

## Culture of conformity

**15 year-old Daragh was beaten up for having his hair long, but is still willing to stand up for the right to be different.**

*Children's Express journalist Daragh Scullion was beaten up because he had long hair. Here he gives his opinion on the pressures of conformity.*

Nowadays to be different is to be exiled. Every society needs a vocal minority; people who at least are trying to think differently about the world around them. You get punched, kicked, laughed at, shouted at and abused – just because your hair is long.

One major tribe of young people in Belfast, 'Smicks', outnumber any other tribe in vast numbers and they are generally the instigators of abuse.

Smicks hold the tribal majority in Belfast, walk down a street and the trademarks of Smicks are instantly recognisable. They generally wear hooded tops, coin rings and anything that contains a "Nike" or "Le Coq Sportif" logo. Hippies on the other hand usually have long or coloured hair, wear flares and maybe long coats.

## Young people carrying on?

Similar to all societies the majority (Smicks) can easily overpower the minority (Hippies), which leaves hippies feeling as if their back is against the wall. But why should anybody care? Sure it's only young people carrying on and they'll probably just grow out of it... I don't agree, every society needs a vocal minority; people who at least are trying to think differently and definitely feel differently about the world around them.

## Consumer Culture

My argument for being a hippy is that I don't believe in, or like, the continuous selling techniques of big companies, splashing our TV screens with their sporting or clothing brands. I'd rather wear something original and avoid companies who, through aggressive marketing behaviour, put pressure on young people to conform.

Recently there has been a rise in the number of people who want to rebel against these big companies. Some young people are discovering that there is a bigger selection of things to do in the world, other than football and the usual array of sports etc, that young people are interested in.

Music, drama, books, bands - there are a whole array of activities available for young people in Belfast but some of these involve stepping out of what is seen as normal behaviour. This is when trouble can start and if you speak up about it, it only gets worse.

## Culture of Violence

The question is, is this Belfast? Or are a majority of young people trained to dislike anything that it is different? What are they scared of? I don't really understand it. What's the big deal about long hair, it's only hair?

I've heard people in Belfast talk about a culture of violence that has rubbed off on young people and the worst case of it is a state of mind where you are closed to new ideas or ways of thinking and use violence to demonstrate your dominance of an area. If this is the case then hopefully this culture of violence will pass and being seen as different from the norm by young people around you won't mean you're automatically a punch bag.

The thing is... what teenager is normal?

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## About the team

This story was produced by Daragh Scullion, 15, assisted by Cathal Hannan, 12 and Lucas Dillon, 13. It was published on Sky television's [Reach for the Sky](#) website.

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