

MRS Awards 2021
International Research

Winner:
Essity, AMV BBDO & The Outsiders

Closing The Gender Pain Gap

SUMMARY

As part of the #Painstories project, Libresse/Bodyform/AMV BDDO commissioned The Outsiders to conduct a global qualitative research study to explore women's subjective experiences of reproductive pain conditions, especially endometriosis. The first objective was to gather women's metaphorical descriptions of their pain to help create a verbal and visual pain dictionary; the second was to create a 'Pain Report' for publication, deeply exploring women's pain, the surrounding taboos, journeys to diagnosis, and how a more open culture with more meaningful language around pain could help everyone live better lives.

Research was conducted in eleven markets, using an innovative three stage-approach, comprising desk research, expert interviews, and interviews with women. The project presented two key challenges: first, discussions around sexual pain are taboo in all countries, so we had to work sensitively and creatively in terms of recruitment and moderation; secondly, we had to conduct culturally sensitive analysis to separate universal from cultural findings regarding women's descriptions of pain.

The Pain Dictionary and Report were launched in March 2021 and have been very positively received by women across the globe. The #Painstories campaign has already won two awards and the film has been viewed over 100 million times on social media.

SYNOPSIS

Background and objectives

Libresse/Bodyform's brand purpose is '*To create a world of v-zone confidence by eradicating taboos, shame and discomfort from society.*' In 2020, Libresse/Bodyform and AMV BDDO released the #wombstories campaign, which highlighted the complexities of life with a womb. It was a move away from decades of femcare advertising focusing on positive and aspirational projections, to represent how women *actually* feel – the pleasure **and** pain, the good **and** bad.

The film led to conversations around painful bodily experiences women/womb-bearers go through that are still experienced in shame and silence, from endometriosis to painful sex. Women's reproductive pain is dismissed – they face challenges accessing medical help, being heard, diagnosed and treated. As a result, Libresse/AMV BDDO wanted to highlight this 'gender pain gap' in its next campaign, and move beyond representation to provide actionable support, with a particular focus on endometriosis. They commissioned the Outsiders because the project required sensitive qualitative research.

#Painstories goals:

- Libresse/AMV BDDO had identified that the 1-10 pain measurement scale has failed women and is a barrier to pain communication. The first project aim was therefore to develop a 'Pain Dictionary', comprising a new verbal and visual language for endometriosis pain, created from sufferers' descriptions, to be used within medical consultations and as a self-understanding tool. Research was required to collect women's subjective experiences of pain, allowing them to speak in their own terms. The dictionary needed to transcend cultural barriers, to be a universal tool that would work for women, worldwide.
- Secondly, to create a 'Pain Report' for publication, to deeply explore women's pain, the surrounding taboos, journeys to diagnosis, and how a more open culture with more meaningful language around pain could help everyone live better lives.

As this was a global project, we needed to separate universal and cultural findings regarding women's descriptions of pain, and emerging differences relating to intersectionality.

An innovative three-stage approach

Research was conducted in Libresse/Bodyform's key markets: Europe (UK, Sweden, France), Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Jordan), Latin America (Mexico, Colombia, Argentina), Russia, China and Malaysia. To ensure we unearthed the cultural codes in each market, as well as the lived experiences of women, we recommended the following:

Desk Research:

To gain an understanding of the key issues in each market, develop hypotheses for later stages, and begin comparative analysis; using sources such as academic and medical journals, health/social research, plus linguistics and semiotic studies.

'Oracles'

To gain a deeper understanding of the issues in each *specific market*, we interviewed experts. We spoke not only to gynaecologists and endometriosis experts, but also those with in-depth understanding of sexual health, semiotics, ethnicity issues, physiotherapists, neurologists and psychologists. We conducted 33 expert interviews, all with women or non-binary people.

Interviews with women

Desk research indicated that, due to the silencing of women and their pain, data was lacking regarding their complex experiences. Although group discussions can sometimes provide a sense of solidarity when discussing menstruation issues, we knew that discussions around painful sex were taboo in every culture. We needed to ensure a safe space for women to express themselves in their own words, and so chose single depth interviews – 24 in total.

How we overcame the challenges of working internationally:

1. Local partners

We collaborated with our partners – Salt, Vanessa Vallenilla, Insider KSA, and China Insights – to understand local nuances.

2. Oracle recruitment

We researched our expert participants online, to ensure they had an up-to-date perspective. The Outsiders work tenaciously when faced with roadblocks. For example, we wanted to speak to a sex-positive expert in Saudi Arabia, to understand the dynamics in a conservative market that might be difficult to otherwise access. We were warned that it might be difficult but, through online networking, we secured an interview with a high-profile sex-positive author, which provided invaluable insights.

3. Recruitment of women

We knew that recruiting women willing to talk about their pain conditions, and also painful sex taboos (where relevant), would be a challenge. We therefore broadened the specification to include women who were voluntary advocates or vocal in online support groups – those already breaking cultural norms. We asked each advocate participant to conduct a mini-interview with five other sufferers they knew, gathering the language they used to describe their pain. This innovative exercise allowed us indirect access to women not involved in advocacy.

However, our local partners advised that advocacy was less prominent in the more conservative cultures of China and the Middle East. Here, we recruited solely non-advocate women, overtly asking whether they were willing to discuss the topic, and guaranteeing anonymity.

4. Inclusive interviews

It was vital that we develop a discussion guide that helped women unlock their experiences in their own terms. We were also conscious that our participants might be from different socioeconomic groupings and backgrounds, and that literacy/language capabilities may vary. Instead of written stimulus, we used projective techniques to access feelings that women have been taught to repress. We used a psychodrawing technique – taken from art therapy – whereby women drew their pain on a diagram of a body, which gave a rich insight into how they imagined their pain metaphorically. (*Please see chart 1.*) Mood Trees, where women selected a figure drawing representing their feelings about their condition, helped us understand their secondary emotional pain.

As Essity is a pro-inclusivity company, we needed to use inclusive language (e.g. 'womb-bearers'), but took guidance from our local partners regarding social acceptance. For example, in France, there is resistance to this term which might have caused participants to distance.

5. Sensitive moderation

We selected female moderators who demonstrated sensitivity and who would create a 'safe space'. Again, taboos meant that moderators had to engage carefully. In China and Latin America, for example, the moderator had to be both open and tactful, letting participants set the pace. Moderators adopted a softer tone when discussing sexual pain, and provided theoretical examples (without leading), so participants did not feel 'abnormal' sharing. In China and Russia, women over the age of 30 often use euphemisms rather than answering directly when discussing sex, and the moderator had to work sensitively to ensure she understood.

6. Culturally aware analysis

A key challenge was identifying universal versus local findings. The client was particularly interested in exploring metaphors which, our desk research confirmed, work universally as the most potent expression of pain. However, we also identified that metaphors have cultural expressions.

- In China, metaphors are closely aligned with the Traditional Chinese Medicine system ('warmth'/coldness/'blockages'). Semioticians also told us that Chinese women rarely use expressive metaphors, fearing being seen as attention-seeking.
- By contrast, Russian participants used more dramatic and evocative expressions, and agricultural/machinery metaphors were more prevalent (linked to Soviet technological utopianism themes).
- In Sweden, metaphors regarding blood/animals were more prevalent versus other European countries.

However, a number of themes *were* universal, e.g. around 'stabbing', 'heat' and 'pressure'. We backchecked these themes with semioticians to ensure we had identified universal findings, and drew distinctions with cultural findings. We collated over 100 different metaphors in total.

Award-winning output

The Pain Dictionary, Museum and Report launched in March 2021, during Endometriosis Awareness month. (*Chart 2 shows examples of research-generated metaphors in the dictionary.*) The campaign and report were widely reported in industry press (Campaign, Adage etc.), as well as mainstream coverage in Glamour, Metro, The Express and HuffPost.

In a rare move, reflective of the high quality of the work, the Outsiders team, Steve Lacey and associate researcher, Zoe McQuillin, were credited in the press.

The campaign has already won gold and silver in the 2021 One Show awards for Creative Use of Data, and a Grand Prix in Health and Wellness at Cannes Lions 2021.

Why we should win the MRS award

Women living with endometriosis around the world have responded positively to the campaign and conversations have erupted on social media. The campaign has had huge reach – although launched only in 30 countries, news (evidenced by online chat) has travelled to over 150 countries. The film has been viewed over 100 million times. Women have thanked the brand for showing how they really feel and speaking out for them. (*Chart 3 shows a selection of responses.*) This proves the success of the project in terms of being globally understood and resonating across cultures – a testament to how well we overcame the challenges of working internationally.

In the UK alone, Bodyform reached #1 social share of voice (mentions jumped 1657%), dominating competitors, and its Instagram account followers increased by 200%. The brand's market share grew by 8.1%.

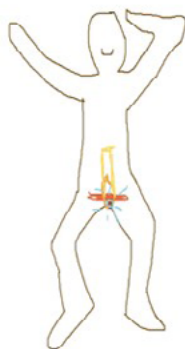
So far, 1,800 doctors in Russia, have taken part in seminars presenting the Pain Dictionary, to ensure it exists in medical spaces. This will be rolled out in the UK once the pandemic has eased.

Libresse/Bodyform set out to eradicate 'taboos, shame and discomfort from society'. The campaign is contributing to that brand purpose, creating impact and addressing stigma surrounding women's pain conditions. For this important contribution to women's health, worldwide, we believe our project to be worthy of winning this award.

Example of Psychodrawings from Female Participants

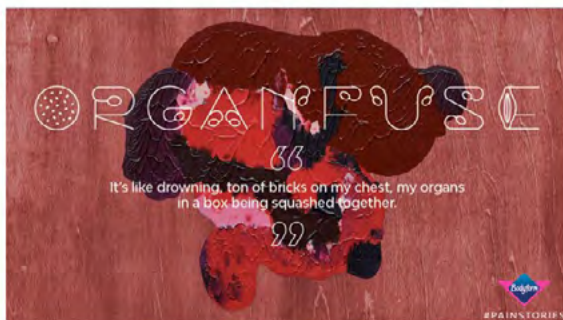
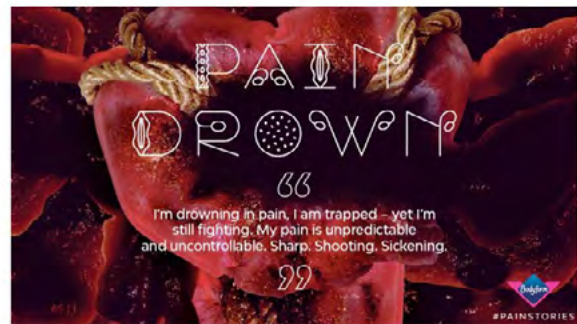
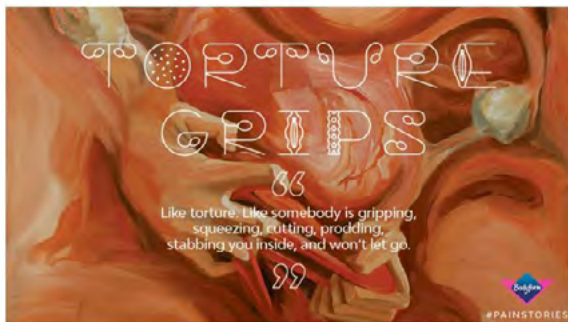


"Here is where my ovary is and it's just kind of like this scribbling, just mess, it's like 'white noise', and that's where all of the burning lies." (Person with endometriosis, UK)



"There's the wall and that's sometimes a problem, not always. There's a hot spot there, which looks like a little flame but it's actually meant to be a vulva, but a flame is very poetic, so I'll go with that! Sometimes it feels like it's on fire.... So there's the wall, which is the hot spot, it smarts like a little blast, like an 'Ooph!' It's a flame in the sense that if I felt something hot I'd take my hand away, it's a twang' just like, 'Ooph!' but then also associated with that is a feeling of dryness, a vagina desert." (Person with dyspareunia, UK)

Examples of output: The Pain Dictionary

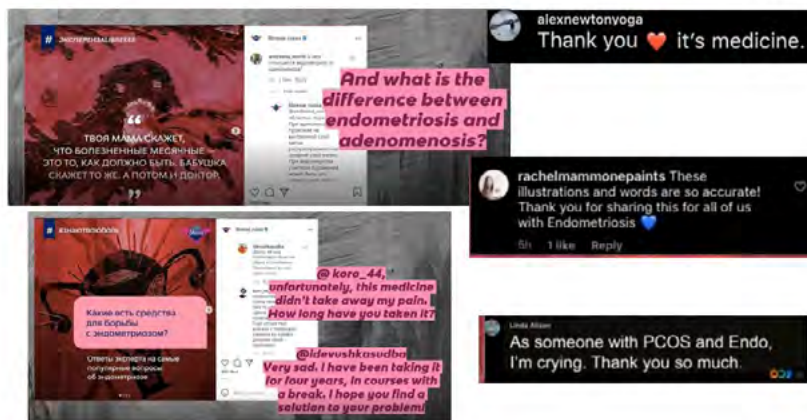


Women are engaging across the world: conversations are taking place

I AM 1 in 10 and I'm fed up. Fed up of not being heard, of being misunderstood, dismissed, overlooked, of reading stories similar of mine and thinking of all the ones yet to come.

March is endo awareness month and world beware, I'm coming for you. If content like this isn't to your liking then you'd better unfollow me and my friends now. X

#endometriosis #1in10 #endotheigma #painstories



I am making sure, no matter what- the light still stays on inside me! Cause trust me, it's got pretty dark, and is pretty dark right now.

I refuse to give up! I will stand, or even fucking CRAWL, to help other people raise awareness for Endometriosis and Adenomyosis, so young people will no longer have to struggle the same way most of us do! Cause even though I feel targeted, the reality is...180 million of us also suffer, and it needs to be taken god damn seriously, because it's debilitating, and many simply cannot cope with living in pain every day, or the thought of living in debilitating pain forever!

villeetcampagne This is wonderful project! It is such an important step to be heard and share experiences. Knowing that we are not alone and be able to talk about it is already healing.

marissa.ptl Thank you thank you thank you, so detailed and so ACCURATE being represented means everything

itsabrinanaa Thank you for spreading awareness, this is something close to my heart and something I openly talk about on my platform. It is so refreshing to see a brand like you @bodyformuk talking about this 🥰 So thank you for that Endometriosis is more than just a "bad" word!!!!!!

notsoperf_xo It feels like I'm being pummelled and ripped apart from the inside out 😭😭 this is a great depiction 🙏🏻💛

thelementaryparticles This is so f***ing genius!!! When I saw the goat I was like, that's it, exactly what it feels like 🙏🏻

#runovernigade #discorderesting #bingeatrecovery #louisize #blackgirl #weightloss #healthjourney #healing #healingjourney #spiritual #health #freudtion #endometriosis #adenomyosis #feminallhealth #1in10 #painsjournal #chronicpain #chronicillness #endometriosisawareness #adenomyosisawareness #endometriosisawarenessmonth #endometriosis #chronicillness #fibroidendometriosis #fatphobia #fatgirl #painstories #endoawarenesschallenge

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