

Changing the Face of Beauty, Changing the Rules of Marketing: The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

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By
Anna Loria
Marketing Major

The College at Brockport
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Thesis Director: Kelly R. Kaye, Adjunct Lecturer, Marketing

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Abstract

In September 2004, Dove® launched its Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) with the aim of establishing a more inclusive definition of beauty worldwide— one that would eradicate the narrow beauty ideals and standards that deliver a corrupt and self-damaging message to females while setting unrealistic expectations for their physical appearances. For the past 10 years, Dove has employed several phases of the CFRB in effort to pursue its mission of encouraging not only its customers, but the masses, to develop more positive relationships with their physical appearances, elevate their self-esteems, and recognize their self-worth. Over the years, Dove has implemented several phases as a part of the CFRB so as to fulfill its vision and mission associated with empowering women. These efforts include selecting a group of models to represent the brand that were made up of “real” women exhibiting a range of body types, creating and disseminating short films that discredit beauty ideals and promote self-esteem, partnering with nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in order to encourage women worldwide to support their mission, and establishing the Dove Self-Esteem fund to finance its efforts. Critics of the CFRB argue that Dove has been unsuccessful in fulfilling its intended mission, which could be considered demoralized because it is fundamentally motivated by corporate interests and profit gain. Some might consider Dove’s message flawed in the way that it parallels self-esteem with physical appearance, and is promoted by models that could be deemed objectively “physically attractive.” Dove’s parent company, Unilever, has also been accused of undermining the Dove mission through its sexist advertising of the Axe brand. However, this project argues that, despite what could be considered flaws in its execution, the campaign has attained success. Dove has encouraged and generated an ongoing, open, honest, and debatable conversation about females’ relationships with their bodies. The Campaign for

Real Beauty is productive in its intention to broaden the definition of beauty and depict “beautiful” as an attainable and unconstrained portrayal of all women, thus increasing self-esteem among female consumers, by encompassing a social mission that extends beyond the scope of advertising, product lines, and profits.

Introduction

The Campaign for Real Beauty was inspired by the telling results of a 2004 global study commissioned by Dove known as “The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report.” Cognizant of a worldwide trend characterized by body dissatisfaction, particularly fueled by beauty stereotypes and media portrayals of women, Dove sought to develop an understanding of these issues and how they affected female self-esteem. Dove researchers, along with gender scholars Dr. Susie Orbach and Dr. Nancy Etcoff, administered a poll to 3,200 women ages 18 to 64 in ten different countries: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Brazil, Argentina, and Japan seeking solutions to the beauty dilemma. Beauty, in this context, refers to an individual’s both internal and external characteristics. Dove insists that, “physical attractiveness is about how one looks, whereas beauty includes much more of who a person is” (Etcoff et al. 35). Survey results determined that “more than two-thirds (68%) of women strongly agreed that ‘the media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can’t ever achieve.’” Accordingly, 57% of the respondents believed that “‘the attributes of female beauty have become very narrowly defined in today’s world,’” and almost half strongly agreed that “‘only the most physically attractive women are portrayed in popular culture’” (Etcoff et al. 27). Three-quarters (75%) of the women polled expressed a desire to be exposed to a more diverse media portrayal of physical attractiveness, with roughly the same amount wishing for a definition of beauty that extended beyond physical appearance (Etcoff et al. 43). The women seemed critical of the manner in which the media portrayed females and their bodies, aware of its shortcomings and misrepresentations with regard to these sensitive issues. Despite this mindfulness, respondents still seemed to be emotionally affected by the media, and voiced dissatisfaction with their physical appearances. A mere 2% of the women

indicated that they would select the word “beautiful” to describe their appearance, while the majority of the group selected words such as “natural” or “average” (Etcoff et al. 9). In all, results of the empirical study revealed that the female perception of beauty remained profoundly consistent across multiple countries. At the study’s conclusion, Dove surmised that women were largely dissatisfied with the narrowly defined attributes of beauty and their personal relationships with the word.

From “The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report,” Dove found that the majority of women strongly agree that “beauty can be achieved through attitude, spirit, and other attributes that have nothing to do with physical appearance” (Etcoff et al. 40). Inspired to “widen” the definition of beauty to one that entails multiple criteria beyond physical attractiveness, Dove launched the Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004. The CFRB was originally commissioned in the United Kingdom, where advertising agency Ogilvy selected six nonprofessional models, whose physical appearances challenged traditional supermodel stereotypes, to be the faces of Dove. Throughout the course of the campaign, Ogilvy has abstained from digital retouching and the use of Photoshop, so as to preserve the models’ “real bodies and real curves” (“The Dove Campaign”). Several phases of the campaign, implemented in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, along with The Dove Movement for Self Esteem launched in 2010, have ultimately presented empowering media images of women that have challenged the population to rethink the definition of beauty.

Critical arguments against the CFRB cannot be discounted, as they present valid concerns regarding the campaign’s conflation of beauty with self-esteem. However, The CFRB’s mission is and always has been to redefine beauty as a

quality that incorporates additional components beyond physical attractiveness. These components include confidence, pride, and acceptance, among others, which certainly all have an effect on a person's self-esteem. Therefore, in upholding the notion that a woman's perception of beauty affects her self-esteem, Dove is referring to more than her mere physical appearance.

As a competitor in the beauty industry, Dove ultimately seeks to broaden its potential market and increase its dividends. Some feel that these motives undermine the CFRB's publicized beliefs and values. This thesis argues, however, that any profit growth derived from the CFRB does not necessarily demoralize the positive impact of Dove's social mission. Dove's product line, which is made up of body and hair "care" merchandise, exemplifies the integrity of Dove's message. Such products do not alter nor enhance the inherent physical features of those who use them, as would cosmetic or styling products. Therefore, Dove's product line upholds its message that beauty is inclusive and attainable for all women— regardless of what products they choose to buy.

Other critics argue that the physical appearances of the models selected to represent the Campaign for Real Beauty hardly challenge today's ideal beauty standards. According to the Center for Disease Control, the prevalence of obesity and overweight women in America has continued to steadily rise, with the average female BMI at approximately 26.5 in the present day. Most of the CFRB models remain noticeably below this average. However, no matter the size of a model, he or she is bound to be the subject of controversy from some source. The models' figures do, at least, represent a standard of health that is not ever-present in the midst of today's obesity epidemic.

Despite critical interpretations of the Campaign for Real Beauty, it was ultimately "designed to provoke discussion and encourage debate about the nature of beauty" ("The Dove

Campaign”). It’s mission statement is centered around “ask[ing] women to give serious thought to a host of issues surrounding beauty, such as society’s definition of it, the quest for ‘perfection,’ the difference between beauty and physical attractiveness, and the way the media shapes our perceptions of beauty” (“Only 2%”). As indicated by a narrator in Ogilvy’s 2009 film promoting the success of the campaign, “At no stage has there been any TV advertising, a risky decision, but crucially, this campaign succeeded because people wanted to talk about it” (“Ogilvyvids”). Both critiques and praises of the campaign function as productive contributions to an ongoing conversation about beauty.

The Campaign for Real Beauty’s ten-year run, the longest of campaigns of its kind to date, has ultimately proved to be productive in the way that it has widened the definition of beauty and promoted open discussions and debates regarding global perceptions of the subject. The following thesis is intended to explore the many dimensions of this multifaceted social mission, and argues that the campaign has had a positive impact on female self-esteem worldwide.

I. The Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior

To better cognize the value-seeking activities of a brand's target audience, such as female consumers in the case of Dove, it is important to evaluate certain facets of consumer behavior. Because we are probing the effects of a beauty brand on self-esteem, it is worthwhile to consider the role of self-concept in consumer behavior. The term self-concept refers to the manner in which a person describes or assigns meaning to his or her identity. It is fundamentally "the totality of thoughts and feelings that an individual has about himself or herself" (Babin and Harris 116). Before and after using a Dove product, consumers will maintain certain perceptions of themselves. Every Dove customer defines herself based on a certain self-concept, and is motivated to act accordingly. According to Babin and Harris, "consumers often use products as a way of revealing their self-concepts to others" (116). Therefore, it is likely that the promotion associated with the Campaign for Real Beauty prompted many women to choose Dove products in a pursuit to personally identify more with the word "beautiful."

Among the various self-concepts that a person may experience during his or her lifetime are the *actual self* and *ideal self*, among others. The *actual self* is "how consumers currently perceive themselves," while the *ideal self* refers to how they would like to perceive themselves (Babin and Harris 116). The women surveyed as a part of "The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report" contributed feedback to the Dove team that provided insight into their *actual selves* and *ideal selves*. The majority of the respondents indicated that they would describe their *actual selves* as "natural" or "average" in terms of appearance, based on their own perceptions (Etcoff et al. 9). Most of the women who participated in the study labeled their body weights as either "too high" or "just right" (Etcoff et al. 17). These descriptions are further reflections of the respondents' perceptions of their *actual selves*.

Other answers from the women elucidate their insights pertaining to their *ideal selves*. The sociocultural standards of feminine beauty presented in mass media tend to have an impact on what women consider to be the ideal physique. “According to communications theories, repeated exposure to media content leads viewers to begin to accept media portrayals as representations of reality’ (e.g. cultivation theory: Gerbner, Gross, and Morgan, 2002; social learning theory: J.D. Brown, 2002)” (Grabe, Ward, and Hyde 460). Such thought processing is exhibited in the results of “The Real Truth About Beauty.” As mentioned in the report, “it is likely to be women from this group who are most receptive to messages about beauty and appearance in the media and pop culture because, although they derive some satisfaction from how they look, they certainly believe they could be more satisfied, and may well strive to be so” (Etcoff et al. 20). Despite the fact that the immaculate physical appearances of commercial models are the end result of an extensive photo manipulation process, many women nevertheless desire to emulate these media images. Therefore, it is not unusual for model-like features to be consistent with a woman’s *ideal self*.

The Campaign for Real Beauty is gratifying to women in the way that it narrows the gap between the *actual* and *ideal self* by depicting beauty as a trait that can and should describe *any* woman, regardless of her physical features. Brand consultant and author, Helen Edwards, insists in a Marketing Magazine commentary that, “brands must stop focusing on who their customers are and instead identify what they would like to be” (Edwards 21). Consumers are consistently striving to deter from their *actual selves* by pursuing circumstances that bring to fruition their *ideal selves*. Edwards suggests that marketers “describe the journey from the Actual Self to Idealised Self” in their advertising (21). The CFRB is innovative in the way that it has the potential to disengage a target customer from her self-perceived physical shortcomings,

rendering that draining, never-ending journey from the *actual self* to the *ideal self* an entirely unnecessary one. The campaign works to convince every woman that her *actual self* is satisfactory exactly as is— so satisfactory that it can already be considered *ideal*.

The Self-Concept and Body Presentation

The beauty and fashion industries are frequently criticized for promoting body ideals and placing excessive value on the concept of attractiveness. This is particularly done so through the portrayal of overly thin models that these industries depict to be purported archetypes of perfection. Research confirms that females, in particular, are conditioned to compare themselves to such images present in advertisements, and that such comparison can be detrimental to their perceived self-worth. President of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) Diane von Furstenberg notes, “The fashion business should be sensitive to the fact that we do have a responsibility in affecting young girls and their self-image” (Lu-Lien Tan B4). Unfortunately, the unforgiving reality is that most beauty and fashion brands do not.

To better understand why the positive impact of marketing efforts such as The Campaign for Real Beauty are so monumental, it is helpful to first comprehend the effect of more insensitive beauty and fashion advertising. Research illustrates that exposure to such promotional efforts is linked to body disturbance and perceptions of body distortion among those who view them. “Findings among both adolescent and adult women indicate that participants who viewed magazine ads featuring the thin-ideal body type reported significantly greater body dissatisfaction than did those who viewed neutral ads’ (e.g., Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004)” (Grabe, Ward, and Hyde 461). Therefore, it is less likely for a woman to experience body dissatisfaction after being exposed to more “neutral” images, which are the core of the CFRB, than it is when

she encounters more conventional photographic advertisements which tend to highlight the thin-ideal.

A meta-analysis conducted in 2008 by Shelly Grabe, L. Monique Ward, and Janet Shibley Hyde analyzed the experimental and correlational studies that examine the effect of media exposure on female “(a) body dissatisfaction, (b) body self-consciousness/objectification, (c) internalization of the thin ideal and drive for thinness, and (d) eating behaviors and beliefs” (463). The team sought to develop an accurate and all-encompassing evaluation of existing studies on the subject in order to draw conclusions on the overall effects of such advertising. Altogether, findings suggested that media exposure correlates with female body dissatisfaction, greater investment in appearance, and a higher degree of instances involving disordered eating behaviors. It is stated that such consequences “appear robust” and “are present across multiple outcomes and are demonstrated in both the experimental and correlational literatures...regardless of assessment technique, individual different variables, media type, [and] age,” among other factors (Grabe, Ward, and Hyde 471). Dove differs from traditional types of media exposure, presenting models with which viewers can physically relate. This way, Dove consumers spend less on alterations in their physical appearances, and are less likely to partake in disordered eating behaviors.

What is Self-Esteem?

A host of real-world implications accompany the issue of self-concept in consumer behavior. The product offerings promoted by the beauty and fashion industry are often detrimental to the buyer’s self-esteem. Self-esteem is elevated and/or depressed intermittently throughout one’s lifetime based on the judgments and evaluations one makes regarding his or her

overall worth. The term essentially refers to “the positivity of an individual’s self-concept” (Babin and Harris 117). Low self-esteem is the result of a negative perception of one’s own worth, or self-concept.

Dove is wise in its decision to commit to focusing on self-esteem particularly as it pertains to females’ appearances. Many of the publicized inquiries into the subject have ascertained that women tend to experience lower levels of self-worth overall than do males when it comes to not only their appearances, but all aspects of their professional, academic, and social lives. One of the first and most prominent of these inquiries is the 1991 study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), results from which insisted that, “declining self-esteem, a governor on dreams and future actions, more strongly affects girls than it does boys” (“Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America”). Nearly twenty-four years later, however, such a notion can now be considered an arguable generalization. Former professor of psychology at Yale University, Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, insists that the majority of 21st century women do not experience a notable struggle when it comes to understanding and expressing their innate identities, as well as maintaining a “voice” even as they confront pervasive gender stereotypes as they mature. She claims that subsequent studies after AAUW’s 1991 exploration use “larger samples and better measures of self-esteem.” Such studies have maintained that “there are no differences between girls’ and and boys’ self-esteem” in any matters except for, not surprisingly— appearance (“The Truth About Women”). Such a conclusion is supported by the results of Dove’s global report, “The Real Truth About Beauty”, as previously detailed. This is not to say that other feminist issues such as gender equality, women’s rights, gender stereotypes, the gender binary and gender roles, sexual double standards, unequal pay rates, and female representation in the workforce, in the government, and in the media, are insignificant. Such

issues do warrant consideration, and it is not unlikely that they could impact a woman's self-esteem as they affect her throughout her lifetime. Recent studies simply show that, "21st century girls now have a strong and positive identity" ("The Truth About Women"), which may enable them better equipped to cope with these collective, universal issues.

With this in mind, Dove's decision to focus the CFRB solely on improving female consumers' subjective issues with their appearance is a purposeful one. Psychologist Dr. Jean M. Twenge claims, "the widespread belief that girls and women have low self-esteem and flawed self-concepts can set up negative expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies" ("Changes in Masculine and Feminine Traits"). As mentioned, results of contemporary research conclude that women have made progress with regard to overcoming oppression and improving their self-esteem overall. Therefore, efforts that focus on improving female self-esteem when it comes to multiple realms: such as their academic, professional, and social lives; may be deemed insulting to females' strength and progressively powerful identities. Therefore, the CFRB is tactful in the way that it highlights female strength, but alludes to females' documented tendencies to experience low self-esteem when it comes to their physical appearances. The campaign is all the more constructive by exposing women to sources that may encourage them to feel differently, and by offering them an outlet to openly discuss this delicate, emotional topic.

II. The Social Comparison Theory

While society has ample access to literature assessing the behavioral effects of mass media on female body esteem, the effect of media portrayals of ‘average’ women on consumers’ attitudes toward their bodies is considerably less ubiquitous. This can be attributed to the fact that a host of beauty and fashion brands portray ideal beauty standards in their advertising in an effort to encourage women to strive for similar ideals by purchasing their products. Certain beauty brands, such as Dove, have differentiated themselves by employing marketing movements that take a more benign psychological marketing approach. Dove, cognizant of the fact that women are likely to compare themselves to the models in their advertisements, experimented with introducing ‘average-looking’ models into their advertising in an effort to uplift and harmonize with the masses— which includes a multitude of what society would call ‘average-looking’ women.

Dove undoubtedly commissioned the Campaign for Real Beauty with the understanding that the decision making processes of their target consumers are incessantly being influenced by the social comparison theory. This theory, originally proposed in 1954 by social psychologist Leon Festinger, explains how individuals compare their own opinions and abilities with those of others, so as to reduce uncertainty when it comes to defining themselves (Festinger 117-120). In conjunction with this phenomenon, it is not uncommon for female consumers to compare themselves to not only individuals that surround them in the flesh, but also to the numerous images of commercial models depicted in beauty and fashion advertising that they are exposed to each day. These comparisons, naturally, can be detrimental to a woman’s self-esteem in terms of body dissatisfaction. As she spends a lifetime noticing ‘flawed’ features in her own appearance that do not equate to the outwardly flawless-looking images of women in the media, she

experiences diminished feelings of self-worth. This frame of mind is exacerbated as the digital age stimulates a flourish in advertising, causing the masses to be bombarded by images on computer and television screens, in magazines, and in countless other media outlets.

What *Should* Constitute Conventional Advertising: Bissell's Findings

Professor of Journalism and Associate Dean for Research at the University of Alabama, Dr. Kimberly Bissell, assesses the effectiveness of the Campaign for Real Beauty in a 2008 experiment known as “Real Women on real beauty: self-discrepancy, internalization of the thin ideal, and perceptions of attractiveness and thinness in Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty.” Bissell refers to the social comparison theory in describing the theoretical framework of her study. She also utilizes the self-discrepancy theory, the difference between one’s *actual* and *ideal self*, to function as the basis of her analysis.

Bissell’s study was conducted by surveying women ages 19 to 51, asking them to make judgments about themselves and four different media images that they were shown. Such an experiment would allow Bissel, along with media researcher Amy Rask, to measure the participants’ social comparison, self-discrepancy, and evaluation of the thin ideal. The first image depicted an unaltered image of a Dove model, while other three displayed manipulated versions of the same image. The first portrayed a “plus-size” model, the second an “athletic” model, and the third an “ultra-thin” model. After asking the women to make several judgments, one of the most striking conclusions was that the women as a whole associated most with the original image of the Dove model, and insisted she represented “what American women should perceive as their ‘ideal’ body shape and size” (Bissel and Rask 660). Subject to an innate tendency to socially compare themselves to others, it is likely that women *would* come to

idealize such ‘average’ body shapes and sizes if they were more prevalent in mass media and popular culture.

Bissell expressed appreciation for the CFRB’s “attempt to redefine the way society views beauty and attractiveness through the use of plus-size or ‘real women as models,” and maintained that if more companies were to embrace similar approaches, society would experience a truly progressive change in the perception of female beauty (Bissell and Rask 663). She expressed concern that women of all ages are subconsciously comparing themselves to media models each day, a phenomenon that is rooted in the social comparison theory. As women “continue to idealize body shape images that are not similar to their own” (Bissell and Rask 665), the resulting behavior can be detrimental, affecting every woman’s mentality, health, and self-esteem. The CFRB, conversely, offers women a healthier, milder, and less controversial platform for social comparison. Beginning in 2004, the long-enduring campaign set the stage for a sequence of similar marketing strategies that are contributing to a worldwide effort ensuring that ‘real’ photographic advertising becomes the norm. If future campaigns model Dove’s approach, and come to constitute conventional advertising, then women across the globe may finally experience to the joy, freedom, and wellbeing associated with comfort in their own skin.

III. Jim Stengel and the Brand Ideal

As the nation's forefront advocate of ideals-driven business, businessman and author Jim Stengel sheds light on the rationale behind Dove's success. The book *Grow: How Ideals Power Growth and Profits at the World's Greatest Companies* presents the framework of 10 years of empirical research conducted by Jim Stengel, alongside the leading global marketing research agency, Millward Brown. Stengel has developed a list of the 50 fastest growing brands that experience higher than average success and financial performance as a result of their commitment to serving a higher purpose and forming meaningful relationships with customers, known as "The Stengel 50." Each of these brands adheres to a specific "brand ideal," which is "a business's essential reason for being, the higher-order benefit it brings to the world... Without a brand ideal, no business can truly excel (Stengel 7-8). As determined by Stengel, "Dove exists to celebrate every woman's unique beauty" (Stengel 298). Essentially, Dove finds success in fulfilling a brand ideal that works to improve the lives of others, which Stengel notes is "the only sustainable way to recruit, unite, and inspire all the people a business touches, from employees to customers" (Stengel 7). Dove serves a higher purpose that brings benefit to the world by uplifting women, spreading a positive message worldwide, and encouraging high self-esteem.

Dove's strategy has rendered it successful in accomplishing its primary goal, which is the promotion of worldwide self-acceptance. Dove's fulfillment of a brand ideal works as the catalyst for success in other respects. As outlined by Stengel, a cause and effect relationship exists between company employees that live by an ideals statement and the financial performance of that company. In fact, since the turn of the century, investment in any one of "The Stengel 50" has proven to be 400% more profitable than investment in a Standard & Poor's

(S&P) 500 (“Millward Brown, in Partnership”). An S&P 500 is a list of 500 companies recommended for investment based on their market size, liquidity, and industry grouping (“Standard & Poor’s 500 Index). Dove enjoys profitability as a result of its ideals-driven marketing strategy. It can be argued that the profits procured by the company through the success of the Campaign for Real Beauty do not compromise the benevolence of the company’s strategy, but rather are merited results of shrewd, ideals-driven business practices.

In *Grow*, the Stengel 50 are arranged into five separate categories, based on the fundamental human values which they serve. These five values are eliciting joy, enabling connection, inspiring exploration, evoking pride, and impacting society. Dove joins Chipotle, IBM, Stonyfield Farm, and others on the list of the top 12 companies that best impact society on a global scale (Stengel 42). The manner in which Dove has approached this feat entails targeting a far-reaching, yet uniquely specific demographic: females that experience low self-esteem levels. Dove’s raw, educational, and inspirational marketing tactics ultimately reach on an emotional level mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters ranging in age and ethnicity, as well as command the attention of men exposed to these often shocking ads. Broadly speaking, “Dove aims to go beyond individual consumers and to help bring about an evolution in how society as a whole thinks about beauty, such that each individual can then be more comfortable in his or her skin.” Through Dove’s pursuance of a brand ideal in implementing the Campaign for Real Beauty, the company has not exclusively induced a specific need for its products but, rather, a need for a change of perception regarding beauty as a whole. Its success is displayed in its extensive publicity and growing profit margin.

Dove vs. Axe

Jim Stengel has also addressed the issue of the juxtaposition of Dove with the controversial, and widely-interpreted as sexist, Axe brand advertisements. Both Dove and Axe are owned by the same parent company, Unilever, a circumstance that some might argue undermines Dove's message. However, based on an interpretation of Stengel's framework, the issue can be argued otherwise. As voiced by Stengel, "Each brand in a multi-brand company needs to not only live under the parent company's beliefs and values, it needs to actively trumpet them in its own voice, in its own style" ("Who is Right?"). It is evident that Dove's intention is to do just that, while the marketing actions of Axe affect and bring meaning to an entirely distinct target. Axe, relative to Dove, may be unsuccessful in fulfilling the beliefs and values addressed by Unilever. Dove, however, is powered by ideals that place the company on a whole new map—that is, The Stengel 50.

Broadening the Meaning of Beauty

The inception of the revolutionary “beauty bar” in 1957, ahead of its time with respect to its extra-moisturizing ingredients that helped to combat dry skin, quickly allotted Dove as one of the world’s leading soap brands. The company has since confronted the problem of having to redefine the brand as one that is relevant to beauty in a wider sense, as well as resonates with women on emotional levels. Dove is particularly strategic in its decision to employ both male and female experts in its agency-client team, in order to prevent a stereotypical examination of serious issues perceived through a single, weighted lens.

The females on the Dove team approached the undertaking by attempting to explain to its male counterparts, on a personal level, the feelings of inadequacy that women encounter when faced with beauty advertisements that feature discreetly digitally-enhanced images of women flaunting seemingly perfect physical forms (Jeffers, “Behind Dove’s”). The team’s success lies in its unique strategy: each employee’s acknowledgement, confrontation, and exposure of his or her individual experience and/or struggle concerning the issue at hand, shared with coworkers. As elucidated by strategic planner at Ogilvy & Mather in London, “The team’s intuitive sense as human beings was that it made them feel a bit demoralized and a bit miserable. It makes you feel deflated when you see the gap between these images of perfection and your own physical reality,” (Jeffers, “Behind Dove’s”). Attention to these issues from the perspective of real women and their real, male colleagues—Dove employees—set the foundation for the company’s sustained inquiry into the subject. These employees’ personalized views of the subject at hand were the force behind the formation of The Campaign for Real Beauty.

Beyond Advertising: The CFRB Social Mission

In 2008, members of The Campaign for Real Beauty marketing team participated in a roundtable discussion for the purpose of reexamining their preliminary motives and decisions regarding the campaign. The conversation reflected upon their efforts to revitalize the brand while concurrently addressing issues regarding stereotypical beauty advertising and media images of women. During the discussion, Dennis Lewis, the creative partner for Ogilvy & Mather, referred to his contributions to the CFRB as the work of which he is most proud. “We were doing something that was somehow a little more socially worthwhile—in a way it was kind of stepping outside of advertising,” he stated (Fielding, Lewis, White, Manfredi & Scott 62). Daryl Fielding, a business partner at the company, concurred. She explains that a creative’s involvement in most advertising campaigns does not entail “doing good” in order to make a living. The CFRB, conversely, offered her “an opportunity to do something that is noticeable, creative, commercially sound, but also...has made a difference in the world—I don’t think it gets better than that” (Fielding, Lewis, White, Manfredi & Scott 74). These two insider perspectives provide evidence that those behind the CFRB were motivated by more than an advertising agenda. The team’s collective emotional drive to disseminate content that is truly meaningful, impactful, and benevolent in nature is what makes the CFRB a true social mission.

Dove has particularly exemplified its intention to promote a social mission that extends beyond the pursuit of profits through its alliances with nonprofit organizations such as Girl Scouts, Girls Inc., and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (“The Dove Campaign”). These partnerships have furthered Dove’s mission by providing the corporation an opportunity to collaboratively establish educational programs and activities that encourage self-esteem-building and challenge beauty stereotypes alongside organizations not motivated by profits. Dove’s

alliance with NPOs has improved the company's social welfare while backing its corporate actions with moral business practices.

It is important to consider not only the outlooks of Dove insiders, but also external perspectives of the CFRB. The acknowledgement of arguments, in particular, prevents a biased analysis. Dara Persis Murray, author of "Feminist Discourse and 'Real' Ideology in the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty" criticizes Dove, regardless of its intentions, for reaffirming the traditional western ideology of stereotypical feminine beauty. Dove presents media images of "real" models that Murray argues are still particularly more in shape than the average American woman. She also states the CFRB promotes a meaning of beauty that is advanced only through "Dove-approved self-esteem and social action" (Murray 21). Despite the internal perspectives presented earlier in this section that would maintain otherwise, Murray argues that the CFRB aligns self-empowerment and feeling beautiful with consumerism and the usage of grooming products. She describes the campaign as an "ideology lined with a profit motive" which "suggests that beauty and self-acceptance can be accessed through the purchase of Dove products" (Murray 12). Murray maintains that regardless of the positivity and influencing power of the message spread by Dove, its profit growth stemming from the campaign's success undermine the value of its intentions.

Josée Johnston and Judith Taylor of the University of Toronto uphold a similar message to that of Murray, claiming in "Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign" that the CFRB pales in comparison to certain grassroots organizations when it comes to executing substantive attacks on stereotypical beauty standards (Johnston & Taylor 962). However, the team does acknowledge that smaller organizations such as nonprofits, attempting to fulfill motives similar to those of

Dove are “unable to connect with the scores of women and girls reached through the Dove campaign” (962). Nonprofits, by definition, are “tax-exempt organizations that serve the public interest [and], in general, the purpose of this type of organization must be charitable, educational, scientific, religious or literary” (“What is a Nonprofit”). Dove does serve the public interests and fulfills an educational purpose by “educat[ing] girls and women about a wider definition of beauty (“The Dove Campaign”). However, the operational components of the CFRB do not match those of a nonprofit entirely, as Dove is a multinational corporation that does procure profits through its promotions. Johnston and Taylor sustain that they are unconvinced that a major corporation can effectually advocate a pro-women message, due to its underlying profit motives. However, the authors also admit that scope, scale, and “market location” of Dove is one that is unmatched by any nonprofit, or even other corporation, delivering a similar message. Consequently, the Dove team is equipped “to have considerably greater influence through the mass market” (963). One might argue that, because of this, Dove is successful in its efforts uniquely because the company has the market power and business acumen to reach and influence an extensive target. It is unlikely that each of the many consumers exposed to the CFRB will notice or be affected by the flaws in its execution that are described above, but instead will merely comprehend the message and its intentions on a surface level. With this in mind, an arguably flawed Dove Campaign is far more successful than any smaller-scale pro-women operation, for the mere fact that Dove has the power to access and influence a wider target.

Dove has prompted an open conversation about beauty that does not consistently accompany the promotion of its offerings. The corporation’s involvement with NPOs challenges the critique that the CFRB is strictly an advertising campaign that is the product of a company pursuing profit growth. Moreover, these alliances offset any claims that Dove’s fostering of self-

esteem among its consumers is only accomplished through “Dove-approved” actions and programs.

Conclusion

Dove’s approach to brand positioning represents the type of risk-taking that some marketers might consider exceptional in theory, yet difficult to put into practice. Yet, Dove truly “changed the rules of marketing,” by administering a social mission through its advertising venture. In the early 2000s, when soap sales accounted for less than half of Dove’s gross profit, it became clear to the Dove team that the company had grown into more than a soap brand. Rather than positioning Dove as a stereotypical beauty brand, Dove differentiated itself as a beauty brand that speaks to more than physical attractiveness.

Dove is successful in the way that it challenges corporations and consumers to widen their personal perceptions and internalized definitions of beauty. Positively aligning beauty with advertising has enabled Dove to both “change the face of beauty” while simultaneously succeeding in impacting society in an uplifting manner through its advertising. Despite flaws in its execution, Dove has created a space on a variety of marketing platforms for society as a whole to engage in open discussions on a topic that has long been considered taboo.

The extent, scope, and depth of the CFRB have set the stage for continued discussions of the meaning of beauty, prompting society to consider why traditional perceptions should be questioned and/or more thoughtfully probed. The Campaign for Real Beauty impacts society by constituting more than a marketing strategy. It functions as competition to the impossibly flawless media culture that barrages women today. The Campaign *teaches* women to grow as individuals and relearn what it means to be “beautiful.” The Campaign *challenges* other beauty companies and media advertisers. The Campaign *uplifts* society by celebrating the endless

variations of physical features and internal characteristics possessed by individuals. Its unprecedented approach to marketing has, overall, changed the face of beauty— for the long haul, not only until the advertising budget runs out.

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