

Written evidence submitted by James Cathcart (BYC052)

Executive Summary

Children and young people who have (or know friends who have) felt anxiety about how they look, been bullied about it, or have subsequently suffered low self-esteem, have raised awareness of the issue, developed and supported a number of campaigns. These usually target the cultural and social attitudes that create pressure to conform to a body image of “normal” and explore ways forward.

As someone who supports and campaigns on youth issues, I am using this submission to draw attention to two examples of good practice, to help identify ways forward. One focuses on the role of new media messaging, and a direct appeal to young people to self-empower.

1. The importance and learning from a good campaign which not only draws attention to the issue but seeks to influence and act by providing evidence based research, and tools, in particular those that can be used by young people. YMCA/Dove partnership Be Real Campaign
2. The positive impact of role models/ambassadors on the issue of Body Image, in particular in challenging powerful established societal attitudes and encouraging children and young people to empower themselves and each other.

I would therefore **recommend** and encourage the greater use of the Toolkit, and the broader recruitment of role models and ambassadors in support of campaigns, particularly those with a large following and access to the media, to influence attitudes and behaviour.

Introduction

1. In 2016 I saw that this issue was important to young members of the UK Youth Parliament. I heard and learnt from them during their debates at the 2016 Annual Sitting, when Grace Van Zyl, MYP for Dorset proposed that the Youth Parliament adopt the following campaign into their manifesto and subsequently voted for it to be included in the UK wide ballot Make Your Mark.
2. “We believe that more needs to be done to raise awareness of on issues with body image and the effects of negative body image on mental health. We also believe that there needs to be a reduction in bullying connect to body image. We must challenge this.”
3. This appeared as a campaign motion on the annual Make Your Mark ballot with the second line amended to “Bullying connected to body image should be challenged and reduced”.
4. In a UK wide ballot, Make Your Mark, it received over 60,000 votes.
5. There are many other examples of campaigns which Im sure will be drawn to the attention of the Committee, and that there are other issues to be explored, such as health and education. I believe that YMCA may be submitting evidence about their campaign. However I wanted to commend it in particular as a good practice example, and to also highlight one example of a celebrity role model speaking out, as her speech was not published and that she might be a future ally and ambassador on the issue.

A/ Evidence of Good practice

6. I would commend the “Be Real Campaign” by YMCA and partners in 2016/17 and its associated materials as a body of evidence of good practice by a voluntary sector organisation, with youth voice input, that not only raises awareness but identifies action for change. <http://www.ymca.org.uk/about/what-we-do/be-real-campaign/real-campaign-body-image-pledge> They were responding to an excellent report by the APPG on Body Image recommendations (which they also facilitated) which I commend to you. http://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/assets/filemanager/documents/appg_body_image_final.pdf
7. As a result they promoted action through a campaign including a Pledge list, <http://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/assets/filemanager/images/general/Body%20Image/Be%20Real%20Body%20Image%20Pledge.pdf> and a resource toolkit for schools, which are also examples of good practice
8. The staff member who coordinated and who would be best placed to provide further information or give evidence, is Liam Preston, Public Affairs Manager at YMCA Central.

B/ Example of a Role model for Change – Kate Winslett¹

1. Kate Winslett is an Oscar winning actress, 41, from Berkshire, well known for her starring role in Titanic. Note I have not had time to contact her directly, and neither she nor WeDay are officially running or backing a campaign or my submission. This is simply an example of a widely reported celebrity role model having an impact on this topic. However the WeDay movement regularly identifies and invited high profile role models to make inspirational speeches to school children as part of their work to encourage youth social action. For more information and contact details go to <https://www.we.org/gb/>
2. My submission is that a useful recommendation of your report, would be refer to examples of people in the public eye who have a value in changing attitudes and being role models, and to urge the recruitment of some to be ambassadors and copy the example of Kate Winslett, and relate their personal stories of overcoming adversity and bullying because of body image, drawing encouragement from her example. This has been successful in the area of mental health with examples of politicians, TV presenters and HRH Prince of Wales being evidence of good examples.
3. In addition I would endorse her appeal to young people to balance their use of phone-messaging, and not be drawn into being overinfluenced to conform to an image or role it social media and messaging can create.
4. I witnessed Kate gave this inspirational and motivational speech to an audience of over 12,000 young people from UK schools in March 2017 as part of the WeDay Movement <https://www.we.org/gb/> and would submit the press coverage of the event as evidence of impact. I also took notes.
5. Daily Mail
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/femail/video-1435447/Kate-Winslet-gives-empowering-speech-Day-conference-London.html> This includes video clip.

¹ For clarity: Kate Winslett has not been involved in the preparation of and has not endorsed this submission.

6. Telegraph <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2017/03/23/kate-winslet-reveals-bullies-called-blubber-inspirational-speech/>
7. Evening Standard <http://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/kate-winslet-encourages-youngsters-to-be-indestructible-as-she-opens-up-about-being-bullied-a3496656.html>

Note that whilst extracts of her speech has been reported and there are informal clips on YouTube, the text has not been officially published or easily accessible. This summary highlights the key points either reported in the press above or from my notes on the day.

Summary:

1. She started by telling her original story of being bullied, and how she overcame it to stick to her goal of becoming an actress. "They called me "blubber." They teased me for wanting to act. Locked me in the cupboard. Laughed at me. I wasn't the prettiest. I always had big feet. And I was even told that I might be lucky in my acting if I was happy to settle for the fat-girl parts. And they would say, "You're just not really what we're looking for, Kate." And so I'd hear that a lot. And so, these comments about how I looked started to crop up, and I'd never really dared to think about how I looked before; I was just kind of ordinary, nothing special, but this unkindness made me feel truly horrendous. I felt I wasn't enough; I wasn't good enough; I didn't look right. And all because I didn't fit into someone else's idea of perfect. I didn't have a perfect body. And I would rarely hear anything positive. And I started to feel uncomfortable in my own skin. It made it hard. "
2. Sometimes she had "wanted to give up - "Maybe I should rethink this acting thing," I said to myself. But it was my passion! And it made me happy! And surely nobody can take my happiness away, so I had to rise above it. I had to dig deep, be strong, because deep down I was done with being told I didn't fit the perfect mold. I wanted to be an actress. And nothing was going to stop me. So what did I do? What did I do? "
3. She went to relate that she fought back "I didn't lock myself away and give up on my dream. I fought back. I had to ignore the negative comments. I had to believe in myself. I had to choose to rise above it all, and I had to work hard. You have to be indestructible to do what you love, and believe that you are worth it. And sometimes that's the hardest part."
4. "Society is changing so fast. What we value is changing so fast. It's not easy being a teenager, and it's becoming harder than ever in a world of peer pressure and such awful things as cyber bullying and exposure to unattainable aspirations.
5. She went on to outline the context of this pressure – the transition to adulthood in school: "Your school years are years you will never get back. Don't waste them. But don't waste them feeling crushed by pressure either. Pressure to achieve the highest grades, or to conform to pressure exerted by people around you. [on body image]
6. I particularly liked the way she said that 'You have to be indestructible to do what you love and believe that you are worth it. Yes. Believe that you are worth it. And sometimes that's

the hardest part. Wrong hair. Big feet. Wrong face. Too ordinary." Yet she encouraged her audience to turn the question around asking the world if they are ready for you as you are.

7. "Are you ready for ME world?" and she encourage them to believe in themselves You be from anywhere, and you can do anything. Believe it. It is possible to overcome your fears. What if I fail? Fall over my big feet? Who cares? Be you! Be you! I'll learn to embrace my flaws, to make no apology for who I am. I dug deep, and I decided that I simply wouldn't listen when they said that my body didn't fit. This is who I am. And so I looked in the mirror, took a deep breath, and I said to myself, "Get out there. Get out there, and go for it."
8. She also highlighted the role mobile phones have come to play in creating a new way to bully or create a image you might not be able to achieve and to "Put down your phone! I use my phone all the time! I do too. I use my phone all the time, whether it's to make photo, take photos, like most of us do, or text my mom, or look up directions. But today, social media robs us of so many, so many of us of just basic conversation. We're constantly distracted from being our true selves in a world that is fueled by "Instant TweetBook Facers," I like to call it. So ask yourself, ask yourself ... is your phone making you, helping you to be happy? Are you using it, are you using it in the correct way for you? Are all those fantastic people you follow, are they having a better time than you, really? Or are they making you feel unsettled or unsatisfied? Does it dent your self-esteem not to get those likes? Does it chip away at your true self? Is it even the real you? Maybe that person is a role. Perhaps you're losing a bit of yourself. Think about that. Let's think about it.

She concluded by urging young people to take time out to know themselves, taking time to figure out what really makes you happy.

In conclusion I believe that celebrity ambassadors have the potential to influence young people for the better, and in being reported doing so – can also challenge cultural stereotypes.

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