

Body Positivity: An Ally Perspective

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Two of our Mental Health Allies offer their perspective on one of the many events we ran as part of Mental Health Awareness Week.

Every year, MediaCom UK marks Mental Health Awareness Week with a series of events designed to educate and stimulate conversation around mental health. This year, we sought to engage with BDD, or body dysmorphic disorder, in particular.

As with many mental health conditions, BDD often presents as comorbid with depression, self-harm and other eating disorders which drastically impact an individual's quality of life and ability to maintain relationships. As the overarching theme for this year's Mental Health Awareness Week we were keen to hear from some industry leading voices on the projects

that are tackling an issue which has become such a priority, particularly amongst the generation growing up with the Instagram newsfeed as a continual source of comparison, competition and ultimately anxiety.

Our response was to plan a session on body positivity with the help of Claire Sanderson; Editor in Chief of Women's Health magazine, along with Mark Sandford, long-time MediaCom collaborator and founder of the Book of Man. Bringing their unique authority in debating body positivity and the nuance of each gender perspective we had an incredibly insightful session which took in the full scope of the disorder with a real emphasis on providing the tangible tools for reframing the body narrative. Claire provided an overview of Hearst's Project Body Love campaign which represents a commitment from their flagship magazines in avoiding the use of terms that have been shown to frame our unique relationship with our bodies in a negative light. Using Instagram pledges and simple slogans that focus on re-establishing a sense of meaningful present tense connection with our bodies, the summer long campaign will provide coverage across Hearst's bestselling magazines including *Good House Keeping* and *Cosmopolitan*. In changing the way we 'think, feel and do,' Project Body Love is based on insights from leading psychologists, linguists and body confidence experts and shows the pivotal importance of the language we use both when looking in the mirror and when seeking to build self-esteem in our young girls.

Mark spoke of body image expectations from a male perspective and what it means to be an 'average male' in the modern age. Mark and the team at The Book of Man pride themselves on broadcasting stories from real men from all backgrounds, shapes, and sizes in an effort to de-stigmatise what it means to be typically masculine in a society brought up on potentially unrealistic expectations. With 56% of men suffering from a mental health related issue (many of which being forms of body dysmorphia) the session focused particularly on the impact that exposure to social media, pornography and even advertising has on young men today. Mark finished the session with a showcase of some of the incredible work they've been doing at The Book of Man, including events with celebrities sharing their mental health stories, nude galleries to celebrate male individuality or even photoshoots with 'regular' men from the streets, rather than the modelling studios.

With great attendance across all the sessions this year it's incredible to see how far we've come in just a few years of mental health awareness coming to a mainstream audience. Having had our MediaCom Mental Health Ally scheme in place for over 18 months now we're in the privileged position of seeing a new culture of openness developing, with experience and a base level of knowledge spreading through the agency. From a personal note the changes have been subtle but stem from an attitude of always checking in with our mental health on a personal and a collective level. This basic attitude has now led to increased awareness of the scheme and as a result on our team of 6 we now have 3 mental health allies! Mental health has become a subject of conversation in our daily lives and as a result it really feels like some of the stigma is slowly slipping away. We're all excited to see how this will continue to evolve over the coming years and how different the culture will be for future new starters at MediaCom.

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