

Written evidence submitted by RSBC Youth Forum

This response was put together by the RSBC's youth forum members. Each point has been numbered according to the area of the inquiry it addresses.

The points were formed from discussions both group based and with individuals.

1) All young people (and young adults) can be prone to poor body image. Boys can be less likely to be offered or to seek help with this, as it goes against the male stereotype that 'boys are less affected emotionally by external factors'. The 'gym' type alpha male body type can cause boys and young men to fixate on their bodies and become obsessional with working out and the gym. TV shows like 'Love Island' add to this pressure and make boys think they need to look a certain way. This also applies to girls and young woman who can be effected in the same way by being bombarded with images of 'the perfect figure' which creates insecurities which can grow to the point of being quite debilitating and can have a negative impact on mental health.

4) Young blind people use social media to the same extent that sighted young people do. However, not having sight means feeling confident and secure (or under confident and insecure) comes from the content of what is **said** by others online, rather than how we are affected by images. For example, if someone talks a lot on their social media page about how much they travel, how much fun they have, how successful their relationships are, this tends to make other VI and blind people have a notion of low self-esteem, and has a similar effect to that of images of perfect bodies etc. for sighted people.

Like images of perfect 'gym' bodies etc., written online content can also be manipulated and falsified in a way that means what you see/ hear online is no longer reality, and yet we are lead to believe it is which makes us feel bad about ourselves.

Online content both visual and non-visual, as well as TV programmes (e.g Love Island) and advertising can make us feel bad about ourselves and insecure. Visual images through these mediums are now so powerful that they have penetrated the minds of blind people, for example one youth forum member speaks regularly about online dating sites and asks for clear descriptions about her matches body shape and looks before agreeing to chat with them.

7,8,9) People should be allowed to express themselves, however there should be some education for young people around the dangers of taking online content and images of 'bodies' etc. too literally. It is the government's responsibility to ensure this is covered in the school syllabus during PSHE lessons.

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