



Fig 1 Images from the Fair Figure Reference Library

## The Fair Figure Reference Library:

Can teaching with a more representative range of body reference images help students cultivate an open minded and diverse approach to character creation while fostering a greater sense of inclusion for all students in the classroom?

“in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.” – **Maya Angelou**

# Context and positionality



Fig 2 Self portrait (Curtis 2018)

Hello! My name is Jess and I am a white, cis-gendered, non-disabled 53-year-old woman born in the United Kingdom.

I have been a freelance **designer** for 28 years in Europe and the United Kingdom and bring my professional experience to my work.

I also **teach** design practice (part-time) to first- and second-year BA Costume for Design and BA Hair, Make-up and Prosthetics for Performance students at the London College of Fashion, part of the University of the Arts, London.

I acknowledge these education systems and structures afford me unearned privilege. As such, I am committed to improving my understanding and practice, guided by people with lived experiences different than my own. I strive to be aware of my own biases and recognise how these may shape my research.



Fig 3 Students in Session (Curtis 2025)

*“Stating your positionality is an action that demonstrates, publicly, that you are invested in the principles of decolonising research and knowledge production.”* **Homan (2025)**



# Rationale : Identifying the need in industry for diverse representation



Fig 4 – Axis Dance Company( De Silva)

*“From embedding gender equity and anti-racism, to adopting the Social Model of Disability in everything we do, our hope is to achieve greater inclusion in the areas of age, disability, faith, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-economic background. We are the nation’s theatre, and we believe our strength is in being together. This is why we are committed to a National Theatre that is equitable, diverse, and accessible.”*

**The National Theatre : Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Statement (2025)**

*“Viewed together and in the context of funding challenges for UK arts, culture and heritage, as well as a cost-of-living crisis, this report shows that we still have a long way to go to address social inequalities in many parts of the sector.”*

**The Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre’s Arts, Culture and Heritage: Audiences and Workforce, Report (CPE 2024)**

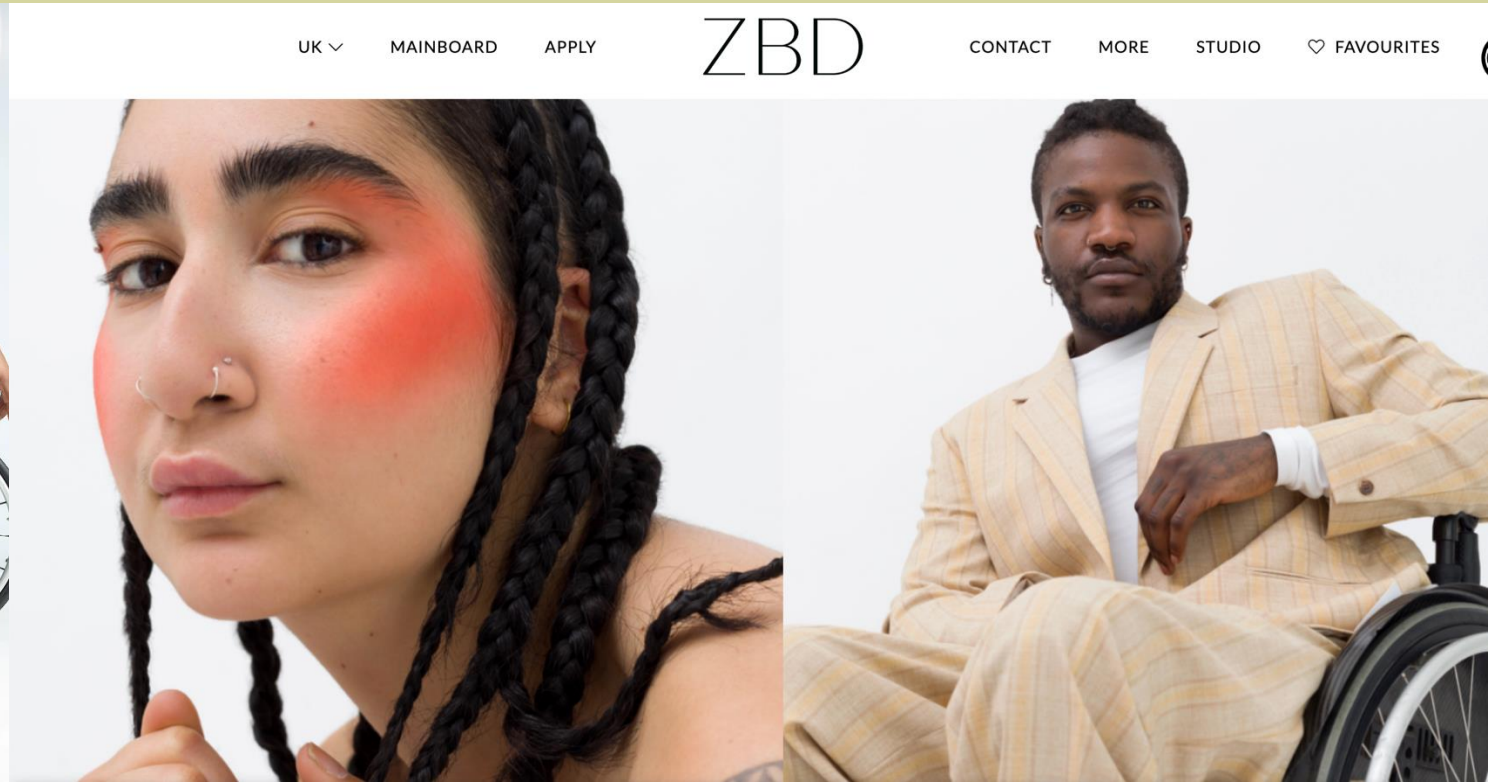
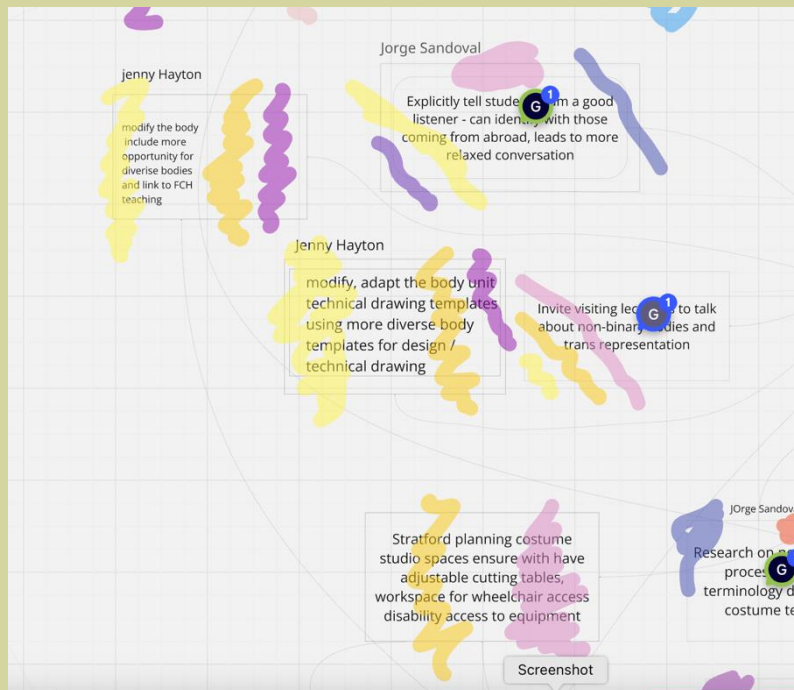


Fig 5 ZBD Talent agency

# Rationale : Identifying the need on my course for diverse teaching resources

Fig 6 Performance Miro board – EDI ( Curtis 2025)



Otherwise a diverse image reference bank could be great- I have always wanted to create an image reference bank for the HMUPP students! Although you probably will have to consider the implications of creating something as literal as that and how its used?- Just reflecting on my experience in that unit trying to create something which wasn't tokenistic or 'othering'.

I feel like as an academic member of staff you will have more success with this than me to embed it into your sessions 😊

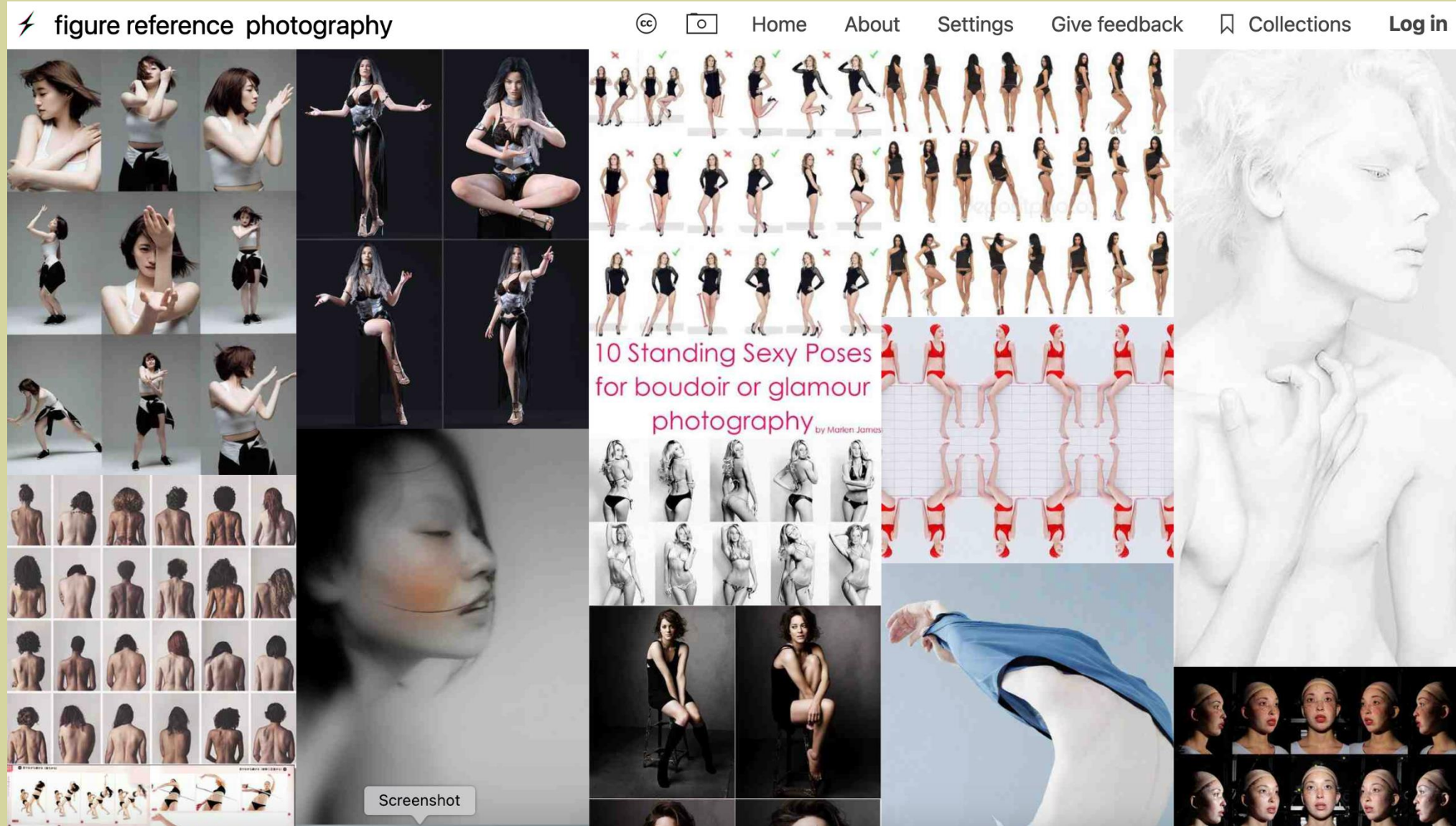
**Lauren Curran - email exchange Wednesday 5/7/2025**

( Curtis 2025)

*“Equality, diversity and inclusion are critical to everything we do at University of the Arts London.”*  
**(UAL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report 2024)**

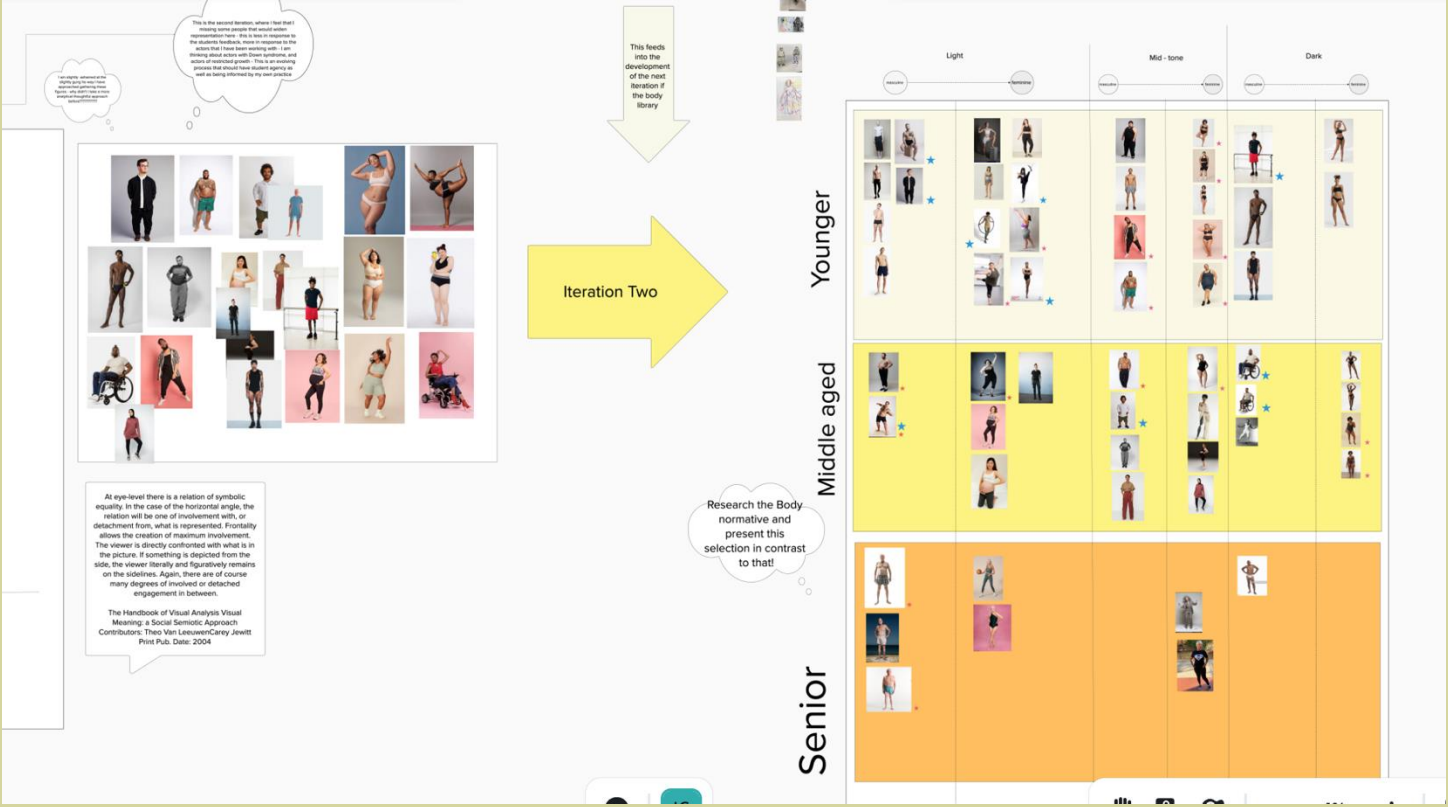
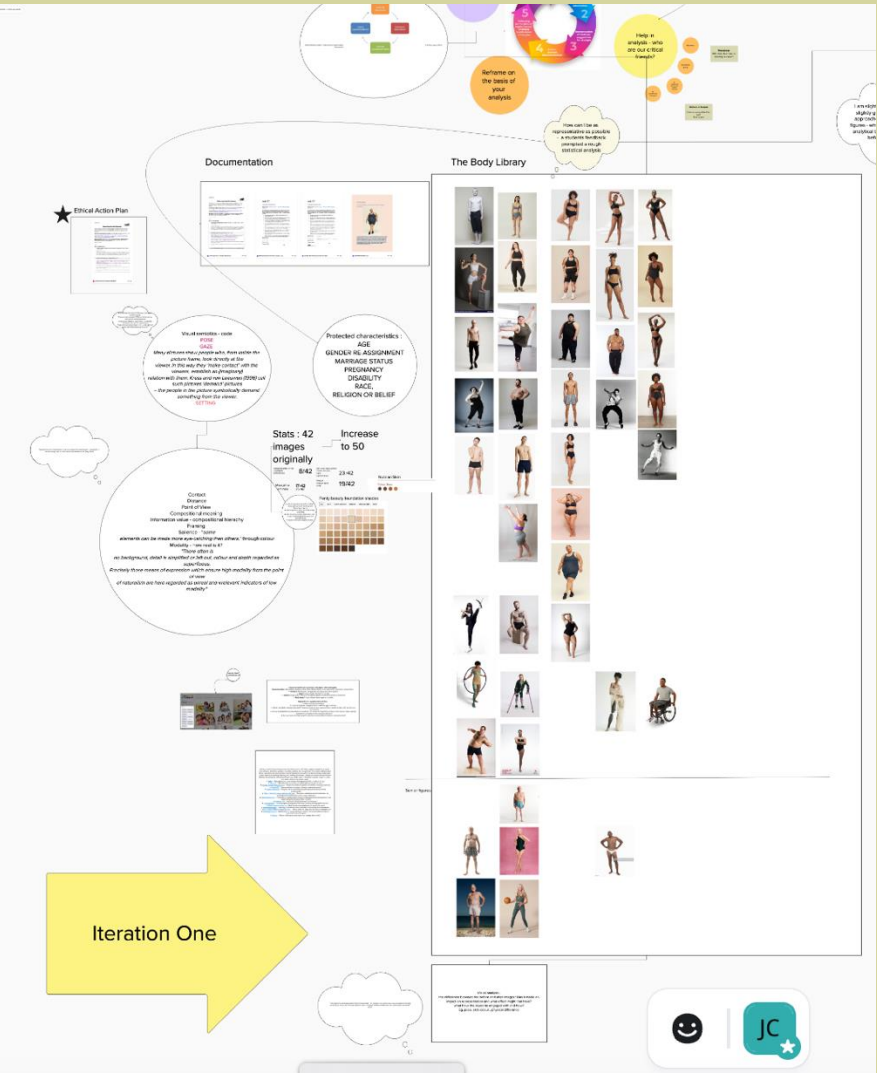


Rationale : Identifying the need for less biased resources



"challenge the bias of the archives and platforms through which you collect images. This will also expand your own design knowledge and aesthetics" ( **Misslin 2025**)

# Making the resource (and remaking it..)



## THE MURAL Board - My research toolbox

Fig 9 /10 Mural board – detail of resource development (Curtis 2025)

# The Fair Figure Reference Library

- A resource that brings a diverse range of actors into the room
- A resource that reflects, supports and inspires open-minded character visualisation
- A resource that can inspire discussions on participants' practitioner identity
- A resource that can prompt discussion around representation in the industry
- A resource that can evolve, co-created by student and staff
- A resource that inspires critical analysis of visual norms
- A resource that evidences and re-enforces an underlying course culture that values all diverse communities

*“Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.” (Gerbner, Gross 1976)*

Fig 11 Example from Fair figure reference library





## Consulting with actor and activist Alex Bulmer



Fig 12 Alex Bulmer being interviewed on Zoom (Curtis 2025)

*" yeah, the ..how hard it is to imagine yourself doing something in a role if you have never witnessed it, experienced it , you know, which is another reason why representation is so important..*

*It's much easier to imagine becoming something if you have seen it exist already"*

**(Bulmer 2025)**



# Workshop One : Participatory Action Research

14 students from 1<sup>st</sup> year BA Costume for Performance



Fig 13 Participation in session October 14th ( Curtis 2025)

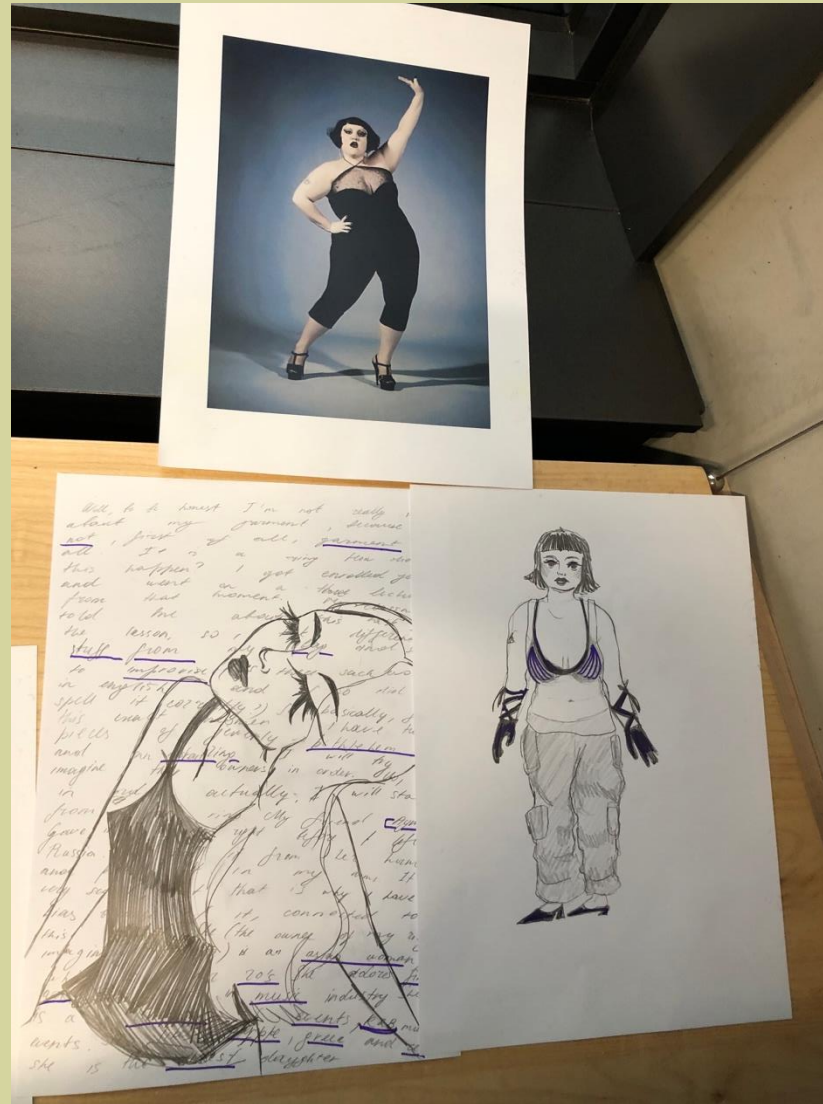


Fig 14 Example of record of Participant's work ( Curtis 2025)

## Section of audio feedback transcribed

What difference it made having a body to work with if any ?

Student: A

I thought about how you change it for the body cast a little bit, like ....in my head I was drawing it for like how ..the what the mannequin looked like when I bought the dress but then when I got the person with a different body type and it was nice to sort of think oh maybe they would have worn the dress just exactly the same ...

Student: B

More gender neutral....I drew it on a female but then I got like a sixty year old man ...

Teacher

So instead of going toward the age of the model you thought of ways of sort of making it fit anybody – does that make sense in terms of what you are thinking...?

Teacher:

Anybody find it tricky? Because the person was very different to their character? Or took any other path in terms of drawing or re-drawing? .... Some people only had to make slight adjustments and for other people it prompted a big change

Embracing different types of bodies and casting

Is there anybody that you think is missing?

Student C:

“ I feel like it was quite inclusive – it looked like it was”

“but like it did help me to see them from a different perspective “

Participant D

# Reflection and iteration

## INFORMATION SHEET -

### The Body Library: a resource of diverse figure references



I am a part time lecturer in design on the Performance course at London College of Fashion. I am one of the few members of staff lucky enough to teach across both BA courses – Costume for Performance and Hair, Make-up and Prosthetics for Performance. I mainly work with the first year, so I am there right at the beginning of their university journey, part of establishing the first principles of their learning. I feel a privilege and responsibility in welcoming them. I want them to feel included, empowered and excited to learn.

Fig 15 Information sheet (Curtis 2025)

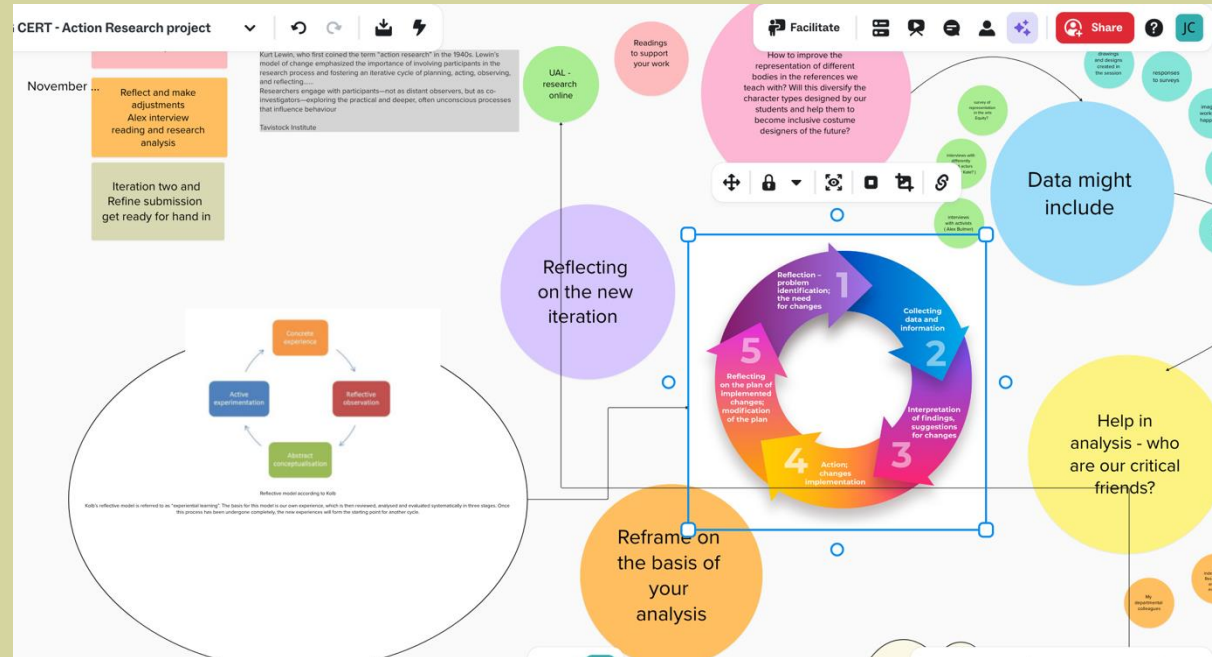


Fig 16 Detail of reflexive cycles on mural board (Curtis 2025)

- Drawings worked well, and it was interesting having a before and after drawing to look at , but I was interested in embedding the resource from the beginning
- Decided to develop a more formal information sheet and have this to refer to in the room as well as verbally explaining the project ( also checking that it was accessible
- Very difficult processing audio, so I decided to ask for written feedback
- Anxious to mitigate participant bias in terms of their relationship with me

‘In a manner typical of action research , the research questions are reorientated and further specified after each research cycle’ ( **Jokela, Huhmarniemi 2018**)



36 students across three sessions 14 students from 1<sup>st</sup> year BA Costume for Performance



Fig 17 Participants in session November 4th 2025 (Curtis 2025)



Fig 18 Drawing of participants (Curtis 2025)

[illegible]

Fig 20 Participants drawings (Curtis 2025)

“I liked having a reference to draw from and thought it expanded my drawing skills as I probably wouldn’t immediately think to draw from different body types” **Participant A1**



# Data : Reflexive thematic analysis

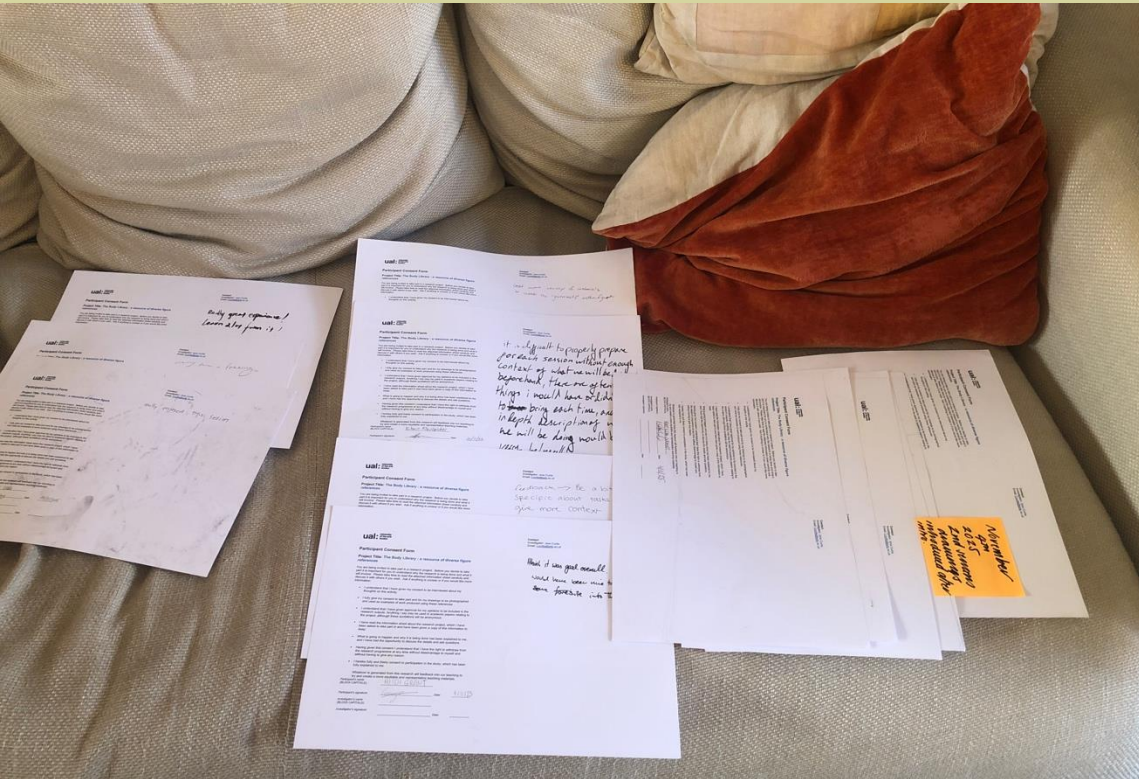


Fig 21 Curtis, J (2025) Sorting data on the sofa

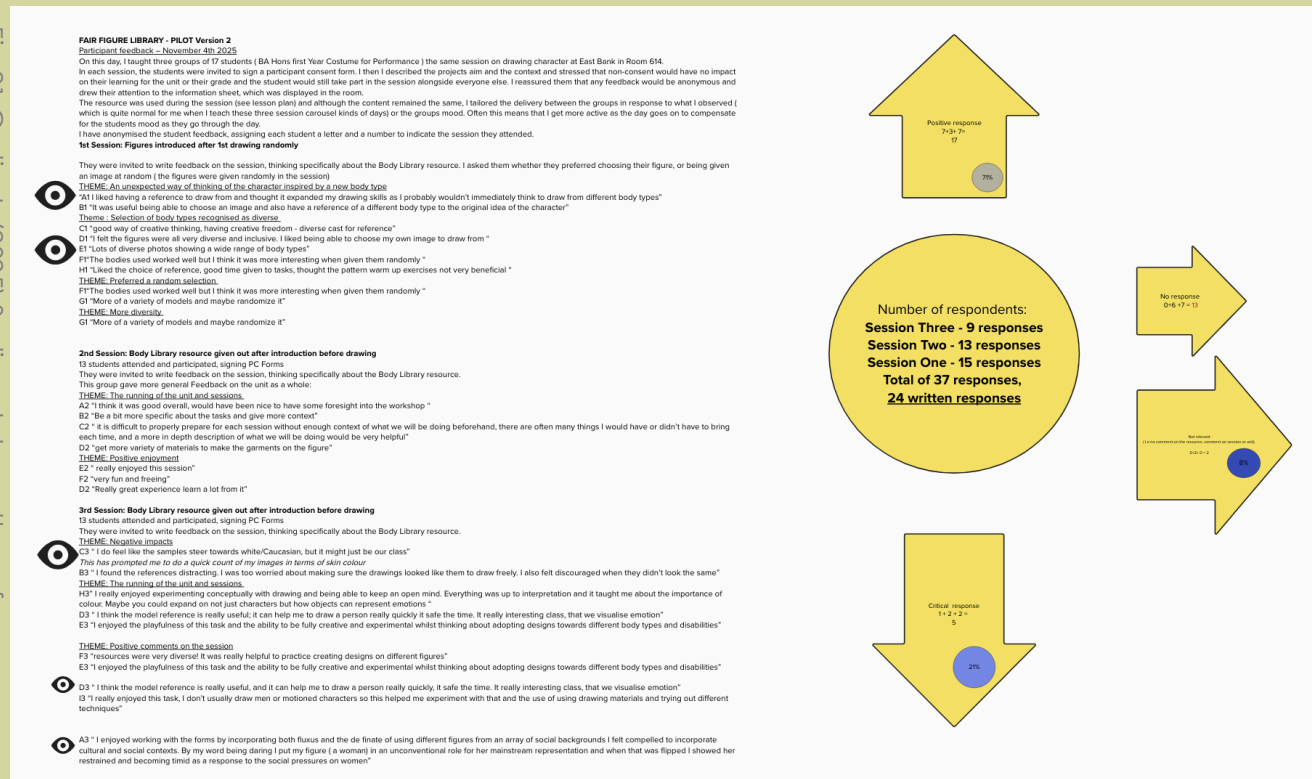


Fig 22 Curtis, J (2025) Mural board – detail of thematic analysis of text

"develop patterns of meaning" ( Braun and Clarke 2023)

- Sorting out written and audio comments into themes, codes and then broader themes on the sofa and the mural : translating, stacking, re-ording, marking and sorting

# Data – Visual Thematic analysis

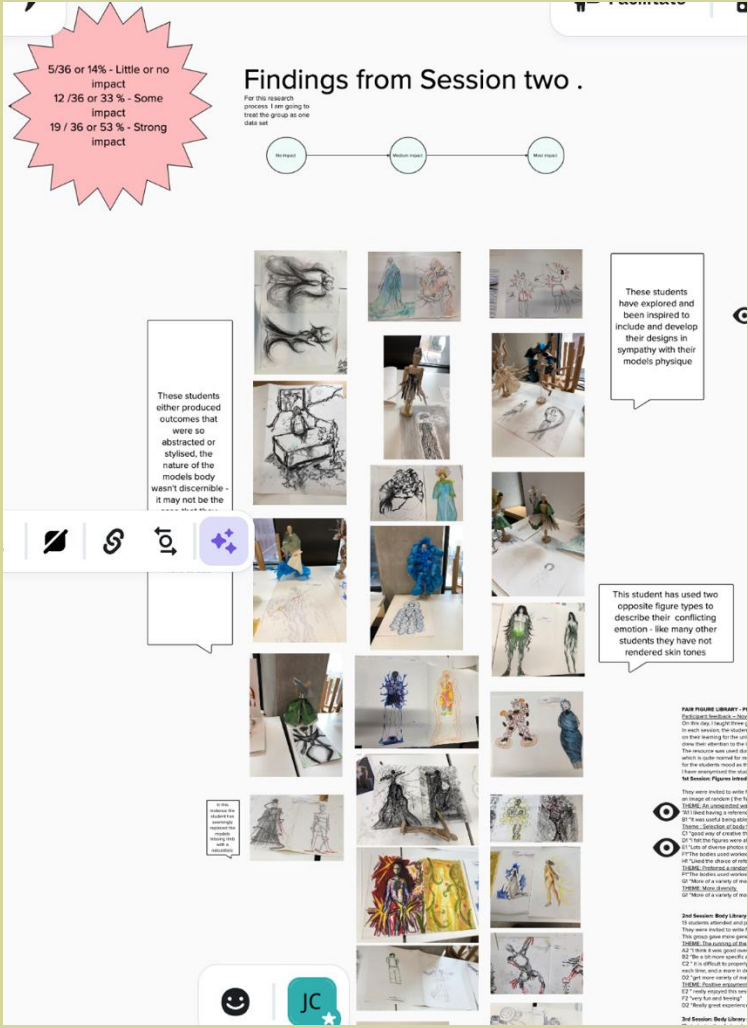
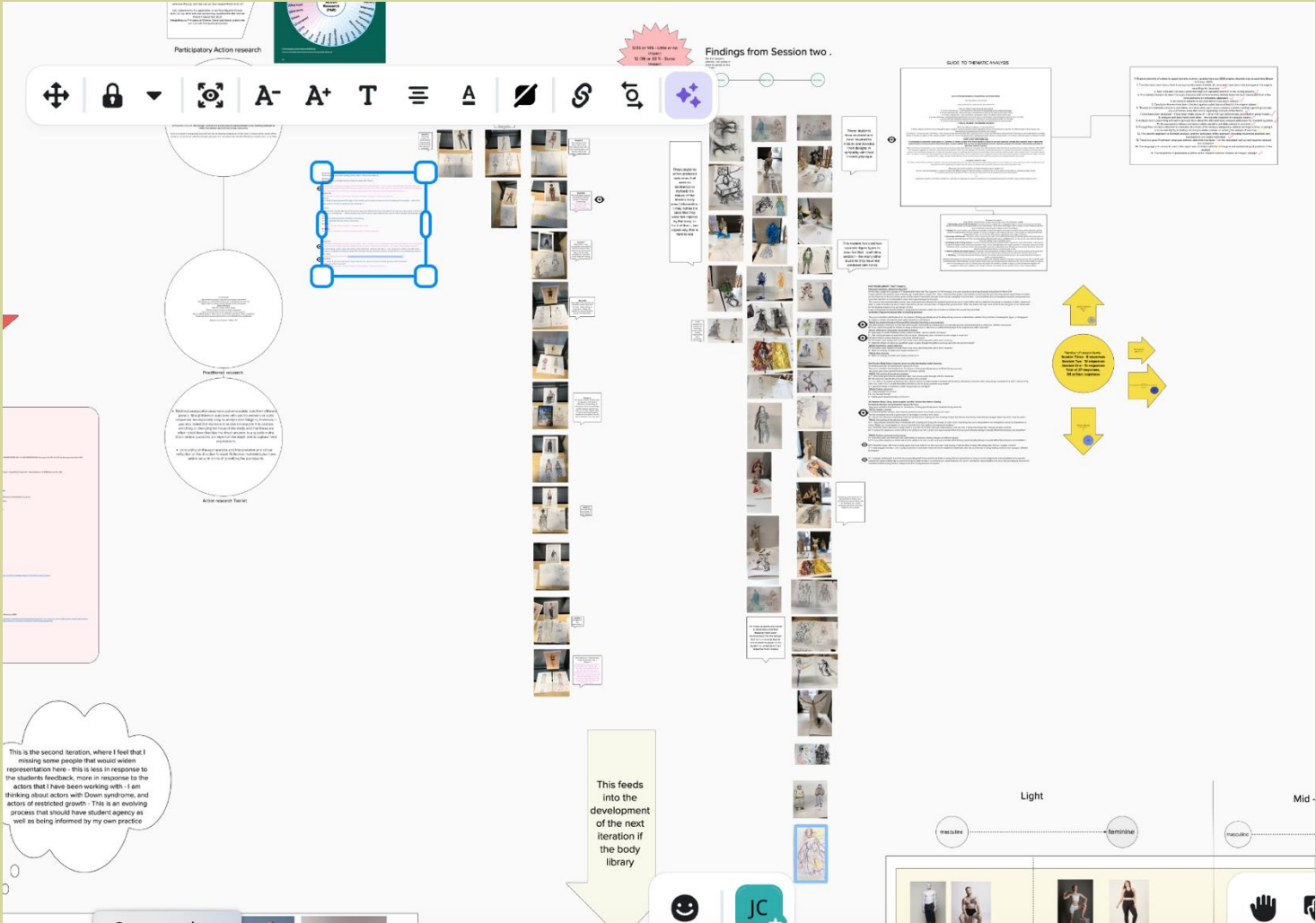


Fig 23/24 Mural board – analysis and sorting of imagery (Curtis 2025)

# Findings

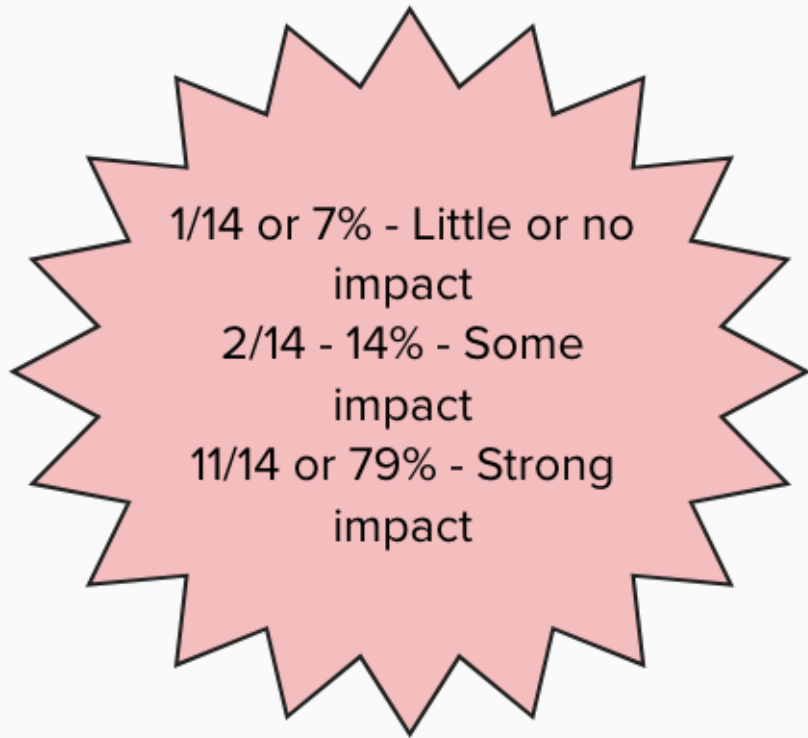


Fig 25 Mural – findings from text analysis session one (Curtis 2026)

Session One – Drawings

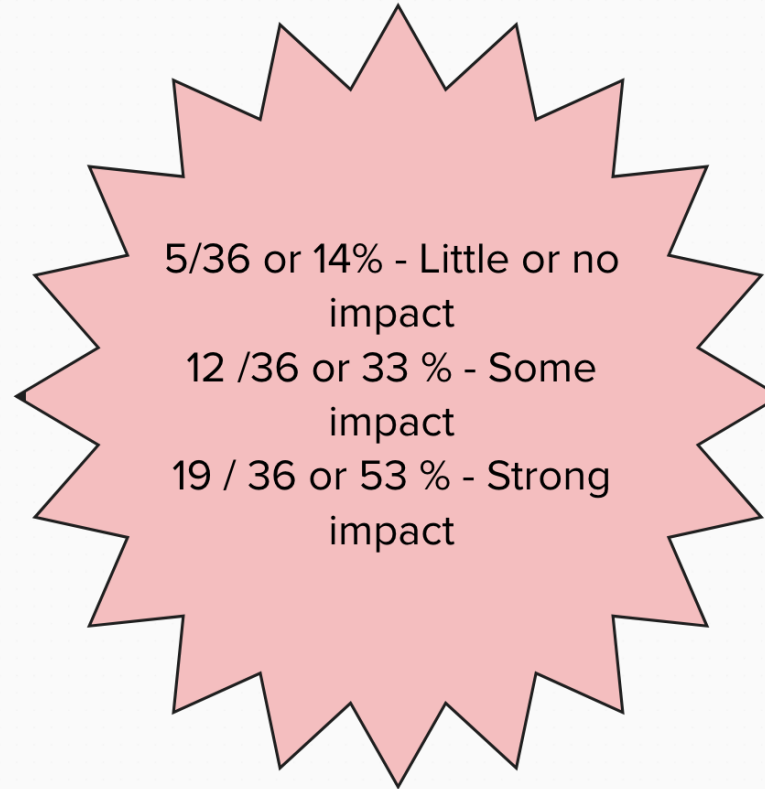


Fig 26 Mural – findings from text analysis session two (Curtis 2026)

Session Two – Drawings

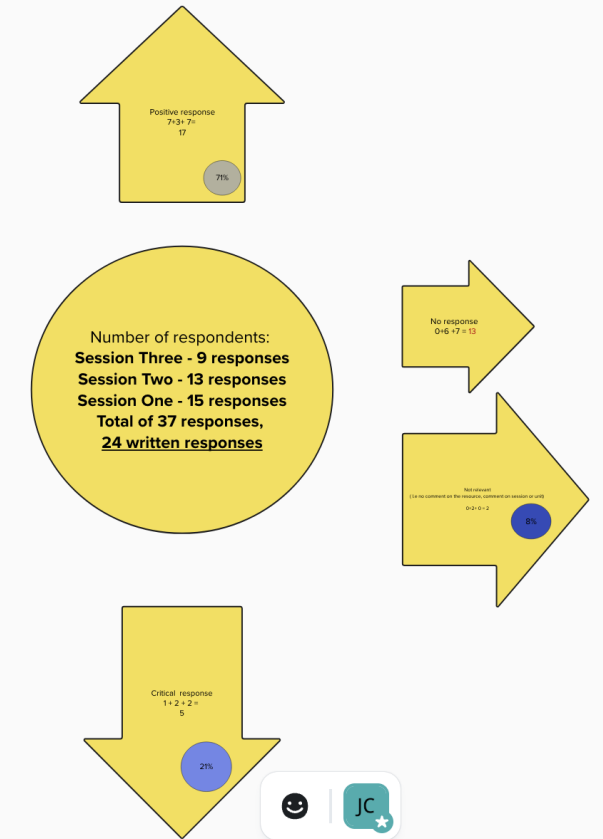


Fig 27 Mural - findings from text analysis (Curtis 2026)

Session Two – Free text

For the majority, their drawings were influenced by diverse body types leading to innovations and adaptations of the clothes they designed, pointing to thought processes that considered the needs of different bodies.



# Findings : there is more thinking to be done!

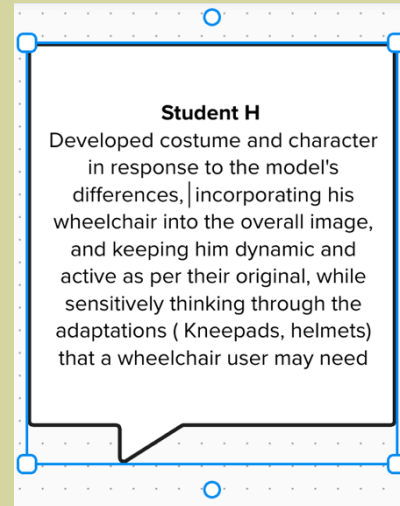


Fig 28 Participants work - 1 (Curtis 2025)

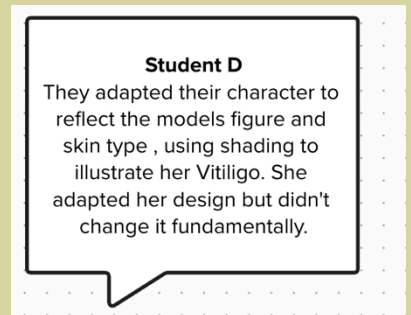
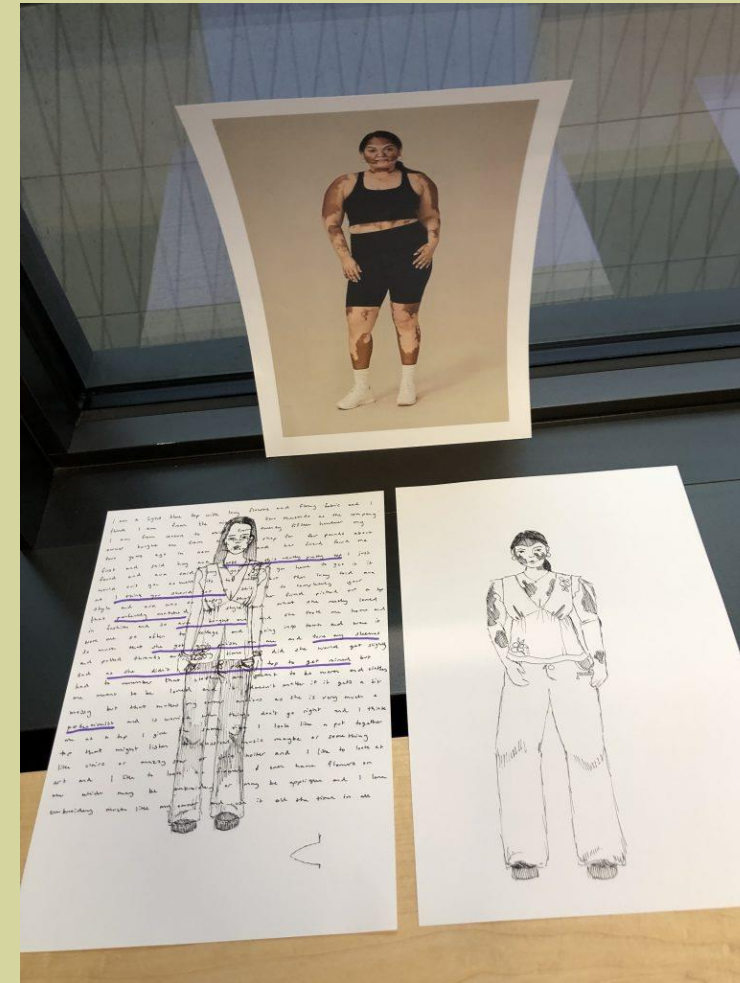
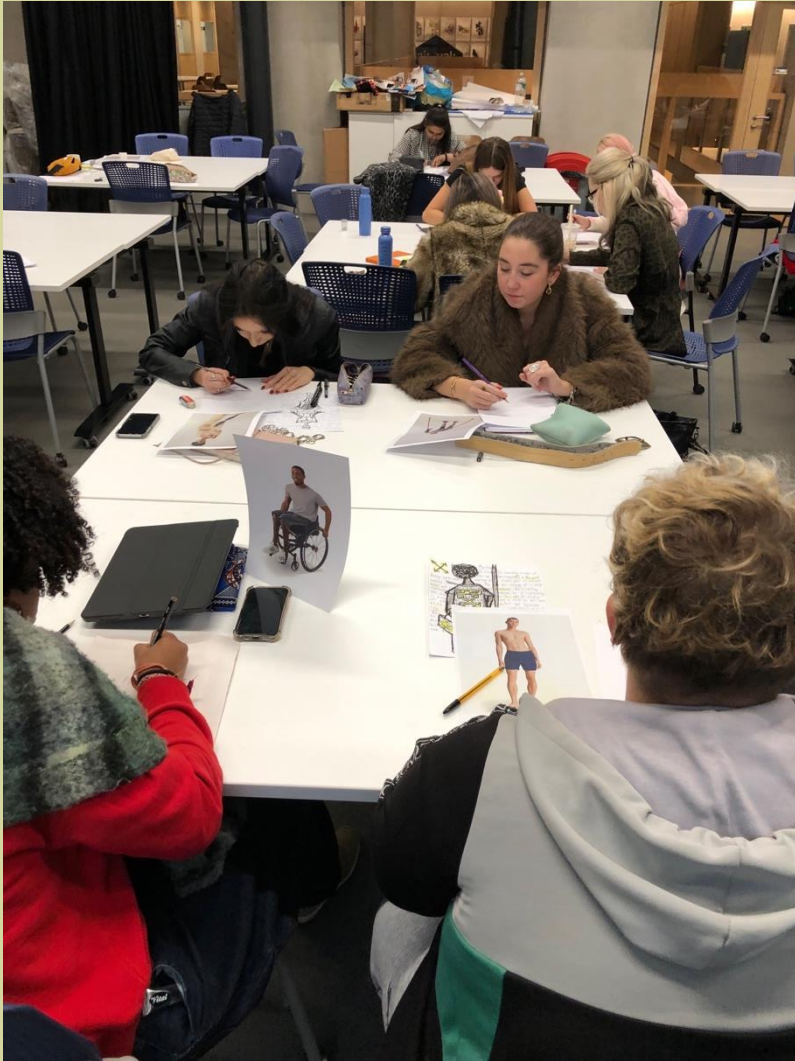


Fig 29 Participants work - 2 (Curtis 2025)

# Findings : there is more thinking to be done!



- Tactile relationship
- Positional relationship
- Is the right size?
- Is it robust enough?

Fig 30/31 Participants drawing in session (Curtis 2025)



Prompted by two of the participants comments ,

*" I do feel like the samples steer towards white/Caucasian, but it might just be our class"*

**(Participant C3)**

which arrived at the same time that I noted on my mural board that :

*"I feel that I missing some people that would widen representation here .. I am thinking about actors with Down syndrome, and actors of restricted growth - This is an evolving process that should have student agency as well as being informed by my own practice"***(Curtis 2025)**

I spent time looking at the resource itself again and other examples of diverse reference collections

Fig 32 Example from Fair figure reference library





## Next steps for the resource

- Reprint the resource
- Create a digital version that is easy to access and co-curate with students and colleagues
- Introduce the resource to colleagues in the next staff meeting
- Continue to scrutinise the resource to make sure it is as fair as possible : develop a criteria for the images
- Find a way to credit photographers and models
- Create other iterations – portraits for hair and make-up face charts, clothed references in context : these can be developed in conference with each course

Fig 33 Example from Fair figure reference library



# Fair Figure Reference Library Padlet

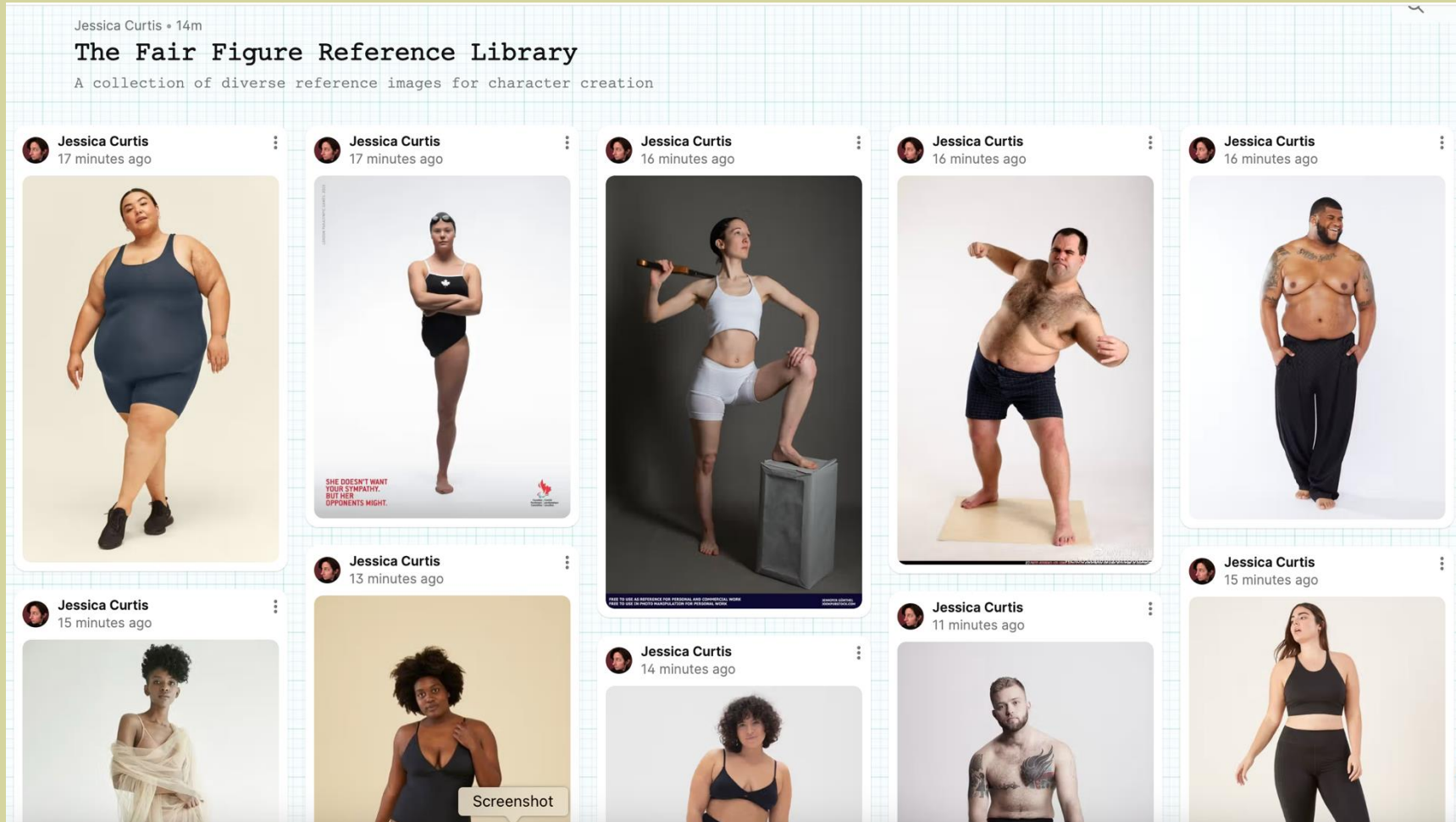
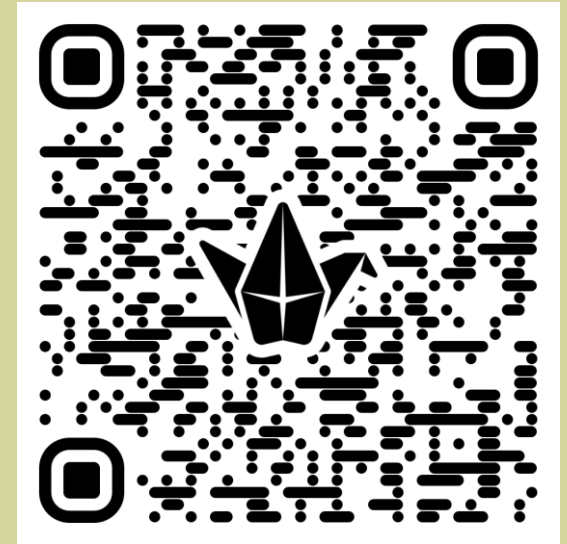


Fig 34 Screenshot of Padlet version of resource (Curtis 2026)



<https://padlet.com/jcurtis53/the-fair-figure-reference-library-7aieb0l03zhog1x3>

## Next steps for Teaching sessions

- Develop key first session with Isher Dihman for 2026
- Explore visual ways of giving feedback on the resource and reframe my question to be more student focussed - guided by the co-creation model
- Design a focus group to enable participant consultation on the nature and use of the resource in teaching
- Provide colour media in sessions so that skin tones can be represented in student work

*“there is no point in producing research that has no bearing whatsoever on the lives of people at the centre of the research, or that is not based on the perspectives and the needs that are identified by co-researchers, in my view.” ( Linette 2024)*

Fig 35 Example from Fair figure reference library





**Thank you so much** to my Tutor Group: Jade Gellard, Sarah Harkins, Antonella Nonnis and all my fellow Wednesday PG Cert colleagues.

Also to our brilliant tutors, Kwame Baah, Mallika Kanyal, Victor Guillen, Amberlee Green, Karen Mathewman, Linda Aloysius

For all their advice and guidance!

Fig 37 Example from Fair figure reference library



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