



Selfies evaluation : final report

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SELFIES EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

Eleanor Formby and Catherine Donovan

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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Executive summary	4
1. Introduction	7
2. Young people's perspectives prior to involvement in Selfies	8
3. Young people's perspectives following involvement in Selfies	15
4. Practitioner reflections on Selfies	23
5. Discussion and conclusions	32
References	35

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Executive summary

Introduction

- Sheffield Hallam University (Eleanor Formby) and the University of Sunderland (Professor Catherine Donovan), working in collaboration, evaluated the Selfies project, run by Projects Galore (a community interest company based in Newcastle)
- Selfies was a two year arts-based project that worked with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) young people in the North East to celebrate strong peer relationships, and help them recognise and resist domestic violence, abuse and sexual exploitation
- Evaluation activities included: a 'pre-Selfies' self-completion survey of participants; a 'pre-Selfies' focus group with participants in one location; a survey of young people at Newcastle Pride in 2015; a 'post-Selfies' self-completion survey of participants; individual interviews with Selfies workers and associated staff; 'post-Selfies' interviews with project participants.

Young people's perspectives prior to involvement in Selfies

- 21 young people participated in an initial 'pre-Selfies' survey, aged between 14 and 25
- An initial focus group in one of the Selfies sites involved seven young people
- 91 people completed a survey at Newcastle Pride (2015), aged between 16 and 25
- The majority thought that LGBTQ people were 'not at all' included within what is taught at schools and colleges
- Nearly everyone thought that LGBTQ people need friends who are LGBTQ
- Some Pride survey respondents (8%) thought it was 'OK' in a relationship to hit a partner
- Survey findings suggest that LGBT organisations/groups and individual previous experience are significant sources of sex and relationships information for LGBTQ youth, alongside (to a lesser extent) youth workers and LGBTQ friends
- There are clear gaps in formal sex and relationships education (SRE) provided at school or college, supporting previous research (e.g. Formby, 2011a; METRO, 2014)
- Formal sources of support (e.g. the police, mainstream health services and other statutory services) were not often sought/used for advice, also supporting previous evidence (Donovan, 2014; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Formby, 2011b)
- Nearly everyone thought that school SRE should include more about LGBTQ relationships

Young people's perspectives following involvement in Selfies

- 16 young people completed individual Selfies session evaluation sheets, aged 14-20
- A further 6 completed the 'post-Selfies' evaluation survey, aged between 16 and 20
- Four young people took part in individual telephone interviews, aged 19-24
- Data collected suggests that participants valued the opportunity to come together and discuss LGBTQ relationships
- Interviewees identified the informal project approach and arts-based methods as particular project strengths
- It was clear from session evaluation that the drama-based work had influenced some participants' opinions
- The main potential weakness identified was the low numbers of young people recruited to and attending the project

- The focus of the project was understood by most participants, and even where they said they had known some of the information provided before, they felt it was a useful ‘refresher’
- Though project impacts were not always easily identified by participants, it was clear the work had been enjoyed, and some were able to identify increased knowledge and/or ‘soft’ impacts such as increased confidence
- It was clear that Selfies was valued in a context where other LGBT-related provision was lacking, such as school-based (LGBT-inclusive) SRE

Practitioner reflections on Selfies

- Six practitioners took part in the evaluation, including two ‘core’ Projects Galore staff members, two artists employed to help deliver Selfies, and two existing group youth workers involved in Selfies work
- Recruitment ‘routes’ to young people were thought to have advantages and disadvantages. Using existing groups was thought to be ‘easier’, but meant that group members might vary widely, and/or be less engaged as they had not ‘chosen’ to access Selfies
- By contrast, establishing new, specific groups was thought to be time-intensive, but also potentially impact-intensive, particularly for those not accessing support elsewhere
- LGBTQ youth were thought to benefit from three forms of (overlapping) support: LGBTQ-specific youth work; ‘general’ LGBTQ SRE, and LGBTQ SRE specifically focussed on domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and/or child sexual exploitation (CSE)
- There appeared to be a consensus that Selfies should not be explicitly described as being about DVA or CSE as it was felt this would be ‘off-putting’ to young people
- Selfies delivery methods were viewed positively, for being engaging, flexible, and able to adapt and respond to young people’s needs, interests and capacities
- In particular, arts-based methods were thought to offer young people a way of expressing their feelings, with activities said to open up useful, varied, and unexpected, discussions
- In the future, there was a desire to try extend the number of young people involved in Selfies
- Similarly, some people wanted to extend the length of time Selfies worked with young people
- Often people wanted school-based SRE to be improved, alongside the continued provision of LGBT youth work

Conclusions

- LGBTQ young people felt strongly about the invisibility of LGBTQ identities within mainstream school and college settings, and reported wanting support related to sex, relationships, and coming/being ‘out’
- Where support was lacking elsewhere, LGBTQ young people tended to turn to LGBT organisations and groups, or ‘learnt from experience’
- In the future, LGBTQ youth most often wanted sex and relationships information to be provided at an LGBT organisation, school or college, online, and/or at a youth club/venue; when asked *who* they would like to receive information from, the most common answers were from an LGBTQ friend or partner and/or from a youth worker
- The stress on provision from LGBT organisations, groups and youth workers is concerning given that LGBT organisations and youth services have both been severely hit by funding cuts

- LGBTQ young people often had no expectations of learning about (LGBTQ) sex and relationships from school, and low or unclear expectations about intimate relationships, demonstrating the potential value of Selfies work
- Practitioners also supported the Selfies work, and raised a number of issues for future delivery
- There is no 'easy' way to recruit young people to this kind of work; it is likely that time and determination will be required on the part of workers
- The lack of youth work 'grounding' for some of the Selfies recruits, plus the level and range of some of their needs, suggests that delivery needs to be carefully pitched and managed
- Flexibility and responsiveness will be required on the part of workers, who may meet a variety of expectations from the young people they work with
- Given the lack of available SRE for LGBTQ young people, it is expected that the provision of more generalised SRE content would be necessary, which could then lead into more detailed discussions of DVA, CSE, and any other specific issues that young people may raise
- The evaluation suggests that should Selfies work be continued, it would be fulfilling an identified need, and able to offer variety in both scope and delivery methods according to the needs of the young people recruited
- The Selfies project makes the case for LGBT youth work within which young people are offered different ways of thinking about their potential for 'safe' and happy sex and relationships

1. Introduction

This report documents findings from a collaborative evaluation of the Selfies project (delivered by Projects Galore), carried out by Sheffield Hallam University (Eleanor Formby) and the University of Sunderland (Professor Catherine Donovan). Projects Galore is a community interest company based in Newcastle that obtained funding to run Selfies, a two year arts-based project that works with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) young people in the North East to celebrate strong peer relationships, and help them recognise and resist domestic violence, abuse and sexual exploitation. This sex and relationships education (SRE) project uses different art forms to explore issues such as consent, respect, warning signs of abusive relationships, and what being a 'good' friend means.

Evaluation activities undertaken included the following:

- a pre-Selfies self-completion surveys of participants (see Chapter 2)
- a pre-Selfies focus group with participants in one location (see Chapter 2)
- a survey of young people at Newcastle Pride in 2015 (see Chapter 2)
- evaluation of individual Selfies sessions, which was designed by Projects Galore rather than the evaluation team (see Chapter 3)
- a post-Selfies self-completion survey of participants (see Chapter 3)
- post-Selfies interviews with project participants (see Chapter 3)
- individual interviews with Selfies workers and associated staff (see Chapter 4).

Experiences of, and results from, these methods fed into subsequent revisions of research tools, as well as project delivery developments. For this reason, the evaluation did not seek to use an experimental approach with 'before' and 'after' comparisons or measurements. Rather, it was designed to try and understand the experiences of those involved in the project in order to inform future project delivery.

The evaluation received research ethics approval from Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee, and all participant names used within the report are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

2. Young people's perspectives prior to involvement in Selfies

This chapter draws together three sources of data prior to participants' involvement in Selfies project delivery: a self-completion survey of participants, a focus group with participants in one location, and a survey of young people at Newcastle Pride in 2015. The chapter begins with some demographic information about participants, followed by a combined thematic analysis of the data.

Pre-Selfies survey participants

In total, 21 young people participated in an initial 'pre-Selfies' survey, aged between 14 and 25, with a mean average age of 18. There were a range of sexual identities reported, including bisexual (x 4), gay (x 5), heterosexual (x 2), lesbian (x 5), pansexual (x 2), and 'none of these' (x 1). Overall, eight identified as male, six as female, three as trans, one as genderqueer, and one as 'none of these'. In total, nine said they had identified as trans at some point. Over half of the survey participants were in full time education. Smaller numbers were in part time employment, on a training course or apprenticeship, or not in any education, employment or training. For the majority, GCSEs were their highest educational qualification, though smaller numbers had no qualifications, A Levels, or a vocational qualification. One individual had a postgraduate degree.

Pre-Selfies focus group participants

The focus group that took place in one of the Selfies sites involved seven young people who shared some information about themselves as part of the introduction:

- Bea was aged 14 and attended school
- Zack was 16 and attended the same school. They identified as trans and pansexual
- Ivan was 19, identified as gay, and attended college
- Yazz was aged 24 and identified as bisexual
- Wayne was 16 and attended college
- Debs was 18 and also attended college
- Si attended college.

Newcastle Pride (2015) survey participants

In total, 91 people completed the Pride survey, aged between 16 and 25. The largest group (63%) were aged 16-19. Of the 91, 59% identified as female, 31% as male, 5% as trans, 3% as genderless, and 2% said they did not know. Overall, 16% said they had identified as trans at some point. Regarding sexuality, 36% identified as heterosexual, 22% as lesbian, 16% as bisexual, 12% as gay, 10% in an alternative way, 2% as asexual, and 2% said they did not know. The clear majority (92%) identified as White British, whilst 8% identified in an alternative way. A small proportion (3%) considered themselves to be disabled.

LGBTQ visibility

Of the pre-Selfies survey participants, the majority thought that LGBTQ people were 'a little' visible in the media, included within legislation, and provided for within NHS services. By contrast, the majority thought that LGBTQ people were 'not at all' included within what is taught at schools and

colleges. When asked about the LGBTQ people they had seen in the media or been taught about at school, opinions were mixed:

- over half felt that they provided a good role model for young LGBTQ people, but over half did not think they told them anything about what to expect in LGBTQ relationships
- just over half felt they showed a positive/happy image of LGBTQ relationships, but over half thought they also showed a negative/unhappy image of LGBTQ relationships
- over half said they showed unrealistic LGBTQ relationships and sexual experiences.

One individual commented that “past depictions of trans people are not portrayed accurately”.

Within the focus group discussion, examples were given of LGBT sex and relationships in the public eye, which included television programmes such as *Glee* and *Hollyoaks*; Twitter; Facebook groups; YouTube channels/personalities (e.g. Tyler Oakley, ‘Gay God’, ‘Lizzy the Lezzy’), and celebrities such as Patrick Stewart¹, Ian McKellen, Ellen DeGeneres and Alan Carr. These were all thought to be positive examples which helped raise visibility, awareness, and were “good to show how far we have come”. Whilst Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen were identified as role models, Alan Carr was described as “offensive”. Online sites were visited and comments viewed to see other people’s “own stories”, but seeing “religious comments” condemning homosexuality made some feel angry. Young people using websites to view other people’s experiences has been documented previously (Craig et al, 2014). A focus on the need for young people to ‘properly’ use privacy settings on social media sites (Craig et al, 2014) may thus misunderstand or underestimate the importance of communication with ‘strangers’, albeit communication that may carry risks. Whilst much discussion of young people’s online activities tends to focus on the ‘dangers’, young people themselves report finding positive opportunities and safety in online spaces (Craig et al, 2014; Formby, forthcoming). Education related to online safety therefore needs to be informed and nuanced.

LGBTQ friendships and relationships

Pre-Selfies survey respondents were asked about ‘good’ friendships. The majority thought that ‘having a laugh’, ‘looking after each other’, ‘listening to each other’s worries’, ‘giving advice if one of you thinks the other is making a mistake’, ‘standing up for each other’, and ‘offering practical support’ were ‘very important’ (though the latter two to a lesser extent). In total, 17 respondents thought they were good friends to other people. With one exception, everybody said they had one or two friends that they trusted and could talk about anything with. Just over half said that ‘most of my friends are LGBTQ. We’re close and look after each other’. However, just under half had less positive experiences:

- three said ‘I’ve got lots of friends but none that I can really talk about everything with’
- five said ‘most of my friends are straight and don’t really understand what it’s like being LGBTQ’
- two said ‘at the moment I don’t really have any friends’
- one said “I have lots of friends and trust the wrong ones”.

Nearly everyone thought that LGBTQ people need friends who are LGBTQ, highlighting the importance of the above ‘gaps’ in some young people’s friendship circles. However, most also felt

¹ Patrick Stewart is often ‘mistaken’ for being gay, though is married to a woman (see www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/01/23/sir-patrick-stewart-im-flattered-that-people-think-i-am-gay).

that LGBTQ people can make good friendships with 'straight' (cisgender) people, with just over half suggesting that 'LGBTQ relationships are basically the same as heterosexual relationships'. The majority said they had experienced an LGBTQ friend coming to them for help about a relationship or somebody they were seeing, including issues about "breakups", "sex - whether or not to have it", "how to ask a girl out", "sexual relationships", "asking for places to go on a date where they wouldn't be looked at angrily", "advice about sexual techniques", "domestic abuse", "advice for sexual activities", "advice and help about being open and/or planning to [be open]", "discrimination against LGBTQ", "faithfulness of a partner", pregnancy, and "where to get help from". The focus on sex here is noticeable, and could relate to a lack of sex education that many LGBTQ youth experience (see below, and Formby, 2011a; METRO, 2014). Comments also suggest some concerns about coming/being 'out', and domestic abuse. In the focus group, there were additional concerns about peer relationships, with negative experiences within school changing rooms reported; Zack and Debs had both been told to change around the corner or facing the wall by other pupils. Just over half of the survey respondents had felt able to help their friend(s) 'a little' (but not 'a lot'), suggesting there was room for increasing capacity for peer support.

Pre-Selfies survey respondents were also asked whether they agreed with a range of statements:

- there was clear uncertainty about whether going out with somebody ten years older was 'normal' and/or could help with learning about how to have LGBTQ sex and relationships as a young LGBTQ person
- most LGBTQ people they knew were going out with somebody near their own age, though most also felt that sex and relationships are usually hard to find because it is harder to meet LGBTQ young people than it is for other young people
- the majority did not find themselves going out or having sex with another LGBTQ person for the 'wrong' reasons
- there was uncertainty about whether it was 'normal' to get drunk before you get off with somebody, with one commenting that "it shouldn't be, but is on the scene"
- the majority did not think it was 'normal' to take drugs before getting off with somebody
- a clear majority did not think that having sex was more important because it helps you decide whether you are LGBT or not.

Age gaps in relationships were also discussed within the focus group. Some suggested that ten year age gaps were "not morally right", but that that can change as people get older (e.g. a 28 year old in a relationship with a 38 year old was seen to be 'OK'). Similarly, a Year 8 pupil dating a Year 11 pupil was thought to be "a big deal", but they thought that this age difference would matter less as people got older and left school. Issues of consent were also raised, with one suggesting that "if they love each other it's their choice", but that they personally would not want to be in a relationship with "anybody who's gonna die before you".

Within the Pride survey, participants were asked a range of questions connected to DVA in relationships:

- 91% thought it was 'never' OK in a relationship if boyfriends or girlfriends are having an argument and one of them hits the other, whilst 7% thought it was 'sometimes' OK, 1% thought it was 'totally OK', and 1% did not know. For this question, there were statistically significant differences according to the reported ethnicity of respondents. Of those who identified as White

British, 93% said it was 'never' OK, 6% said it was sometimes OK, and 1% did not know. By comparison, of those who did not identify as White British, 71% said it was 'never' OK, 14% said it was 'sometimes' OK, and 14% said it was 'totally OK'.

- 95% thought it was 'never' OK in a relationship if someone's boyfriend or girlfriend pressurises them to do things they do not want to do, whilst 2% thought it was 'sometimes' OK, 1% thought it was 'totally OK', and 2% did not know
- 52% thought it was 'sometimes' OK in a relationship if boyfriends or girlfriends asks to see who their boyfriend or girlfriend has been ringing or texting, whilst 32% thought it was 'never' OK, 2% thought it was 'totally OK', and 13% did not know (figures here and below may not equal 100% due to rounding)
- 65% did not know any LGBT friends who they thought had experienced domestic violence or abuse; 25% did, and 10% did not know
- 79% said they would feel confident to respond if one of their friends talked to them about domestic violence or abuse, whilst 7% would not, and 14% did not know.

Sources of sex and relationships information and support

Pre-Selfies survey respondents were asked where they had previously learned any information about sex and relationships relevant to LGBTQ people. The table below shows the most common answers, ordered by the sources felt to be most useful.

I have learned about sex and relationships relevant to LGBTQ people...	Most common answer
From an LGBT organisation or group	Yes, and it was very useful (x 10)
From a partner or previous relationship/sexual experience	Yes, and it was very useful (x 8)
From a youth worker	Yes, and it was a bit useful (x 9)
From LGBTQ friends	Yes, and it was a bit useful (x 8)
From information I've read, e.g. leaflet, pamphlet, book	Yes, and it was a bit useful (x 8)
From a website	No (x 8)
From straight/heterosexual friends	No (x 8)
From a general health worker, e.g. doctor or nurse	No (x 11)
From a parent or other family member	No (x 11)
From pornography	No (x 11)
From the media, e.g. TV, radio, newspaper, magazine	No (x 11)
At a sexual health or GUM clinic	No (x 13)
From a school nurse	No (x 13)
During school sex and relationships education (SRE)	No (x 15)
From a faith group or leader, e.g. Vicar, Rabbi, Priest, Imam	No (x 15)
From an LGBT helpline	No (x 17)
From a general helpline	No (x 17)
From a tutor at college	No (x 17)
From a school teacher but not in an SRE lesson	No (x 18)

The above table demonstrates that LGBT organisations/groups and previous experience are significant sources of sex and relationships information for LGBTQ youth, alongside (though to a lesser extent) youth workers, LGBTQ friends, and paper-based information. The results also

indicate that there are clear gaps in formal provision provided at school or college, and from mainstream health services such as GPs and sexual health or GUM clinics.

Within the Pride survey, respondents were asked if they had received any information or advice about LGBT relationships at school: 55% said 'nothing at all', whilst 27% said 'a little', 9% said 'a lot', and 9% could not remember. At college, 65% had received 'nothing at all', 20% 'a little', 11% 'a lot', and 4% could not remember. At university, 77% had received 'nothing at all', 13% 'a lot', 8% 'a little', and 3% could not remember. Respondents were also asked about other sources of information or advice about LGBT relationships: 39% had not received any anywhere else, whilst 8% did not know. However, 21% had obtained some information from the internet or media, 15% from family, 9% from a support or youth group, 4% from a Pride event(s), 3% from friends, and 1% from counselling.

Pre-Selfies survey respondents were asked if they had ever sought advice or support about any difficulties in a relationship, and if so how helpful it was.

I have sought advice or support from...	Most common answer
A friend or ex-partner	Yes, and it was a bit helpful (x 10)
An LGBT organisation or group	Yes, and it was very helpful (x 9)
People I don't know online or via social media	No (x 5)
A youth worker	No (x 11)
A counsellor	No (x 12)
A parent or other family member	No (x 13)
A school nurse	No (x 16)
An LGBT helpline	No (x 16)
A teacher or tutor at school or college	No (x 16)
A health worker, e.g. doctor or nurse	No (x 17)
The police	No (x 18)
A faith group or leader, e.g. Vicar, Rabbi, Priest, Imam	No (x 19)
A general helpline	No (x 20)

The above table again stresses the importance of LGBT organisations/groups, friendships and previous experience for LGBTQ. Conversely, it suggests that formal sources of support are not often sought or used for advice, echoing wider evidence about LGBTQ mistrust, for example, of the police and other statutory services (Donovan, 2014; Donovan and Hester, 2014), as well as mainstream health services (Formby, 2011b). These findings support evidence that informal sources of support, such as friends, are more likely to be approached by LGBTQ people about problems in relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014). Nearly everyone thought that school SRE should include more about LGBTQ relationships.

Pride survey respondents were asked if they felt things were not OK in their relationship who they would talk to: 48% said a friend, 37% said a family member, 13% said they would contact an organisation, and 2% said their partner. Overall, 43% did not think there is enough support for people in LGBT relationships who experience domestic violence or abuse; 25% thought there is, and 32% did not know.

When asked where or how they would most like to receive information or advice about sex and relationships relevant to LGBTQ people in the future, the top four responses (from over half of pre-Selfies survey respondents) were:

- at an LGBT organisation venue (x 17)
- at school or college (x 15)
- online (x 14)
- at a youth club or venue (x 12).

When asked who they would most like to receive information or advice about sex and relationships relevant to LGBTQ people from in the future, by far the two most common answers were from an LGBTQ friend or partner and/or from a youth worker. Mirroring topic areas discussed amongst friends (see above), the areas they would most like to see covered in information or advice about sex and relationships relevant to LGBTQ people in the future, were “safe sex”, “how an LGBT relationship works”, “sex education”, “more about domestic violence and abuse”, “abuse in relationships/how to recognise abuse”, “STIs, how to be safe”, “STIs, domestic abuse”.

Within focus group discussions, it was education, information and support related to LGBT sex and relationships that prompted the most animated responses, with participants detailing how they had had to learn for themselves because they had either “missed” their school’s provision of SRE/personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), or because their school had not yet provided any. This speaks to the ‘patchiness’ of current PSHE provision, tied to its non-statutory status (Formby and Clague, forthcoming; Formby and Wolstenholme, 2012). However, there was also a view that even when SRE/PSHE was experienced, it did not mention LGBT people or relationships: “they don’t talk about gays”. Schools were thus branded as “homophobic” because of the lack of relevant teacher input. When the focus group moderator asked if the group therefore had ‘low expectations’ of (SRE) learning at school, this was met with laughter and derision, with participants saying “we don’t expect anything from them”. This had implications for their learning about domestic violence and abuse (DVA), because it was felt that DVA was only ever discussed in a heterosexual context (with only men as perpetrators), if at all. It was thought that messages were simplistic, advising young people ‘don’t do it’ and/or only focusing on physical violence rather than other potential forms of abuse, yet it was suggested that DVA is “relevant to everyone’s life”. A number of the group had personal experience of DVA, either from their own relationships or within their immediate family. Despite this, it was noted that it was sometimes difficult to know what’s “weird” in a relationship.

Non-curriculum/classroom based issues were also raised. Similar to evidence elsewhere (Formby, 2015), there were examples given where ‘words’ had been exchanged between pupils that resulted in LGBT students being told they were ‘starting problems’ by a member of staff. Debs also described how she had wanted to go to the school prom with her then girlfriend but had been told she had to go with a boy; consequently she had not attended at all. There were a minority of more positive experiences, however. One group member said that gay marriage had been mentioned by a teacher in class and that she had been able to do a project on gay discrimination. Another said that some teachers could be “helpful”, but thought that most treated pupils differently once they ‘came out’. That these ‘positive’ cases were notable exceptions rather than the ‘norm’ was clear. The general view was that college was a ‘better’ or ‘easier’ environment in which to be ‘out’ compared with schools.

When asked about alternative learning or sources of support, references were made to 'rule 34' (i.e. "if it exists, there is porn of it"), meaning that some practitioner concerns that porn acts as a source of SRE have some merit. Familiarity with each other's sexual experiences also suggested that they talked amongst themselves, though this may be problematic given the wide age range within some existing groups (see further discussion below). Regarding young LGBTQ people's learning about sex and relationships in the future, a number of potential improvements were put forward. Ivan said that they thought lots of (heterosexual) people would not want to learn about LGBT relationships in school lessons, but that schools could offer 1-1 support for LGBT young people via a counsellor. However, others vocally disagreed and argued that it should be within lessons so that it is available for everyone who may or may not identify as LGBT currently or later in life. They thought this would mean that it would therefore be(come) no "big deal" to include LGBT issues or people in schools: as they argued, "we have to learn about marriage so why not LGBT?".

Views on Selfies

The idea of the Selfies project was met with enthusiasm within the focus group, though there was some apprehension that music tastes varied widely within the group, which could impact upon experiences of the project's approach. There was also a keenness for the project to lead to 'outputs' so that it was not felt to be "pointless".

In summary, though the sample sizes were clearly not large, evidence from young people prior to involvement in Selfies supported existing research in suggesting gaps in current sex and relationships knowledge and provision, and thus the potential benefit of Selfies work.

3. Young people's perspectives following involvement in Selfies

This chapter draws together three sources of data following participants' involvement in Selfies: paper-based evaluation of individual Selfies sessions carried out by Projects Galore, a self-completion survey of participants, and four interviews with project participants. The chapter begins with demographic information about these participants, followed by a combined thematic data analysis.

Individual session evaluation participants

In total, there were 16 individual Selfies workshop evaluation sheet participants, aged 14-20. The age most often reported was 16. Participants identified their gender in various ways, including male (x 5), female (x 4), trans male (x 2), trans female (x 1), and questioning (x 1). Sexual identities reported included gay (x 7), lesbian (x 4), and pansexual (x 2). The majority identified as White, White British or White Irish (x 11), with one participant saying they were mixed race.

Post-Selfies survey participants

Six people completed the post-Selfies survey, aged between 16 and 20. Once again, White British respondents were the most common. Each respondent identified as male, though one had previously identified as trans. Four identified as gay, and two identified as bisexual. No participants identified as disabled. Respondents were employed part-time (x 3), attending school (x 2), employed full-time (x 1), and one was a full-time student (responses were not mutually exclusive, hence add up to 7).

Post-Selfies interview participants

Individual telephone interviews took place with four participants who had been involved in the Selfies project. Ian, Beth, Penny and Lea all shared varying levels of information about themselves. One was aged 19, one was 23, and two were 24. Whilst one was employed, the other three were looking for work and/or involved in volunteer work.

Participant recruitment

Three of the four interview participants had heard about Selfies from a member of Projects Galore staff visiting an existing LGBT group in the area. One had heard about it via word of mouth from friends. It is interesting to note that all the interviewees referred to the project as Projects Galore rather than Selfies. The information they had (or remembered) prior to their involvement varied. Most were aware that the project related to 'healthy relationships' or abuse:

“It was a group based around LGBT friends and I think that it's healthy relationships... that is like an interest of mine... so it was just like talking and whatever and that was of interest to me” (Lea).

However, one was not aware that it was targeted at LGBTQ young people. Had they known this before going, they said they would have been keener to attend:

“During the first session... I found out everyone who was there was LGBT... It would have made me want to go more [had I known that before]” (Penny).

Project strengths

Respondents to the post-Selfies survey were asked to identify the best thing about the project. Responses included: “Being sociable and making friends”; “Doing the show at the end”; “Learning to be more confident in relationship”; “Discussions”; “Learning about relationships”. These comments suggest that participants valued the opportunity to come together and discuss LGBTQ relationships.

When interviewees were asked to identify what they thought were project strengths, participants often identified the project approach, including its informality:

“The way in which it was done, it was very informal, which was nice, it made you feel a lot more comfortable... I don’t have a problem talking to new people anyway, but most of the people who went do have kind of confidence issues and stuff like that, so it was good in that sense” (Ian).

The arts-based methods were also appealing to participants:

“I was given a chance to make stuff which I have never really made before... we made and directed a video and got a chance to direct... which most people had never given me before... It was great... I think it’s a very unique style of teaching through creativity” (Beth)

“How they focused on more different art forms and different things to do... it was just extremely, it was rather more engaging I think” (Lea).

Connected to this, the staff running the Selfies sessions were described in positive terms:

“It was fun to meet some of the people... somebody you can learn a lot from... it was so inspirational being around [them] and being able to learn more from [them]” (Beth).

Participants also praised the location of the sessions:

“I think they organised it wonderfully. I think the venue was nice, I think the food and stuff you got was nice” (Ian)

“I would say that the location was perfect” (Beth)

“The venue was really nice, I liked that” (Lea).

The individual session evaluation also asked people what they thought was good about the session. Responses included specific comments on the comic-based and drama work, as well as more general feedback:

“General atmosphere; younger members taking part; constructive feeling of a productive outcome”

“I enjoyed being creative, and being given a sort of control over the work”

“Very informing and productive”

“It was fun and interesting”.

It was clear that the drama-based work had influenced some participants’ opinions:

“We acted out and [were] able to see different views on situations”.

In addition, the individual session evaluation asked people how effective the workshop leaders were. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 labelled ‘a lot’), the majority of respondents were positive (1 scored leaders a 3, 3 scored them a 4, and 10 scored them a 5).

Project weaknesses

Interviewees were also asked to identify potential weaknesses in the project. Whilst most were largely positive, they all said that project recruitment and retention could have been more successful:

“The only sad thing about the entire thing was that the attendance was terrible, like it was pretty tragic... from the three or four days that I’ve done... it wasn’t tremendous, which is a shame... I think it was the young people really” (Ian)

“It was usually just me and [one other person] though most of the time” (Beth)

“It would be nice if there were more people there... the whole thing is sort of a bit limited... I think it could be better advertised... It was just by sheer chance that I heard about it” (Penny)

“There never seems to be that many people there... that’s the main problem we have... there never really seems to be that many people involved” (Lea).

It is interesting to note the young people’s concerns about low attendance, given practitioner discussions (below) about more impactful work being possible in smaller groups.

One person also said that the informality, which they had identified as positive, could be viewed as a weakness in relation to the subject matter, and the potential need for more structure:

“The work itself could sometimes be quite relaxed and not specific enough... it was more in conversation... some of the stuff, it should have been more kind of, this is what you should do from this and blah de blah de blah... Not all of it, because I think some of it worked, but some of it was just a bit too relaxed... because the reason of the training was domestic violence and abuse, for some of that I would have liked to have seen a more, regimented would be too strong a word, but more of a formulated kind of, this is what this is, this is what that is, and stuff like that... there were some parts which I think are too sensitive to just casually talk about” (Ian).

Other feedback was more personal:

“The short comedy sketch things... it wasn’t something I enjoyed, but there were people who did... it was kind of two hours long and the sketch was about 10 seconds long!” (Penny).

When post-Selfies survey respondents were asked to say what was the worst thing about the project only two people identified anything, which were “Repetition of activity”, and “Doing same task multiple times”.

One shared uncertainty among interviewees concerned the final ‘products’ produced, and whether/how they would be able to access these.

Project focus and content

The focus of the project was explored within participant interviews. Most were positive about this, and even where they said they had known some of the information provided before, they felt it was a useful ‘refresher’:

“A lot of the things I’ve done are kind of repeats of what you hear before... but I feel I would do it again because I think it’s valuable stuff and I think... it kind of keeps you refreshed on what’s current... certain things change, you know” (Ian).

Whilst Ian was clear about the value of, and need for, Selfies information, Penny appeared more confused about the content that had been covered:

“As well as domestic violence and abuse... alongside that what they did was consent and... that’s vitally important, I think, because a lot of people – who maybe they’re just new out or they haven’t come out – you know, when someone offers you some sort of attention that you aren’t getting, then it’s so easy to fall into that trap of, well I’ll just say yes, even if they feel uncomfortable, because of some sort of closeness. I mean it happens with all people, but I think it definitely happens more so in the LGBT community because there’s more chance of confidence to be low because some of them might not be out” (Ian)

“LGBT friendship wasn’t talked about that much but being LGBT was... There was nothing in the activities that we did that actually specifically touched on LGBT stuff, although it did sort of come up naturally... I think that [project] could be adapted to... be focused on relationships. That would probably be quite useful... sexual relationships” (Penny).

Though it may be of some concern that Penny was not clear on the purpose of the Selfies project, at the same time it is likely to be testament to the skills of Selfies workers that she felt LGBT-related content came up ‘naturally’, given that this was actually the focus of the work. By contrast, when asked, the majority (five out of six) of post-Selfies survey respondents were clear what the Selfies project was about.

Project methods and approach

The individual Selfies session evaluation asked participants if they found things easy to understand. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 labelled ‘a lot’), the majority of respondents were positive (1 scored the session 3, 3 scored the session a 4, and 9 scored it 5).

Within the interviews, the project approach was also explored and identified as positive:

“I think that exploring the scenario the way that they did was pretty unique” (Beth).

This had been particularly helpful for those with personal experiences that they were still ‘processing’:

“I was in an abusive relationship a couple of years ago and that exercise kind of gave me more insight in to how I got in to it... and someone actually said that I was too nice” (Penny).

In addition, the arts-based methods were enjoyed:

“It was a good chance to flex my creative muscles... I am not especially creative but I guess I did some stuff that was pretty cool, that I wouldn’t have thought I was able to do... watching someone create something, I guess, you can kind of learn a lot about it... and that was kind of interesting to see” (Penny)

“I went to like art college and stuff and I have some background in a few of the arts. I was hoping to get back in to it with them... It was a good experience for me to do things that I hadn’t in a long time, or something I hadn’t quite done before” (Lea).

Project impacts

It appeared difficult for participants to identify project impacts, which in part may be because the approach of the project meant it was experienced more informally. Alternatively, participant confidence levels may have influenced their ability to identify change in themselves, suggesting that staff perspectives are also important (see Chapter 4). Project impacts were therefore more likely to be identified in relation to having fun or enjoying the arts methods, rather than linked to the content or any ‘soft’ outcomes such as confidence. One participant thought that although it had less impact on him, it would have been useful for others:

“There wasn’t lots of new things [for me]... that’s because... I’ve grown up doing stuff like that and I’ve grown up with like events in my life that I kind of knew about that already... However I think a lot of them will have learnt something... in terms of, say, noticing things in other people... we can go out and say, well that’s potentially a problem, that’s potentially a problem, this is how you say no, this is how you do this” (Ian).

Another also felt the project had impacted upon their friendships:

“I think it [Selfies] fostered some kind of understanding between different aspects of the LGBT community, and in terms of fostering or supporting healthy LGBT friendship I did get to know a bit someone there... one of the other people who I met there, I see him occasionally and we are acquaintances... and one of the friends I went with, I got to know him a lot better since then... we have become a lot closer” (Penny).

Post-Selfies survey respondents were asked did they think they had learned anything useful from taking part. All six felt they had, and identified this in various ways: “The importance of friendship”;

“About controlling relationships”; “I’m not in a controlling DV relationship anymore”; “To be more patient”; “Importance of friendship”; “Communication is important”. As most of these comments concern friendships, relationships, and related skills, it seems that Selfies has been useful to these participants in the ways in which it was intended. That said, within the individual session evaluation, content was not always thought to be new to participants. On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 labelled ‘nothing’), 1 scored the content a 1, 2 scored it 2, 5 scored it 3, 5 scored it 4, and 1 scored it 5 (‘a lot’). When asked if there was anything they were going to do or change as a result of taking part in the session, a number of responses related to the arts-based methods, for example that they might draw more after the comics work. Comments also related to their level of participation, which may suggest that at least initially the work was a source of anxiety to some:

“I will probably try to be more involved from the beginning”

“Remember more things to say”

“Take part and not worry too much about what happens”

“Maybe take part and not worry about how stupid I look”.

Some comments also concerned ‘soft’ skills more generally:

“Be more confident around small groups (or try anyway)”.

When they were asked to finish the sentence ‘Taking part in the workshop has made me feel...’, responses mostly related to self-confidence, though some also concerned the specific arts-based activities. In addition, some identified impacts on their knowledge levels:

“Like I’d be more prepared to deal with relationship problems, and to advise on them”

“More enlightened on the forms of domestic violence and how it works”.

Most said that they found the content of the workshop useful to their everyday life: 3 scored it 3, 8 scored it 4, and 3 scored it 5 (‘a lot’). When asked if the workshop had given them any specific ideas to follow up, the majority (9) said no, but 5 positive responses related either to the comic work, or to relationships:

“Relationship – make sure I’m not a bitch”.

Though not everybody was able to identify discernible impacts, interviewees were clear that they had enjoyed the project:

“With Projects Galore, these interesting projects, you are attempting like media, which I have never tried before, really enjoyable projects like that, and it has made me want to keep coming back and it made me sorry when it was all over” (Beth)

“I did like what it set out to do and... it was always a good experience... [There is] nothing quite like what they did... I don’t know if I learnt anything new but I really enjoyed what we were doing and I can definitely see how it could be helpful to people who are perhaps

younger... I would say it was more in-depth about what I already knew, at least knew vaguely” (Lea).

Overall, five out of six post-Selfies survey respondents also said they had enjoyed taking part (one did not know).

SRE and other service provision

Within the interviews, it became clear that Selfies was valued in a context where other LGBT-related provision was lacking:

“Some in South Tyneside have no provision at all... I certainly think there is a place for LGBT youth groups or just LGBT groups in general because it is a place to find likeminded people, share some of their stories and be in a space with people who are like you, meet people like you, because often when you’re younger you don’t find people who are like you, you find no one, so they’ll always be valuable” (Ian).

In particular, the lack of school-based LGBT-inclusive SRE was identified as problematic:

“I think you should learn about it at primary and I think you should certainly learn about it in secondary school. I think you reinforce it from when they’re young... then they’ve had more of a scope for it when they get to secondary school... So many people are scared to say so many things... [but] you need to be a lot more open about this, it’s a natural thing and kids will ask... I blame the government because the government will not put it [SRE] in, they will not reinforce it, they will not make it a big priority... Legally we’re only meant to do it once every key stage, which is tragic, but in terms of LGBT-related things, that’s even worse, it’s barely mentioned... it’s totally neglected” (Ian).

Others also identified a need for SRE post-school:

“I think that a lot of people could do with a refresher course that is maybe more engaging than like a school classroom, and also because what you do learn at school is extremely limited... It is very traditional and exclusive, like they don’t really cover things that could happen to everyone... A lot of it seems unnecessarily gendered towards the heterosexual perspective” (Lea).

Future planning

Looking towards the future, interviewees identified a range of suggestions for Selfies work:

“The only thing I would tweak is to make sure to try hard and try and get, add a bit of extra work around it... Like we were supposed to meet up around about this time... for them to see the final pieces... [but] we haven’t had a get together yet and it would be nice” (Beth)

“Try and have it on a bit of a larger scale... something a lot more broader and bigger” (Ian).

Others also wished that they could be more involved in the future:

“I think that they did everything really well to be honest... all the work that I have done at Projects Galore was really fun and enjoyable and I hope that eventually I will get to do some of it again” (Beth).

Just two post-Selfies survey respondents identified suggestions for how they thought it could have been more useful, through the provision of “More information on DV”, and a “Focus on different situations”.

In the individual sessions evaluation people identified what could have been better, but mostly this related to the arts-based activities specifically, rather than more general or content-related feedback, for example:

“[In] my comics I tried to do too much”.

However, some people did give feedback that could be considered in future working:

“It was kinda pressurey”

“The session could have been longer”

“Maybe find a system where everyone gets to speak”.

Some also answered the question in relation to themselves, rather than the project:

“Being able to remember some stuff”

“Me stop being shy”.

When specifically asked if they came to another session what would they change, suggestions echoed interviewees’ feedback about recruitment:

“Get more people involved”.

In addition, people also suggested:

“Make the sessions less of the games with movement”

“I would make it longer, and maybe with more acting and creating characters within it”.

When asked what should happen next or in future sessions, most responses related to more drama activities, character development, and/or switching roles.

Overall, it is clear that Selfies was valued both for its methods and approach, and for its content/the subject matter it dealt with. However, there were some concerns about recruitment and attendance that could perhaps be considered in future planning.

4. Practitioner reflections on Selfies

In total, five practitioners were formally interviewed as part of the evaluation, with one additional staff member's perspectives noted and included but not using the same question prompts. Data from these six research encounters are documented below, and include a variety of perspectives, including two 'core' Projects Galore staff members, two artists employed to help deliver Selfies, and two existing group youth workers involved in Selfies work.

Approaches to participant recruitment

Interviewees were asked to comment on the 'routes' to young people that had been deployed in the course of establishing the project. Initially, Selfies had accessed existing groups of young people. This was thought to have advantages and disadvantages. The benefits were often connected to the 'ease' of this way of working:

"I think it would be hard to do it without using an existing group and I think that it worked really well for us [because of existing relationships]" (Jane)

"I'm not sure it would have worked if you attempted to put groups together specifically for that purpose because where on earth would they have come from? ...Trying to select LGBT young people who have a history of or are going through sexual exploitation would be really hard because they don't appear in sexual exploitation services very often... If you had gone through our own services and just tried to select people that were using LGBT services that have that history then you would have had a group that came from all over the region and getting them together would have been impossible... It's been proven plenty of times that exploitation and domestic abuse are at least as relevant to LGBT young people, if not more so, and that bit more hidden, and therefore doing work around it within specific groups is the way to do it, because it's not anywhere else" (Caron)

"Having that group there where they go every week was a blessing because they didn't have an opportunity to run away from it... Fear of the unknown for young people is, well just for people in general, is a massive thing isn't it?" (Liam).

However, a number of issues were also raised with regard to this approach. This included the potential difficulty that young people did not attend the existing group to access Selfies, and therefore may have been less engaged than a group established specifically for the project:

"Because they've come together for a completely different purpose other than [Selfies]... those who didn't feel artistic or didn't have confidence... didn't really want to engage beyond having the discussions" (Caron).

Partly for this reason, between the first and second round of Selfies, the project changed tactics and began to recruit independently of existing groups, particularly where these groups did not have designated youth workers available to support Selfies delivery. In the current climate of 'austerity', staffing shortages thus impacted upon Selfies set-up procedures, and subsequent delivery:

"It was difficult getting in there [an existing youth group] from the point of view they had problems with staffing and it was difficult to pin down the youth worker, but I did do that, but

that took a lot [of time]... instead of relying on emails I telephoned quite a lot and turned up!” (Simon).

In addition, the wide range of different young people (for example regarding age, health, and education levels) participating in these groups was identified as a challenge for Selfies:

“When you’re getting [young people] into the 20s and things... some of them were at school, some of them are working, some of them have got mental health issues, you know, so it’s quite a different group to get together... The youngest was 16 and the oldest was 24... it’s [a] huge [range]” (Simon).

This potential complexity has been acknowledged previously in relation to support linked to child sexual exploitation. As Donovan (2014: 5) commented, “because of the scarcity of this provision and the resources underpinning it, LGBTQ groups often attract a wide range of young LGBTQ people some of whom face a range of complex needs”. This can be illustrated with regard to Selfies, which attracted young people aged under and over 18, as well as those with a variety of health and/or learning needs.

As mentioned previously, later on in the project Selfies explored the potential for establishing specific groups for the work. Whilst these were not as large as the existing groups, for this reason it was suggested that they were able to offer more ‘intimate’ work with the young people involved:

“We had four who took part and... that was excellent, it really worked out well. It was really quite intimate work that we could do... in a small group... The kids that we had as well have other more complex issues going on apart from going through their [gender] transition. One of them has autism and another one of them had... some behavioural issues and stuff. In a bigger group they would have got a lot less and would have been unable to really get to the potential that we did” (Simon)

“I think that this particular group, it was small, there was definitely a big amount of trust and there is a huge comfort level there... I think it was a successful atmosphere because... [Selfies worker] was running the group and he had a great rapport with them... When I walk in to a group, if the leader, the facilitator, of that group has a good rapport with everybody and has known them for a while it makes all the difference in the world and that was definitely what is going on here. I don’t know how long they’ve been meeting but it seems like possibly quite a while” (Olivia).

There is an interesting contrast here between larger groups, which are commonly viewed as more ‘successful’, and smaller groups, which may actually be able to do more intensive work with young people (when supported by skilled staff, as Olivia alluded to). The markers of a group’s success may therefore be more complex than they appear; that is, should a high attendance be valued, or the level of ‘successful’ impact on a smaller number of people? Not unrelated to this, it was thought that whilst establishing new groups took time and money, it could reach some young people who were more attracted to specific activities than more generalised LGBTQ youth groups:

“We had one new person who joined that group who hadn’t joined any other groups through word of mouth from one of the others, and [they were] a young trans person... just getting

comfortable with a name change and it was a really big step for [them]... We were privileged to be in the position to be there and support [them] on that” (Simon).

Understanding the needs of young people, and the potential role of Selfies

In conversation about approaches Selfies had adopted, there was often discussion about three separate but interlinking needs that LGBTQ young people might have that Selfies could, or was, addressing. Put simply, these were: broad LGBTQ youth work; ‘general’ LGBTQ SRE; LGBTQ SRE specifically focussed on DVA and/or child sexual exploitation (CSE). Selfies was thus, at least partly, fulfilling a variety of (albeit not necessarily intended) functions. These needs were identified in a context of youth service provision gaps and/or LGBTQ invisibility, echoing young people’s perceptions of school (see above, and Formby, 2011a):

“For a lot of young LGBT people they are not well supported and well cared for and able to access the same opportunities, and they are struggling with kind of homophobia and bullying and difficulties at home and a huge number of issues, and there needs to be good quality support around that... We need more LGBT youth workers... In most mainstream youth work there is no mention... [of] sex with anyone of the same gender... [even] amongst the workers, the youth workers, that are very good at doing sex and relationship education with heterosexual young people... I would say that 90% of mainstream youth work doesn’t ever mention the possibility that young people might have sex with someone of the same gender... they are just as bad [as teachers]... It’s really shocking” (Jane)

“Of course within your general youth work... I found that generic workers couldn’t even deal with LGB young people within their group, it wasn’t really very talked about and generally speaking they would say, ‘well I don’t know whether I’ve got any’, and I’m like, ‘how can you not know... Do they not trust you enough to tell you?’” (Caron).

In a context where “experienced LGBTQ youth workers move on to more secure employment... [meaning] that replacement staff have to ‘start again’ in their development of skills and knowledge about working with LGBTQ young people generally and specifically in relation to CSE” (Donovan, 2014: 5), Selfies may have been filling more than the gaps it originally intended to address. Equally, the project may have worked with young people who had complex needs that impacted upon their ability (but not necessarily need) to participate:

“I felt that they [the young people] really tried to put effort in to it. They were certainly capable, but I felt like there was one person in particular that was kind of depressed... They enjoyed it in a way that some people who have a lot of issues going on do, you know” (Olivia).

Selfies content

Connected to the above, there were a range of expressed opinions about the content of Selfies. Generally, there appeared to be a consensus that it should not be explicitly described as being about DVA or CSE as it was felt this would be off-putting to young people:

“At the beginning [Selfies staff member] didn’t go in to huge detail about promoting healthy relationships, looking at abusive relationships, partly because I think it would have totally put

them off... I think it [being explicit about domestic violence] doesn't help sometimes... I think that young people had enough of an idea and they knew it was about relationships... I think that they know about domestic violence but I don't think that they would relate it to them... I think the words aren't quite right for young people" (Jane)

"[I] went to the [existing] group... and they weren't keen on me coming in doing stuff on domestic abuse and violence. They had felt that it had been overdone recently and they were a bit sick of it from that angle... That was the young people *and* the staff I would say... I think it's... more beneficial going in and looking from the positive side, you know, from saying that we're going to look at relationships and start really sort of going back a step in some ways. Then as we look at positive relationships and friendships, we look at the negative sides of that as well and that brings up the DVA stuff... Rather than going in with DVA... I just think it's a more natural way to do it and they're not frightened off by it... I think had I gone in with friendship and positive relationships at the very beginning, I might have... convinced more people to do the work" (Simon, original emphasis).

Facilitating discussion about broader relationship issues was viewed as positive, but also potentially challenging:

"One of the things that comes up... it's always come up with this group and that is that there is a lot of them that don't see any issues about being involved with someone who is 20 years older than you if you're 18 or something"² (Jane)

"I think in some of the later sessions some of the young people were kind of a little bit... 'not *more* about relationships!'" (Jane, original emphasis).

Whilst raising awareness was sometimes viewed as challenging by staff, this in itself evidenced a certain amount of unmet need (and/or young people's low expectations within relationships):

"As a vehicle for discussing kind of positives and negatives of relationships it [Selfies] has worked quite well... We haven't done too much in-depth on sexual exploitation and domestic violence... for a lot of the group, it was kind of beyond what they could imagine" (Caron).

Selfies delivery

Whilst the content or 'marketing' of Selfies was contemplated, the delivery approach was also assessed, and generally viewed positively. One of the reasons for this was because specific activities could divert attention from young people's professed disinterest in relationships, thereby helping to reignite levels of engagement and/or enthusiasm:

"[When] we actually did [a particular activity]... it was kind of moving on... There was quite a variety of ways of looking at things and I think that it [the overall approach] probably did have an effect... I think that you can't really do enough talking about relationships and talking about how to behave in relationships... it was a really positive way of doing it and a positive way of everybody being involved in it" (Jane).

² It is perhaps interesting to note that this was not documented within the pre- and post-Selfies data collection with young people.

Linked to the range of young people involved (discussed above), the need for flexibility within Selfies delivery was highlighted:

“We have a broad group of young people with different abilities and capacities and different age groups as well... It kind of... moved in different directions depending on what the young people, what their understanding was” (Caron).

On the whole, the project and staff were praised for working flexibly in this way, and being open/able to be led by young people’s interest and/or level of capability:

“From my point of view as [an existing youth group] worker, the whole thing worked well because... it went at their [young people’s] pace, it was something they were interested in... It not only fitted in with the group, it fitted in with our other stuff going on with the group, so it was kind of flexible and appropriate really... It was [really good] because they didn’t do [that activity] every single time... It was quite varied... It sort of fitted in with what they [young people] had enjoyed” (Jane).

The project was also commended for utilising a suitable venue that supported the work through facilitating a ‘safe’ atmosphere:

“The actual building it took place in was great. It seemed like a lot of various community groups were getting together and there was a real sense of, it was a safe and very artsy feeling in the building, and it was in the middle of Newcastle, so it was a really good location” (Olivia).

Specifically, arts-based methods were thought to offer young people a way of expressing their feelings:

“I think the work we were doing was offering them a way of expressing their feelings, which are all sometimes quite difficult to do... I think it’s much easier to engage people when you’re offering something exciting and visual” (Simon)

“I thought it worked really well... I think it [drama] is a way in which you can have discussions about any problems or any issues and talk open and free about something and not realise that actually you’re talking about yourself. So if we say ‘create a character’, your natural reaction is to create a character who is similar to yourself and then you can project your own images and then you can ask questions without feeling embarrassed about you asking that question... That’s the great thing about forum theatre... that it actually helps people engage with their own communication skills because... you have to put yourself in someone else’s position and then you can empathise and then you say ‘well actually I wouldn’t do it like that’, and that may be the first time they’ve thought about how they would deal with these situations” (Liam)

“I think because I work with a very visual media that it lends itself to... getting at something very intense, so if someone allows themselves, if someone has control over their image and it’s part of the process of producing... it’s a safe but exciting way to explore your image, your body issues” (Olivia).

Not letting the method rule the project was also seen as important, so that 'process' rather than 'product' was kept at the forefront:

"I think that it is really important for the focus to be on the... youth work rather than the [art]. Sometimes you can get people that get so caught up with the product... Obviously if you're doing that you do get some kind of product usually at the end of it and you want that to be good because the young people want it to be good, but sometimes that can squash what the young people are actually saying or doing... I think that we need good workers... more focused on the work than they are on the product" (Jane).

However, working towards a 'product' might also be a way of maintaining young people's interest and engagement, though there was not always certainty about how or whether Selfies 'products' would obtain a wider audience/use:

"I think that it's quite good to have a product, partly because young people are pleased with that, and it's a good experience for them to be involved with something from the beginning" (Jane).

Perceived impacts

Overall, the project was said to have engaged young people:

"I think that they [the young people] did really enjoy it and I think that it also made them think and it sparked up discussions and it wasn't like pulling teeth... actually everybody in the group participated... it was really good for the group generally, no matter what it was about" (Jane)

"I thought it was extremely positive. I thought it was trying to get the young people to communicate, raise their self-esteem... It was seeming successful. People were definitely feeling positive during the sessions" (Olivia)

"They were very engaged... They've done a lot of work outside of the group in their own time to put things together... even the ones who weren't interested in doing the [art] got involved in the discussions that were held in the early stages... and gave their points of view and some personal stories... I think it opened a few eyes... I think they all realise that some friendships or some relationships that are ongoing or quite new actually were pretty negative. It's enabled them to think about what they might do about that" (Caron).

The activities were thought to have opened up useful, varied, and sometimes unexpected, discussions:

"Interesting things came out actually in the conversations and the [doing] of it... actually some young people were saying... 'well I've never had sex, I've never even been kissed'... There was a lot of conversations that came out of that that were much more kind of ambivalent around sex and relationships, and there were conversations... about relationships that people were in, so I think that it was really positive... I would say that it has

had an impact... Even if sometimes they thought we were probably making out it was a bit more serious than it was... I think it will have sunk in” (Jane)

“We do have some young people in our group, the ones who were talking about friendships mainly, who are kind of out as asexual. So they’re not having relationships, they don’t want one, and they don’t feel that they’re necessarily ever going to have one. At first it was ‘well that’s not appropriate to me’ and then once we went in to actually friendship is a relationship too and your relationship with your family is also a relationship and these positive and negative aspects can be seen in all sorts of relationships, then the penny dropped and it was kind of ‘ah, you’re right, I actually have had a friend like that’, and then it kind of hit home... It [Selfies] just made sure that it [relationships] was on the agenda really and that it happened... The positive discussions happened more often than they would have done” (Caron)

“They [young people] were given an opportunity to talk about something and speak to people and speak to adults openly and freely about some of these subjects, about being in relationships or making friends, which I think in this country is a bit of a taboo, to talk about those subjects within a group setting... It’s the stuff that you talk to your friend one-on-one and you don’t want to tell anyone else and every conversation is sort of filled with either shame or sort of taboo-ness... Where[as] I think the more you encourage these young people to speak openly and freely and see that we’re all the same and we all have these fears and we all have these situations, that’s the best way to deal with it, by talking and communicating” (Liam).

Implications and issues for future practice

In the course of the evaluation a range of issues were identified in relation to future working. Some of these specifically related to Selfies and similar work, whilst some referred to broader policy and practice regarding young people.

With regard to recruiting young people, there was a desire to try and extend the number of young people involved in Selfies work:

“There’s a lot of kids out there that still are not being reached or given the opportunity... I think there’s potential for outreach outside of established groups... I think going into the established groups and doing work’s all very well [but] I think it would be more interesting to try and get more of those people splintering off from there” (Simon)

“You get the feeling that there is more young people out there who might benefit... Possibly through the university... or maybe [the] NHS” (Olivia).

Similarly, there was a case made for extending the length of time Selfies worked with young people:

“That’s always a thing I find with these sorts of groups is that you get something like six weeks or eight weeks or whatever it is and the two or three weeks at the beginning is just getting to know everyone really isn’t it, and then by the time you start coming up with something then you’ve only got two weeks left to put it together. So I would always say length of time... we can always improve on” (Liam)

“It would have been nice to do a longer project, assuming that they had the interest to do it” (Olivia).

Often people raised the subject of schools, and how they could – and should – include LGBTQ pupils more within curriculum delivery. In particular, the need for improved SRE suitable for all young people was emphasised:

“[A young person] was talking about her experience of why it was important to talk about LGBT issues in schools and she was saying that she has got absolutely no sex or relationship education that referred to lesbians... she said she didn’t have a clue about lesbian relationships and when she was in a relationship she didn’t really know how to go on... she felt really let down and she felt really ignorant... She said she just felt that she should have got more, much more, and she didn’t know anything about lesbian sexual health and she didn’t know anything about how, just how relationships go, and particularly around the dynamics in lesbian relationships and those kinds of things... Most teachers can’t even say the word lesbian, so they’re not going to be able to talk about gay or lesbian sex” (Jane)

“Despite the fact that most of the local authorities will tell you that LGBT relationships are covered within their own PSHE and sex education policy, the amount of young people that come through all our groups and say it was never mentioned or it was mentioned in such a way... ‘there are gay people, by the way’, and that was it... Neither the relationship element, nor the sexual health element, is done properly or in any sort of depth... not even being able to discuss gay relationships, gay friendships, you know, friendships with a gay person, is pretty poor really” (Caron).

With Selfies and other work addressing these gaps, there was some concern in case that linked particular issues with particular groups in some people’s minds:

“Sexual exploitation and domestic abuse aren’t generally spoken about in schools... so going in to a school with a bunch of LGBT peer mentors talking about sexual exploitation to a general pupil populous does link in their minds, ‘sexual exploitation, that’s an LGBT thing’... If you’re going to do a general audience in schools, you would probably need to couch it in terms of general sexual exploitation with a little bit of LGBT, or a little bit of ‘this can happen to boys too’, and kind of just push the boundaries a bit” (Caron).

Other gaps, or areas for further work, were also identified, including with trans young people/on (trans)gender issues, and more work related to bodies and relationships:

“Quite often, within LGBT circles, trans young people can be kind of the odd one out... Not always, sometimes they’re just accepted, ‘that’s my friend and they happen to be trans’... Transgender issues are something that people don’t have a good grasp of, so they tend to be frightened to talk about it. They are very quick to pick up the phone and pass them on to somebody else really... [A] youth group like the one that we’ve got... is always going to fulfil the needs for them to experience affirmation, to socialise with other people going through the same kinds of things. That is always going to be the best place for that. But... we need other people to be able to deal with some of the trans young people’s issues like anxiety, agoraphobia or depression” (Caron)

“Trying to look at how we deal with... gender and those kinds of things, so that would be the new thing I would think, trying to do some work with the group looking at gender without it being, you know, [only] trans young people... [and] I think that it would be really useful to do work around what relationships might look like... Moving on from this project we did... a session with the young people about things that could be... I can't remember the words that we used but it was basically a load of sensual things that weren't sex... Maybe you could do that with photography... There are lots of things, but those kinds of issues I think partly because I think that a lot of young people actually feel frightened and not positive about their bodies or about sex” (Jane).

Caron's comments above echo previous research which found that “mainstream agencies refer young LGBTQ people to LGBTQ youth work projects because of their sexuality and/or gender identity without considering whether and how they could address their needs” (Donovan, 2014: 5). At the same time, the importance of specific LGBT youth work, and LGBT role models, was also raised:

“The youth workers who are doing the LGBT work who I was working with... were not LGBT... so that's kind of missing a bit... People don't have to be LGBT to be good LGBT youth workers, don't get me wrong, but there needs to be some element of that somewhere, you know. I think that's lacking a bit... As a gay man myself obviously [I] was a role model in some ways... I think we're offering people life skills... Those rites of passage that straight people take for granted are denied to LGBT people at that age, you know. We're kind of there to support that and we can do that through art” (Simon).

The comments and suggestions offered above did not mean that Selfies was not praised in its present form, however:

“I wouldn't make any suggestions for anything different... I think it's been so organic and kind of empowering for the young people that to keep doing that really” (Caron).

In short, practitioners were positive about their experiences of Selfies, and the impact they thought it had had on the young people involved. Their insights also offered avenues to explore in future project delivery, identifying complexities regarding recruitment, content and delivery, all of which point to the potential value of continuing Selfies work.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This section draws together evaluation data to highlight key messages, with implications for future working.

Across the various sources of data collection with young people, evaluation findings suggest that LGBTQ youth feel strongly about the invisibility of LGBTQ identities within mainstream school and college settings. This may link to the importance they placed upon having LGBTQ friends, which for some were lacking. They specifically identified wanting support related to sex, relationships and coming/being 'out'. This evidences the lack of appropriate SRE provided in schools (and to a certain extent the NHS), but also the pressures that may be placed upon LGBTQ friendships striving to fill this gap. This supports the provision of services to up-skill and build capacity for LGBTQ peer support. The LGBTQ young people who participated in the evaluation often had no expectations of learning about (LGBTQ) sex and relationships from school, and low expectations about intimate relationships. In particular, they identified the lack of role models and (positive) images of LGBTQ relationships in the media and wider society that left many of them unclear about what to expect in a relationship. The fact that even a small number thought it was 'sometimes' or 'totally OK' to hit a partner is testament to this. In this context, the potential value of Selfies work was clear, and participants valued the opportunity to come together and discuss LGBTQ relationships. Where support was lacking elsewhere, LGBTQ young people tended to turn to LGBT organisations and groups, or 'learnt from experience'.

When looking toward the future, LGBTQ youth most often wanted information related to sex and relationships to be provided at an LGBT organisation, school or college, online, and/or at a youth club/venue. When asked *who* they would most like to receive information or advice from, by far the two most common answers were from an LGBTQ friend or partner and/or from a youth worker. The stress on provision from LGBT organisations, groups and youth workers is particularly concerning in a context where youth services and LGBT voluntary sector organisations have both been severely hit by funding cuts. There is a history of research-informed calls for greater funding for LGBT youth work to support "young people to develop and explore their sexualities [and we might add gender identities] in environments that are free from some of the sexual and social pressures of the general scene" (Valentine and Skelton, 2003: 863; see also Juetten and O'Loan, 2007), but in the present climate these are unlikely to be met. The need for work like Selfies therefore becomes clear, particularly where young people called for SRE 'refreshers' post-schooling age (and in a context where colleges and universities were less likely to provide this information). Discussions about youth work may not always consider the demand from/for those in their twenties.

Practitioner perspectives also supported the need for Selfies work, praising what had been delivered so far, but also raising a number of issues that complicated its provision, summarised below.

Recruitment

The evaluation findings indicate that there is no 'easy' way to recruit young people to this kind of work. Whilst going through existing groups may appear to be the most efficient method, this may mean young people are less engaged or 'ready' to undertake the work (having not directly asked for, or signed up to, the project), and can be so varied in age, background, and health or learning needs that this makes the work more difficult. Building capacity in LGBTQ peer support also becomes complex in a context where 'age-appropriate' discussions may be hard to balance in

mixed age groups. In addition, there are questions about what an 'existing group' is, when sometimes it may be run as a drop-in service/space with little staff support on offer to young people. This lack of youth work 'grounding' for some of the Selfies recruits, plus the level and range of some of their needs, suggests that delivery needs to be carefully pitched and managed. In an ideal world, groups would be tailored and not so varied. Establishing new, dedicated Selfies groups may take longer and therefore require more resources, but may facilitate more 'intense'/impactful work, and provide an opportunity to reach young people not accessing services or support elsewhere. However, it should be noted that young people had concerns about low recruitment and attendance, which suggests that the markers of success may not be shared between practitioners and participants. Whichever recruitment routes are explored, it is likely that time and determination will be required on the part of workers, who may also need to consider how to offer or signpost to specialist, 1-1 support if necessary.

Young people's needs

Linked to the above, discussions which took place over the course of the evaluation suggest that future work in this field may need to be mindful of potentially overlapping functions or needs that the project could fulfil/address, which may necessitate clarifying what it seeks to offer. Specifically, thought needs to be given to the provision of broad LGBTQ youth work, 'general' LGBTQ SRE, and LGBTQ SRE specifically focussed on DVA and/or CSE, and the ways in which these can be distinguished and/or simultaneously supported. In the current climate of 'austerity' and shrinking public services able to support LGBTQ young people, it is probable that all three functions may be required. This may include, for example, facilitating affirmation and peer socialising within group work, filling the gaps in mainstream SRE delivery, and attending to some of the specific concerns about DVA and CSE for LGBTQ youth. In addition, some young people may require specialist 1-1 support to help with any emotional issues they may have. This is therefore likely to demand flexibility and responsiveness on the part of workers, who may meet a variety of individual expectations and needs from the young people they work with.

Project content

Following on from consideration of young people's needs, there was a general consensus within the evaluation that Selfies work should not be explicitly described as being about DVA or CSE, as this was felt to be 'off-putting' to young people. Given the lack of available SRE for LGBTQ young people, it is expected that the provision of more generalised SRE content would be useful, which could then lead into more detailed discussions of DVA, CSE, and any other specific issues that young people may raise. There may be a demand for SRE to include broader issues, such as asexuality and/or body image/satisfaction. This relates to the 'starting point' for Selfies. Whilst one might assume that a DVA/CSE focus could build on 'core' SRE building blocks, it is likely that these may be lacking, meaning that Selfies may need to take a step back and provide more fundamental SRE, at least initially. There was also concern that a sole focus on DVA or CSE could suggest that these were problems only associated with LGBTQ relationships or identities, and this should be considered in future delivery planning.

Project delivery

Given the above context, and varied young people with differing needs, work of this kind needs to be flexibly delivered, by staff willing and able to 'follow' young people's interests and capacities. Arts-based methods were thought to offer this flexibility, facilitate engagement, and support young people in expressing their feelings, with evidence from young people to support this belief. In particular, the drama-based activities that utilised scenarios and role play were reported to be useful

by young people, including those who themselves had experienced abuse in the past. One interesting contrast between practitioner and participant perspectives concerned the output of Selfies work. Whilst a youth worker stressed the importance of process over and above the end 'product', young people seemed keen to have a clear focus and 'closure' at the end, which for some had been lacking in the work they had done. Nevertheless, the activities undertaken were thought to have opened up useful, varied, and sometimes unexpected, discussions (for example about asexuality). These point to issues that could be explored in future practice, for instance how to support young people who may not be interested in being, or feeling pressured to become, sexually active.

As Barnardo's have recently acknowledged, "There is little in the way of educational resources or general information that provides advice to LGBTQ young people about what a healthy relationship is" (Fox, 2016: 6). This, together with the evaluation findings, suggests that should Selfies work be continued, it would be fulfilling an identified need, and able to offer variety in both scope and delivery methods according to the needs of the young people recruited. If this was extended to larger groups of young people and/or larger geographical areas (assuming there was not already similar provision in place) it seems this would only be beneficial. The Selfies project therefore makes the case for LGBT youth work within which young people are offered different ways of thinking about their potential for 'safe' and happy sex and relationships. This is particularly important given the ongoing absence of (statutory) LGBT-inclusive SRE. However, whilst everybody valued Selfies, almost everyone simultaneously called for improved school-based SRE. It would seem that there is a consensus that whatever is provided within 'informal' SRE needs to be reinforced and/or supplemented within formal (school-based) SRE.

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