WITHIN AND WITHOUT: BODY IMAGE AND THE SELF

EVALUATION REPORT

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ART OF REGENERATION

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1. Introduction

Within and Without: Body Image and the Self is the second co-curated exhibition in the Story LAB, an experimental and interactive gallery space housed at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) and running from 22nd July 2018 until 1st February 2019. It follows on from the first exhibition in the Story LAB *The Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire* (*TPIN* Oct - June 2018).

This evaluation report presents project data and findings regarding the development process and audience responses to date, as well as seeking to identify learning in terms of both the organisation and the methodology being tested. This relates to both the process and the exhibition curation and interpretation.

2. Context

Within + Without, as the second Story LAB exhibition needs to be understood as part of BMAG's wider strategy to repurpose "a major historic civic collection in order to ensure that it becomes part of the common, shared heritage of a young, multi-cultural city it is located within, and produced out of." In doing so there is the imperative to make the Museum more attractive, relevant to and representative of its multifarious potential audiences.

Birmingham's population is one of the largest, youngest and most diverse in Europe, with over 400,000 children and young people and over 450,000 BAME residents. Statistics show that:

- 42% of Birmingham's population the population classify themselves as BAME.
- Just fewer than half the population is under the age of 30. 75,100 students study at Birmingham's five universities.
- Birmingham is estimated to be home to some 60,000 LGBT citizens.
- 18% of the population describe themselves as having a disability and the proportion of SEN school children is higher than the national average.
- There are high levels of deprivation, with over 41% of people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England and above average levels of children living in poverty.

However, BMAG visitors to BMAG do not reflect the diversity of Birmingham. Only 29% visit in family groups, and 15% are BAME residents. Only 27% of BMAG's visitors are from lower income backgrounds, compared with 53% of the city's population[1].

The overarching aim of the programme is to grow and diversify Museum audiences, as set out in the Audience Development Strategy[2]:

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1 Figures taken from Changemakers ACE application

- Developing our practice in decolonising the displays and interpretation through working with communities, partners and academics
- Reflecting the diversity of Birmingham people in our interpretation, volunteer and staff workforce, collection, programme and marketing
- Developing our practice in co-curation and co-production with target communities and audiences

There are dual drivers for the Museums development; as well as the ambition to increase audience diversity, the co-curation models being explored through the Story Lab initiative is integral to the Museum's need to secure financial sustainability. As Alison Rooke stated in the *TPIN* evaluation report, this is "not a 'bolt on' to 'business as usual' but rather part of BMAG's 'direction of travel' informing a whole new museum approach and identity by 2022". This strategic impetus is both *structural*, (with the closure and redevelopment of Birmingham Museum building between 2019 and 2022), and *cultural,* with ambitions to radically change and decolonise the museums curational practices. The Story Lab, a relatively small space at the heart of the galleries, therefore has a pivotal position in this journey, offering the opportunity to test new modes of interpretation through collaboration with groups and individuals outside the museum. The learning arising from the Story Lab exhibitions, and the processes from which they emerge, will critically inform how the Museum works with and responds to its audiences going forwards.

The elected theme of *Body Image* for this second Story Lab exhibition was chosen for its ability to speak directly to diversity and to our own relationships with body image. It therefore had the potential to have relevance for everyone and anyone, challenging normative notions of bodies and drawing on current debates about body-related matters such as race, gender and disability. Given the rise of social media and its hyper focus on body image, the exhibition theme offered a timely opportunity to explore different facets of this and draw on historical objects and artworks held in the collection to illustrate, explore and challenge these.

Interconnected with the incentive to increase audience diversity, is the impetus for cultural institutions to become more participatory. This signals a significant change in the traditional relationship between Museum (internal/active) and audience (external/passive). The Story Lab has been developed to purposefully explore and test. This is not a matter of testing content and interpretation, but also a reappraisal of the museum's relationships, encouraging a more dialogic and permeable dynamic with Birmingham communities. The Story Lab therefor has dual purpose: involving outside participants in curatorial processes provides platform a for new perspectives which in turn it is hoped, are able to speak to wider and new audiences. As Nina Simon[3] asks,

'How can cultural institutions use participatory techniques not just to give visitors a voice, but to develop experiences that are more valuable and compelling for

2 BMAG" s Draft Audience Development Strategy 2018-2024
[3] Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum, 2010

everyone? This is not a question of intention or desire; it's a question of design'
Simon, 2010, p1

This is a facet, albeit an important one, of a wider discourse regarding the role of museums in society and the notion that they can and should be agents of social justice with relevance for us all, responding to contemporary experiences and social issues. Reassessing the Museum's purpose requires re-visioning; that is re-assessing vision, values, management and practice. Interestingly, as in this instance with BMAG and Story Lab, many museums are using a 'test bed' (i.e. working with groups with an exhibition focus) as a vehicle for exploring and facilitating organisational change. The extent to which these experiments, frequently located in education and/or learning teams, impact on wider museum practice, remains to be seen. However examples of good participatory museum practice highlight the fact that to break barriers to participation requires the view that 'participation is everyone's job'[4].

3. Evaluating Story Lab 2

3.1 Aims and Objectives

The evaluation set out a framework with which to clarify the aims and objectives of the project and agree the key areas of research focus.

Supporting the overarching aim to grow and diversify Museum audiences, the programme objectives are to:

- o Deliver a Story LAB exhibition exploring Body Image
- o Test interpretation methods
- o Work with external ColLABorator to develop the project
- o Creatively document the development of the project though blog posts, articles, social media etc.
- o Evaluate visitor responses to the exhibition.

Underpinning these the project targets are defined as:

- o Open the Story LAB BI exhibition 22nd July 2018
- o Facilitate a work placement for a BCU MA student for 22 days
- o Minimum of 50 volunteer hours
- o Involve a minimum of 20 people external to the museum in the project's development
- o Recruit 10 volunteers to facilitate the gallery when open
- o Deliver evaluation report by September 2018
- o Host a Museum of Leicester MA placement.

3.2 Evaluation Methodology

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[4] No Longer Us and Them: How to change into a participatory museum and gallery, Dr Piotr Bienkowski, 2016, PHF http://ourmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Our-Museum-Report_single-pages.pdf

The evaluation was tasked with recording and capturing the project development and delivery, assessing the extent to which it achieved its aims, exploring the experiences of those involved (Museum staff and the group of volunteers), analysing audience responses, and highlighting emergent learning. In terms of audience target groups[5] are defined as:

Primary Target Audience:
- Home Grown Aspirational
- Deep Learners
- Vulnerable People

Secondary Audience:
- Culturally Engaged Non-Visitor
- Young Urbanites

The evaluation had three distinct areas of focus:

- **The development process** - working with ColLABorator in the development of the exhibition to understand their experience of the project
- **The exhibition** - to understand how visitors respond to the storylines and interpretation styles.
- **Digital engagement** - the effectiveness of the use of digital engagement in increasing reach and impact.

It should be noted that it was agreed early in the evaluation process that digital engagement was dropped as a focus given the limits of time and resources, therefore the evaluation focussed on the co-curation process and resulting exhibition.

The evaluation ran alongside the process, but was not in this instance embedded. Instead provided a point of reference, for example checking in on progress and evidence capture, and liaising on the design of audience surveys and collecting feedback.

A wider evaluative consideration here was understanding how learning from the first Story LAB co-curated exhibition, *The Past is Now*, had been taken forwards into this second iteration asking: How had this worked or been challenging, and what this might mean for the Museum going forwards. The evaluation therefore wanted to try to articulate any good practice emerging across both exhibitions.

4. The Process

The *Body Image* project was delivered by Lynsey Rutter (Project Manager), Hannah Graham (Community Engagement Officer and joint Project Lead) and Rachael Minott (Research Assistant and joint Project Lead) with overall management within the Museums Community Engagement Department. The involvement of other Museum

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[5] These are BMAG Audience segmentation groups

Departments in the collaboration process was kept to a minimum in this iteration as the involvement of Museum staff had been seen as somewhat overwhelming with *TPIN.* However, an external designer Ian Richards was appointed and was involved in the later stages which included working with the ColLABorators.

The Story LAB concept was instigated by Museum senior management which meant that there was strong support for it from wider Museum staff and departments. Furthermore funding was specifically set aside for it. Temporary staff were contracted to work on Body Image and a project board was established for it. The project was resourced at least as well, if not better, than other temporary exhibitions. The model adopted for the delivery fits directly with Community Engagement working practice so it was not deemed difficult or unusual for them.

4.1 The Selection Process

There was clarity at the start of the process regarding the remit, schedule and relationship with the ColLABorators. The role was described as a volunteer one which would require attendance at 10 weekly evening meetings from February to April 2018 with the exhibition scheduled to open in July. The publicised role profile[6] followed standard museum practice for volunteering and described the involvement as:

- Attending the Collaborator meetings
- Working as a team to generate a provocative and engaging story
- Accessing collections currently not on display and selecting up to three supporting 'story lead' objects
- Supporting with ideas for the design, look and feel of the space
- Making a shortlist of potential objects for the exhibition
- Helping to select a contemporary art work/artist or the space.

It then went on to detail the skills needed as:

- Keen interest or active connection to the theme of body image
- Passion for Birmingham and Birmingham's stories
- Happy to share your opinions whilst respecting and considering others
- A good team player
- Honest, reliable and committed.

The application process involved writing a personal response to the theme of Body Image. Anyone interested was asked to apply and 14 people were invited along to the initial selection session. The first session focused on several different activities in order to draw out the applicant's skills and interests. The criteria for selection of the final group of 8 people, included being able to work well as a team, listening and communication, being open-minded and having a sense of shared values (with keeping with the project ethos), and finally the ways that each individual brought a different set of experiences and interests to the mix. Those who weren't selected were signposted back to the Museum by the Volunteer Manager.

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[6] The role was advertised on the BMAG website and via social media platforms and networks

The selected ColLABorator were given a 'Start Up Survey' comprised of 5 questions which 6 out of 8 replied to. They were asked about their relationship with BMAG. Of the six responses 3 described themselves as fans of the Museums work, whilst 2 had volunteered at the Museum previously. Only one person said that they hadn't visited the Museum before and were unfamiliar with its work. They were also asked about their understanding of museum work and exhibitions. All said they had some understanding from being a visitor and some additionally through their past or current work or study.

The survey included two questions related to individual understanding of the term 'body image' and how their life experiences had shaped this view. The answers to this illustrated how differently each person came to the theme as well as areas of commonality. Lastly, they were asked what they hoped to get from the project. One Collaborator wrote:

'I hope to get a better understanding of the term of body image and how it can be incorporated in the museum story. I am especially interested in the way the theme will be explored in relation to the local history. I also hope to learn more about BMAG and the way the museum operates. I am very interested in how exhibitions are curated at BMAG and the ways the ColLABorator of different age, experience and background can work together and contribute to the project'.

This illustrates well the way motivations for participation combined personal, professional reasons and potential social benefits.

Of those who became part of the group some had previously volunteered at the Museum, whereas others were new to it and had heard about the opportunity through social and social media contacts. One person had been recommended to it via one of the *TPIN* Co-curators.

The selection process was not targeted to a distinct demographic or group as with *TPIN* (which had targeted BaME cultural activists). Instead, through a more open process, staff carefully selected candidates that would approach the subject matter from diverse perspectives and experiences and who would gain maximum benefit from involvement. Whilst there was a diversity of people who applied, there were less males and only one older person. It should also be noted that given the advertising and application process was standard practice that this acts as a filtering system from the outset and is therefore likely to reach and attract some groups and not others. In this instance the group selected were articulate, educated and young.

4.2 The Collaborative Process

The process and schedule for the work with the ColLABorators was carefully planned from the outset. This meant that the project leads were able to be clear what was expected of the ColLABorators. It is important to note here that this was very much informed by the experiences of *TPIN*. In reviewing the role of the Co-Curators in the first iteration, the staff team wanted to avoid some of the issues which arose. These included:

- Having clear parameters regarding decision making and the amount of work involved for staff and co-curators alike.
- Collaborator having a voluntary role (in contrast to *TPIN* where the co-curators received a sessional fee)
- Having clear parameters about the amount of work entailed and the degree of agency in making decisions regarding aspects of the exhibition.

In summary then, *Body Image* provided discrete opportunities for collaboration, contributing to the process of developing an exhibition rather than a model of co-curation which can involve co-curators in the complete curatorial process. That is, the staff and museum were there as resources and guides to the process, enabling participation within defined limits.

Essentially staff viewed the relationship with the ColLABorators as 'a two-way exchange'; that they would be offered opportunities in return for a specified commitment of time and input. As, one member of staff described this, there was a need to 'recognise each other's expertise'. The commitment was to 10 sessions, with clear parameters about what would be achieved within these and the amount of work expected. One of the staff said that they were 'very conscious of the fact that yes, there is an output for the gallery, but there is also an output which is about people and their experience of a project.' They wanted to ensure that they did all they could to make the experience a positive and rewarding one for the ColLABorators. The focus in designing the *BI* process was on the need for transparency and trust through good relationship building with guidelines that are understood by everyone involved from the beginning. As part of this, one of the first pieces of work the group did was to establish their own manifesto or set of values.

The Volunteer Manager played an important role for the ColLABorators as a point of reference outside the immediate working group. Again, in the light of TPIN it was felt that there needed to be someone who could support the volunteers and respond to any issues or questions arising about the role.

There was also a conscious decision to make the ColLABorator group somewhat discrete from the Museum. This was in part because of the TPIN experience where the Co-curators felt at times overwhelmed by the numbers of museum staff involved. That the project leads were slightly outside 'allowed us to operate as ambassadors of the museum but also gave us some disconnect' so that they could hold both the values of the museum and also their own values for the project. This separation was also spatial with sessions taking place in a venue very near but outside the museum.

The exception here was the role of the Exhibition Designer who worked closely with the ColLABorators from early in the project. A member of staff observed 'This was a new way of working for him and it really helped jointly shape the work'

In summary the commitment and engagement asked of the ColLABorators was seen to be more realistic and focused than it had been with the *TPIN* Co-curators. This said, it is not the case that the ColLABorators lacked agency. Although the theme had been pre-selected, the ColLABorators came up with the core concept. Through an

explorative process they arrived at the title of 'Within and Without' to encompass the agreed focus on bodies that / who are not represented enough. They also developed the curatorial approach, the design idea (with the designer) and chose the key objects from the curators short list.

Empathy Body Trail

There was one area of what was deemed 'extra work' which the ColLABorators could do if they wished. 7 of the 8 ColLABorators agreed and were therefore involved in adding their own responses / voices for the Empathy Trail. This was an opportunity to illustrate the way that they each had a different response to the key objects and made them 'present' in the gallery. During the launch some had their photos taken in front of this which in itself points to this being important to them.

One of the ColLABorators described the process of working with the content and with the group through to producing the exhibition in a blog piece:

> *'The constant flow of information provided across tables, walls, boards and screens helped build more of an understanding on how to create an accessible and meaningful representation of our work together, each week seeing a new variety of subjects dissected, worked and reworked within the group.'*

And another commented:

> *'The process was very much drawn out really well so that you didn't realise you were going to this point until you were almost there and it was like oh we have a gallery now, how did that happen? All we've been doing is talking about things....'*

4.3 Other Groups

The project also involved staff working with 3 other groups of people; Lordswood Girls School students, Birmingham LGBTQ+ Refugee Group and a group from the University of the 3rd Age (older people). Each of these groups had two extended sessions with the Community Engagement Officer leading the project delivery. The first session was an introduction to the theme of body image and the second involved them choosing 1 or 2 objects from the curator's shortlist of approximately 25 objects. They also wrote about these, both individually and collectively. There hasn't been any process for eliciting feedback from the groups although some individuals (including those involved from groups and volunteers) have posted positively on social media[7]. A teacher from the school commented:

> *"They really enjoyed the session. I think for some of them who are quiet it allowed them to come out of themselves a bit in the group. The text (the interpretation for their chosen object) reflects all of their thoughts of what they were discussing on the day really. They are all obsessed with Instagram. Making the clay models was a great way for them to respond to the work they had seen too. Some really interested pictures and sculptures were made"*

4.4 The ColLABorators Responses and Follow Up

Working with the ColLABorators involved 'checking in' at the end of sessions to get responses about how everyone was feeling about the process. This feedback then helped to inform what happened next, for example at one point the group said they needed to know about who the audience would be for the exhibition. Staff responded to this request in the next session. In this way there was ongoing informal evaluation as part of the delivery. The evaluators also attended a session to meet the ColLABorators, get a sense of what was involved and to introduce the evaluation. However, the evaluation was essentially outside of the collaboration process and therefore it should be noted that the feedback on this has come from staff rather than the ColLABorators themselves

After the sessions were finished the ColLABorators were sent a set of evaluation questions (to which they could respond voluntarily) but there were no responses. Therefore, the evaluation has drawn on their questionnaire responses at the start of the process, filmed interviews with two of the ColLABorators about the project, blog posts, feedback from staff, and social media.

Staff describe having a 'good relationship' with the ColLABorators and that they enjoyed being a part of the project, and were generally very positive with the resulting exhibition. Some of the ColLABorators kept their own records and notebooks, which illustrates their engagement with it. A member of staff described that 'they were going through the process individually and collectively'.

Five of the ColLABorators attended the exhibition launch event and responded very positively while some took a more active part speaking about their experience of the

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[7] https://twitter.com/hashtag/Withinwithout?src=hash&lang=en

process. Staff continue to have some contact with most of the ColLABorators, and one currently volunteers at the museum and the others are focused on their professional careers. One Collaborator spent a day with the project Curator to find out more about her career path, as she has decided she would like to do something similar. Another Collaborator is doing a PhD focused on black masculinity and reported that the opportunity to explore notions of body image through discussion, research and writing has helped him with this. The project was also a finalist in the West Midlands Volunteer Awards[8] and several of the ColLABorators attended this along with the Volunteer Manager from the Museum.

In terms of targets the project aimed for a minimum of 50 volunteer hours contributed, and overachieved this totalling 738 hours during both the development and exhibition phases. It involved 82 volunteers (across multiple engagements) during the development phase and 9 for the exhibition, exceeding the target of 20 and almost meeting that of 10 people respectively (see chart below). Two students were hosted on placement, with one making a film about the project and the second co-ordinating the volunteer team in its opening weeks.

Target and achieved numbers of volunteers
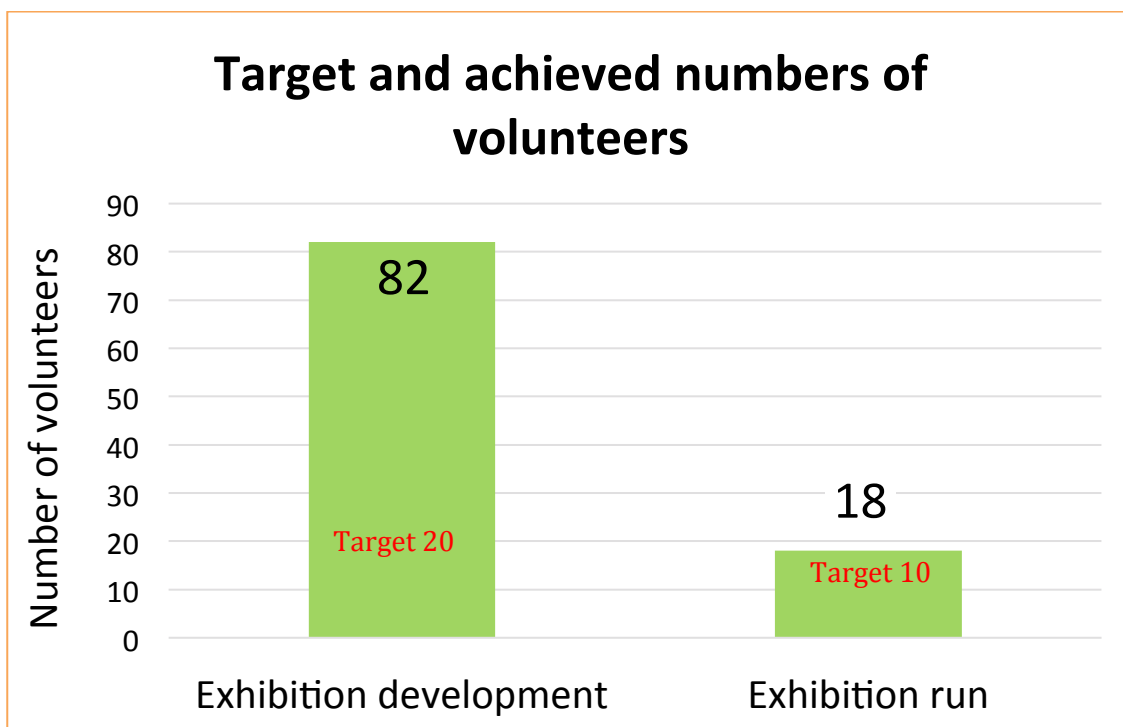
5. Responses

The quantitative survey was designed to capture how visitors experienced the exhibition, with emphasis on the topic of the exhibition and how this was presented. Specific aspects of the presentation (different labels and empathy trails) were looked at in more detail. The questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the exhibition

[8] https://www.brumpic.com/homeblog/2018/9/5/birmingham-museum-volunteers-shortlisted-for-ironbridge-gorge-museum-trusts-third-annual-west-midlands-museum-volunteer-awards

team and trialled on visitors during the first week of the exhibition (week beginning 23rd July). Feedback collected from the visitors during this trial, was used to finalise the questionnaire.

The volunteers involved in conducting the questionnaire were inducted by museum staff and their training included information about the gallery, how the exhibition was created, how to welcome and engage visitors as well as how to complete the questionnaires. The volunteer team were led by University of Leicester student Avehi Menon while on her MA Museum Studies placement.

Visitors could choose whether to fill in a paper questionnaire or use an electronic version on a tablet. Only 5 visitors chose to use the tablet (mainly due to WiFi problems). Data was collected and entered into a spreadsheet by museum volunteers and then sent to the research team for the analysis presented in this report.

The survey was handed out to everyone who visited the exhibition between 24/07/2018 - 31/08/2018. There were 264 completed surveys. Data was collected and entered into a spread sheet by the placement student and museum volunteers and then sent to the research team for analysis.

5.1 Qualitative Feedback and Observations

The Story LAB space encouraged visitors to give feedback either on cards and / or by completing a questionnaire with one of the volunteers. The exhibition volunteers were asked to keep daily logs of visitor interactions including observations about how different people responded to the exhibition.

Comments from feedback cards indicate that the interactivity of the exhibition was received positively, as was the inclusion of what was seen as traditional museum display protocols alongside more interactive and experimental forms. The ways in which the exhibition could be seen to challenge traditional ideas of curation and display seemed to both attract interest, but also in some cases confusion; one person said they found it 'chaotic'. However, this seemed to be very much a minority view in contrast with many who responded favourably.

There were strong responses to the content, with audiences describing it as 'thought provoking'. It triggered lots of personal connection. The representation of different people was particularly commented on, and again many people found this personally meaningful.

Interestingly some people felt it appealed to children and young people whilst other felt it should do so more. Volunteers noted how different objects seem to attract the attention of specific age groups. For example, lots of people took pictures and selfies, particularly with the dressing table.

The curtained area which around the Michael Jackson automaton (Donald Rodney's Pygmalion, 1997) was experienced as frightening and unexpected by some people. There were comments that there should have been some kind of warning outside (which was responded to with a warning sign was put in place 2 weeks in after which

there were no more verbal complaints) particularly for children, (although it should be noted that some children found it enthralling). However, Volunteers recorded that there was lots of interest in Pygmalion with people coming back repeatedly and being entertained by it which contrasts to the 'shock' recorded on the feedback cards. This is perhaps unsurprising given that it is on display for the first time since the artist's death in 1998.

'Pygmalion explores the complexities of racial identities, masculinity, perfection and fame through an irreverent depiction of Michael Jackson as a moving automaton. This piece provokes a discussion about one of the exhibition's key themes of colourism and how racial identities affect lived experiences.'
From Body Image exhibition text

Considerations in the future should include the fact that for some the exhibition could have been bigger (this could refer to space and / or content), although one volunteer commented that the size and layout 'meant it was easy to go back to objects / pictures', which visitors clearly did. Another comment was that 'it needs better lighting' (this also came up in the *TPIN* evaluation and is an ongoing limitation of in the Story Lab space).

Some visitors felt that the audience questionnaire was too long. It should be noted that in this instance it was particularly detailed as it was felt important to try to gain insight into how visitors responded to the different interpretations offered via the colour codes. However, it would be worth considering other more interactive and immediate ways of giving feedback into the future given that different methods attract different people and different types of responses. In this instance there were a number of ways in which visitors could respond including questionnaires, the poll, audio and feedback cards. However interactivity with audiences isn't simply about the

Museum asking about what it wants to find out, but also about facilitating people's active engagement.

The staff team were particularly interested in the responses to the Empathy Trails and so made every effort to direct visitors to them and explain how they worked. The volunteers recorded mixed responses to the Empathy Trails. One volunteer stated that there was 'Not a lot of interest in the empathy trails', whilst another wrote 'The Empathy wall seemed to attract a lot of attention but this didn't mean that it was then followed (complicated, took time)'. Another volunteer noted that 'Trails not used a lot – however it offers a different way of engaging and so perhaps a variation on this could be tried in the future. Is there a different way to do this perhaps – objects having more than one label?' However for some visitors this was the aspect that they felt was most interesting about the exhibition (see section 5.12). Given that this approach was being tested the responses have offered ways in which this could be used and adapted going forwards.

5.2 The Visitors

- ⚜ BMAG volunteers approached visitors and asked them to complete the survey, which resulted in 264 completed surveys.
- ⚜ The average visitor age was 34 years, with the youngest visitor being 12 and the oldest 75 years old
- ⚜ The majority of the visitors (68%) were female, while males accounted for 28%; 3% of visitors identified as non-binary, while 1% preferred not to answer this question
- ⚜ 7% of visitors had a disability, while 3% declined to answer this question.

The majority were White British (64%) , while other ethnicities made up the remainder (36%), as shown in the following table:

Ethnicity	Number of visitors	Percentage
White - British	145	64%
Asian/Asian British - Indian	10	4%
Black/Black British - African	4	2%
White - Irish	3	1%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	9	4%
Black/Black British - Caribbean	3	1%
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1	%
Any other white background	5	2%
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	1	%
Any other Asian background	2	1%
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	13	6%
Other - Arab	2	1%
Any other ethnic group	18	8%
Mixed - White & Asian	6	3%

Any other mixed/multiple ethnic	5	2%

Non white audiences are therefore slightly higher when compared with BMAG data for visitors[9] across the Museum which records 82% White British and 18% other ethnicities.

- There were similar proportions of infrequent and frequent museum visitors around 1 in 5 had not visited a museum in the last 12 months but a similar proportion had visited museums at least 6 times in the last year
- About half (47%) of the visitors who had been to a museum in the last year had not visited BMAG in that time, 27% had visited BMAG at least once in the last year and 18% had visited BMAG more than two times in the last year. Only 4 visitors were members of BMAG.
- About a fifth of the visitors (22%) to the *Body Image* exhibition had also visited "The Past is Now"
- Most visitors (64%) to the *Body Image* exhibition came across it on a visit to BMAG, 10% found out about it through social media and 9% found out about it through word of mouth.

5.3 Exhibition Size
- The majority of respondents (65%) felt the exhibition was about the right size
- 30% of respondents felt it was too short
- Only 2% responded to say that they felt it was too long.

How did you feel about the size of the exhibition?

- It was too big/long
- It was about the right size
- It was too small/short
- Don't know/Not sure
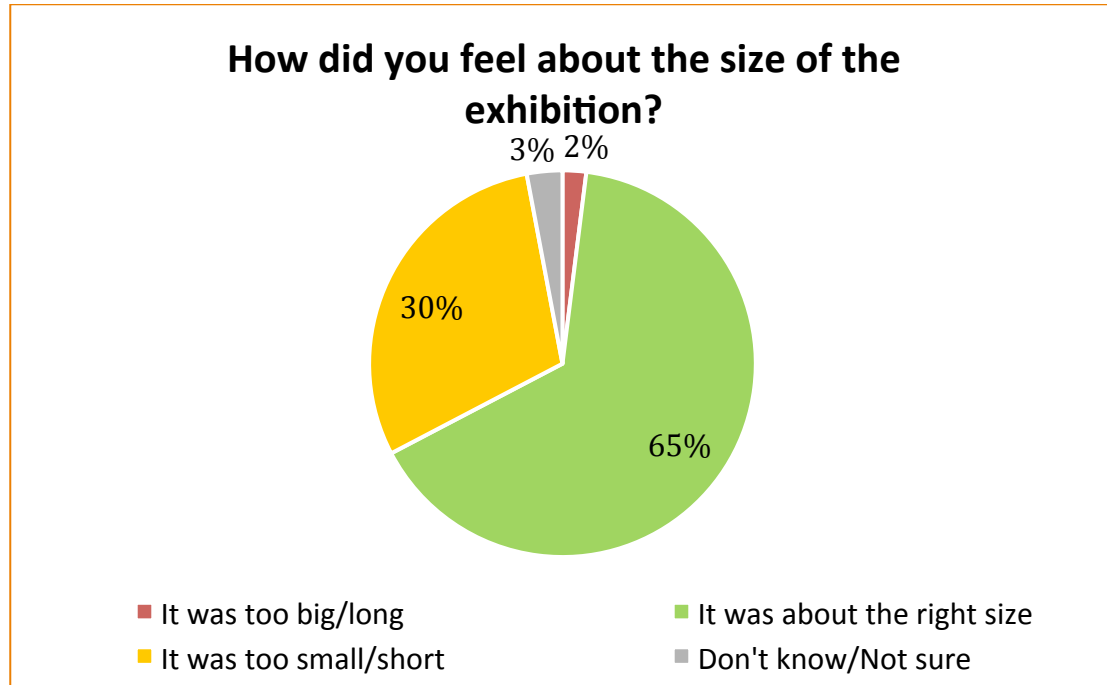
All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262

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[9] Summer 2017 Visitor Profiles, Birmingham Museums Trust Audience Research 2017, Bluegrass Research, January 2018

5.4 Information

- Most respondents (87%) felt that the information given at the exhibition was at about the right level
- 6% of respondents felt that it was too confusing
- 3% responded to say that they felt it was too simplistic.

How did you feel about the information given at the exhibition?

3% 4% 6%

87%

- ■ The information given was too confusing/complicated
- ■ The information given was at about the right level
- ■ The information given was too simplistic
- ■ Don't know/Not sure
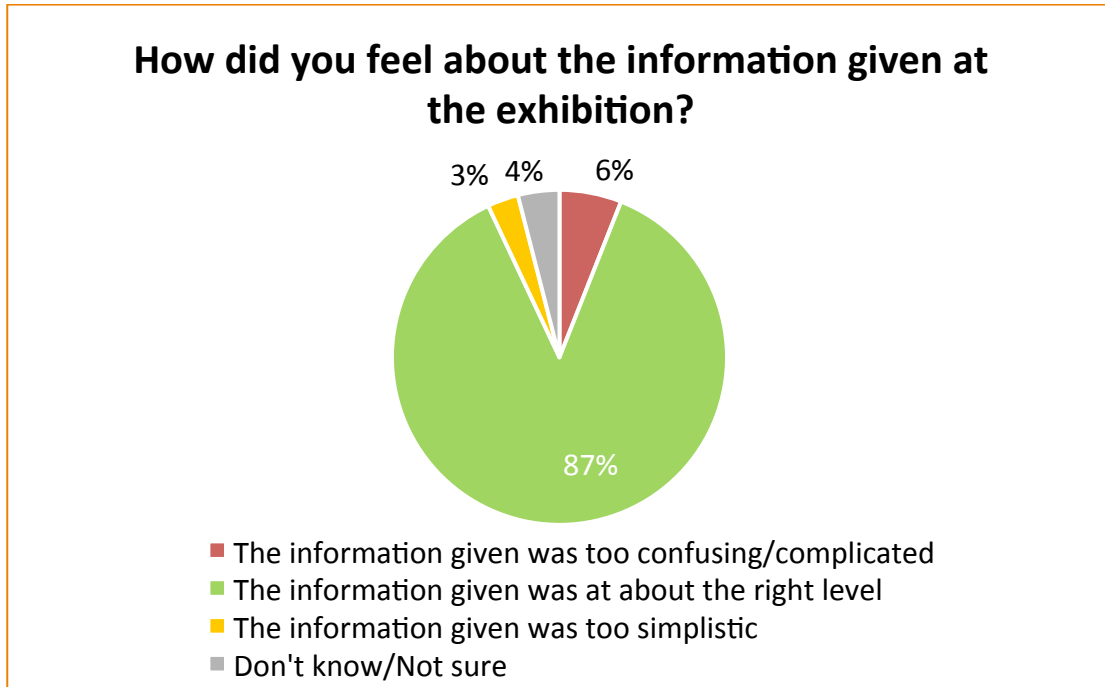
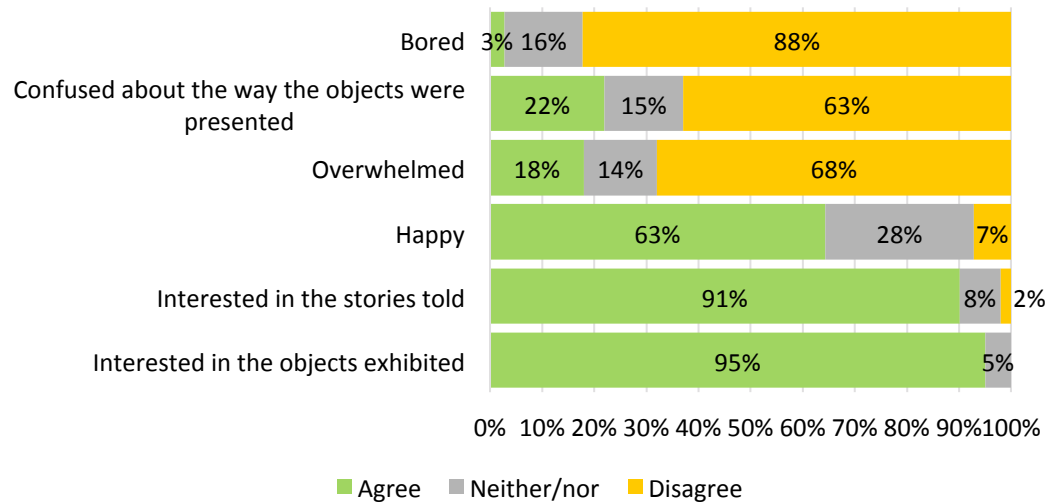*All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262*

5.5 During the Exhibition

- Respondents generally experienced the exhibition very positively
- 95% agreed that the objects presented were interesting to them
- 91% agreed that the stories told were interesting to them
- However, almost 1 in 5 respondents (18%) felt overwhelmed
- A similar proportion (22%) felt confused about the way the objects were presented

During the exhibition, did you feel…

Category	Agree	Neither/nor	Disagree
Bored	3%	16%	88%
Confused about the way the objects were presented	22%	15%	63%
Overwhelmed	18%	14%	68%
Happy	63%	28%	7%
Interested in the stories told	91%	8%	2%
Interested in the objects exhibited	95%		5%

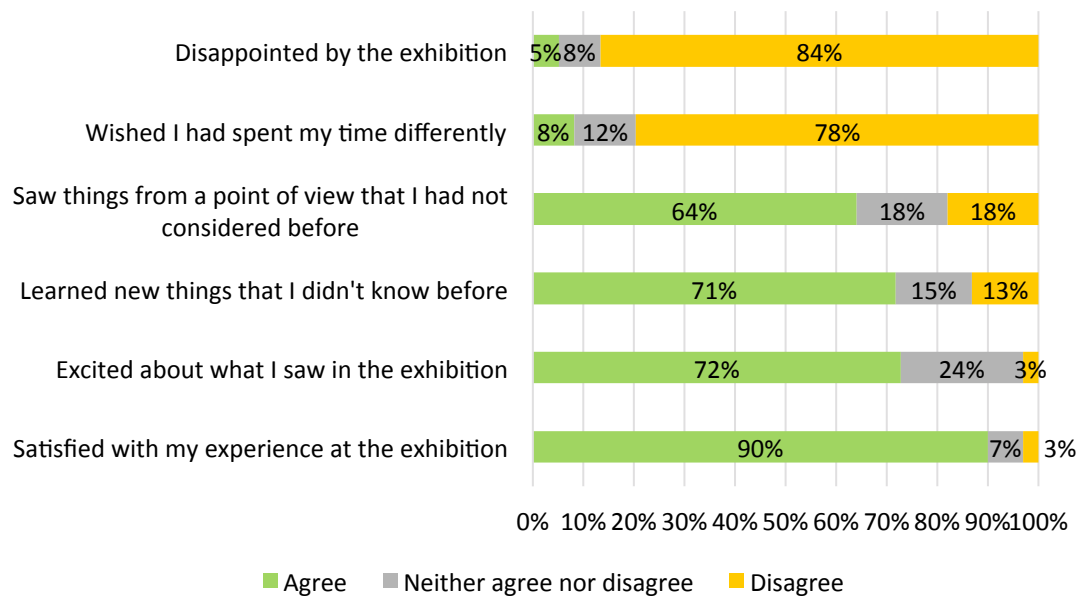Legend: ■ Agree ■ Neither/nor ■ Disagree

All respondents, excluding non-responses. Figures may add up to more than 100% due to rounding

5.6 After the Exhibition

✚ In their majority, respondents were satisfied with their experience at the exhibition – 90% agreed with that statement

✚ 72% said that they were excited by what they saw in the exhibition

✚ A similar proportion (71%) agreed that they learned new things that they did not know before and 64% saw things from a different point of view than they did before.

After the exhibition, did you feel…

Category	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Disappointed by the exhibition	5%	8%	84%
Wished I had spent my time differently	8%	12%	78%
Saw things from a point of view that I had not considered before	64%	18%	18%
Learned new things that I didn't know before	71%	15%	13%
Excited about what I saw in the exhibition	72%	24%	3%
Satisfied with my experience at the exhibition	90%	7%	3%

Legend: ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree
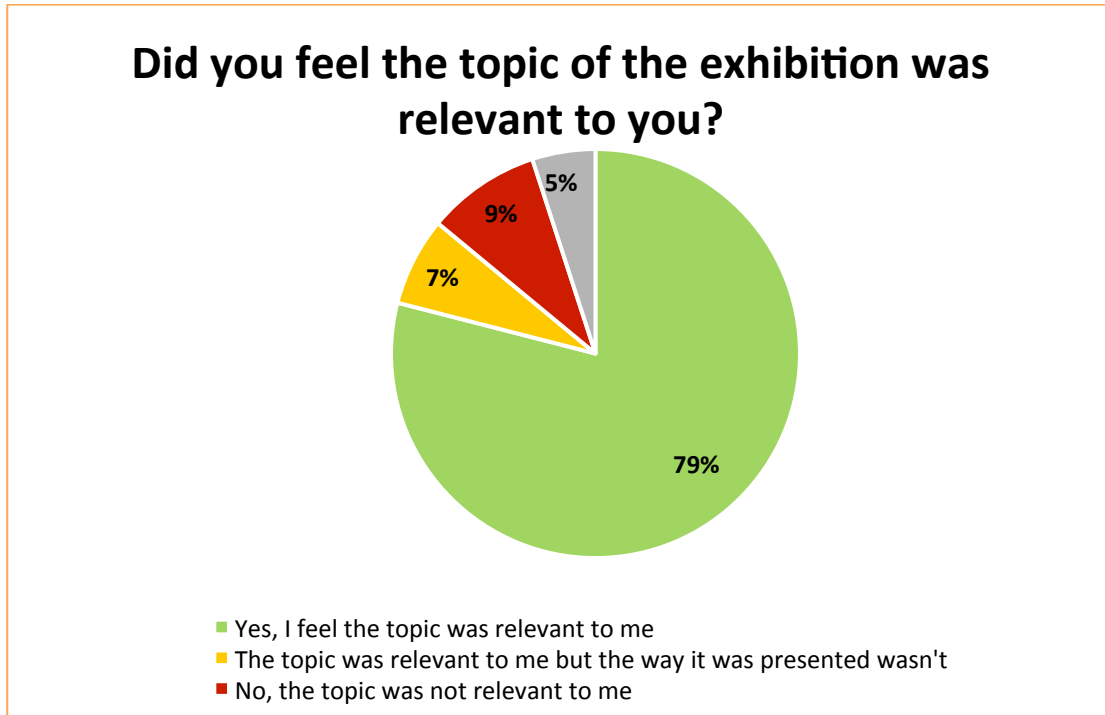
All respondents, excluding non-responses. Figures may add up to more than 100% due to rounding

5.7 Exhibition Theme

- ✚ Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that the topic of the exhibition was relevant to them – 79%
- ✚ This, of course, could be because people who felt the topic was not particularly relevant to them did not attend.

Did you feel the topic of the exhibition was relevant to you?

- Yes, I feel the topic was relevant to me
- The topic was relevant to me but the way it was presented wasn't
- No, the topic was not relevant to me

All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262

5.8 Exhibition Labels

Exhibition visitors were shown the information below, explaining the different options available for navigating the exhibition and getting information about the objects exhibited. We wanted to find out how this was perceived by the visitors.

HOW TO USE THIS SPACE

This gallery allows you to experience the content in a variety of ways:

+

Orange - Read the books and follow from number one to experience a story involving five objects.

+

Yellow - Read personal responses to objects in our collection written by volunteers.

+

White - Read typical museum labels following our house style and standard practice.

+

Burgundy - Read our academic labels, engaging with some of the more complicated conversations which occur when discussing body image and identity.

- About half (53%), noticed the different coloured labels, although some had to be directed towards these by the museum staff
- About 1 in 5 people (21%) noticed some but not all of the labels
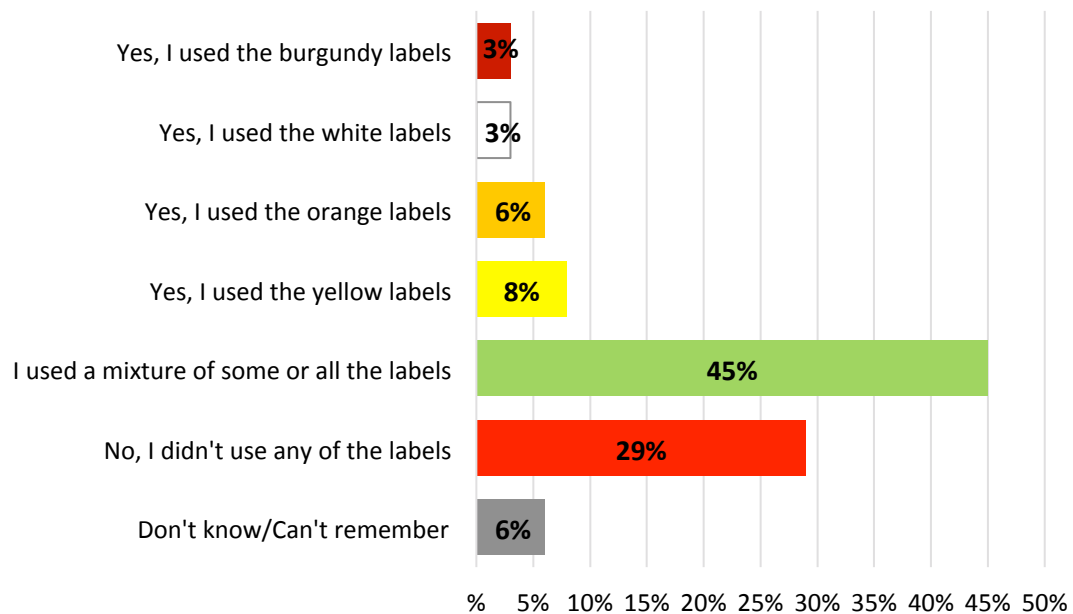- A similar number of people (22%) did not notice the different labels.

Did you notice the different coloured labels?

- 53% Yes, I noticed the different labels
- 21% I noticed some but not all of the different labels
- 22% No, I did not notice the different labels
- 4% Don't know/Can't remember

■ Yes, I noticed the different labels
■ I noticed some but not all of the different labels
■ No, I did not notice the different labels
■ Don't know/Can't remember
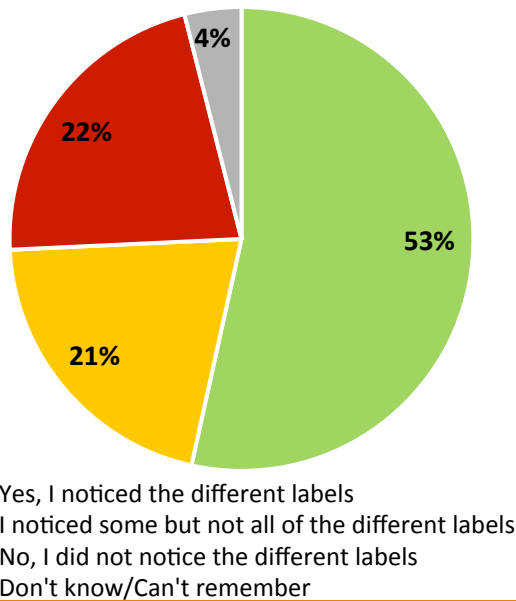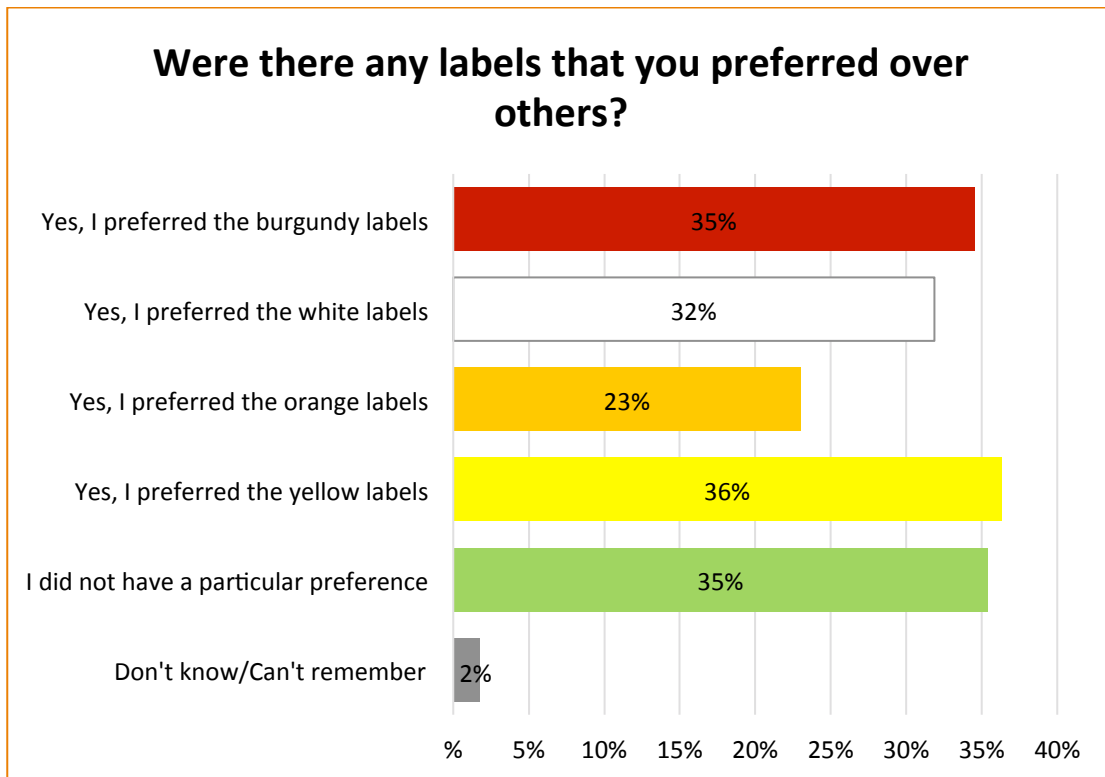
All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262

- Most respondents (45%) used a mixture of different labels
- 29% said they did not use any of the labels
- Only a few people (between 3% and 8%) used a single label

Did you use any particular colour label?

Yes, I used the burgundy labels	3%
Yes, I used the white labels	3%
Yes, I used the orange labels	6%
Yes, I used the yellow labels	8%
I used a mixture of some or all the labels	45%
No, I didn't use any of the labels	29%
Don't know/Can't remember	6%

All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262

- Respondents who used a mixture of labels appear to have done so because they preferred all of them equally
- Slightly fewer people however, appear to have preferred the orange labels – around 1 in 5 preferred those, compared to around 1 in 3 who preferred the rest

Were there any labels that you preferred over others?

Label	Percentage
Yes, I preferred the burgundy labels	35%
Yes, I preferred the white labels	32%
Yes, I preferred the orange labels	23%
Yes, I preferred the yellow labels	36%
I did not have a particular preference	35%
Don't know/Can't remember	2%

All who used a mixture of labels; base = 113

Respondents were also asked to give information about what they liked or didn't like about the labels they used. Notably a number people commented positively on the fact that there were different interpretations alongside one another and a significant majority used a mixture of labels rather than just one colour. However, the responses about what visitors didn't like nearly all related to a specific coloured label, and therefore that a particular style of interpretation didn't appeal to them. Examples of things that people liked include:
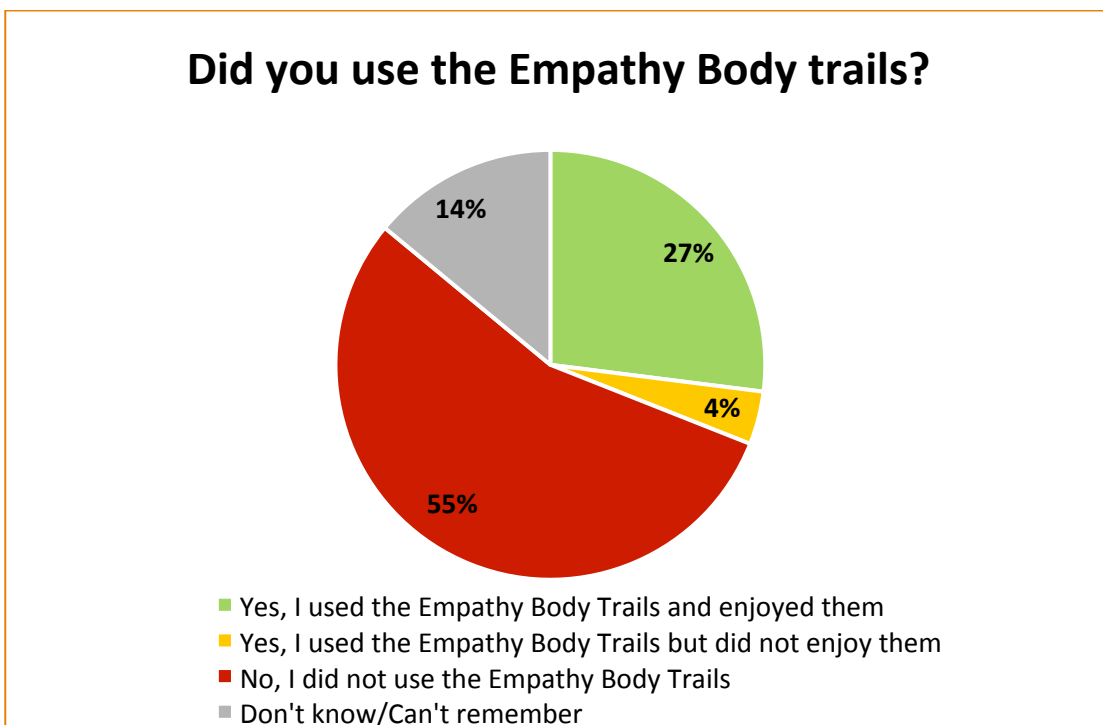
- The juxtaposition of the personal and the academic and the way academic theories e.g. queering were expressed + lived out in practice
- I liked the greater depth of understanding they offered
- The story behind the art - it felt so human and real
- Orange - liked the way objects can tell a story + draw out feelings in people. Yellow - enjoyed how the labels relate objects to real people. White - like to find out info about pieces

With regards to aspects of the labelling that people disliked, there were quite a few comments about design / presentation aspects including heights at which the labels were displayed or not understanding how they worked. Comments included:

- Occasionally wanted some further reading or acknowledgment of debate among academic circles
- They were not very noticeable
- Nothing particular
- I don't see the need for colour distinction- all info was part of the curation.
- Structure wasn't clear from start. Board not near entrance.

5.9 Empathy Trails

- About 55% of respondents said they did not use the Empathy Trails
- 27% said they used them and enjoyed them
- 4% said they did use them but did not enjoy them
- There is a much higher proportion of people (14%) who said they didn't know or couldn't remember, compared to other questions. This could potentially be because they did not notice the Empathy Trails, or used them but were not aware that this is what they were called

Did you use the Empathy Body trails?

- ■ Yes, I used the Empathy Body Trails and enjoyed them
- ■ Yes, I used the Empathy Body Trails but did not enjoy them
- ■ No, I did not use the Empathy Body Trails
- ■ Don't know/Can't remember

All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262

5.10 Representation

- The vast majority of respondents (90%) felt that the exhibition reflected the diversity of Birmingham to some extent.
- This held true for both White British and all other ethnicities
- 94% of White British thought that diversity was reflected to some extent at least; although fewer non-White Brits thought so (89%)
- There was not enough of a sample to test this for other groups, such as people with disabilities

Birmingham is a diverse city with people of many ethnicities, ages, social classes, sexual orientation living here. Did you feel this exhibition reflected the diversity in Birmingham?
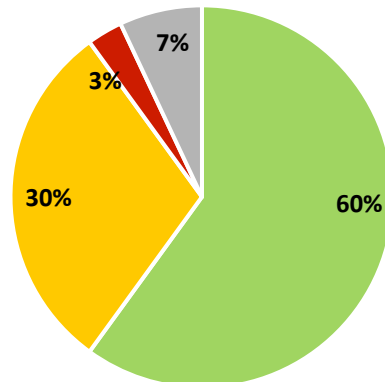
- ■ Yes, I think the exhibition reflected Birmingham's diversity well
- ■ I feel that the exhibition somewhat reflected Birmingham's diversity
- ■ No, I don't think the exhibition reflected Birmingham's diversity at all
- ■ Don't know

All respondents, excluding non-responses; base = 262

Responses to the notion of diversity and representation also occurred in open parts of the questionnaire. For example, one visitor wrote:

'As someone visiting such a multi-cultural hub of Birmingham there are few better places to experience the diversity of experience within a community. I hope an exhibition like this promotes intrigue, discussion, debate and hopefully understanding'

5.11 Friends and Family Test
➕ Most visitors (80%) would recommend the exhibition to people they know

How likely are you to recommend this exhibition to friends and family if they wanted to do something in their leisure time?

- 2%
- 7%
- 11%
- 80%

Likely ■ Neither likely nor unlikely ■ Unlikely ■ Don't know/Not sure
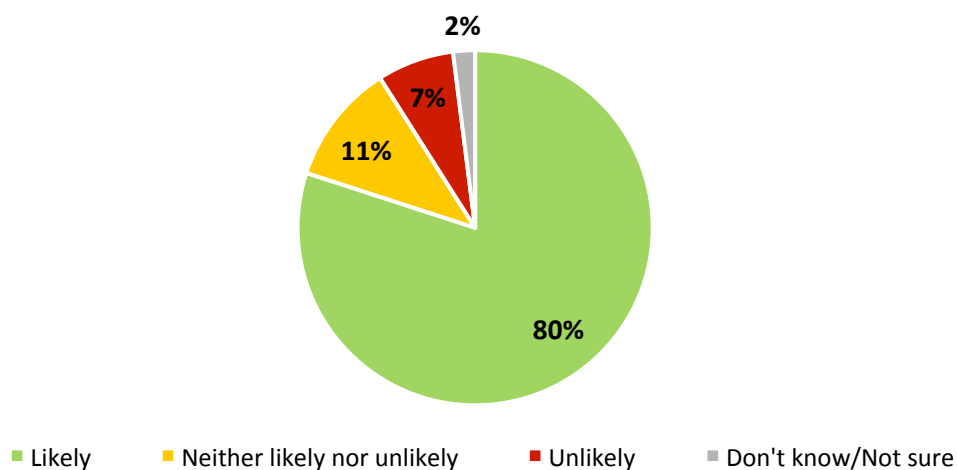
5.12 Responses to open questions

The first open question was: *Did you feel the topic of the exhibition (body image) was relevant to you?* Respondents could initially answer either yes, no or that the theme was relevant but the way it was presented wasn't. There was then a text box in which they could explain their answer. The significant majority said 'Yes' (84.3%), while 'No' was 7% and *the topic was relevant to me but the way it was presented wasn't* 8.7%.

The richness of the responses gives a strong sense of the individual visitors and the ways they each uniquely reacted to the exhibition. Despite the apparent individuality, it is possible to draw out reoccurring themes, (although many answers touch on more than one of these) which include:

Connection – own body, self-awareness, affect, confidence, struggle, etc.
- Everyone has one, they are all different.
- I sometimes struggle with how I portray myself.
- Like a lot of other people, I've struggled with body image, loved to see the difference and loved it
- Because we are all affected by body image in different ways and we should understand it from others point of view
- I use to struggle with body confidence, but I have become more confident in myself, and seeing this exhibition has made me so proud of society in general, as we are becoming more understanding.

Identity – gender, ethnicity, disability, diversity, representation
- As a woman of colour, I have been thinking a lot about bodies, identity and representation. After walking through the art gallery, in which I would only see portraits of white, able-bodied as people. I felt very happy and relieved to be in this space which is critical about the dominant and normalised body image. The art

shown in the exhibition shows different perspectives. The critical approach of the topic itself are very important. I really am happy to have experienced this exhibition.

- I love the inclusion of how beauty is depicted in more than just your 'normal' heteronormative way
- I feel that male body image is something that is not explored to the extent that it is for women. This I believe, is down to the prevalence of objectification of women more so than men. It was good to see a thorough exploration of both race and gender lenses on the perception of the body and the differences in cultural representation.

Societal issues and pressures – media, norms, ideals, self-portrayal
- It's an issue that's prominent with our society at the moment. Perfectly timed
- We all have bodies and we can't escape reflecting on how our own society's perceptions of our body effects how we live
- In society girls are pressured a lot to have the ideal body due to institutions such as social media
- We are constantly surrounded by images to make us consider our own body image, it's refreshing to see images that don't conform to typical beauty standards.

Learning, understanding and education
- As a woman I feel it is important learn about the origins of the ideals for women's beauty.
- Interest in gender study and how society constructs expectations of gender + sexuality
- As a media and communications student, I am writing my dissertation on body image and I feel it's important that other people are aware of the problems different people have with body image
- I'm a young girl that's still on the way of self-discovery and I'm growing up in this society

Challenge and change – different perceptions and stories
- Represented my identity and those of my generation as hopefully rigid ideas from the past are starting to shift
- I think it's important to know the story of people and try to understand it. Sometimes their story/stories change the way we think, we have another or many points of view. I enjoy it.
- Well I'm the stereotypical 'white male' so I'm the demographic this is likely targeted at. I felt like it was designed to challenge even shock.

For those who found the topic relevant but not the presentation the few responses (10) were difficult to draw any conclusions from, however there a sense that some people felt there could have been more space, questions, diversity, engagement or depth. Responses included:

- Not diverse enough
- I am not affected by it but I was interested

- A lot of potential to fit this into a bigger space
- Relevant to anyone I believe. Didn't relate to it, could be more in depth, structured.

For those who felt the topic wasn't relevant to them (8 respondents), four said they weren't concerned with their own body image and so don't give importance to the topic. One person felt as a white male it wasn't something they experienced and another that they disagreed with the ideas in the exhibition:

- I don't really agree with most of the statements/ideas put forward in this exhibition
- I no longer care much about my own body image though I am interested in the ideas concerning body image/identity and representation of these in the media.
- I'm comfortable in who I am and this just felt as if it was more questioning than accepting - how many people does it really apply to.

The questionnaire asked: *Which aspects of the exhibition did you find most interesting and why?* There were 170 answers in total. These can be grouped broadly as:

- The Empathy Trail
- Diversity, representation, identity
- Specific objects (the Michael Jackson automaton was mentioned most frequently, but others noted included the mirrors, photographs, Male Gaze, Seventeen, the dolls, the artificial leg)
- Facts
- Different perspectives – challenging mainstream notions
- The stories
- The whole topic

- Specific topics, e.g. colourism
- The variety, mix and juxtaposition.

Visitors also described the effects of the exhibition in various ways, such as finding it thought provoking, making them feel happy, empowered or keen to find out more about something. There is also recognition and appreciation (in these responses and others) of the Museum attempting to do something differently, and of the polyvocal curational approach. Some examples of the range and types of comments are:

- It felt part of real life
- The back wall - queer identity, race + body image felt very personal + nice to see some aspects of myself and community reflected
- How there are things to with body image that I never thought of
- The subject of beauty from a non-white heterosexual able-bodied viewpoint
- The personal stories and photographs
- The Empathy Body Trails. I loved that it was so original, so simple and yet so powerful. You also present it as an option, rather than an obligation, which I loved.
- Native Canadian carving: very thought provoking
- Michael Jackson exhibit because it is provocative
- The Michael Jackson behind curtain. Very funny made me laugh.
- All of it but especially the corner with more queer representation. It made me really happy to see that.
- The fearlessness
- I was particularly interested in the work of Barbara Walker and I will seek out more examples
- Honestly all of it!
- The video where real people were interviewed (with subtitles) was interesting.
- People's self-identity as being different from their social norm - and why
- An attempt to be different.

Finally, those completing the questionnaire were asked: *What is the most important thing you will take away today?* There were a total of 138 responses which were nearly all very positive, with people seeming to feel inspired and engaged. These were frequently expressed as short mantra like statements or single words such as 'Empathy!' and 'Everybody's different and it's beautiful'. We drew out the following 6 strands:

- Body positivity, diversity, difference and acceptance
- Feeling represented
- Societal change – greater representation and acceptance
- Relevant to Birmingham
- Multiple meanings, interpretations and perspectives
- Relevance for everyone.

The following is a sample of the range of responses:

- For me it made me reflect on identities that have been there all along but are now perhaps beginning to feel the freedom to express themselves more openly - and how much work there is still to do to create an environment that supports this.
- To love yourself for who you are
- More representation!
- Diversity is beautiful. As someone newly moved to Birmingham from the States, I very much appreciated coming across an exhibit that highlights and celebrates people typically ignored or marginalised from the mainstream
- That it is okay to be different and people's opinions are changing
- The way we think about bodies is not natural, it is formed historically through different types of media.
- More museums should mix up their collections
- That debates about bodies are a subject of lively debate now
- The huge influence the outside world has on my body image
- Young people are very insightful - we need to give them more credit!
- Body image is fluid. Beauty is a concept not a fact.

6. Findings and Learning

This evaluation has considered the two parts of the *Body Image* project; the development process and the exhibition. *Body Image* has undoubtedly been successful in achieving its objectives which have contributed to the aim of diversifying and growing audiences. It has done this through involving a group of collaborators in the development process, and through a theme, curatorial and design approach that have proved popular and engaging, providing multiple ways in which a diversity of people can connect with the displays. The project has successfully engaged volunteers through both the development and exhibition phases, exceeding targets in terms of numbers of people and hours volunteered, as well as hosting an MA student on placement from Leicester / BCU.

In terms of the digital engagement, in this second Story Lab exhibition, it was decided early on in the process that there weren't the resources to fully support this aspect and therefore this remains an area that would warrant focus in future projects. Digital engagement has the potential to widen reach and could be an interesting area in which to involve new community collaborators.

6.1 Testing Interpretation
The *Body Image* exhibition methodology was focused on exploring and testing interpretation. The focus of the work with the ColLABorators was on a polyvocal curatorial approach and choices about this led to questions of how to engage visitors and present different ways of viewing the objects and artworks. In contrast to *TPIN* where authorship and interpretation was one of the most difficult areas in the collaborative process, in *Body Image* this was resolved by offering audiences multiple, parallel interpretations. The choice of colour coded about labels, each with a distinct voice / language / authority provided audiences with an opportunity to engage with the exhibition from a number of distinctive perspectives. Incorporating these into the design of the exhibition was innovative. The presentation of multiple voices challenges

the orthodoxy of the authoritative and dominant museum voice, and in that process reveals greater layers of complexity. However, while responses to the exhibition as a whole (theme, content and design) were extremely positive, not all visitors engaged with the labels or the concept of the Empathy Trail. This suggests the strong resonance of the theme and the engaging way this was interpreted as an entirety, was what was at the heart of the way it was received.

> *'Although I'm white this 'norm' in so much art + media doesn't represent my reality. My Birmingham has always been mixed + exhibitions not engaging with this feel disingenuous. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that museums have traditionally stolen from other cultures needs space. Museums take from cultures + then exclude members of those cultures + diminish their importance in the white male narrative. As a queer, non-binary, disabled person, I want to know that the museum, always my sanctuary, sees me +it's not a one-way engagement of me looking in.'*

Looking across all of the visitor questionnaire data, it is the multiplicity of perspectives, communicated through both the accompanying texts and the juxtaposition of objects and artworks, that engaged people. The theme, the display and interpretations were congruent, while being able to successfully talk to a diversity of people about diverse human embodied experiences. The exhibition offered different ways for people to connect with a theme that clearly has strong relevance and is both rich and complex.

6.2 Reflections on Process

The process of bringing together a group of collaborators who brought a wealth of diverse interests and experiences, that then fed into the multiple representations and interpretations was foundational. They were given scope to contribute, research and explore, as a member of staff described 'it was about testing what people responded to and it allowed people to be really free!' And critically the lead staff were determined that there would be well-defined parameters, within which the ColLABorators could be clear about their agency. In contrast to *TPIN,* where the issues of interpretation were a significant source of antagonism regarding semantics, the learning in *Body Image* was 'that you don't ask someone to do something and then take the control of that' (member of staff). The approach here was to give the ColLABorators agency within a clearly defined field of influence. The ColLABorators took their role seriously and carried it out with due attention to rigour and quality.

This underlines a key issue which arose in *TPIN,* that the team addressed by ensuring that the creative and critical engagement with the overall curation process, was firmly underpinned by project structure, planning and clear lines of accountability, influence and decision making. In this way the project provided a discrete and safe space in which to collaborate.

It is critical to recognise the importance of time in Museum engagement. There are essentially different temporalities at work. Organisational and funding schedules have one rhythm whilst building relationships and trust require a different momentum. The approach in this instance was to have a scheduled project plan with key phases and deadlines set out before the ColLABorators were involved. This added to the transparency of what was expected, but arguably limited possibilities by imposing the

organisations clock. In sessions this sometimes translated as the staff literally telling the ColLABorators they had for example, 45 minutes to make a decision about the exhibition title. From the feedback we have received, it seems the challenge of this time pressure was seen to be positive, with one ColLABorator describing this as her favourite session.

TPIN and *Body Image* present two different ways of working with a group of external collaborators. Each have their strengths and limitations. Whilst the need to move on from a process that was experienced as 'antagonistic' was imperative, by thoroughly designing the process with careful structuring and facilitation, elements of risk, unpredictability and creative tension were negated and their disruptive potential neutralised. The ColLABorators in the second iteration were described as 'more distant' whilst the first group were 'more challenging and communicative'. There was an element of challenge and debate in the *Body Image* sessions but in general the ColLABorators got on with the task at hand and 'mostly they just asked questions and for clarification'. However, this enquiry does need to be framed by the fact that involvement in the *Body Image* process was experienced positively by staff and ColLABorators; one of the staff said 'this had been truly a collaborative process – inside and outside'.

6.3 Who is engaged and where does engagement sit?

Body Image successfully engaged a committed diverse group of ColLABorators who, through their own experiences and exploration, shaped the resulting exhibition. Their influence, individually and as a group, undoubtedly brought perspectives on the exhibition subject matter that genuinely engaged audiences. The diversity and representation at the heart of the exhibition was welcomed and particularly appreciated in the context of a lack of interrogation of museum representation of societal ideals and media stereotypes. So there were two levels of engagement here, through bringing people outside the museum into its processes and through audience engagement with the exhibition.

The project leads were clear at the outset about the level of participation involved, and the ColLABorators (from the data available) seem to have had positive experiences of participation and their own influence on the exhibition. Their collaboration is visibly acknowledged in the signage and individual voices are present in the Empathy Trails, giving a genuine sense of agency and ownership (see image below). Likewise, it is important to be clear about the limits of participation, who is engaged and crucially where the work of engagement sits within the organisation and how this might be taken forwards.

Nina Simon writes about the fact that most institutions prefer experimenting 'behind closed doors' and therefore that 'The participatory design processes are often institutionally defined, time-limited, and involve a small number of participants.'[10] This was undoubtedly the case in this instance.

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[10] Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum, 2010

Thinking about who was engaged as collaborator and as audience, the museum can be seen to have had an open call for volunteers as well as attracting a more diverse audience than usual. Nonetheless the reach (through promotion, word of mouth, etc.) of both of these 'offers' is likely to be limited to certain groups. The question therefore is how the museum can build on this going forwards.

In 'Whose Cake is it Anyway', (PHF 2011) Bernadette Lynch highlights another challenge: the structure of the museum itself. Whilst the work of engagement is gaining a greater prominence, the experience is often that this work sits at the periphery rather than the centre of most organisations. The challenge is one of 'shifting the work from the margins to the core of many of these organisations' and therefore a literal revision of what the purpose of a museum is. With *Body Image* the two staff leading the project were on temporary contracts, and the project was managed by Community Engagement. Clearly these experiments bring significant resourcing implications during a time of challenging economic conditions, however, there is a risk here that knowledge and expertise gained through both the Story Lab exhibitions could potentially be lost (through staff leaving) or siloed rather than shared, through being contained within (and seen to be the work of) one department.

6.4 Rethinking Evaluation

The evaluation of *Body Image* began after the project started. Whilst contact was good with Museum staff, evaluation sat outside the collaborative process. This was part of the conscious decision to limit the number of staff and external professionals coming

into the group, thereby promoting bonding and ensuring that the ColLABorators didn't feel overwhelmed (which was reported during the evaluation of *TPIN)*. With hindsight the evaluators and staff could have worked together earlier on to build in evaluative reflection to the development process, in order to better understand and capture the responses of those involved. It should also be noted that the space for and practice of review and reflection is not time away from the creative process. It generates learning and can be part of growing group cohesion, shared purpose and voice.

6.5 A Model of Collaboration

Story Lab is concerned with testing; in this second iteration it has explored and tested interpretation and a refined model of collaboration. In doing this the development of *Body Image* set out to address some of the learning and issues arising from *TPIN*[11]. Lessons that we have seen successfully incorporated include:

- Defining terms, expectations, roles and remit
- Creating plans for sessions in advance but also allowing flexibility
- Being open about the process of finding balance between academic rigour in interpretation vs. emotional response.
- The challenge of working with different external groups; addressing individual subjectivity at start of process so we understand how it affects our interpretation methods.
- Challenging content and challenge / awareness of museum processes and practices
- Ensuring there is support for the staff involved – structures and space to review
- Thinking about the public outside the collaborators and communicating to different audiences
- Creative approaches to interpretation. The notion of decolonising helped to reinterpret the museum's collection and shift perspectives (internally and externally)

As a result of the learning from *TPIN* perhaps the greatest success of *Body Image* has been its ability to make space for, hold and present, multiple viewpoints, both within the process and the exhibition.

However, there are areas that need further consideration:

- Feeding back to wider museum lessons learnt to help disseminate learning but also to create opportunities for reflection.
- It is an extremely short timeline for an exhibition and for the collaborative process needed to develop this.
- How to widen the opportunities for participation to include more people, including gallery visitors, rather than the collaborators exclusively.

There is a model of collaboration emerging here, however it is suggested that this shouldn't become something that is fixed or 'one size fits all' but rather maintains the capacity to be responsive to each new project and the degree of agency desired by those involved. If this is the case then the collaboration model could be framed by

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[11] Drawn from internal document 'Lessons Learnt: Empire', Rachael Minott and staff interviews

principles and values, rather than structures. This requires asking each time what individual collaborators want from their involvement? Underlying this is the principle of recognising that the relationship between the museum and the external collaborator is dialogic and that the terms for this need to be clear to both. And in making this clear, the Museum itself needs to be clear about the direction of travel and how far it wants to or is prepared to go, as well as the challenges and resources that this will require.

The collaborative and indeed participatory process which brings the Museum into conversation with its wider community/ies can be opened up more and doing this could frame the next challenge or focus of testing. Questions to consider here include:

- How can the Museum allow its collections to be meaningfully accessed by collaborators?
- How could ideas from Birmingham's communities be generated to produce a socially and culturally relevant contemporary exhibition?
- How can the Museum extend its reach beyond its established circles of engagement?
- How might a longer-term process of building strong equitable community partnerships inform the museums direction of travel beyond discrete one-off projects and representative groups?

There is a real opportunity here to learn from BMAG's own experiences and from the examples of good practice and experimentation in other museums and galleries nationally and internationally. In the PHF funded study 'Whose Cake is it Anyway' Lynch writes:

> *'The strongest work that emerged from this study came from those organisations that had shifted the role of their community partners from beneficiaries (or supplicants) to active agents and partners of the museum.*

> *They had transformed their role into one of supporting people in developing their own capabilities. These museums and galleries had realised their capability in helping others to realise theirs. At the same time, they gained from the reciprocal capability of others in helping them reflect on their public engagement role.'*

7. Looking Forwards – Recommendations

> *'Your reputation is not built on your last exhibition, you are known for your way of working. it's about ethics and practice and being respected for that. You need to articulate this and revise it and be able to speak it. This is what you need to build your reputation on. The notion of the useful museum is paramount. If they are not making a contribution in a significant way then what are they there for?'*
> *Bernadette Lynch, TPIN Review Session*

From the evaluations and learning arising from both *TPIN* and *Body Image*, and centrally from the reflections of the staff involved we offer the following

recommendations for taking forwards the evolving practice, which it is hoped will help inform BMAG's future direction.

- **Develop a model and articulate practice.** There is a need to clearly articulate the principles and values that inform engagement work and then develop models of practice which can adapt to accommodate the various capacities and ambitions of collaborators. There is scope here for learning from other museums and cultural organisations demonstrating good and promising practice regarding the scope of museum engagement and the museums civic role.

- **Embed Evaluation.** Evaluation is not merely an opportunity to capture evidence and summarise predefined impacts, outcomes and audience reception**.** At its most effective evaluation is formative and dialogical, providing opportunities for all involved in a project to regularly reflect on values, practice, learning and the extent to which a project is meeting shared ambitions. Designing evaluation into delivery will enhance learning and ensure a diversity of voices in evaluation.

- **Develop a strategy for taking this work forwards** and embedding it within the museum as a whole. The learning from Story LAB should inform the Museums' ethos and practice. It is not the case that the Story Lab is merely a display and interpretation test bed. It is also a space where models of participation and collaboration and ultimately cultural democracy can be tested out. As a member of staff commented: *"[The] Team have been through so much and we are on a change agenda and everyone gets that – what have we learnt… discussion about it but hasn't been brought together and formalised"*

- **Develop Research Collaborations**. Much of the work of producing *Body Image* took place behind the scenes. The level of engagement and influence offered was acceptable and enjoyable for the collaborators involved. *TPIN* in contrast offered greater levels of agency yet it produced higher levels of antagonism. In both cases the collaborators were carefully selected for the task and carried it out with commitment and rigour. While the more curtailed *BI* approach understandable given the reverberations following TPIN, there is scope for engagement work that works more responsively. The research process offers more opportunities for knowledge production beyond the confines of institutional agendas and strategic plan and the benevolence of engagement.. As stated in the *TPIN* reflection session, "If you don't open up the research, people will always feel that they are being kept out of something." (Bernadette Lynch). Offering opportunities for collaborative co-produced research earlier in the process is one way of opening up the museum. This approach requires developing the relationship of partnership with individuals and organisations and from here exploring emerging ideas. This is a much longer more complex process of community development.

- Take more **risks** and keep asking questions**: '***Many storylines can be difficult. Why do we have this collection? 90% of objects tell the story of someone white… should it be like this?' (staff interview)* Open up dialogue with the wider community and use this as the impetus for future work.

- **Staff development.** The work that has begun here is complex and frequently beyond the day to day work of many museum professional. Providing professional development opportunities and peer support within and beyond the museum would generate better understanding of areas such as de-colonisation, international development tools, evaluation and reflection. This could be part of continuing professional development and therefore integral to staff learning.

- **Ensure staff learning is passed on**. Given that *TPIN* and *Body Image* have been largely delivered by temporary staff on short-term contracts there is a danger that learning and good practice gets lost as staff move on. Therefore there needs to be a formalised process for capturing learning and sharing this across teams.

- **De-colonisation as a process;** seeing it as a journey that will need ongoing discussion, testing, risks, resourcing, etc. and as part of the strategy for being more engagement heavy! How can BMAG progress the project of decolonising the museum – what does this mean and what does it look like? There needs to be a common understanding of this and a shared vision of where it will take BMAG, looking forwards to both the redevelopment of the building and strategy to repurpose its collection to have relevance for Birmingham's communities now.

By investing in and resourcing organisational development and change through a 'critical friends' co-developed processes, future funding can help museums and galleries to:

- o Renegotiate or reaffirm their relationship with, and role within, civil society
- o Understand their locality – the *place* in which they are located
- o Broker creative, strategic partnerships and alliances in their local area

Story Lab has generated both notable achievements and rich learning; the question is now what this might mean for the museum, what is the legacy of the *TPIN* and *Body Image* test beds? As one of the staff team observed:

"For me it's important that there is a dissemination of this learning – what we learned from TPIN. Lots of people ask about TPIN – how did you do this – how did you get departments involved and to work together? How did you get the curators on board? There needs to be more shared learning – between organisations. Different models / examples / experiences / practice. I don't think it should be sharing via conference – too elitist / expensive. So there is a question of how to share this knowledge and how can it be actively be used to inform the regeneration of this museum? I think the question is what is the legacy of this work?"

APPENDIX

A. Story Lab Values

Story LAB
ColLAB team

"These are our guiding principles"

01 | **Trust**
means trusting each other to follow these principles and being generous to assume good intention.

02 | **Democracy**
will be practiced and we will come to agreements within time constraints, making room for compromise, aiming to end conversations on a metaphorical high five.

03 | **Sensitivity**
will be at the heart of open conversations. We also believe critique shouldn't be taken or given personally.

04 | **Inclusivity**
should drive sessions. Every idea will be considered and practiced with our value of democracy.

05 | **Respect**
applies to peoples boundaries and each others right to an opinion. Everyone will understand the aims and outcomes of each meeting. We also respect if someone wishes to leave a conversation for any reason at any point.

ColLABorator Sessions

6th March (BMAG) – Object based storytelling: long list is presented, each collaborator presents a story they are passionate about. We interrogate these and begin to make links/comparisons/similarities in stories.

13th March (Pure) – Narrowing the selection of stories down to three final options, recapping gallery purpose and vision. Final 3 worked up slightly, with genre to line them up against objects and potential. (*BCU student in attendance*)

20th March (Pure Bar) – Final story selection. Looking at objects. Deciding on the 'experience' of the space. (Cont artist brief written internal for final story, key partners fully engaged).

27th March – (MCC) visit to see physical objects. Decide gateway object, and subsequent objects. Begin thinking about what we want to say about objects. CoLABs get to see the brief and circulate for two weeks.

3rd April - (Pure/Thinktank) – Intense interpretation masterclass. Examples sharing from research. Wellcome, Science Museum, BM, Whipple, MAA, Scott Polar, V&A. *(BCU student presents look and feel ideas to group)*

10th April (BMAG) – Tour of TPIN 20 mins, Pizza critique of TPIN. Discuss design and launch. Team invited to join design or programming team. (Deadline for contemp artists application)

17th April – Interps continuation as a group. *(Designer in BCU presents – designer presents)*

24th April – Selecting / shortlisting artist responses for contemporary commission.
Group offered to continue in either design/fabrication or programming.

3rd May – Working on personal interpretations for 'Empathy Body Image trails' and intro panel

10th May – Designer in, working out the 'walking layout' with all the objects and deciding what additional brought objects will be needed to complete the look, feel and fabrication.