

A New Side of Dove: Straying from the Path – Kelsie Roberts

Advertisements today that contain women usually display them in unflattering or demeaning circumstances that devalue their worth and promote social and cultural stereotypes. Many images exploit women's bodies and flaunt them in ways to please male viewers. This is what our society has deemed appropriate because even though it is demeaning to women, it unfortunately sells products. Advertising has created a forum in which women compare themselves to models who have been made to look like perfection. This results in a gap between constructed perfection and reality (Richins 72). Dove breaks away from traditional marketing strategies of using pencil thin, camera-ready models to change women's perceptions of beautiful by creating an un-sexualized atmosphere and including a variety of women with different features to target the media's repetitive use of unrealistic, unattainable images of women and challenge beauty stereotypes in an effort to alter the culture of advertising. Dove created a new trend in advertising by relating the product to women's emotions in an attempt to get women to feel confident no matter what they look like.



("Real Beauty by Dove")

Dove reaches out to women by making an emotional connection between the consumer and product. The media constantly bombards women with tips and tricks for fashion, fitness, and dieting to enhance their features in an attempt for them to achieve beauty according to society (Bissell and Rask 644). Instead of convincing consumers to buy products to make up for what they lacked, Dove turned the table and targeted women who did not fit the ideal mold of beauty (Bissell and Rask 646). This particular advertisement from Dove came out in September of 2004 to promote their “Campaign for Real Beauty.” This marketing campaign was launched worldwide by Unilever. Dove needed a way to revive their brand because they were being overshadowed by other companies. It was part of their many advertisements that were created after conducting research from a global report of ten countries that revealed only two percent out of the 3,200 women surveyed saw themselves as beautiful (Etcoff et al.). This advertisement was part of the first stage of the campaign with the mission to replace anxiety with beauty as the main source of confidence for women. Their target audience is women who feel insecure about their body shape and size, and they are striving to make them feel comfortable in their own skin. Dove’s purpose is to form a new definition of beauty so that women can be freed from self-doubt, allowing them to embrace their real, inner beauty.

From a social perspective, Dove uses this advertisement to defy the stereotypical norms that were dominant during this time. The power that the media has over the consumption of products and their ability to influence society should not be underestimated. In the article “Real Women on Real Beauty,” the authors go into more detail on this subject by arguing, “Although there are other factors aiding in the creation of ideal and unrealistic beauty, the mass media seem to provide many examples of such and are believed to have enormous influential power” (Bissell and Rask 645). It received immediate responses because it featured women in an un-sexualized

atmosphere. Dove challenged socially constructed images of women during that time period. Instead of using models that ranged from sizes zero to two, they chose women that were sizes six through fourteen. These women fit the standards of what “real women” actually looked like. They are shown wearing only their bras and underwear to show their natural beauty. They are showing as much skin as possible to convey the message that women should feel comfortable in their own bodies. They are free of makeup and designer clothes that flatter their body types. This turns the focus off of the socially constructed image of beauty and on to natural, inner confidence that is emitted once a woman feels comfortable in her own body. The models are shown laughing in a relaxed environment and they are posed in non-sexual positions that alert viewers of their confidence. There are no men present in the picture, so these women are representing empowerment and courage to embrace the bodies they have been given. The bright lighting and the use of white in the advertisement symbolizes purity and innocence (Real Beauty by Dove). This is targeting the ads that portray women in a negative light, proving that women are being treated as objects instead of human beings. It also promotes the belief that they have done nothing wrong to deserve this treatment. The care-free relationship shown between the women in the advertisement represents the connection that Dove is trying to create between women. That through their product, women all over the world can make connections to people just like them.

Dove has created a place for social interaction and community growth. They are implying that no one is alone; there are others out there with similar struggles facing the same dilemmas. Dove uses an advertising tactic known as branding to persuade consumers to make their brand a part of their daily lives. The author of the article “Branding Real Social Change in Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty” explains the effects of this tactic further by declaring, “Thus, when people purchase a brand based on the corporate identity that has been attached to it, socialization

occurs through a common association with the brand. Their socialization, then, is mediated through the brand's role in their lives, and their attachment to the brand secures its place in culture and social networks" (Murray 87). The slogan that Dove uses, "new Dove Firming. As tested on real curves," promotes the idea that their product is free of any restrictions that cause conformity to society's definition of beautiful (Real Beauty by Dove). There is no pressure for women to be something that they are not. The term "Dove Firming" carries the connotation that every woman should be her own judge; that she does not need outside confirmation to tell her what she should look like. The product's feel good message brings about positive attitudes and new ways of thinking. Since this advertisement empowers women instead of making them feel less, they feel obligated to promote this change and share it with the world. Not only has Dove's new marketing strategy in this advertisement made a huge impact on the social aspect of society, but also on our culture as well.

The culture of advertising has expanded upon the exploitation of women to sell products. Today's culture revolves around the picture perfect woman who can easily draw the attention of a man. Many companies revolve their marketing tactics around the beauty myth that convinces women that they can achieve the same look as the model by using their product. This has created a culture in which women not only are judged by these guidelines, but they also use them to alter themselves (Lachover and Brandes 304). Dominant industries within our culture are responsible for designating the features that are most desirable. They influence different looks that cause women to buy products so that they can possess those desirable features. Jennifer Millard performed a study focusing on beauty in the advertising world and concluded that "beauty is still not something one has but something one does" (150). She is saying that our culture has created an image of beauty that is not natural, but can be chosen.

In Dove's advertisement, the focus is taken off all of the enhancements used to make models look flawless, and on to natural, God-given beauty. The models in the picture have different skin color, backgrounds, and nationalities. They are different shapes and sizes. They are beautiful in their own way based on how they define beauty. The color white used in the advertisement exposes the different skin colors of the women to show that beauty has no limits (Real Beauty by Dove). Beauty is not defined by designer clothing or types of makeup; it is defined by how a person feels about the body they have been given. Today's culture centers on a common notion of beauty that sets unrealistic expectations. The common image of a beautiful women is usually tall and thin with a robust chest, round hips, and unblemished skin. Rarely are there any great variations from this image (Mazur 283). The women in the picture all have different qualities that make them unique from this mold.

The products that Dove is trying to sell are lotion, shampoo, and conditioner. The way the women are dressed in the picture is directly related to the products being advertised (Real Beauty by Dove). Since these products are used in the shower, the women's attire is minimal. The more skin exposed, the more the audience is aware of the effects of Dove. That by using this product, consumers will have smother skin and it will bring out the natural beauty of their hair. The shape of the products in the lower right hand corner next to the phrase "Dove Firming Range" represent the different shapes and sizes of women (Real Beauty by Dove). Every person is unique in their own way and they should be free to look and feel how they want without conforming to society's rigid rules that have developed from cultural norms. Dove meant for this advertisement to challenge the conventional image of beauty and change how today's culture depicts women in advertisements.

Dove's use of a variety of combinations of elements has brought meaning to its overall purpose and has paved a path for future improvements. These elements include color, theme, setting, and the arrangement of the women in the picture (Real Beauty by Dove). This advertisement urges women to stop judging themselves and defining beauty based on what society has deemed appropriate and today's culture considers normal. Real beauty comes from confidence and acceptance. In order for a change in how the media portrays women to occur, the gap that exists between creation and reality needs to close. Dove strives to accomplish this task by targeting the media's constant use of unrealistic, unattainable images of women. This advertisement caused women to take a step back and think about how this portrayal effected their treatment in real life. Instead of using the marketing strategy of selling products that promote unattainable images of beauty, Dove used the power of emotional connection by making its product relatable to the average women. By continuing to implement un-sexualized images of women in the media, Dove could change the way our society and culture view women.

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