerment towards engaging with social media. The girls responded to these harms in various ways. While some tried to ignore and avoid negative content, others were more active or even resistant in their responses, seeking to enact change themselves.

Negative online experiences

Body shaming

The problem of body shaming was a big concern for the girls, with many commenting about the negative implications of this kind of content for those it was aimed at. Body shaming included unkind remarks about what the girls should or should not wear, and even views about their body shape, size and posture. Some participants complained about the problematic use of inappropriate words within those comments, which they felt could amount to cyber bullying. One participant mentioned it was common to *"get called names on (social media) or people tell you to do things you don't want to, it's kind of disheartening and it makes you not want to use it".*

Sexualisation

Many of the participants commented about the sexualisation of young girls through their exposure to comments about (their own and others') bodies on social media. Although these remarks could be viewed as "just banter", there was also a darker undertone. This might include discussions between boys about whether a girl was 'their type', whether they considered a girl's appearance was provocative and what they thought about their sexual appeal. The participants also noted stark differences in how girls and women were spoken about and treated online, compared with boys and men.

These kinds of negative conversations could quickly build in social media spaces as others joined in, creating a 'contagion effect'. As one participant explained: *"If someone starts writing a post, a bad post, other people are more pushed to comment about that post if one person has written it. So, as long as one person's written it, I feel like other people will join...For them, they feel it's good, but it's negatively affecting the content creator that posted the content".* Another complained, *"It just started from one person (and) other people will join. They don't really consider...how the person will feel, and just all of them join in together and that's that".*

Halloween Horrors

The effects of objectifying comments on the wellbeing of children was a particular worry. One participant had seen an image of a young child dressed in a Halloween costume that included a corset-type top where her breasts were pushed, which made her look older than she was. She was shocked by how this sexualised the child and especially by the negative and sexualised comments - made mostly by men.

Unwanted attention and voyeurism

Relatedly, the girls were especially concerned about what they saw as age-related targeting, complaining about the voyeurism they faced from older people (usually men). They were indignant to be the subject of this unwanted attention, arguing that "*women should be comfortable*" online, rather than have "*to put up with older men commenting about them*".

"You see men double the female's age that comment, it's like, what's going on here?"

"It's really weird because the (female social media user) would be like 25 and the men (commenting on their content) they'll be like 60, so it's just weird somehow"

"This old man, he looked like he was in his 40s or something, (commented on my post), "Oh, you're beautiful, then he followed me"

Gender stereotypes and misogyny

Participants referred to various issues linked to sexism or to men making comments that suggest women should behave according to particular stereotypes. One girl who followed women who were involved in sports like boxing and football recalled seeing *"really nasty comments"* admonishing these women and girls for taking part in what were deemed "masculine" sports. Comments included, "*You shouldn't be doing this*" and "*You think you're good at boxing, just go in a ring with a man and they'll put you back in your place*". What counted as a "masculine sport" even included football, with one commenter suggesting what they perceived were more suitable sports for girls, "[football is] *quite a harsh sport because it's a lot of body activity and stuff, you should leave it to the men and stuff go do like swimming or dancing or something*".

Misogynistic comments were also a serious concern, with some participants referring directly to Andrew Tate and Charlie Kirk in their responses. There were strong views about whether boys and men have the right to comment on issues affecting women's bodies. One of the girls became angry after seeing negative views about abortions expressed by men online and was worried that when extreme opinions are readily viewable, others may become "*brainwashed*".

"Gendered role stuff and like alpha male stuff and women belong in the kitchen"

"Opinions on girls, how they should act or look or dress or speak"

"The toxic masculinity stuff"

"Trad wife... traditional housewife"

"Podcasts like 'Bros' where they talk bad about women"

"Andrew Tate and his negative views"

"Laughing about sexual assault"

A growing problem for participants was the tendency for boys to be bolder and more outspoken online than they would be in person. In a sinister turn linked to "*rage baiting*", they described seeing comments that appeared to diminish or make light of serious issues, such as sexual assault or domestic abuse. The girls saw this behaviour as linked to the un/dysregulated nature of the Internet and social media spaces. One participant described it as "*very free range*", evoking images of the 'Wild West'. This allowed people online to act in "*irresponsible*" or "*inappropriate*" ways without "*many repercussions*".

> *"I see countless like comments from boys my age that make jokes about like domestic abuse, sexual assault, like a lot of things like that and they seem to find it very funny. There's this whole thing now of like rage baiting, which is basically where you like say something to try and get people's attention, but it used to be kind of funny things that you know kind of made people mad but they weren't that harmful, but now it's turned into, you know, once again people making comments about things that just aren't really funny to make comments about".*

Impacts of negative experiences

The girls faced wide-ranging effects from the incessant surveillant pressure and the objectification associated with it. Some of these effects - such as their immediate emotional reactions - passed quickly, while others were more serious and had longer-term consequences. These included negative effects on their mental health and how they were able to express themselves online, which was associated with persistent feelings of disempowerment or disillusionment. Many described becoming desensitised to the objectification they faced, accepting routine online surveillance and the bad behaviour that accompanied it as normal parts of everyday online life. Others were aggrieved that these harms were disproportionately targeted at girls and women.

Effects on my emotions...

The short-term **effects on the girls' emotions** were considerable, even where they made effects to minimise their exposure by keeping their accounts private. These constant surveillant pressures and the negative backlash associated with them, left many feeling judged or in some case discriminated against. A flood of different emotions could be unleashed, including anger, annoyance, resentment, indignance, frustration, embarrassment, awkwardness, shame, sadness, fear and distress. These responses were deepened by the view that these impacts were disproportionate for girls and women.

> *"I think it makes me feel very angry for one, because, you know, it makes me feel, you know, kind of just fed up because it's been going on for so long, before even I was born. Obviously, it makes you feel upset, it makes you feel scared, like so many different things".*

Impacts on my mental health...

As well as the immediate emotional effects of the harms girls faced, there could also be **longer-lasting impact for their mental health**. Several participants spoke feelingly about the negative and sometimes severe impact of being routinely exposed to negative content. The effects of body shaming and other cyber bullying were particularly problematic for many of these social media users' mental health.

Another concerning longer-term effect was in **limiting the girls' self-expression** and their willingness to present themselves as they wanted online. Many resented not being able to 'be themselves' online, without being shamed. Although they argued that "*everyone has the right to do whatever they want*", they found in practice that their self-expression was limited due to the negative attention they faced. This could fundamentally affect their own online behaviour, as they described being "*wary of what I post and what I say and ... how I dress*" and conscious of the need to *"make sure that I'm covered"*. Some felt overwhelmed by the negativity they saw aimed at others, which also influenced how they chose to behave online. One Muslim participant described facing frustrating cultural assumptions about how she 'should' behave.

"Even if a girl's wearing Hijab and stuff like people they'll just be commenting on stuff, saying you shouldn't post yourself and stuff because you're Muslim and stuff. I'm like at the end of the day, obviously they can do what they want, it's between them and what they want to do".

Feeling disempowered or disillusioned...

While many participants felt **disempowered or disillusioned** by the bad behaviour of others online and were resigned to this being unlikely to change, they did want to see more boundaries around people's behaviour, with "*lines drawn*". This sense of disempowerment was deeply frustrating for some, who expressed feelings of futility about the situation.

"You don't even make a difference if you do anything"

"Anyone can say anything with no repercussion"

"Nobody really, people just don't care enough"

"Truth is, we can't change people"

"I'm like, yeah, yeah"

"They're just behind screens and they're not going to change"

Normalisation of these harms...

The girls also spoke about the **normalisation of these harms**, of how they had been *"exposed to it for so long"*. Most saw it as "*a daily occurrence*" and an inevitable part of using the internet, even though they felt it should not be. In attempting to deal with these challenges, some tried to distance themselves emotionally. They told us, *"Nothing really bothers me", "I don't care", "I guess you get used to it", "it's not worth it", "I don't take it personally"* and *"I don't let it define me"*. Even so, they worried about how the kind of content they were routinely exposed to could impact what is and is not deemed acceptable or cause more lasting damage.

"When you see people say things like that, like laughing about sexual assault and things like that when you're like an 11, 12 year old, that can like really kind of change your view on like a group of people, even if like you don't want it to, and it can very much make you think like, okay, all of them are like that, so I want to stay away from them. I think once again being exposed to it from like a young age, which I know a lot of people are, it can definitely like really leave a long-lasting impact on you".

Responses to objectifying content

Responses by the girls to objectifying content ranged from being avoidant, to more active and resistant. While some girls chose to ignore and quickly scroll past negative content, others were active in their management of such content, including blocking certain accounts or opting-out of viewing content. Some of the girls described more resistant techniques for navigating objectifying content, such as calling out "bad behaviour" and engaging in debates in comment sections.

Avoiding: *"I just want to get away from it"*

Attempting to avoid objectifying content was a common response described by the girls. Different 'avoidant' strategies included: 1) **deleting or leaving groups** ("*I see those kinds of things, I just click, delete the group chat or remove myself from there*"); 2) **scrolling past** upsetting content ("*normally, I just swipe past it*"); 3) trying to **ignore** what they've seen ("*just ignore and let it be*"); and 4) leaving or **limiting time on social media** ("*I just probably stay off social media for a while*").

Responses to objectifying content

There were various perceived benefits for engaging with such techniques. Some participants thought that people who post objectifying content - 'rage baiters', for example - are primarily motivated by **receiving attention**, and that these techniques allow them to deny such engagement ("*I don't want to give them that attention*"). Some were wary about possible **repercussions** related to engaging, hoping to avoid any negativity directed their way: *"I don't feel that I would respond out of fear of backlash*". Others considered that as "*there is so much"* objectifying content online, more active approaches, such as reporting content, were unlikely "*to make a difference*", which "*makes you feel not great*".

There were also instances where the girls had reported troubling content but *"nothing gets done"*, leading them to think "*there's no point in trying*". One participant said: "*I've learned that they* [social media platforms] *just don't really care*". Dealing with these challenges could involve "*steering clear from social media*" after viewing upsetting content to gain **space and distance**, which allowed them to "*focus on myself*", "*clear my head*" and "*try not to think about what I have seen*".

Participants who identified as Black and held religious beliefs (such as Christianity and Islam) observed that decisions to abstain from engaging with negative content online were linked to their cultural background and upbringing, as the following quotes indicate.

> *"I feel my background plays a role...from my background we weren't trained to talk about people negatively, so we're trained to accept people the way they are and avoid anything that would cause...arguments".*

> *"As I'm mixed race, with the black community if you tell someone or tell someone you're struggling or someone's bullying you, you'll be known as a wuss or someone who's scared or someone who's going to back down. Or even just a snitch in general. So I don't feel like no one. They've just kept it inside".*

Taking Action: *"I keep my accounts private...this makes me feel safer online"*

Many participants described taking more active steps in response to objectifying content. This action included changing how they engaged with social media, with techniques ranging from reporting or muting certain accounts, trying to control the type of content they saw online, using private accounts, or seeking support within their networks.

1) Reporting, blocking, muting or unfollowing accounts linked to objectifying content. Participants often said they had reported individuals or accounts making negative comments. However, they also questioned the effectiveness of this technique, recounting instances where no discernible action had been taken by the platform.

"The people that say that kind of stuff, they will get blocked and muted and reported because I'm just really fed up of having those comments said"

"If it's someone that's like saying, like, absolute rubbish, I'll probably just end up blocking them... There's not really much you can do else"

"Sometimes I'd like report it, you know, like a lot of platforms have where you can like report a comment for harmful things and censors and things like that, but nothing, usually they usually say that no violations have been found, there's nothing wrong with this comment, and I'm like, right, okay"

2) Opting-out of viewing similar (harmful) content. Some of the girls described using the 'Not Interested' function which is designed to train the social media algorithms on platforms to show fewer similar posts.

"Sometimes I press, like, don't show any more of this stuff...I'm not interested in bad things"

"You can hold and press 'Not Interested', so it basically says you don't want to see this stuff anymore"

Another strategy was 3) using **private accounts and anonymised profiles** to control who could interact with them online and help to curb the number of negative comments and interactions.

"I have seen a lot of bullying on people's posts that has made me feel uncomfortable about posting my own content in case of negative backlash and bullying. That's why I keep my accounts private"

"All my social media is private. And like, I guess with [name of platform], like you choose who are your friends, so, like, I would know everyone on my [name of platform] so that helps"

"If I show you my account, you wouldn't know it was me...it's public but no one knows it's me...I just want to (have a) mysterious cover"

4) Seeking support from a **trusted friend/adult**. Participants described seeking moral support when faced with objectifying content directed towards themselves.

"I'd just go to, like, my friends, or a trusted adult, my mum or even my youth workers or teachers, if I felt comfortable enough with them".

"To be fair I don't go through the comments normally on a [social media platform] video when I'm by myself but if I'm with someone, we'll be like check the comments and then we'll check them, and we'll just see them and we'll be like, what the hell, but then we'll just go past it and stuff, unless it's like really concerning and stuff. Then my friend will be like why don't you just report that account altogether".

Resisting: *"That's not right"*

Several participants described ways in which they and other social media users would sometimes push back or call out negative comments to try to resist objectifying views and behaviour, as well as offer support and solidarity for those affected by it.

The girls described "*whole big debates and arguments*" within the "*comments section*", with "*disputes about their different views*" in relation to objectifying content. Often the original poster was 'tagged' to draw their attention. They also saw other social media users stand up for themselves and directly address the objectifying comments they had received: "*They'll make another video replying to the comments saying 'Look, I get what you're saying, but you shouldn't be saying this on my post and stuff, I can do what I want'*".

Although not commonly reported by participants themselves, pushing back was seen as increasingly common. One of the girls noted that this growth in the resistance was linked to the increase in objectifying content shared online: "*There's a lot of both, there's a lot of people, you know, standing up for what they think is right, and then there's a lot of people, you know, saying things that aren't exactly appropriate*". Many praised this behaviour and felt heartened by it.

> *"I feel like they should do it because men think they can just say it, and nobody will, like, take notice of what they're saying and they'll just continue doing it. But I feel like when people respond to that comment and make a whole video about it, they'll be like, "Oh, I've been caught out", basically. It kind of puts them in their place".*

Others were less optimistic and felt that resisting would have little material impact: "*I don't really think they're changing much, they're just really arguing about it, like, they're not trying to educate the other person on, like, why it's wrong, they just argue about it*". They spoke feelingly about the tricky balance between objecting and giving those responsible for bad behaviour unnecessary attention, which may inadvertently "*fuel the negativity*" and "*generate even more exposure*".

Livid in the 'Lives'

Several of the girls we spoke to described using apps which connected them to people of similar age and location through Live videos calls, enabling them to "*connect, talk about relatable stuff and actually become friends in person*". One participant described troubling behaviour that they had seen on such an app.

They had joined a Live video call which already had three boys and one girl in attendance. The boys were laughing at the girl and saying derogatory things like "*look at this girl, she's fat*". Although wary of getting involved ("*In case things were said about me...I do have my insecurities*"), the participant described feeling disgusted at their behaviour and typed a comment to the boys in the chat box area: "*That's not right...you boys in this generation are actually really disgusting in the way that you act to girls that aren't your type*". She then left the Live and reported the boys.

Other participants expressed support for others in more subtle ways. For example, one participant said that if they view posts which contain objectifying views they will often go to the comment section and 'like' existing comments which oppose such views. This allowed them to push back in a less exposing way.

Real-life narratives

Created by the research team, the following narratives illustrate some of the ways in which the key issues discussed in the interviews were experienced in 'real-life' by the girls. While grounded in lived experiences and supported by direct interview quotes, to protect the identities of the participants, the text has been created to fictitiously represent the experiences they commonly expressed.

Story 1: Body shaming

I use my smartphone all the time, it's fun to find time to browse my favourite social media apps and to have a place where I can hang out and talk with friends. But almost every day I have to put up with negative comments about girls and young women, talking about the way they look, dress or how they act. These comments are usually posted by boys and young men, but girls sometimes post too. Now that I see these comments so often, I expect it and I'm getting used to it. But it makes me feel uncomfortable and sad. I hate that I can't avoid them, and they've become 'normal' on my social media feeds.

Recently, I had a picture taken of me in shorts and a crop top. My friends gave me lots of compliments, so I decided to post it on social media. When I checked my notifications I was really shocked. Commenters were analysing and picking apart my appearance, saying things like: *"Why would you be wearing that"; "Put clothes on"; "Look at this girl"; She's fat"; "Look at how she's standing"; "You're too young to do that".*

I felt overwhelmed, angry and embarrassed, and quickly deleted the picture. I've turned my profile onto private now and will be more careful about what I post in future. I just can't stop thinking about the how people reacted and their horrible, objectifying comments. They made me feel much more insecure about my body and it'll be a while before I want to post again.

Why don't these people realise there's more to a person than what they look like? I draw, I sing, I make artwork, I write songs. But all of the comments only focused on my appearance. Perhaps I should stop using social media altogether.

Key Themes: Body Shaming; Unwanted Attention; Surveillance and Judgement; Gender Stereotypes and Misogyny; Emotional Response; Limited Self-expression; Active Response.

Story 2: Voyeurism and unwanted attention

I went Live on social media earlier today. There were the usual old men, some in their 40s and 60s, who joined the Live and tried to comment. My sister, who usually moderates for me, quickly blocked them. Later though, I noticed I had a new follower. He appeared to be one of the older men from the Live, who had gone through my recent posts, liking them and commenting with love hearts. I also had a new message in my inbox. The message read: "*Oh hi. I saw you on Live and you were really pretty. I love your lips, you're beautiful.*" I followed my normal process: do not respond and block. He was persistent though. The following day me messaged me on a different account. Feeling fed up, I responded: "*You're disgusting, you're way older than me. You shouldn't be contacting me and saying this to a young girl. It's not right*". I blocked him, again.

I feel like women should feel comfortable to go Live and do whatever they want on social media without having to put up with older men messaging them. My profile clearly states how old I am, and I often say in my Lives: "*If you're 18 and over, you need to leave because I don't want you in here. It's not that kind of party*". I wish they didn't watch my Lives, view my posts or message me; it's unwelcomed and unwanted. And yet, I know when I go Live tomorrow, a similar thing will happen again. And again. And again.

Key Themes: Sexualisation; Unwanted Attention and Voyeurism; Active Response; Resistant Response.

Story 3: Surveillance by relatives

My family members watch my social media; monitoring what and how often I share things online. My mum doesn't seem to care but my two male relatives are always watching. I think it stems from our Muslim culture. They'll come to me, and be like *"why are you posting this? Why are you even posting online in the first place?"* I try not to care about it, but they seem to go out of their way to monitor and criticise what I post online. Recently, I changed my social media account settings from public to private. I thought that they might lose interest, but after I went back to sharing publicly again, one of them started watching all of my Stories. I think he does it on purpose, so that I know he is always watching me. I went back to sharing privately again. I wish they wouldn't do it. I want to be able to post freely online, to post what I want, but their intimidating presence is always lurking in online, ready to chastise me.

Key Themes: Surveillance and Judgement; Gender Stereotypes and Misogyny; Active Response.

Stage 2 - Intervention Design: Co-creation workshops

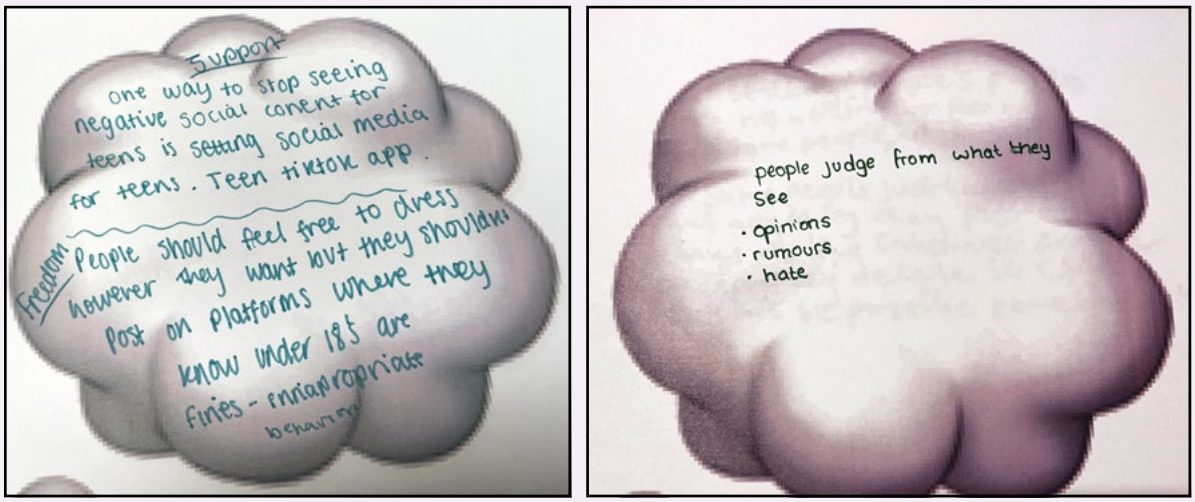
The participants attended workshops in two groups based on the Getaway Girls groups they belonged to. Group A was attended by girls from a youth club-like group aged between 11 – 16 and Group B were members of Vocal Girls who are 15 to 18 years old. All our participants were 15 to 18 years old.

The workshops were developed by Woolley with Flavia Docherty (CEO of Getaway Girls) and creative workshop leaders with an existing relationship with Getaway Girls; Paulette Morris (singer-songwriter), Denetta D3 Copeland (spoken word artist) and Marcia Brown (visual artist). Woolley supported all of the workshops and provided material from the interview transcripts that expressed commonly shared experiences. (See page 41 for workshop session plans)

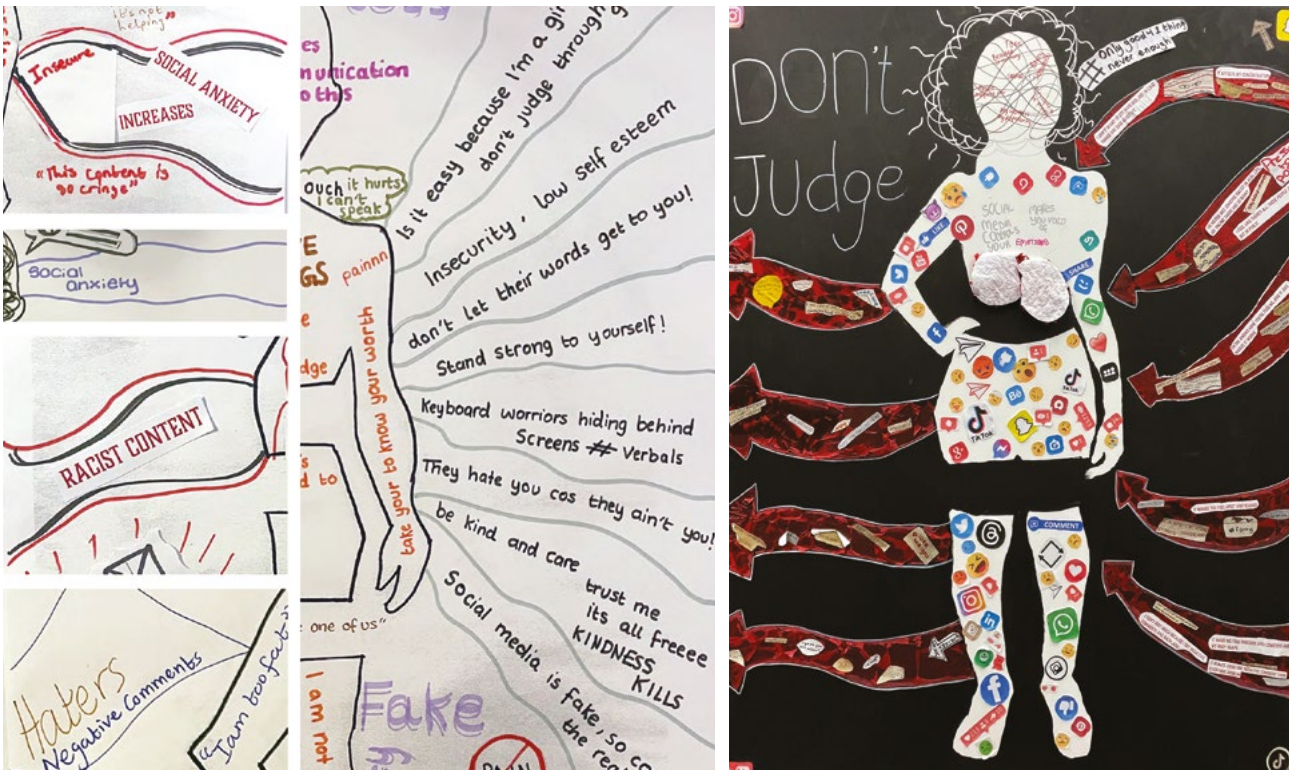
Words and poems

The first workshop was led by Copeland and discussed specific social media accounts that participants follow. Gender expressions and objectifying content were explored through examples provided by the girls. Participants annotated and collaged large sheets of paper to record common experiences. In the second part of the session, they discussed notions of freedom, protection and support on social media using thought bubble handouts.

Key phrases from the interview transcripts and thought bubble handouts were used in workshop 2 led by Copeland and Morris. The girls worked individually and in small groups to create poems and raps using the texts. We used audio recorders to record the girls rehearsing, revising and performing their poems.



Left: Group A workshop 1. Right: Group B workshop 1

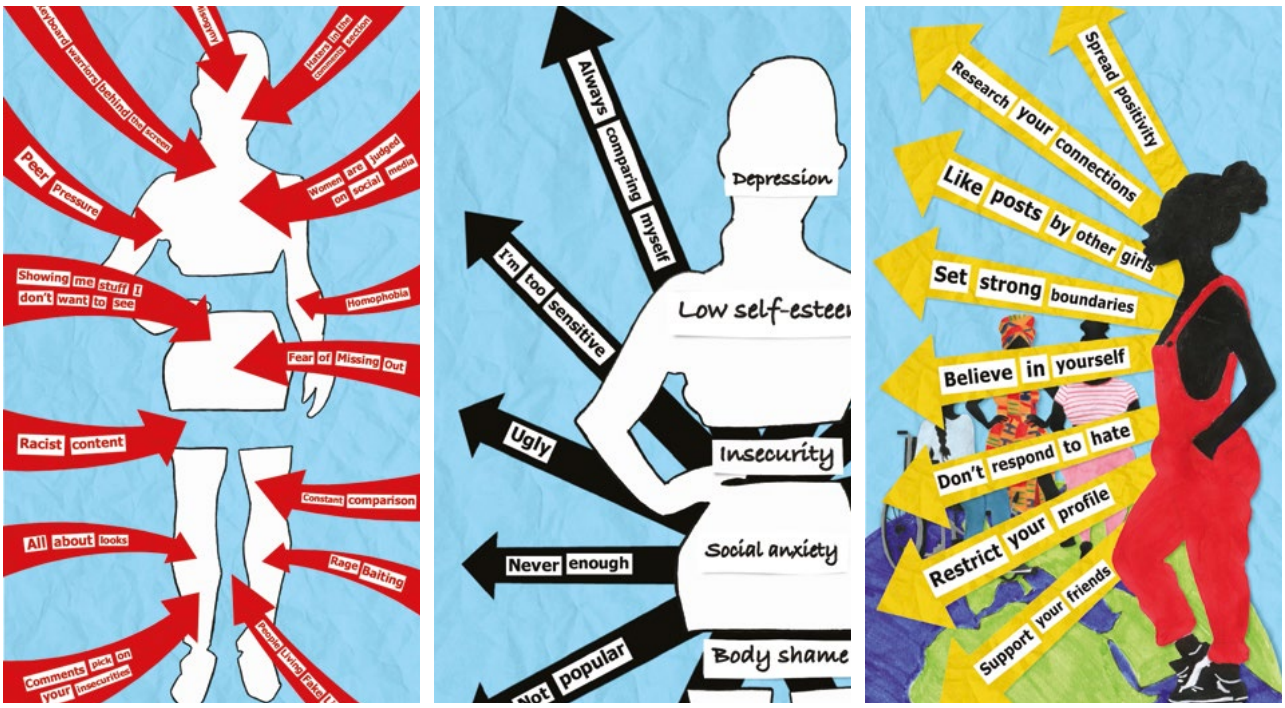


Images and symbols

Workshops 3 and 4 were led by Brown and focused on creating artworks to accompany the poems. In workshop 3, participants created collage sketches using silhouette figures and magazines. In workshop 4, they worked together to create large mixed media collages that combined and refined their individual ideas. Group B focused on the impact of objectifying content. Like the collage described above, eyes feature in several drawings, suggesting that surveillance is a common thread through participants' experiences online. To express the idea of negative content and its effect, several of the participants used wavey lines to imply things going into the body and radiating out of it. In their large collaborative canvas, the participants used arrows to show the directional flow of influence and impact.

Group A focused on the things girls can do to build resilience and support each other. They decided to use a figure positioned to face into the future, annotated with the word resilience. Behind the figure are figures from magazines connoting peer support and community, and text cut from magazines stating, 'facing the future' 'black beauty' 'no gatekeepers' 'heroes' and 'find your joy'. Key phrases from the participants' poems fill the figure, including 'stand strong to yourself', 'research who you connect with', 'to improve your mental health'. This figure is not experiencing an oppressive flow of objectifying content and negative feelings but is surrounded by positive influences that help them move towards resilience. The canvas expresses participants' vision for a social media platform in which they have agency regarding the content they see and who interacts with them.

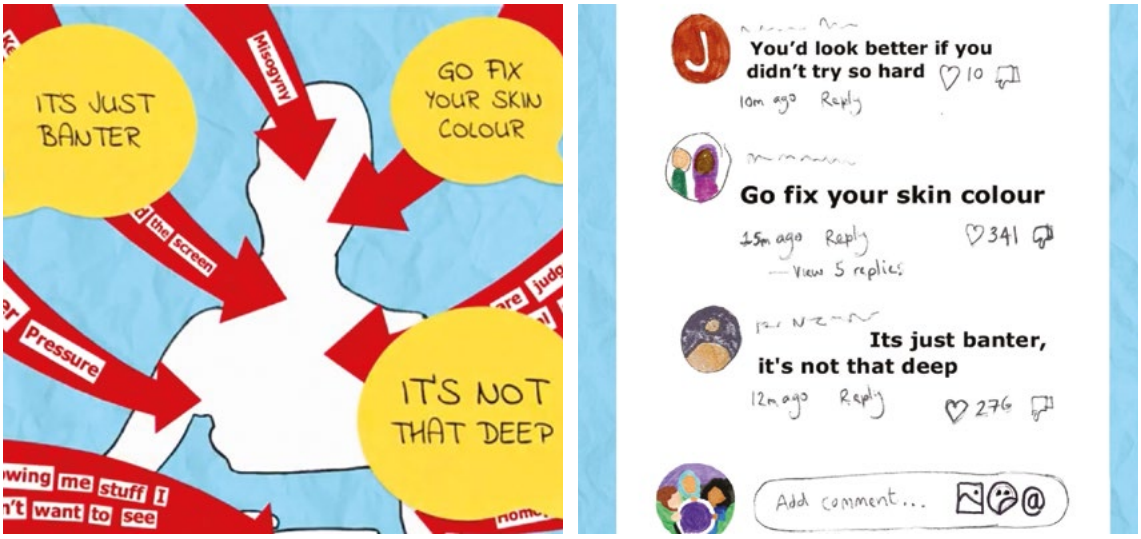

RELIENCE
improve your mental health
GIRLS
FACING THE FUTURE
ONLINE
play
RETHINKING
Research who you want to connect with
Surround yourself with strong
100% SOUL
Great minds
MOSCHINO
FIND YOUR JOY
Black beauty
WIFI



Animation Stills

We employed Louise Atkinson to create an animation (intervention) using the participants' poems and artworks. Atkinson is a multimedia artist experienced in leading participatory art projects and academic research. Her brief was to animate the workshop materials rather than use them as an aesthetic guide and so additional material needed to create the narrative sequence was kept to a minimum. This ensured that the participants' voices and creativity remained central to the animation. At key stages of the co-design and production we consulted with the girls.

In December, Woolley and Dibb led a reflection session to gain feedback and suggestions for the animation before it was finalised. Below is an example of the co-design process in action. During this session one of the girls suggested that speech bubbles in the animation should be changed to look like TikTok comments.



Left: Animation Version 1 Right: Final Version

When reflecting on the animation one of the girls said

> ***"I liked how they creatively took everything that we had written, like, they didn't add anything else, but they did what we did, and then they made it more, like, easier to break down with the different animations"***

(Workshop A transcript, 9th December)

This is an important indicator of success for the co-creation design of the project. Interestingly, another participant said

> ***"there should be exposure of the social media apps where the abuse happens, so, like, people know, like, which apps, like, to go on and not to go on. But overall, it was good because it was relatable and it informed a little bit on what can happen online"***

(Workshop A transcript, 9th December)

In an advisory panel meeting we discussed whether we should 'name and shame' social media platforms that the girls identified as being particularly problematic or ineffective in dealing with objectifying content. It was agreed that it would be difficult to include logos due to copyright law, but that we could name platforms in contextualising information.

Vocal Girls

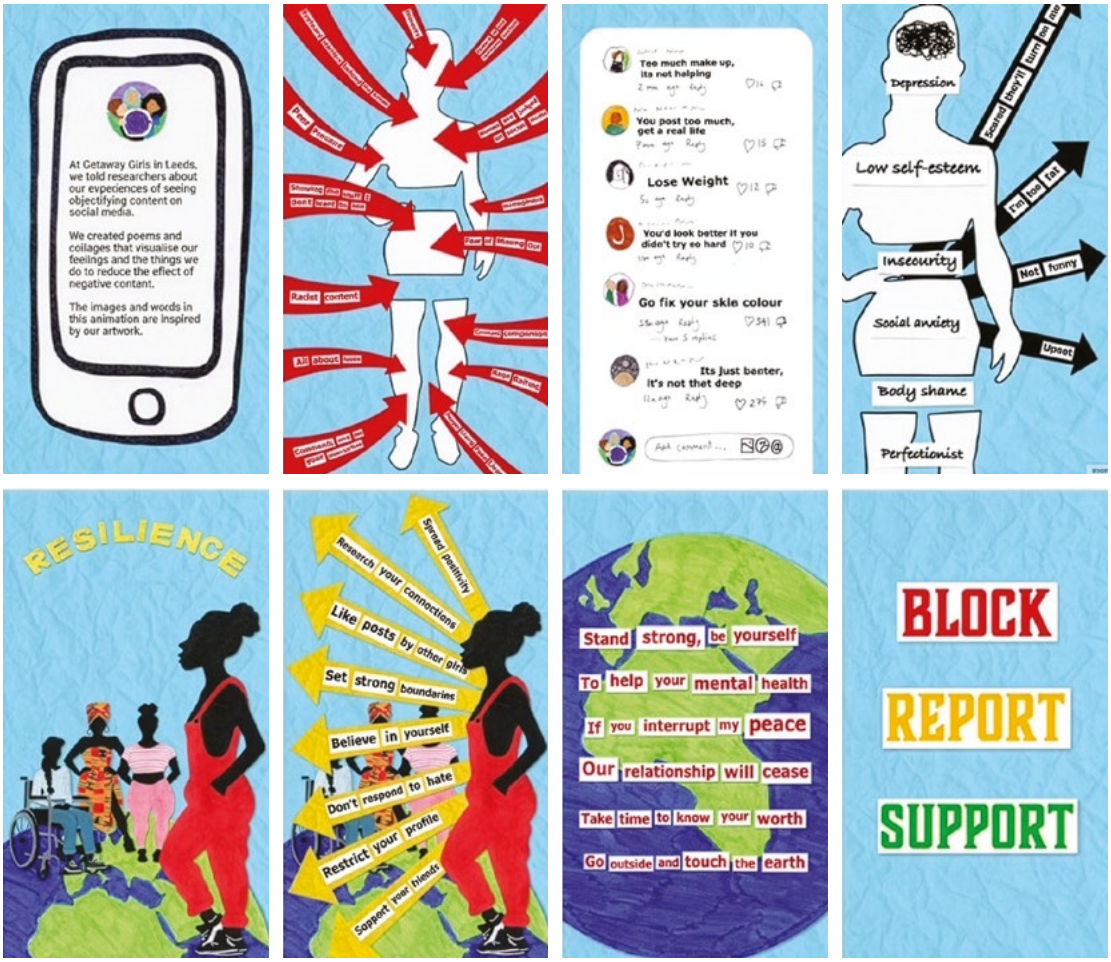
In February Woolley returned to Getaway Girls with Morris and 5 self-selected participants to record the audio track for the animation. We asked the girls to give consent to use their voices on the animation and indicate if they want to be named as voiceover artists. Providing granular choice to remain anonymous or be credited with creative work is at the heart of the co-creation process of this project. Including the voices of some of the participants added depth and brought the animation to life. During the recording session the participants experimented with tone, inflection and style of speech to emphasise the meaning of their words. It was agreed that the animation would begin with individual voices describing negative experiences that are often experienced in isolation. As the narrative moved on to methods of building resilience and support the participants spoke in unison to express the feeling of empowerment when sharing experiences. Woolley also recorded conversations between Morris and the participants in which they expanded on some of the phrases in the animation, for example, describing why they might block someone or the impact of receiving negative comments. The audio track was presented alongside the animation and the large canvases in an exhibition at B-Gallery Space in Leeds Arts University (see Page 34 Stage 4).

Intervention: Animation

The animation is 2 minutes 49 seconds long (longer than the final version used in Stage 3 due to the addition of full end credits). It is formatted to the dimensions of TikTok videos and Instagram stories to aid viewing on mobile phones and sharing on social media platforms. After an introductory section that explains the project and who the participants are, the animation follows a narrative arc that begins with the negative content that the girls experienced on social media platforms and how it made them feel, moving to the things they can do to increase their resilience and support each other.

The first part of the sequence features an outline of a female body facing towards the viewers. The figure is 'empty' until it is filled by red arrows representing negative experiences. The body is obscured by a series of negative comments and then revealed and filled with the impacts of the comments, such as feeling insecure or becoming a perfectionist.

Black arrows emanating from the body describe how participants feel about themselves as a consequence: 'I'm too fat' and 'I'm too sensitive'. The third section is about resilience. The visual image changes from an outline of a body to a silhouette of a women with colourful clothing, symbolising self-confidence and agency. The figure stands on a drawing of the earth to represent the importance of real-world connections and there are other female figures in the background to represent community support. Arrows issuing from the body state the positive things girls can do to limit the negative effects of objectifying content. The final sequence features a poem written by the participants that reiterates the messages in the previous section and is read in unison by a group of participants to enact the support they describe. The final scene features a call to action: block, report, support, reiterating three ways to build resilience against objectifying content on social media.



Link to view animation: https://youtube.com/shorts/Sxik0v32o1s?si=DLnPwV-Gjf3RnHpl

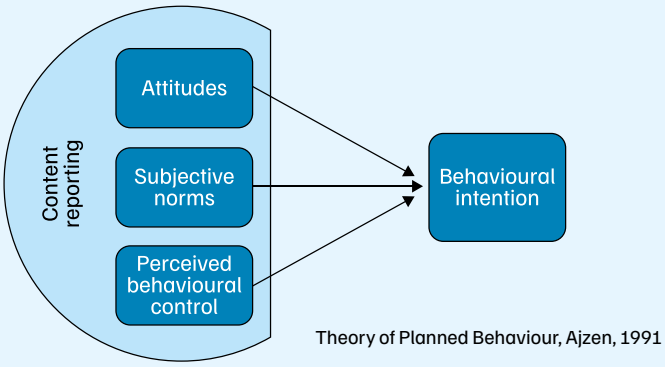
Stage 3 – Quantitative Testing: Showing it works, survey stage

This stage of the project, led by Zawisza and supported by Lefevre, tested the effectiveness of the animation as an intervention reducing the impact of viewing objectifying content online by increasing resilience against such content. In the context of exposure to objectifying content online, resilience can be measured through participants' readiness to report problematic content. In our online experiment we measured a number of readiness indicators, including: girls' attitudes to reporting objectifying content, their sense of having control over reporting (perceived control), as well as whether they thought their closest family and friends believed they should report such behaviour (subjective norms).

Lastly, we measured girls' intentions to report unwanted objectifying content encountered online. These are all known indicators of actual reporting of such content.[36]

Survey participants completed the questionnaire on the Qualtrics online platform on a voluntary basis. The study took about 15 minutes, comprising the same questionnaire immediately before and after exposure to the animation. The questions asked participants about their attitude to, subjective norms about, perceived behavioural control, and intention to reporting objectifying content (informed by Theory of Planned Behaviour[37]).[38]

The first 150 participants were offered £5 Amazon vouchers for their participation. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Panels at Anglia Ruskin University.[39]



Theory of Planned Behaviour, Ajzen, 1991

What the terms in the diagram mean:

Subjective norms: What you think other people expect you to do (the social pressure you feel).

Attitudes: How you personally feel about doing something (whether you see it as good or bad).

Perceived behavioural control: How much you believe you're able to do it (whether you feel capable or in control).

Behavioural intentions: Your plan or decision to do something (how likely you are to actually do it).

Survey Design Overview

Resilience measures

1. Attitude
2. Subjective norms
3. Perceived behavioural control
4. Behavioural intentions

to/about/in reporting content

Resilience measures

1. Attitude
2. Subjective norms
3. Perceived behavioural control
4. Behavioural intentions

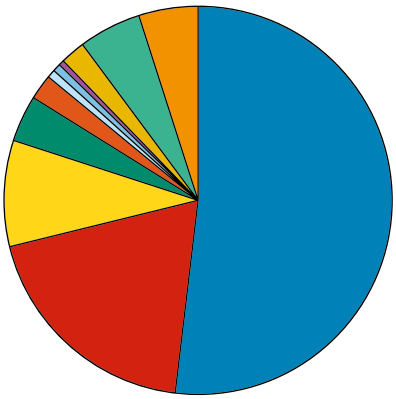
to/about/in reporting content

Demographics

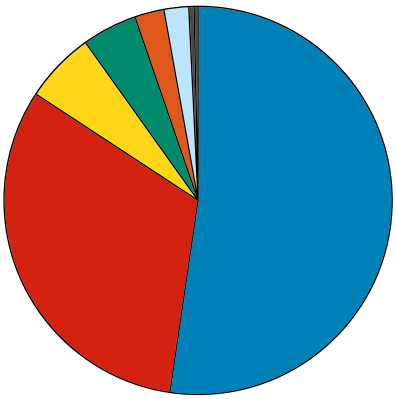
1. Ethnicity
2. Religious identity
3. Social media platform use
4. Past reporting behaviour

Participants

Two hundred and eighty-five girls, aged 16 to 18 (17.09 years on average) who reported being social media users were recruited from local schools. Recruitment involved using Head of School mailing lists, as well as online and offline advertisements disseminated within schools and community groups, with gatekeeper permission. Recruitment was facilitated through existing contacts with Leeds City Council and Kirklees Council. Just over 50% of the young women were White – British, Christian as shown in the pie charts below.

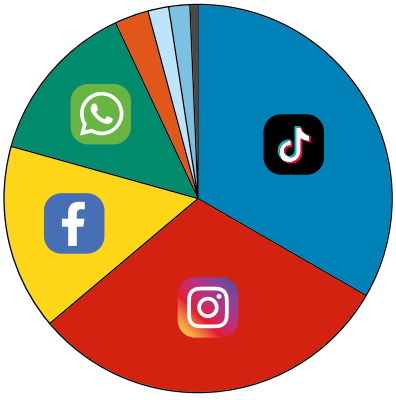


White - British	51.9%
White - Irish	19.3%
Other White Background	8.8%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	3.9%
Black or Black British - African	2.1%
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0.7%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0.7%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	0.4%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	2.1%
Mixed - White and Black African	5.3%
Mixed - White and Asian	4.9%



Christian	52.3%
No religion	31.9%
Muslim	6.0%
Buddhist	4.6%
Sikh	2.5%
Hindu	2.1%

Fifty-eight percent of participants answered that they had never used the report function tool of any social media platform. Most participants (92.3%) used a smartphone as their primary source of access to social media platforms, even though some used a tablet, laptop, or personal computer. Just over 50% of the girls used TikTok or Instagram.



TikTok	33.3%
Instagram	30.5%
Facebook	15.4%
WhatsApp	13.7%
X	2.8%
Snapchat	1.8%
YouTube	1.8%

Key findings

The key findings show that the animation worked very well in increasing all indicators of resilience and that these effects were statistically very strong.

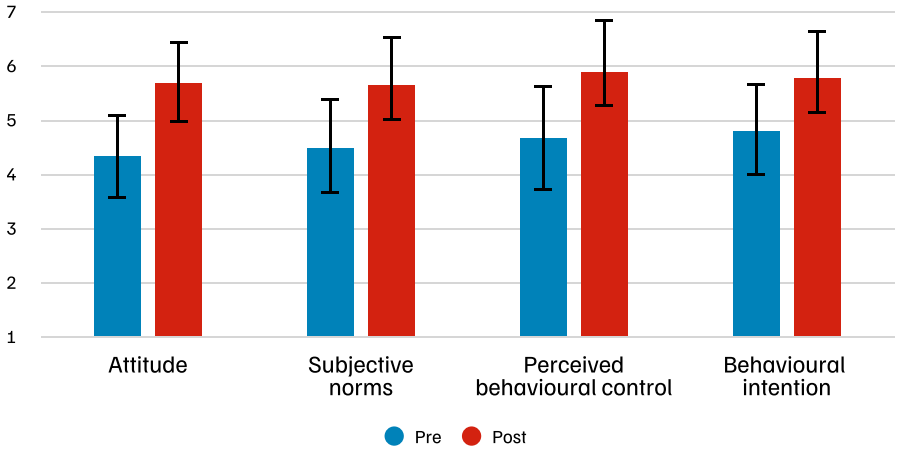
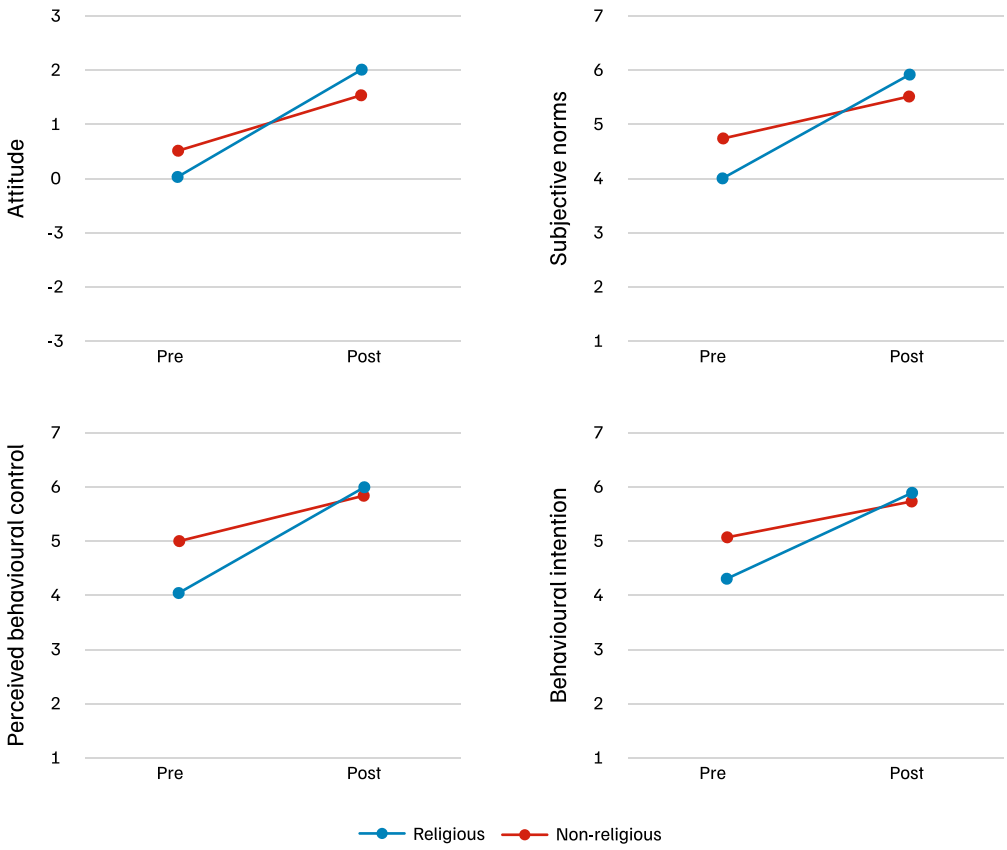


Figure 1. Pre- Post-Intervention Means and Standard Deviations of the TPB-driven resilience indicators.

Note. Range of responses for each indicator was 0-7, where the higher the mean, the more positive the response.

While the animation increased the resilience indicators for all participants, the increase was significantly higher for non-religious (91) than religious (193) young women. This held for all indicators as shown in the following graphs:



Further analyses also showed that:

- Girls who had previously reported inappropriate objectifying content had significantly higher intention to report such content in the future than those who did not.
- Girls who had greater past exposure to objectifying content had also significantly higher intention to report in the future.

These findings are important for several reasons. First, the results suggest that watching a short animation is able to increase girls' attitudes towards reporting harmful content, their sense of control in doing so, their perception that such behaviour is socially supported and appropriate, and their actual intentions to report such content when they next encounter it. In other words, watching our animation increased girls' resilience to objectifying content online and their readiness to report. This effect was particularly strong for non-religious girls, who may encounter less frequent reminders about the perils of immoral behaviour as religious girls do. Our animation may speak to them directly without the need to reference religious values. This makes our intervention inclusive and applicable to individuals, irrespective of their religious identity.

Our findings also suggest that both prior experience and prior reporting of objectifying content increase the likelihood that girls will actually report such content when they encounter it again. This is good news for the impact of our animation: Given that our animation increases intentions to reporting, and likely actual reporting, it may facilitate even more reporting in the future.

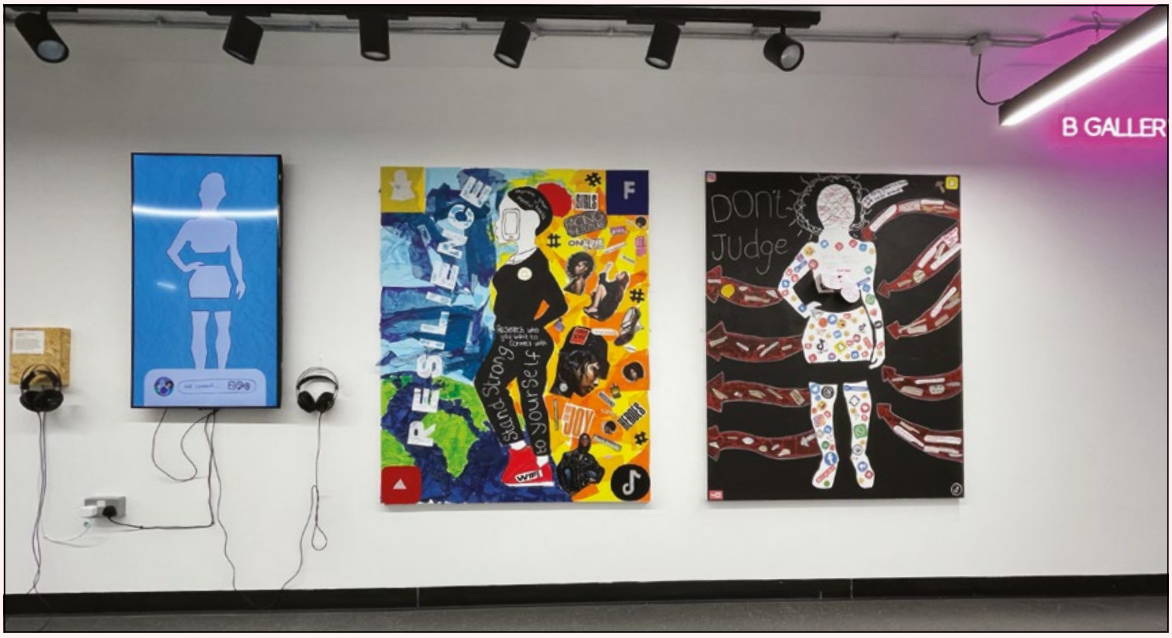
Take home message

Watching our animation online significantly increased girls' resilience to objectifying content by increasing their readiness to report it. Given that increased intentions are likely to translate into actual reporting, the intervention holds great promise particularly as those who reported such content in the past have stronger intentions to do so again. This easy to implement online resilience intervention provides an effective tool for educators, social media companies and charities aiming to address the online harms girls face by viewing objectifying content encountered on social media.

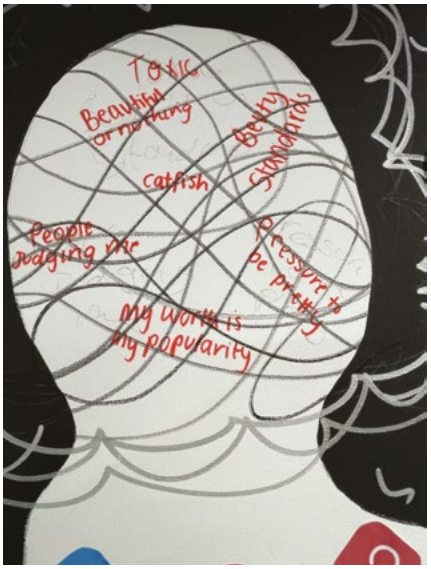
Stage 4 - Sharing Results: ‘Stand Strong, Be Yourself’ exhibition

Paulette Morris, Marcia Brown and Dawn Woolley at the exhibition opening event for Stand Strong, Be Yourself, B-Gallery, Leeds Arts University, photographs by Getaway Girls

Participants and youth workers from Getaway Girls at the exhibition opening event, photographs by Getaway Girls



Installation photographs by Woolley


TOXIC
Beautiful or nothing
Beauty Standards
catfish
People judging me
pressure to be pretty
My worth is my popularity


LIKE
SHARE


SOCIAL MEDIA CONTROLS YOUR EMOTIONS
MAKES YOU VOID OF
LIKE
SHARE


zero gatekeeping
FIND YOUR JOY
Black beauty
smart women)


GIRLS
FACING THE FUTURE
ONLINE
play
RETHINKING
Beauty


improve your mental health
#


LOSS OF CONFIDENCE
MUST ONLY POST WHEN
IT AFFECTS MY CONCENTRATION
I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH
TRY NOT COMPARE MYSELF
BUT TIS HARD


I'VE NEVER MET SOMEONE RACIST IN REAL LIFE,
BUT ONLINE THERE ARE SO MANY
I FEEL LIKE THERE'S ALL
OUT IN PUBLIC.


I don't want to get involved just in case things are said about me.
I DON'T POST MUCH BECAUSE I GOT NEGATIVE COMMENTS AND BACKLASH

In the final stage of the project, we finalised the animation and shared the project findings. **'Stand Strong, Be Yourself'** was a key sharing event that took place in B-Gallery at Leeds Arts University (29th April – 20th June 2026). The exhibition was launched on Tuesday 28th April, welcoming many of the participants, youth workers and workshop leaders from Getaway Girls to see the artworks and celebrate the success of the project. During this opening event one of the girls gave a speech to share her experience of the project and why it was important to her to take part.

After watching the completed animation at the exhibition, participants used uplifting language to describe it as shown.

Marcia Brown, visual artist and project workshop leader said:

"These canvases are a powerful testament to the resilience and raw talent of these young women. It is vital that we and the older generation listen to their lived experiences of navigating the digital world and by doing so we gain a necessary and profound understanding of their fight against online objectification"

Additional sharing events so far have included **'It's Just Banter: Building resilience to objectifying content online'** an online event to share the processes and findings of the project with community organisations (including Getaway Girls, the NSPCC, and Childnet), policy organisations (including Ofcom) and academics. We have also shared findings in the Government **POSTNote on Impacts of Social Media on Children and Young People** and the Government's **Growing up in the online world**: a national consultation.

What we learned: Measuring success, benefits and recommendations

The intervention's effectiveness in promoting wellbeing and more resilient responses to harmful online content was evaluated in two ways: (1) through qualitative feedback from participants and partner organisations; and (2) from the quantitative survey evidence gathered from Stage 3 participants. A key measure of our success is the participants' approval of the intervention, and the extent to which they considered it relatable and authentic. As mentioned in the Workshop section of this report, the girls liked that the animation remained true to their original artworks and poems. All the participants said that they like the animation and thought it worked well (Workshop A & B transcripts, 9th December). During the last Workshop, Woolley and Dibb asked participants if they felt differently about social media since taking part in the project. Here is some of what they told us.

"You realise people have similar experiences to you, you realise how normalised it is and the fact that it should be a bigger impact"

"I saw my Follow You page and I went into the comments, I realised that there's so much more objectification that women might receive throughout social media"

"I think it's a bad thing people are more desensitised, but I think it's a good thing that people are talking about it more because they can realise it's not normal"

"I speak to my family about it more"

These responses demonstrate the importance of facilitating conversations with young people about objectifying content online to enable critical thinking and empowering them to talk to family and friends. The comments also indicate that we successfully co-developed digital literacy skills and techniques for building resilience. By sharing these coping mechanisms and resilience-building actions, we enabled the girls to develop self-care techniques and facilitate their own caring communities on- and offline.

The survey results from stage 3 also support these findings: watching our online animation significantly increased girls' resilience to harmful content. This included changing their attitudes toward reporting, the extent to which they thought they had agency in reporting content, and their perceptions of the expectations of those closest to them about whether such content should be reported. Consequently, their own intention to report this content also increased. The animation was particularly effective for non-religious girls. Given that increased intentions are likely to translate into actual reporting, the intervention holds great promise, especially as those who reported such content in the past had stronger intentions to do so again.

The animation intervention is easy to implement via online platforms, lending itself as an effective tool for educators, social media companies and charities aiming to address the harms girl and young women face from objectifying content on social media. We encourage wide sharing of the intervention among relevant parties and stakeholders.

Learnings for civic engagement

Successful knowledge exchange was central to the project's success in supporting and enabling civic engagement. This took various forms and had several key benefits:

- Using a community-led approach and collaborating with Getaway Girls to co-create activities enhanced our participatory methods. Our research demonstrates the effectiveness of creative participatory activities in enabling important discussions.
- Through listening and learning from participants' lived experiences and centring their creativity and voices, we produced an intervention that is authentic, relatable and effective.
- Through sharing our skills as researchers to train youth workers to undertake the qualitative interviews, themselves trusted and skilled in creating safe spaces for difficult conversations, the process was invaluably enriched.
- Our research illustrates the effectiveness of creative participatory activities as conduits to deep conversations that provide participant benefits, while also producing a rich dataset.
- When designing workshop activities, we found that mixed creative processes that bring together both words and images can effectively draw out new understandings of experiences.
- Through involvement in the research, participants gained experience of being interviewed which they saw as beneficial in helping them to prepare for university and job interviews (Workshop A transcript, 9th December).
- With this in mind, we summarised the project description, the participants' important contributions and the key institutions that the project findings will be shared with (i.e. Ofcom, Government Online Safety consultation), to enable this information to be included on participants' CVs and university applications.

Recommendations for policy and practice

The girls who participated in the Stage 2 (interviews) were asked what kind of interventions they would like to see undertaken to reduce online objectification. Many pointed to the need for greater regulation or action on the part of social media platform providers.

- Platforms should enable users to restrict the age of people who can interact with their content (this was linked to the issue of receiving unwanted attention from older men).
- Platforms should employ more stringent ID checking to enable safeguarding in terms of the content you can see based on age classifications.
- Platforms could consider creating 'child-friendly' versions of social media apps.
- Platforms offering users more control over the content they view, such as by selecting 'Dislike' and 'Not Interested', should be more effective in screening it out.
- Platforms should ensure that content labelled with a 'trigger warning' about content are not 'easy' to access.
- Platforms should be more proactive in their moderation of harmful and objectifying content, with human intervention preferred over automated action/responses.
- Platforms should be more responsive in responding to reported content, with clear actions taken.
- Platforms should have simpler user guides that detail how to turn off data sharing, use of images, and forms of tracking across or within platforms.
- Platforms should create and communicate clearer (and stricter) consequences and repercussions for those posting harmful and objectifying content online.
- Policymakers should take action to require platforms to take these steps so that progress can be made to reducing the harms associated with objectifying content.

Recommendations for supporting the resilience of girls and young women

Some of the participants shared ideas around specific support and resources that could help to build their own resilience when viewing objectifying content online.

- More education and resources available in school settings, as well as online. More relatable and authentic resources are likely to work best.
- Safe spaces (both online and in-person) should be facilitated where girls and young women can discuss objectifying content they have seen to provide peer support.
- Accessible support and guidance should be provided to girls and young women on how to process strong negative emotions when seeing objectifying content.
- Tailored education should be directed at boys and young men on what constitutes objectifying content and the impact it can have on girls and young women.
- Specific interventions aimed at boys and young men are needed to encourage better online behaviours that reduce their involvement in promoting this kind of content.

Appendices

Interview training for Getaway Girls

A semi-structured format will cover:	Example Questions
Social media use and motivations	Can you tell me about the social media platforms you use most often? Can you talk us through your use of these platforms on a typical day? What do you usually do on these platforms? What draws you to these platforms? What do you enjoy most about using them? Are there particular communities or groups you engage with online? What is it about these communities that you like?
Experiences of objectifying content types of content, who posts them how do other people respond to the posts	Do you ever see content that makes you feel uncomfortable? What is it about that content that makes you feel that way? Have you come across content on social media that you felt was objectifying or demeaning to women or people like you? What types of content do you see that you would describe this way? (e.g. images, videos, comments, memes) How often would you say you come across this kind of content? Who tends to post this type of content — individuals, influencers, brands, or others? When this type of content is posted, how do others usually respond? (e.g. like/share, challenge, ignore) Do you ever see people calling it out or supporting the person targeted? What does that look like? Have you ever posted or responded to this kind of content? Can you describe what you did and why?
Emotional impact and well being	How does seeing objectifying content (or other content that makes you feel uncomfortable) online affect you personally — your mood, self-esteem, or how you think about yourself? Are there any particular examples you feel able to share? Are there particular kinds of content or interactions that stay with you or make you feel especially affected? Why do you think that is? Do you think your identity (e.g. gender, race, sexuality, disability) influences how you experience or interpret this content? Can you give as an example of what you mean?
Resilience methods how they respond what responses they want to see	What do you usually do when you come across objectifying or harmful content? Is there anywhere or anyone you reach out to for support? Are there tools or features you use to protect yourself (e.g. block, report, mute, unfollow)? What kind of things (online or offline) help you feel stronger or more in control in those moments? Have you found any supportive online communities, creators, or resources that help you navigate harmful content? What would you want to see happen when objectifying content is shared online? What kind of responses or support would make a difference to you or others who experience this kind of harm? If we were designing a tool or resource together, what would you want it to include to help users recognise and respond to this type of content? How could we make sure it works well for different people, especially those who face more than one type of discrimination?
Closing prompts	Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences online? Is there a message you'd want to send to app designers or decision-makers about creating safer online spaces?

Workshop session plans / activities

Session Plan 1

Date
Time 3.3-5pm Group 1 / 5-6.30pm Group 2

Aim To discuss Social media/ Themes from Research/ Responses to Online Objectification

Facilitators-
Youth work support

Duration	Activity	Who	Method	Resources
10 mins	Refreshments			Pizzas/ drinks/ fruit/ crisps
10 mins	Icebreaker Name/ Favourite ticktock/ Influencer		Round	Makes notes- Ticktocks/ Influencers
10 mins	Social Media Platforms		Choose Platforms use +/- discuss	Large Iconr
5 mins	OO Research- Themes/ Ideas		Info	A4 FLASH CARDS with Themes from research
	Responses to Online Objectification		Small groups Messages/ Ideas Speech marks Recording	Speech marks Recording equipment-
5 mins	Recap/evaluation/ next week		Info	

To do following the session

1	
2	
3	

Session Plan 2

Date
Time 3.3-5pm Group 1 / 5-6.30pm Group 2

Aim Let´s get Vocal/

Facilitators-
Youth work support

Duration	Activity	Who	Method	Resources
10 mins	Refreshments			Paninis/ drinks
10 mins	Icebreaker Phrases from Influencers/ Tick Tock Content		Agree/ Disagree/ Not sure	*Phrases on A4 Flashcards *A4 Agree/ Diagree/ Not sure
30 mins	Your 1 minute of fame- Get your Voice heard Online Objectification--What s your message Captions/ Phrases		Small groups	Speech marks – A4
30 mins	Our Voices/ Our Messages		Whole group poem	Canvas Recording equipment-
S mins	Recap/evaluation/ next week		Info	

To do following the session

1	
2	
3	

Session Plan 3

Date
Time 3.3-5pm Group 1 / 5-6.30pm Group 2

Aim Vocal to Visualise

Facilitators-
Youth work support

Duration	Activity	Who	Method	Resources
10 mins	Refreshments			Paninis/ drinks
10 mins	Icebreaker Images-		Choose an image Why chose/ Initial feeling	Photos Or Pack of Images from Getaway Girls
30 mins	Planning our Image Silhouette Messages/ phrases/ shared poem Symbols / slogans as border Thoughts/ feelings/ behaviours		Putting images and words together	Symbols/ silhouette ideas/ Shared poem/ Slogans Large canvases
30 mins	Agreed image to create next week			
5 mins	Recap/evaluation/ next week		Info	

To do following the session

1	
2	
3	

Session Plan 4

Date
Time 3.3-5pm Group 1 / 5-6.30pm Group 2

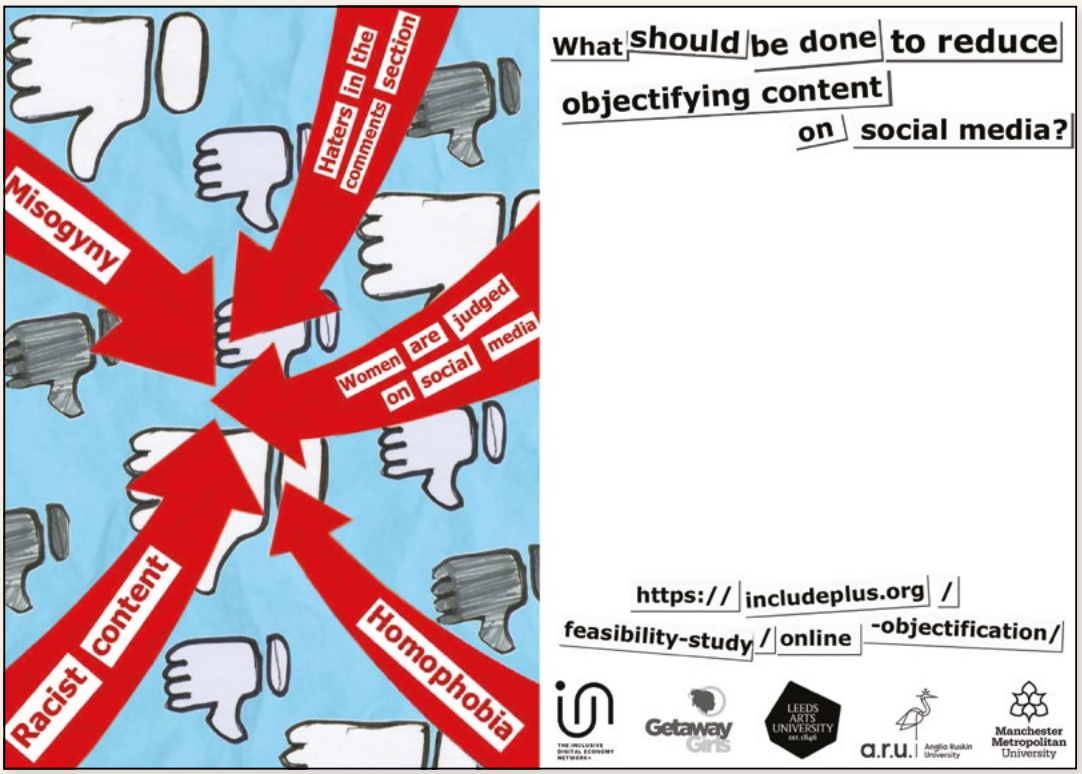
Aim Let's Create our Art for Activism

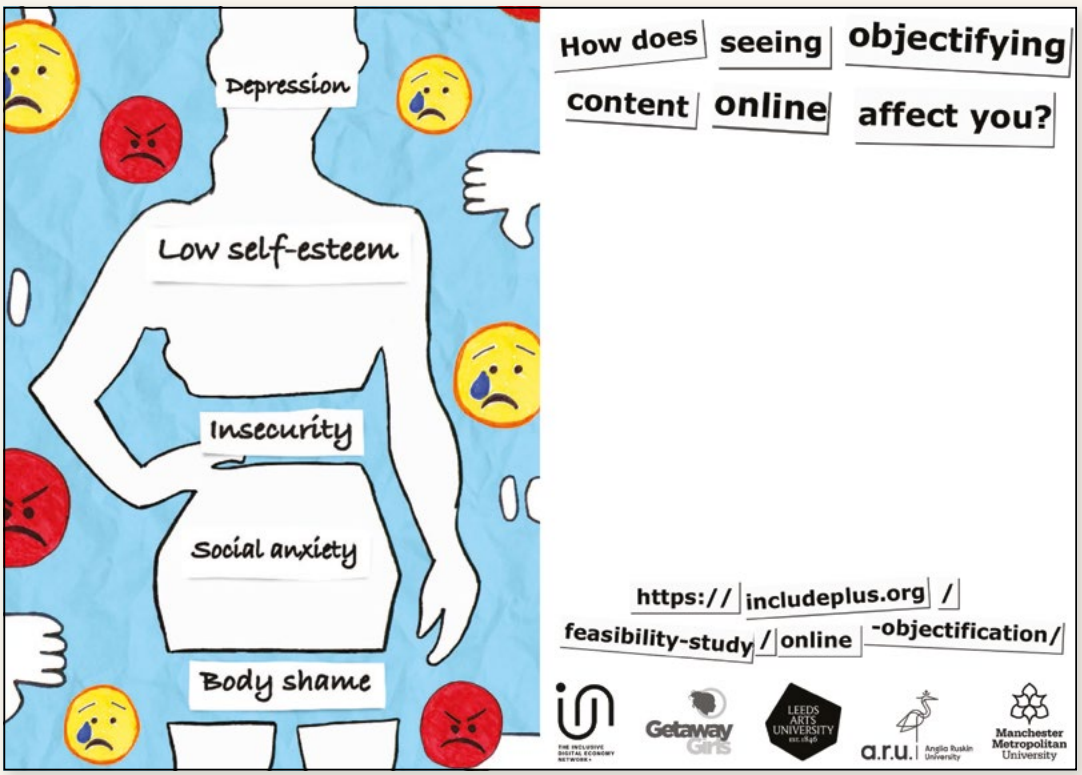
Facilitators-
Youth work support

Duration	Activity	Who	Method	Resources
10 mins	Refreshments			Fajitas/drinks
15 mins	Icebreaker Online Objectification- message now- word spiral		Game- 1 word about Online objectification- no word twice Spiral of words	
60 mins	Creating Visual image- silhouette Content/ messages Symbols/ slogans - border shared poem		Create Images Silhouette with message On Large Canvases	Silhouette/ 2 large Canvases per group/ Content/ Markers/ Graffitl pens
	Let's celebrate			Cake
5 mins	Recap/evaluation/ next week		Info	

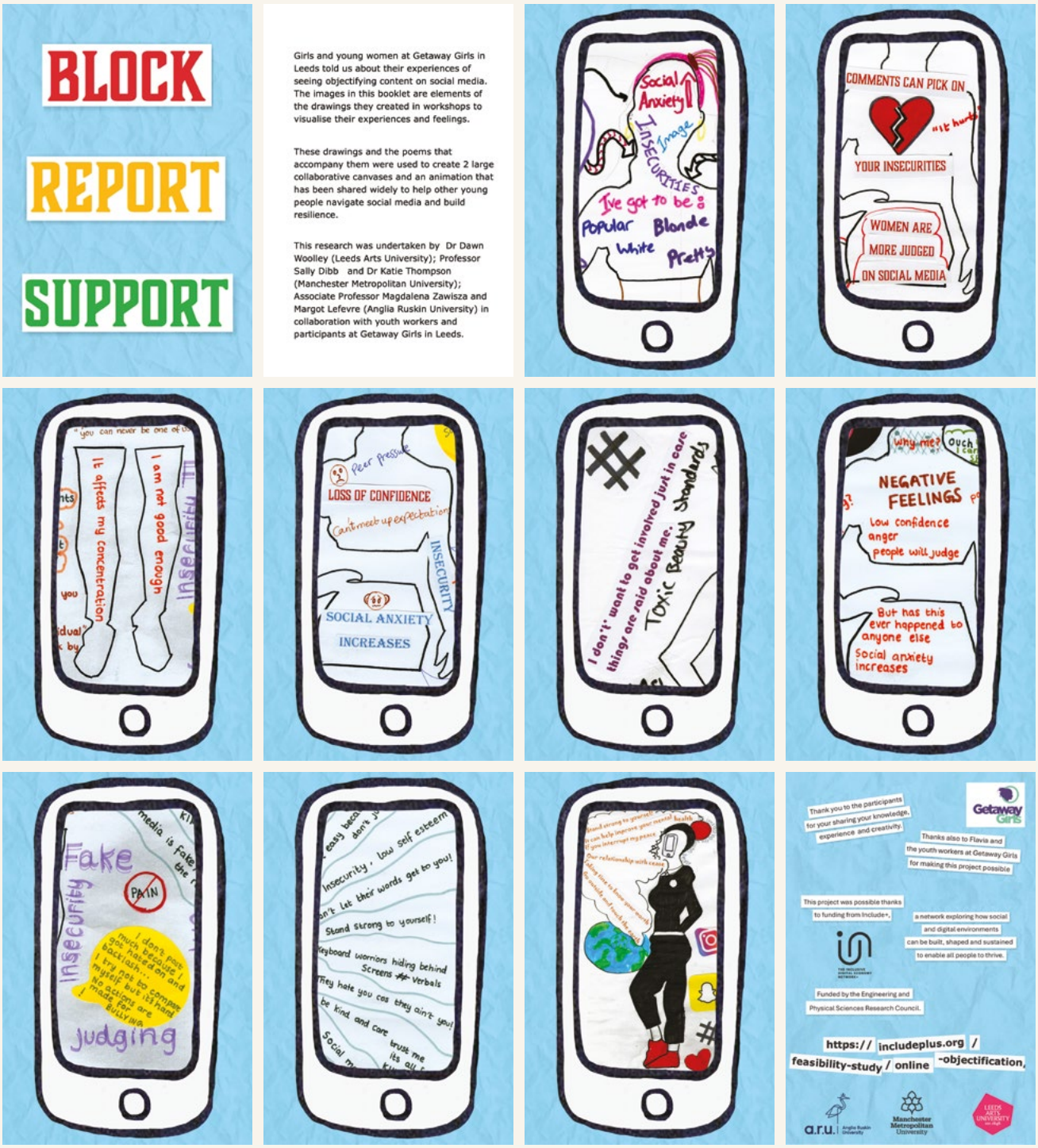
To do following the session

Exhibition Postcard and Booklet designs





Postcards design by Woolley to aid conversations with girls.



Selected pages from *Block Report Support*, a booklet showcasing important ideas and messages from artworks by the girls at Getaway Girls. These artworks were created when developing ideas for the large collaborative canvases on display in 'Stand Strong, Be Yourself' at Leeds Arts University.

More information about this project can be viewed at https://includeplus.org/feasibility-study/online-objectification and www.leeds-art.ac.uk/research/research-projects/exploring-barriers-to-digital-civic-participation-through-an-anti-objectification-intervention

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38 The full study protocol has been pre-registered on OSF here https://osf.io/pfy6k

39 (ETH2526-2330), observing the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and GDPR

Authors

Dawn Woolley
Sally Dibb
Magdalena Zawisza
Katie Thompson
Margot Q. Lefevre