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Dove: Campaign for True Beauty
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Since the earliest days of mass media, women have been told what is beautiful. Beginning in 1919 a cigarette company called Lorrillard began to run ads showing chic, upscale women provocatively dressed. This was the idea of beauty in 1919: beautiful women who smoked cigarettes, were rich and elegant, and dressed exotically. Today this image of beauty has evolved, largely because we are aware of the detrimental health effects of smoking. In the past the predominant image and standard of beauty promulgated in the mass media.

Unfortunately, these standards, both past and present, create damaging consequences for women whether it be persuading them to damage their bodies by smoking or losing unhealthy amounts of weight to squeeze into that size zero. According to research done in 2002 by Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders Incorporated, one out of every hundred women between the ages of ten and twenty have anorexia, and four out of every one hundred college-aged women have bulimia. Unfortunately, this is not a surprise considering the images of “perfect” women we are bombarded with every day. From the actresses we see in movies and on television, to the models we see in commercials and advertisements, these perfect, beautiful creatures have been our examples, representing certain standards for what defines beauty. The majority of advertising and marketing campaigns in the beauty industry today have followed this tradition, portraying women with barely an inch of body fat. Their purpose is clear: they target women especially, forcing an image of perfection onto them. An image that they are expected by our society, to represent, when in reality this ideal is unreachable.

One company is endeavoring to break that mold. Dove has recently decided to change the previous standard of beauty and create a new one with the Campaign for Real

Beauty. Their motto: “Real women have curves.” In this paper I am going to begin by examining the use of ethos, pathos, mythos, and visual persuasion in the advertisements used in the television and magazine campaign as well as on the website Dove has created to go along with this campaign. Then, I will demonstrate how this campaign is not substantially different from the legacy of beauty product advertising which have promoted a typically unrealistic and often harmful ideal of perfection. Despite Doves’ attempt at promoting a new, more modern image of beauty, they are still reinforcing an ideology of beauty: that one is never quite good enough, and no matter what, there is something about them that they could improve upon or need to change. Although Dove is claiming to support women of all shapes and sizes, they are still promoting beauty enhancement products telling women that they can still change and improve their bodies, which in effect is a contradiction. Dove may perhaps have good intentions, but it comes down to the fact that you just cannot sell “beauty” products- as opposed to bath products- without exploiting women’s insecurities in some way.

First, I will start by examining some of the advertisements that are currently running for Dove (attached at end of paper). At the present time Dove has a few different magazine ads out; each ad is very similar visually and textually, the only variation is that there are different women in each ad. What is constant is that all of the women depicted in the ads are not your everyday models with perfect skin and thin, slender bodies; these women are real, flaws and all. All of the women that Dove has used range from a size 4 all the way to a size 12, and they claim that they have in no way retouched or airbrushed the photographs. There is some evidence of this in the ads, especially those displaying only one woman. You can visibly see their flaws, little dimples or shadows, even skin

discoloration, and stretch marks. These women really do appear to be real, not fake or edited.

All of the ads have identical text reading: “New Dove Firming. As Tested on Real Curves.” This is working as a logos appeal because Dove is making a factual claim. They are arguing that if you buy their product it will work, it will firm your skin. Why? Because they have tried it on the women shown in the ads, and since it worked on them it will work on you. The visual images of the women are therefore functioning in an indexical sense because they are supporting this claim. In order to support the claim that they have tested the product on real curves, Dove depicts women with “real” body sizes in their magazine advertisements. So, women who see the ads will give credit to the claim and believe it because they have some sort of proof here to back it up with. They can agree that yes, these women do have curves. Dove is not attempting to convince people to buy a product by showing them ads of anorexic models because that would not be convincing in this case.

This leads us to the next category of persuasion that can be applied to the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, which is ethos. While there are not any well known figures used in the Dove ads, such as celebrities, I believe the women that are used as models in the ads are convincing sources. First of all, these are real women being used; real women with real bodies. As I said before, the models go up to a size 12, so I think in this way the women in the ads are legitimizing the logos message of this campaign. Dove did not have to use actual woman in the ad; they could have found some other clever way to focus on this idea of “firming” your curves. Yet, they decided to depict women, real women, to link their message to. In this way, it makes the message more credible, more persuasive.

While these women are not famous or well known, I believe they are still credible figures. None of them are professional models; Dove claims they are real women picked practically off of the streets. One woman was chosen while working at the Gap, and another is a college student. I believe this has an influence on other women out there like them who may be embarrassed about their bodies or don't feel confident about themselves. They may view the women in the ad as role models; they can relate to them, and if those women are proud enough of their bodies to be on large billboards and buses all across the country in their underwear, then I should be too. These ads will spark confidence in them: it's ok for me to look the way I do, and I should not be ashamed about it. Further, since women can relate to the women in the ads, they will build a source of trust with them. They will see that these women have enough confidence to be in their underwear on enormous billboards all over large cities. As a result, they will relate this confidence to Dove. Dove uses these messages to transmit a certain message to their customer's mind: this product works for those women, and I trust those women, so I believe it will work for me and give me confidence as well.

This is very closely associated to the next persuasive strategy, which is pathos. For the majority of women, if not all, their weight and their bodies are always going to be very emotional issues. It also reaches self esteem, a very touchy subject to deal with. These Dove ads come as such a shock to people because they aren't used to seeing women of real shapes in advertisements, especially in their underwear. This topic can really touch women; even make them feel a sense of pride. Finally, someone is standing up for real women and trying to break the stereotype; this can have a very strong impact. Women may not feel so embarrassed because finally there is someone who is

sympathizing with them. Someone is out there saying for them that this is how I look, this is who I am, and that is just fine. They are showing that models don't have to be a size zero, and you should not longer be ashamed about your body or how you look. Finally, someone is rejoicing in the female body, curves and all.

All of the ads are visually consistent with a white solid background and the woman or women in different poses, wearing nothing but their underwear. Visually, the white background works to draw your attention into the ad, and it really makes the women stand out. So, immediately when you see this ad your eyes are pulled directly into the image, it is the first thing that you see. The women dressed in nothing but underwear also helps to do this, since although ads are getting more risqué, it is still quite an attention getter to portray women in nothing but their undergarments.

The next aspect of the ad that draws you in is the text. The text is identical on all of the ads reading: "New Dove Firming. As Tested on Real Curves." As I said previously, the visual images of the women serve an indexical purpose because they are supporting Dove's claim, what the text is saying, by showing real women who have curvy bodies. However, what is most noticeable about the text is its placement. On all of the ads, the text is placed to the right of the model, either right next to her butt or in between the curve of her back. I think this serves a vital purpose, as it tends to pull you into the ad and makes you notice the shape of the woman. One may just glance at the ad, but after you read "real curves," you go back and look and, if you didn't notice before, you become conscious of her curves. Also, since the text is written in a darker color, it really does contrast and stand out against the white background. As a whole, the ads are not very cluttered and focus primarily on the model(s) and the text. There is also a small

image of the actual Dove products in the lower right hand corner of the ads, but since the image is placed in the corner it does not attract too much attention or take away from the rest of the ad.

Besides magazine advertisements, Dove also has a very popular commercial running that shows hundreds of women all with the same exact hair. They are all wearing wigs of long blonde hair, and we see them walking around a city. At the end of the commercial all of the women end up in what appears to be a city square, and they all throw their wigs off to reveal their own unique hair.

This ad, above all, utilizes pathos to evoke certain emotions from women viewing this commercial. What Dove is trying to communicate here is that most women at one time or another wish that they had the perfect, ideal hair, or hair different from their own. Dove is embracing the idea that your hair is perfect; it would look strange if we all walked around day after day looking exactly the same way. They are saying that you and your hair are unique, and you should embrace that fact, not cover it up. So, again Dove is evoking a sense of pride and also celebration. This is the psychology of spectacle, getting this large group of women together to celebrate their hair. Watching it makes you want to join in, to say "I love my hair too, and I'm not going to hide it anymore." The image of the wigs being thrown off is indexical because it is supporting Dove's campaign and message, which is that who you are is beautiful. But, it could also be seen as symbolical because it is such a powerful image. If you are just seeing this clip of the commercial and you do not have any prior knowledge about Dove's image or their recent campaign, it is still powerful to see all these women throwing off this stereotype of hair and revealing their own.

Dove has created this line of hair care products to allow women to personalize what products to use on their own individual hair so they can bring out their best qualities and their own beauty. I think that this is the most effective ad Dove has out right now because it truly does work to defy beauty standards in a positive light. Hair products are, for the most part, staple products. You need shampoo to clean your hair, so the message here cannot really be perceived as harmful. Yes, Dove is using some persuasive strategies, but in order to separate convenience goods apart from one another you must do this. They are creating an emotion in women, in particular, to celebrate their own individual hair and to use Dove products to do this. This is a safe enough message and gives an optimistic view to defying beauty.

Apart from the hair commercial, the rest of the Dove campaign appears to be promoting a positive message on the surface; that having curves is beautiful, and therefore everyone is beautiful. Yet, what is really going on below the surface is much deeper and much more intriguing. Another persuasive strategy used in these advertisements that can be used to look at what is actually going in these ads, is mythos. The myth used here is that beauty is attainable. Dove is exploiting these women to show that they have achieved this level of beauty. They have used this product and they are now beautiful. You can see it in their facial expressions; they are glowing and smiling, and also through their body language. These women are exuding complete confidence. They aren't hiding or concealing any parts of their bodies. For the most part they are openly revealing themselves, unashamed of what they have to show. Dove is in effect playing off of every woman's insecurity and desire to be beautiful. They are offering this firming product, claiming that if you use this you will be beautiful. If you use this then

you too will be confident enough to be out in public in your underwear, per say, with nothing to hide. This is a lie; beauty cannot be sold in a bottle. Dove is saying beauty is easily obtainable, the truth is, it's not. Dove is using this myth, which has always existed when selling beauty products, to persuade women to buy their product. In reality, you can't just run out to the grocery store and pick up "beauty" in the form of a firming lotion. This product will not give you beauty, no matter how hard Dove is trying to push it.

In order to understand why beauty is not easily obtainable you must look at the ideology that is also occurring under the surface of this campaign. If ideology is the study of ideas, or more importantly the way of thinking in a particular society or culture, then this is applicable to the analysis of Dove's True Beauty Campaign. Our culture is constantly giving us an image of beauty, a standard to follow. Ideology has shaped our beliefs about what beauty is, what defines it, what depicts it. Most recently, if not always, beauty has come in the form of size zero models, even double-zero. Whether or not this image is actually possible in real life is not relevant, this is what we are given as our ideal, this is what we are being told to aspire to.

Here we can also apply a specific ideology. Even before we are born we are given a certain gender, and depending on that gender our whole life is tailored. This relates to Althusser's discussion of subject position, we do not exist without ideology; it is what who we are. Depending on what gender we are born, everything from what clothes we will wear, to what color our room will be painted, to what toys we will play with will be decided for us. For example, most young girls growing up play with Barbie dolls. So, this is one of the images that they are bombarded with on a regular basis; Barbie then

becomes a role model. While most people may not think about what message Barbie is sending to their children, it is quite a powerful one. Barbie is a powerful example of unrealistic expectations; her measurements, if she were real, would be six-feet tall, weighing only 101 lbs., with a 39" bust, a 19" waist, and her dress size would be a four. Compare that to the average woman: 5'4", 145 lbs., bust 36-37", waist 29-31", and dress size ranging from 11-14 ("Statistics: How many people have eating disorders?"). These two figures are in by no means comparable or equal. Barbie is an image of this perfect standard of beauty, one that is clearly unrealistic and unreasonable.

However, what is a more prominent image of beauty are models. No matter if it is in movies, commercials, magazine ads, etc, models everywhere are throwing a certain image in your face. A much more common and present image than Barbie dolls, but nonetheless, just as harmful, if not more. Today's fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women ("The Average American Woman Dieting & Weight Statistics"). A young woman between the ages of 18-34 has a 7% chance of being as slim as a catwalk model, and only a 1% chance of being as thin as a supermodel ("Body Image and Advertising"). In one study 69% of girls in one study said that magazine models influence their idea of the perfect body shape. Clearly, these images are having quite an impact on young girls.

It's no surprise then that four out of five American women say they're not satisfied with the way that they look ("The Average American Woman Dieting & Weight Statistics"). So, what then is the result of all of these idealistic images? Why should we worry? Well, 75% of "normal" weight women believe they are overweight, and 90% of women overestimate their body size. Eighty percent of 10-year-old girls have dieted, and

50% of American women are on diets at any one time (“Body Image and Advertising”). What’s worse is when this dieting becomes out of control and develops into an eating disorder. In the beginning of my paper I already touched on this topic slightly; one out of every hundred women between the ages of ten and twenty have anorexia, and four out of every one hundred college-aged women have bulimia. Between five and ten million women and girls in the United States struggle with eating disorders and borderline conditions (“The Average American Woman Dieting & Weight Statistics”). Ninety percent of those suffering from eating disorders are women. Unfortunately, it can get worse: when these disorders aren’t treated or aren’t properly dealt with, and result in death. Without any type of treatment, up to 20% of people with serious eating disorders will die; with treatment, that number falls to two-three percent (“Statistics: How many people have eating disorders?”). After treatment about 60% of those with eating disorders will fully recover, others go on with their lives forever struggling with their disease.

This way of thinking is obviously very detrimental in many different ways. This standard of beauty has always been around, but that does not make it correct. In this way the campaign functions as a sort of propaganda, it is attempting to expose the “beauty” industry by defying it and not using the typical models. Yet, at the same time this campaign is promoting these same ideas by persuading people to buy their firming lotion by making them feel self-conscious. Dove is pushing this idea that you can buy beauty which is not ethical; it is a false idea. You simply cannot use people’s self-esteem and self-consciousness to get them to buy your product, whether this is done intentionally or not; that is using people. By going against the ideology of beauty, Dove is in fact contradicting itself and thereby reinforcing that same notion, which could be considered


counter-propaganda. Women may not look at the deeper meaning of this campaign; they maybe just take it for face value. They are manipulated into thinking that using this product is supporting the fight against the beauty stereotype, when in reality they are just buying into it. This may not be Dove's goal; they may be genuine in their effort to break the mold, but the effects of this still dangerous. The statistics I gave are only a few examples, but just from taking those into account you can see how harmful it is to go near this idea of "perfect beauty." No one should have to starve themselves to the point of death just because they don't consider themselves as beautiful as our society expects them to be. That idea is unethical and immoral, whether it is done on purpose or not.

On the exterior Dove appears to be breaking the mold of the ideal of beauty which we've learned through the ideology of our culture. At a closer look, Dove is really just doing the same thing every other company in this market is doing, using advertising to exploit the idea of perfect beauty. You just cannot tell women that they are beautiful, curves and all, and then offer them a product to change and firm their bodies. If you're telling women they are beautiful just the way they are, then why are you pushing a product to change them? Advertisers manipulate consumers into thinking they must buy certain products to improve upon themselves in order to fit into the ideal image of the industry, a phony perfection. Dove was on the right path with their hair commercial; celebrate your individuality, and use our hair products to do so. No one should make you feel like you need to be somebody else; it's time to embrace your own individual definition of beauty, without compromising who you are.

Works Cited

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“Campaign for True Beauty”




campaignforrealbeauty.com | Dove

New Dove Firming.
As tested on real curves.



The advertisement features a woman with dark skin and hair, wearing a white bikini, posing in a side profile. She is smiling and looking back over her shoulder. The background is plain white. In the top right corner, there is a URL and the Dove logo. In the middle right, there is a headline. In the bottom right, there are three Dove Firming products: a tube, a jar, and a spray bottle.

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