

Written evidence submitted by Hounslow Youth Council (BYC045)

The Internet, Social Media and Messaging

- "Although Insta culture has led to something of a democratization of fashion and beauty, it has also led to an escalation of the pressures on young people that already existed around looking good, competing &c."
- "The proliferation of images on social media leads to the hypernormalisation of celebrity culture and beauty - you are now exposed to what celebrities look like "just got out of bed" and expected to mimic them."
- "Young people's constant exposure to pornography causes not just unrealistic expectations of sex and relationships but also specific unrealistic expectations about their own and others' bodies."
- "Send nudez" culture creates a set of body image issues along with the obvious legal &c issues.

Education

- YM (16) - discussed in school (but 'not helpful'). YW (16), YM (21)- not discussed.
- 'Not helpful' - advice was outdated/of poor quality/attempting to stop "normal" behaviours. Bullying victims were singled out.
- Schools and parents are not always confident/comfortable with dealing with online bullying.
- There are issues of credibility with campaigns about body image run by beauty/make-up companies.
- Youth organisations should play a role in promoting body image messages.
- A problem is that it is very difficult to define exactly what the message we want to give to young people is. We don't want to say, "have no interest in fashion, beauty or even celebrity culture" for example and "Be Yourself" seems trite and simplistic. One suggestion might be to encourage young people to think of fashion and style as a way of enhancing, rather than hiding themselves. Another might be teaching young people better skills with which to cope with the many competing pressures they are under.

Health Implications

- Competing pressures include, for example, the contradiction between messages about body acceptance and childhood obesity. The specific needs of children and young people with

disabilities need to be taken into account as do considerations of educating parents as well as children.

- Eating disorders have a number of nuanced and complex causes, including issues of control, change, disappointment and fear and should not be simplified to "imitating skinny celebrities". However the idea that "thin is better" is still prevalent - messages to young people about weight should be more realistic and more sophisticated.
- Cultural norms valuing thin-ness mean that teachers and other adults are less likely to identify the early stages of eating disorders.

June 2017