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<u>Dove Campaign for Real Beauty: is beauty in or out?</u>

In 2004 the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was launched. The Campaign was set with two obvious goals. The first was to sell Dove products. The second and primary goal, according to Dove's website, was to, "challenge beauty stereotypes and invite women to join a discussion about beauty" ("The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty"). After analyzing several different advertisements and raising ethical questions concerning the campaign, Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty does challenge society's beauty stereotypes and can invite discussion about beauty, but does not necessarily do so in a positive or ethical way.

While the Campaign was launched in 2004 it's inspiration was the results of a study, *The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report*. The study was conducted under the hypothesis that the "definition of beauty had become limiting and unattainable." The results of the study included a statistic that only 2% of women around the world considered themselves beautiful ("The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty"). Dove responded to the study by launching a campaign to broaden the definition of beauty and incite discussion among women.

The Campaign has changed over time, though its goals have not. From 2004 to 2007 Dove has worked to widen definitions of beauty by including different themes such as age, varied body types, and breaking down stereotypes. In 2010 Dove decided to revamp the Campaign by starting the Dove Movement for Self-Esteem. The movement was intended to inspire women to mentor younger generations about beauty.

Many other beauty products marketed today use sex appeals, such as Herbal Essences or Axe. Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty's vision to challenge beauty stereotypes causes a change in marketing that lacks the sex appeals many other similar products boast.

According to Gass and Seiter, "Motivational appeals may be generally defined as external inducements, often of an emotional nature, that are designed to increase and individual's drive to undertake some course of action" (285). Among motivational appeals are sex appeals. Sex appeals are used to sell a wide range of products, including beauty products as previously mentioned. Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty works against stereotypical sex appeals. Of the nine print and billboard ads analyzed, only one contained full nudity.

Figure 1 to the right is an advertisement created with Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty when the campaign took a pro-age stance in 2007. The ad, at first, does not appear to hold any sex appeal other than nudity, but Gass and Seiter claim that one way sex appeals persuade is by stating that use of the product will make you look, act, or feel sexy. Even though the woman featured is not what is stereotypically considered sexy, for women in her age demographic using this product may help her feel sexy, based on the ad, and thus make her more inclined to purchase it.

Source: "ANEB Positive Message Prize." *Media Magnifying Glass*. n.s., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty featured a variety of billboard ads with very limited words. The advertisements each had two check boxes, with one word beside each. Underneath the two check boxes there was only one question. Each of the ads addressed different issues society has with beauty, such as weight, wrinkles, and freckles. Some of these ads are featured below.

Another motivational appeal the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty utilizes is ingratiation, or flattery. In societal views of beauty higher weights are not perceived to be as attractive as lesser weights. Figures 2 and 3 to the right both are advertisements that address society's issue with weight.

Both images show the women in the same kind of pose, but both messages are meant to flattery the women of a larger size. Fig. 2 flatters women by showing that even if they apply in society's stereotype of "fat"

Figure 2

fat?
fit?

Does true beauty only squeeze into size 8? Join the beauty debate.

campaignforrealbeauty.co.uk   Dove

Source: Lynch, Brenden. "Billboards." *Campaign Examples*. University of Oregon, n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

Figure 3

extra-large?
extra-sexy?

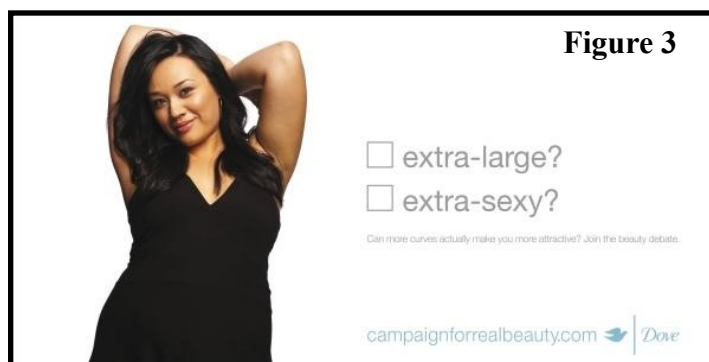Can more curves actually make you more attractive? Join the beauty debate.

campaignforrealbeauty.com   Dove

Source: Valencia, Yvette. "Dove Campaign for Real Beauty." *Global Marketing Culture*. n.s., 15 Nov. 2013. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

that does not have to be true, they could be fit based on their age, size, and body type. Fig. 3 emphasizes a ploy on size, expressly stating a clothing size. The advertisement by comparing a tangible size to a feeling shows that women can feel sexy regardless to shape and size, another play at ingratiation and flattery. Gass and Seiter's explanation of social labeling states, "The use of

positive social labels can produce changes in the target's self-concept that, in turn, lead to

changes in the target's behavior." (300). "Fit" and "sexy" are positive social labels, when the per-

suader identifies with them, they may change their behavior to purchasing Dove products.

Language is very important in persuasion and advertising. Because Dove chose to use less words, the words they selected really stand out. Some of the advertisements use the same model, the same issue, and yet use different sets of words.

Figures 4 and 5 to the right feature the same model and both address freckles, but use different words to address the issue. Figure 6 to the right features a new model, also discusses freckles, but uses different language to address the issue. All three advertisements assume the audience is going to check the second

Source: Tobin Ariana, and Mitchell Hartman. "In Which

Source: "Dove - 'Ugly Spots/Beauty Spots.'" *Fragiledoubt.* n.s., 15 Oct. 2011. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.
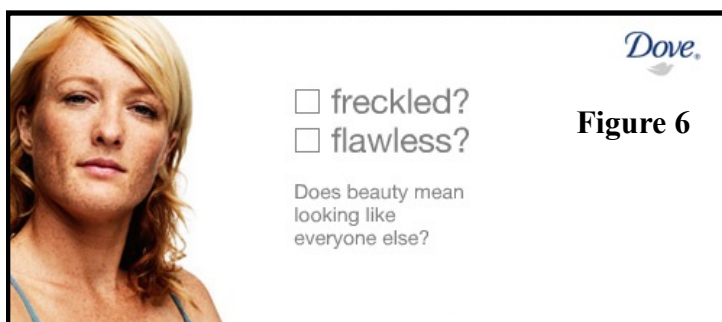
Source: Moldovan, Oana. "The Truth About beauty and Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty." *Ideas Matter.* n.s., 4 Feb. 2013. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

box because each of the words express a positive connotation. The campaign is designed so

women recognize their beauty by accepting what society would consider flaws. The stark contrast between the negative first check and the positive second makes women want to choose the positive answer. This is caused by language intensity. Gass and Seiter claim that language intensity is defined as "the quality of language which indicates the degree to which the speaker's attitude deviates from neutrality" (161). In fig. 5 "ugly" and "beauty" are both very intense opposing words, as the audience already has views on what is ugly and beautiful. "Flawed" and "flawless" from fig. 4 are opposites as well. "Flawless" could be considered a god term from Richard Weaver's ultimate terms theory. Flawlessness, or perfection, is something society strives to achieve, and naturally the audience of fig. 4 would want to accept flawlessness, making the advertisement persuasive.

Fig. 6 causes a bit of discrepancy. While figures 4 and 5 had opposite terms, "freckled" and "flawless" are not necessarily opposites. Figures 4 and 5 boast that freckles are neither a flaw or ugly because of the opposing terms, while fig. 6 shows that freckles are a flaw. "Freckled" should not be considered a flaw based on figures 4 and 5, but because it is opposed by "flawless" it represents a negative connotation to the audience. Freckles were never given a negative connotation until fig. 6.

Figure 7

New Dove Firming.
As tested on real curves.

Source: Lynch, Brenden. "Billboards." *Campaign Examples*. University of Oregon, n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

It can be argued that the reason Dove's

Campaign for Real Beauty became so popular is because of the company's understanding of their demographics. Figure 7 above features an average women, but states, "as tested on real curves." Dove's Campaign understood that a celebrity endorser would not appeal to their demographics the way the women in fig. 7 does. The woman in fig. 7 is of an average body type and build, she could be any one of Dove's customers. Dove could not use a celebrity endorser for a firming product because celebrities would likely not use the product in the first place. To appeal to their audience Dove used someone that could actually be an audience member.

Source: "What Went Wrong with Dove's Attempt at 'real beauty.'" *Makeup, Adverts, and Everything Else.* n.s., 5 Sept. 2013. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

In Figure 8 the text states, "Let's face it, firming the thighs of a size 8 supermodel wouldn't have been much of a challenge." Dove understands their demographic would not identify with a super-model, nor would the demographic reasonably believe a supermodel uses Dove firming products. Instead to boost the product's cred-ibility Dove used "real curves" from fig. 7, and a model larger than a size 8 that would prove the product really did work, on every woman.

Figure 9 below was among the images launched with Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty. The image includes women of all shapes, sizes and ethnicities. The variety of women empha-sized to the audience that Dove products are meant to be utilized by all women. The product was

made to be more relatable to its demographic by including women that were not subject to the outrageous standards of beauty that society upholds. This persuaded women Dove was a product for them.

Figure 9

Source: "What Went Wrong with Dove's Attempt at 'real beauty.'" *Makeup, Adverts, and Everything Else.* n.s., 5 Sept. 2013. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty raises a few ethical questions. The Campaign is meant to be a social mission for the company, but is also obviously being used to market Dove products. Jennifer Millard conducted a study exposing women to some of the Campaign's print and billboard ads. While the women in Millard's study liked the new portrayal of beauty in the ads they were also, "skeptical of Dove's hidden sales agenda, calling the campaign a gimmick, albeit a positive one" (161). Dove took on an important social issue, society's unreasonable views on beauty, and turned it into a marketing tactic. These smart consumers raise an important question, is it ethically sound to exploit a social issue to sell more product?

Millard's study found that even though this campaign was used to market Dove products women "appreciated realistic role models for their daughters. They also thought these images are better for men to see to lower their expectations of regular women" (162). Under Gass and Seiter's definition of utilitarianism, the company is providing the greatest good to the greatest number. While the Campaign is benefiting the company, women still have positive role models, men

may lower their expectations of women, and ultimately the Campaign can still work to change the standards of beauty.

Alternatively, Dara Persis Murray felt that not only did Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty still perpetuate standards of appearance and behavior for women, but it did not actually promote discussion. Murray specifically discusses some of the billboard check box advertisements pictured above claiming,

> "The central meaning of 'real beauty' in these texts is connected to a voting device' the linguistic sign 'cast your vote' connotes the feminist value of suffrage, however, CFRB (Campaign for Real Beauty) is not an election. By tallying the votes on publicly displayed interactive billboards and on the CFRB website, the women become objects for approval or disapproval by the 'real' judgement of global audiences" (91).

Murray is expressing that the real women on the billboards are still seeking approval from society. This is ethically concerning because this is what the Campaign should be promoting against. The Campaign is meant to allow women to enhance their own beauty without following the stamp of approval from society's views of beauty. Murray also argues that the limitation of selected one option does not promote debate or discussion as the Campaign had hoped.

Kristin Liard argues that Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty is exploiting women's insecurities. The campaign does focus on topics that many women are insecure about, such as weight and freckles, but tries to convey them in a way that empowers women. Women often buy all kinds of products to mask these insecurities, like spanx or coverup, but the Campaign wants to push women to accept these insecurities. Even so, by doing this Nina Bahadur argues that redefining beauty this way does not mean that women accept the Campaign's ideas and feel beauti-

ful themselves. Bahadur also claims that at if Dove believed the core of it's Campaign the products being marketed, such as firming lotion, would not be in existence.

These are also valid ethical concerns of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty. The message behind the Campaign is that women should accept themselves and find themselves beautiful regardless of society's standards of beauty. Yet in doing this they are also advertising firming lotion. There is a cognitive dissonance in this logic. Dove is claiming that women should feel beautiful regardless of society's standards, while also trying to sell women a product to fix something society feels is not beautiful. It is unethically sound to exploit women, and also it is unethical to convey two very conflicting messages.

Kimberly Bissell and Amy Rask claim the Social Comparison Theory suggests, "people look to images they perceive to be attainable and realistic, and subsequently make comparisons among themselves, others and the idealised images" (648). This theory can be applied to arguments made by Angela Celebre and Ashley Waggoner Denton. Celebre and Denton claim that even though Dove is using "real women," actual women in the audience of these ads may still feel as if they are not beautiful compared to these "real women." Celebre and Denton claim that many young women have been conditioned to know that beauty in magazine is all faked with unachievable goals, now Dove has placed "real women" in front of their eyes and suddenly these standards of beauty are attainable, but what if these girls do not fit this new profile? Now the Campaign may be isolating young women through the Social Comparison Theory.

Celebre and Denton even argue that Dove's "real women" are still accepted by stereotypical beauty standards. Many of the women are white, or have lighter skin tones, and those who are of another race really are not accurately portrayed. Millard's study also claimed that by,

"providing more reasonable beauty scripts, consumers might feel even better about themselves by being thinner or more attractive than the women in the advertisements" (163). This pins women against one another in a competition that objectifies them which is both ethically un-sound and agains the Campaign's intentions. These issues are unethical because while Dove is boasting "real women" they are not accurately representing "real women," and may be changing the views of young women in a negative way that the Campaign does not intend.

While all the advertisements analyzed deconstruct society's stereotypical views of beauty, they still maintain the stereotypical view that beauty comes from the outside, not the inside. While this is understandable because the products are beauty products, it does still make the campaign ethically suspect. But the question Dove should be addressing is, is real beauty on the inside or out?

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