

Sarah Scott

A Critique of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty

In 2004, Dove launched their "Campaign for Real Beauty" in order to alter women's beliefs about the definition of beautiful. The campaign consists of four separate, yet interrelated phases of marketing. The first phase utilizes the print advertising medium. Dove focuses on featuring women of all shapes and ethnic groups in these initial advertisements. The second phase of advertising targets young women and uses commercial advertising on television. The third phase features older women in print advertisement that focuses solely on the 50+ age range. The last, and most current, phase of this campaign is a viral video that has been spread on social media newsfeeds across the country.

While Dove argues that these four phases are meant to change women's perceptions of beautiful, I argue that they fall short of their goal for several reasons. Even if their intentions are ethical, which I argue they are not, the actual advertisements lack several key factors, rendering them useless. Throughout this paper, I discuss several of the campaigns' shortcomings. These shortcomings include the campaign's failures in relation to Habermas' notion of the public sphere, men's perceptions and how they are affected by the campaign (and, therefore affecting women's perceptions), and the prominence of male gaze in media. Also, the categorizing of the women who are invited to participate in the online forums of Dove's campaign as well as the exclusion of women who are naturally thin, and therefore excluded from the campaign's tag line, "Real Women Have Real Curves," render the Campaign for Real Beauty useless.

In addition, I explain the dire financial crisis Dove was facing before developing this campaign and their profits skyrocketing as a result of it, look into studies conducted about

advertisements and how consumers are able to create brand loyalty through calculated advertising campaigns developed by brands, and finally, highlight the inconsistency of the Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty when contrasted against their sister company's Axe's advertisements featuring scantily clad models.

I conclude with a look at the medical side effects that accompany the use of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty products. There are several chemicals used in these products that have adverse health effects on human skin as well as the environment, further encouraging consumers to take a second look at this seemingly revolutionary campaign.

Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty

According to Dove's website, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is "a marketing campaign established in order to widen the definition of beauty as well as provoke discussion on what our society deems beautiful." In 2004, Dove employed researchers to conduct a survey in order to study "how comfortable women are with using the word to describe themselves; their level of satisfaction with their own beauty; its impact on their sense of well-being; and, how important it is to them (Etcoff et al. 9)." The results of this study showed that only 2% of women in the 10 countries where the interviews were conducted would chose the word "beautiful" to describe themselves, while even fewer chose the adjectives "sexy" and "gorgeous" (Etcoff et al. 10). The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was created soon after with the hope of raising that 2% statistic.

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was launched in three separate, yet interrelated, phases. The first phase was launched in 2004 with a majority of its advertising focused on the print medium such as billboards and magazine. The initial advertisements of this phase featured

non-models of all different sizes and ethnic backgrounds in hopes of challenging the trend of solely white, tall and thin female models. In one of the largest print campaigns of the first phase Dove featured twelve women of varying sizes and skin color in white undergarments. The models have their arms around one another and are wearing pearly white smiles as the only accessory to their white bra and panties. The posture and facial expressions promote a sense of acceptance among one another, while the smiling faces portray confidence in their bodies despite the fact that they don't fit western societies normalized version of "beautiful."

The first phases' models appear to range in age from early 20s to late 30s. All of the women, in the large ads as well as the smaller ads designed for magazines, are what our society nicely deems "curvy". There is also a noticeable lack of blonde hair in all the advertisements that ran during this phase. The campaign's goal was to promote a more natural and obtainable beauty for our society, which has otherwise idolized models and actresses that seem to never be larger than a size 2.

Dove added an extra twist to this first round of advertisements by giving viewers the option of going online and submitting their thoughts about these new models via online voting polls. Smaller ads shown in magazines had simple white font statements featured next to the models asking questions such as "Flawless or Flawed?" "Oversized or Outstanding?" and "Fit or Fat?" with a check box next to each adjective. Consumers could then go online and find that particular advertisement and check the box that they deemed appropriate for the model.

Two years later, in 2006, Dove began it's second phase of the Campaign for Real Beauty, this time reaching out to young teenage girls via commercial advertising. Keeping in mind these young girls would be more likely to watch TV commercials as opposed to viewing advertisements in a women's magazine (where the first phase of campaigns had been mostly

prominent), Dove customized this second phase to short films or commercials to be viewed on the television.

This phase of the campaign, according to Dove.com, was prompted by Spain's ban of overly thin models on the runways of its weekly fashion show in 2006. As stated on *CNN.com*, Spain was the first country in the world to ban under weight and sickly looking models from the catwalks of their annual fashion week. One reporter wrote, "Madrid's fashion week has turned away underweight models after protests that girls and young women were trying to copy their rail-thin looks and developing eating disorders (*CNN.com* 2)". Dove harnessed this notion and produced a short film called "Evolution" to show teenage girls how unobtainable these runways model's looks really were.

"Evolution" is a time warped, short film of an average woman evolving into a model for advertisement purposes. It opens with the woman sitting in front of a mirror in a simple white tank top with no makeup on. A team then begins to transform her in accelerated time right before the viewer's eyes. First, the team applies face makeup, covering up her skin blemishes and dark spots to give her a creamy, even complexion. Second, they also add dark, smoky eye makeup, drawing attention to her blue eyes while giving her eyes the appearance of being upturned and catlike. Third, her eyebrows are darkened and shaped into uniformed arches while her lips are glossed to perfection. Finally, the team curls and adds volume to her hair to give her curls an effortless "beachy" appearance while applying fake eyelashes.

After her makeup transformation, "Evolution" gives the viewers an inside look at her beauty shoot. The finalized portrait is then chosen and edited for marketing. However, the shot chosen isn't good enough as is; editors then enhance and edit the photo for mass consumption.

The editor's first order of business is plumping her lips to give them a more full and luscious appearance. Her eyelashes are lengthened and her neck is concaved in order for it to appear longer and thinner. All the while, the entire image is being airbrushed, focusing heavily on the models' cheekbones and hair. Lastly, her eyes are made larger and more doe-like as well as her cheeks being sunken in order to make her cheekbones appear more prominent. The short film then shows the final edited advertisement on a billboard promoting foundation makeup. As the film ends, "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted" appears in white font on a black screen before the video completely fades out to black.

"Evolution" created such a stir on Dove's online blogs, they continued the second phase with another commercial advertisement called "Little Girls." Aiming to reach an even larger audience, Dove launched this commercial for the first time during the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl estimates 111 million viewers a game and, according to *Forbes*, an estimated 8.4% said they were influenced enough by Super Bowl commercials to purchase their products (Bickle.1).

The main focus of the "Little Girls" commercial is to highlight the insecurities young girls feel while growing up in a beauty-driven society. The girls featured in this commercial range from 10 to 13 years in age and the main portion of the commercial consists of quick shots of these young girls looking into the camera with forlorn and dejected facial expressions. On every other shot, an insecurity appears in white font next to the young girl, as if to show what she is thinking. Some of the insecurities featured are: "I hate my freckles," "Wishes she were blonde," and "Thinks she is ugly." Still aligning with the theme from the first phase of the campaign, most of the girls are ethnic groups other than Caucasian and there are very few blondes shown.

After the screen shot of these girls and their insecurities, black font appears on a white screen stating, “Let’s change their minds.” The commercial then moves into shots of the same young girls, however, this time they are dancing and smiling in front of the camera instead of looking gloomy. The next screen, featuring a white backdrop and black font, shows “The Dove Self Esteem Fund” before scanning to a young girl with glasses smiling with “Because every girl deserves to feel beautiful” written on the bottom left of the screen. The last portion of the film features the girls with insecurities, that weren’t already shown dancing happily, with the statement “and to see how beautiful she really is” next to her head before fading into the Dove’s slogan for the “Real Beauty Campaign.”

The final installment of the second phase is a video titled “Onslaught” that was produced in order for viewers to understand better the stress young girls encounter through exposure to media and advertising to be “beautiful.” The film starts with a red haired, blue-eyed pre-teen girl smiling into the camera. The film then quickly jumps to fast-forwarded screen shots of advertisements, commercials, and videos promoting what our society deems beautiful. Model’s faces, breasts, legs, and butts on advertisements promoting beauty products are shown in rapid-fire screen shots. The video momentarily slows after 20 seconds showing women dressed in nothing more than booty shorts and push up bras dancing for a music video. The rapid fire advertisements are then shown again for a few seconds before the video slows to show a montage of commercials featuring women trying to sell you quick, easy fix pills that will make you “younger,” “thinner,” “firmer” etc.

The next portion of “Onslaught” focuses mainly on internalized body image. A girl in her bra and underwear is shown on a scale in time warp going from heavy to scarily thin and back to heavy again. Rapid-fire shots show salads and healthy foods being eaten before the girl on the

scale is shown gaining and losing weight yet again. The video then quickly shows the girl in front of the toilet purging the food she just ate.

Lastly, “Onslaught” focuses on plastic surgery. The video shows rapid-fire shots of women going under the knife for cosmetic procedures such as breast implants, lip fillers and Botox. To end the film, a group of 6 young girls are shown walking across a crosswalk followed by white font stating “Talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does.” The film ends with the same red haired girl shown in the beginning walking across the same crosswalk alone, erasing the words on the screen.

The third phase of the Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty was to promote beauty for women in the 50+ age range. Dove went back to the first phases’ use of print ads for this final phase. Some advertisements featured the original images with checkboxes next to descriptive adjectives, while some simply featured a single woman with simple slogans written underneath her.

In this third phase, the check box advertisements have sayings next to the models such as “Wrinkled or Wonderful?” and “Grey or Gorgeous?” All these advertisements are headshots, featuring only the models’ heads and necks. The models for this third phase of advertisements are elderly and proudly flaunt graying hairs and wrinkles. Each woman smiles directly into the camera exuding an air of confidence despite her age and flaws being placed in the limelight.

In other advertisements of the third phase, elderly women are shown in full body shots, completely nude, with a slogan underneath them stating “Too old to be an anti-aging ad.” Similar to the check box advertisements, these women proudly display their graying hair, wrinkles, and age spots. Unlike the check box ads, however, these women are shown in full body shots. Their body type is in alignment with the first phase of the campaign, featuring only curvy women that

are not a “typical” model. Also similar to the first phases’ ads, these women are shown smiling confidently into the camera appearing confident and happy.

Just recently, in April 2013, Dove seems to have launched a fourth phase of their Real Beauty Campaign. This emerging phase focuses less on particular age groups of women, and more on women’s perceptions of themselves as a whole, as well as utilizing the growing popularity of social media and it’s effective means of circulating information to a wide audience. In this new promotional launch, Dove released a viral video about women’s perceptions of themselves. Dove had women sit down with a retired police sketch artists and describe themselves. The sketch artist never saw the women, and the women did not know what the man was doing behind the curtain. He simply asked them questions about their facial appearance and sketched accordingly.

Dove then had a second party come in and describe the women the sketch artist had already drawn. These second party witnesses had met briefly with the women in a waiting room, and were then asked the same questions the sketch artist asked the “models,” and he drew a sketch according to their answers. After all this was completed, the sketch artist hung the two sketches, one from the woman herself and another from a witness describing her, side by side. The women were then invited in to see what the man had been doing behind the curtain. The video then focuses on the women’s reaction to the striking differences between the two sketches. Some women cry, while some smile and laugh, but it is obvious that all of these women are deeply affected by the difference in the way they describe themselves as compared to the way other people describe them. When one woman is asked to describe what she sees, she says the sketch she described of herself looks “more closed off. Fatter.” While the other sketch looks “friendly and happy.” Another women said she should “be more grateful of her natural beauty,”

when she is interviewed. Ultimately, the sketch artist asks, “Do you think you are more beautiful than you say?” and the women answer several versions of the answer “yes.” The video ends with a white background with writing stating, “You are more beautiful than you think.” The next screen says, “Watch the whole experience at dove.com/realbeautysketches.” The final screen shows the Dove logo on a plain white background.

There is no doubt that our media horribly stereotypes women. One must simply watch the short video “Onslaught,” produced by Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty to see the unrealistic images women and girls are bombarded with on a daily basis via multiple media outlets. TV shows, movies, and advertisements alike lead women to believe that only a small and elite portion of our population can ever reside in the realm of our society’s idea of “beautiful.” The Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty drives home the very real point that women in our society are exposed to unrealistic and unobtainable goals by the media messages that saturates our lives.

Interpreting Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty

It appears the campaign’s main objective to change women’s perceptions of what it really means to be “beautiful.” By choosing the campaign slogan “Real Women Have Real Curves,” Dove drives home the main focus of their campaign: to raise the percentages of women in the world who would describe themselves as beautiful from the current dismal statistic of 2% (Etcoff et al. 10). However, after analyzing Dove’s marketing choices for the Campaign for Real Beauty, I will show how this campaign falls grossly short of what it claims they aim to achieve.

First, I will discuss the campaigns shortcomings in relation to Habermas’ notion of the public sphere. According to Jurgen Habermas, the public sphere is “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens

(49).” As of right now, the mass media public sphere tell us that in order to be beautiful one must have long hair, big breasts, and a small waist. According to Habermas’ definition of the public sphere, access must be granted to all citizens and changes can only occur once society as a whole changes their opinion from the current status quo (49). Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty only allows women participation in the public sphere because their advertisements are geared solely towards reaching women as an audience.

Social psychologist Carol Tavris states that men’s conception of female beauty is also shaped by the same advertising that has a negative affect on women, which then adds substantially more pressure on women to meet unrealistic standards (Dye 119). For decades now, men’s perceptions of what constitutes female beauty have been influenced by the same advertisements that produce negative affects on women’s self esteem. Due to advertisements’ portrayals of beauty, the appearances women strive to obtain are the same appearances men strive to possess in the women they find attractive enough to pursue. Therefore, the Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty may help women realize beauty is a much broader term than advertising leads us to believe, however, the fact that men are not targeted by this marketing campaign brings the campaign’s main objective to a screeching halt within the public sphere.

Chicago Sun Times columnist Richard Roeper reacted to the Dove’s campaign for Real Beauty by stating:

I find these Dove ads a little unsettling. If I want to see plump gals baring too much skin, I’ll go to Taste of Chicago, OK? When we’re talking women in their underwear on billboards outside my living room windows, give me the fantasy babes, please. If that makes me sound superficial, shallow and sexist -- well yes, I’m a man (Pozner 1).

Jennifer Pozner also states in her essay “Dove’s Real Beauty Backlash,” that a second *Chicago Sun Times* columnist, Lucio Guerrero, wrote, “These disturbing and frightening women should put on clothes (please, really), because ads should be about the beautiful people. They should include the unrealistic, the ideal or the unattainable look for which so many people strive. The only time I want to see a thigh that big is in a bucket with bread crumbs on it (2).” Other men were found to have the same sentiment for bringing the fantasy girls back into advertising, but tried to cover any sexist implications with medical concern facades. According to Pozner, Bill Zwecker, a Chicago CBS newscaster, wrote in a blog, “In this day and age, when we are facing a huge obesity problem in this country, we don't need to encourage anyone -- women OR men -- to think it's okay to be that out of shape (2).”

Laura Mulvey, a pioneer in the second wave of feminism, was the first to discuss the idea of the “male gaze” that Roeper, Guerrero, and Zwecker use to victimize and discipline women. She states:

The determining of male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women display as sexual object as the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire (803).

If the perspective of Mulvey’s theory is applied here, then males have internalized the male gaze for as long as advertisement and film have existed. Therefore, how men perceive and view women is highly influenced by how women are portrayed within mass media. According to Mulvey, women have only been utilized in media for their “to-be-looked-at-ness,” therefore;

this notion is inevitably deeply engrained in the male psyche of our culture due to the repeated portrayals of women in objectified manners.

With male gaze playing such a strong role in mass media, Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty's may never reach its declared goal. By excluding men from its ad campaign, they fall sickeningly short at any attempt to reverse the male gaze within mass media. Roeper and the other sexist men caught making negative comments about the Dove ads prove men within our society have become accustomed to the fantasy women in media, and unfortunately, a single advertisement campaign featuring curvier women is not going to change the status quo. Some men's beliefs about beauty may be slightly altered by viewing these advertisements geared towards women, but little can be done to completely change the male gaze in mass media.

The second breach of Habermas' public sphere is made apparent by the Real Beauty campaign categorizing the blog implemented for women within the Dove.com website. Lauren Dye, author of "Consuming Constructions: A Critique of Dove's Campaign For Real Beauty," argues that segmenting the discussion groups on Dove's blogs subsequently categorizes women, therefore taking them away from the collectivity that is required by the public sphere. The blog categories consist of "Mothers and Mentors," "Girls Only," and "Ageless Beauties." By providing labeled categories as the only available means for public collaboration, Dove makes it impossible to change the public sphere and western societies' ideas about "beauty" as a collective whole. Categories are simply a container of meaning, and such containment of meaning runs counter to the public sphere's notion that any one individual could convene with their peers to discuss matters that concerned them, regardless of their social class.

The last breach of the public sphere is the campaign slogan utilized in ads and commercials for the Real Beauty Campaign. The slogan "Real Women Have Real Curves"

discriminates against a certain subset of woman, which is counter-productive to the campaign's main focus. Women who are naturally thin have voiced discrimination from the Dove's campaign and products because their slogan suggests they are not real women due to their natural body type.

This being said, many would still argue that while Dove's campaign falls short in some aspects, they still strive to alter an aspect of society that obviously needs improvement. On the surface of this campaign, despite its minor flaws of inclusivity, it does spark controversy and resistance against Westernized beauty standards. Utilizing curvy women for ad campaigns, dressed in simple white under garments, disregards the trend of stick thin models and asks society to question, "What is really beautiful?" I argue, however, that while on the surface Dove appears to be changing beauty perceptions, the Campaign for Real Beauty was simply formulated and driven by corporate greed and the desire to sell products.

According to Tim May, the author of a financial analysis titled "The Dove Case," Dove has existed since 1957 (3). Suddenly, in the late 1990s, Dove noticed a decline in financials due to a surge of strong competitors within the market. May states:

After several meetings of Dove's upper management, three major goals were set into strategic motion. First, was to increase market share through improvement of brand image. Next, was to develop a full-scale marketing campaign. And lastly, they wanted retain the functional strengths of the brand. After doing much research into "consumer-related variables" rather than "product-related variables," they launched their biggest marketing campaign to date (3-4).

May uses one key term in his financial analysis proving Dove's underlying motives when creating their Campaign for Real Beauty: "consumer related variables." On the surface, Dove

may claim their campaign was produced to help change women's perception of what it means to be beautiful, and to some extent this may even be true. However, we must also acknowledge Dove researched consumer related variables and ultimately concluded there was a 98% market audience that didn't view themselves as beautiful and if Dove could simply play into those insecurities, they could reach the largest audience their company had seen since its creation in 1957. Women fall victim to male gaze, and have an internalized desire to be the object of male's attention. With these advertisements, Dove is able to inadvertently play into Mulvey's male gaze and women's desires.

In 2008, Fitzsimons, Chartrand, and Fitzsimons found that "brand exposure may elicit automatic behavioral effects consistent with the brand image (Aggarwall and McGill 307)." In Aggarwall and McGill's discuss marketers' decisions to advertise their brand in ways to make the product appear more humanlike. Marketers utilize this advertising tactic, called anthromorphism, because humans readily see the human in non-human (Aggarwall and McGill 308).

Although classifying Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, as an act of anthromorphism may be a stretch of the factual definition, Dove still appears to have utilized anthromorphism within its product line after the campaign was created. According to Gilmore, anthromorphism can be classified as the act of giving a product a "soul" (Aggarwall & McGill 309). Consumers now associate Dove's products with the notion of acceptance and change. By associating this campaign with their products, Dove has given their products a "soul," enticing consumers to purchase their products with an emotional driven decision as opposed to a logically driven decision.

In order to give their product line a sense of acceptance, Dove geared its advertisements towards promoting the brand as a whole, as opposed to promoting one single product within its

line. In the first wave of advertisements featuring curvy women in white undergarments, there is no single product placement on the advertisement itself. Instead, Dove simply put their brand name and slogan for the campaign in their commercials in order to encompass their product line as a whole. Their ad statement “Tested on Real Women With Real Curves” allows this “soul” to apply within the entire brand as opposed to association with one product within the Dove line.

The only time Dove strayed away from this strategy was during the release of their anti-aging line. The release of this line occurred during their third wave of advertisement instillations geared towards the 50+ age range. Ads during this phase hosted slogans such as “Too Old To Be an Anti-Aging Ad” and “Wrinkled or Wonderful,” yet were contradicted by the notion that these ads were formulated in order to promote an anti-aging product line. By doing such, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty and the Dove product line itself formulate an inconsistency. They state, “you are beautiful exactly the way you are, but if you purchase our product to help minimize the appearance of your fine lines and wrinkles, you will be even more beautiful.” If these women were in fact beautiful exactly the way they are, as the Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty states, what need do they have with anti aging products that alter the way they currently look?

An inconsistency within the Dove brand occurs with the advertisements of their sister company, Axe. Axe and Dove are owned by the same parent company Unilever, and their product advertisements create a dissonance with Dove’s cry for acceptance within our society. As Dye points out, Axe’s advertisements still utilize the “fantasy babe”: women with small waists, long hair and large breasts (120). In every Axe commercial aired on television, women are presented flocking to and fawning over men who use Axe products, while in turn, these beautiful women ignore men who do not use the products. On one hand Dove, and therefore

Unilever, begin the Campaign for Real Beauty seemingly to promote the idea that all women are beautiful exactly the way they are, yet they contradict this very message by casting the “fantasy babe” in the Axe commercials and show them in an extremely sexualized manner.

If Unilever and the Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty really meant to change male gaze and how men perceive women’s beauty, they would also use the “Real Women Have Real Curves” notion when designing their Axe advertisements as well as Dove’s. By not utilizing curvier women for their television commercials, it proves that much of the Campaign for Real Beauty is simply a ploy to exploit women’s desire to feel beautiful in order to sell products.

The Ethics of Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty

After we understand how Dove created their Campaign for Real Beauty, what the purpose of the campaign was, and how we can interpret the campaign’s advertisements, we can now ask ourselves: why does this matter? The most obvious reason was discussed earlier: the messages appear to exclude men from the perceptual changes the campaign intends to produce as well. However, we must also look further into the unethical appeals Dove’s advertisements utilize in order to create brand loyalty. In addition, the advertising techniques used by Dove to promote their anti-aging product line that doctors prove have no actual ability to alter the aging process. Finally, we must confront the simple fact that Dove’s products are cheap and sometimes even harmful, yet generate millions of dollars in revenue for Dove thanks to their manipulative advertising techniques.

According to Ioana Chioveanu, “The most advertised segments [in the United States] include many consumer goods: Beer, cigarettes, cleaners, food products, personal care, and soft drinks. In many of these markets the goods are nearly homogenous, and eventually advertising,

rather than increasing the demand, redistributes the buyers among sellers (69).” Personal care, which is the product segment Dove’s line falls within, is an extremely competitive market with many similar products from different brands. These brands must then compete with one another to become profitable and marketers search for advertising techniques to set their brand of products apart from others if they are going to entice customers to purchase their products.

In September 2008, *Games and Economic Behavior* published a study in which similar products’ advertisements were manipulated to research how affective advertising is within a similarly priced and highly competitive product market. The study concluded, “In many homogenous product markets, advertising only operates a redistribution of the consumers among the sellers. Many advertising campaigns and a great deal of the TV spot advertising have rather an emotional content and try to attract consumers associating the product with attitudes or feelings that have no relevant relation to the product or its consumption, (Chioveanu 93).”

Similarly, “The Creative Destruction of Decision Research” demonstrated how Coca-Cola advertisements elicit emotional responses in their consumers, therefore creating brand loyalty:

While conventional models of decision-making can make sense of advertisements that provide information about products (whether informative or misleading), much advertising- for example, depicting happy, attractive friends drinking Coca-Cola seem to have little informational content. Instead such advertising seems to be intended to create mental associations that operate in both directions, causing one to think that one should be drinking Coca-Cola if one is with friend (by evoking a choice heuristic) and to infer one that one must be having fun if one is drinking Coca-Cola (playing on the difficulty of evaluating one’s hedonic state). (Loewenstein 503)

This idea of common sense and the difficulty of evaluating one's state helps explain how Dove has created brand loyalty within their Campaign for Real Beauty's advertisements. None of the ads marketed by Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty mention the actual products' effectiveness. Instead, by showing women with curves proudly flaunting their bodies, or showing women crying after seeing how much different they perceive their beauty in comparison to their peers, Dove evokes a choice heuristic, which connects an event to an action and simplifies decision making in the mind of the consumer. These advertisements then lead women to question whether or not they should feel content with their curves, wrinkles, and other imperfections, therefore playing on the difficulty of evaluating one's hedonic state.

The unethical nature of this advertising technique is taken a step further when Dove introduces its third campaign phase, which is accompanied by their new anti-aging product line. As stated by Bayer, "if aging is a natural process to be experienced by all, why are visible signs of aging met with increasing cultural disdain? Why, for many, does looking younger mean greater happiness and improved social standing (14)?" According to Muise and Desmarais, "North Americans are exposed to an idealized image of beauty in the media, and this image often equates beauty with a youthful appearance. The impact of these messages falls disproportionately on women since there seems to be a 'double standard of aging' whereby aging is seen as negative for women's appearance (126)." This notion is comparable to Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty's purpose statement; however, Dove uses this idea to entice, encourage, and manipulate consumer's emotions in order for them to purchase Dove's products.

In a study conducted by Muise and Desmarais, Western societies notion of beauty was linked with consumer habits to test the likeliness of women purchasing anti-aging products as well as how likely they were to use these products. The study found that the age of women

purchasing anti-aging products is getting younger and younger with time; therefore the market to sell anti-aging products is steadily increasing (Muisse and Desmaris 132). Participants stated they used anti-aging products to maintain youth. They also stated looking better meant looking younger (Muisse and Desmaris 133). The women acknowledged anti-aging products would not have the drastic effects that cosmetic surgery has, therefore they sought out anti-aging products to maintain their youthfulness (Muisse & Desmaris 133).

In the discussion portion of this study, Muise and Desmaris recognize that while several anti-aging advertisements utilize scientific claims about their products, women consumers are still skeptical about the effectiveness these products have on their appearance (135). However, many still claimed they were very likely to purchase anti-aging products in order to maintain that youthful appearance (Muisse & Desmaris 135). Dove is able to utilize this research and instead of citing the clinical effectiveness of their product line, they tap into the insecurities of women seeking to maintain their youthfulness. They do so by posing elderly women in their advertisements prominently flaunting wrinkles. Although Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty states their main objective is to change women's perceptions on beauty, they actually utilize a key marketing technique that exploits women's insecurities to push their new product line.

By featuring elderly women in advertisements with slogans stating "Too old to be an anti-aging ad," yet the Dove brand sells and promotes anti-aging products, they create a paradox with consumers. This paradox can then create cognitive dissonance among women consumers. Women realize that society's idea of beauty is extremely limited and somehow needs to be resisted, but the pressure to maintain their youthful appearance in order to fit into society's small box of beauty is overwhelming. With the cognitive dissonance theory, one must either ignore information that doesn't align with their beliefs or alter their beliefs in order to include the new

information (Festinger 3). Looking at the profit Dove has made from their products, we can infer that most women who experience cognitive dissonance after viewing these ads choose to ignore the new information that women should be happy with the body they were given since it didn't align with their current belief that one must mold to society's notion of beauty.

Mazlow's Hierarchy of Needs can also help explain why women ignore the need to change their beauty perceptions. Within Mazlow's hierarchy structure, one must achieve each step before moving on to the next. This being said, love and esteem come first on the ladder of needs before self-actualization. Without self-actualization, we would be unable to alter our perceptions and therefore unable to be fully content with ourselves. Society's idea that beauty is youthful is so engrained in women and men, they cannot achieve the esteem phase of the hierarchy before moving forward to a place where they are able to alter their perceptions of beauty. If they are unable to change their own perceptions, they will be unable to contribute to the public sphere where society's perceptions as a whole could be altered. Therefore, these advertisements featuring wrinkled women promoting an anti-aging line do nothing more than promote products to which women searching for the fountain of youth can steadfastly cling. Whether or not Dove marketers realize the counter productivity of their ads is unknown, but they will not change their ads as long as a profit is being made.

We as consumers should see these advertisements for what they communicate, whether or not intentional, because these techniques exploit our socially constructed insecurities in order to make revenue for a company. According to a new article published by *Science of Aging Knowledge Environment*:

Alarmed by these [anti-aging product] trends, scientists who study aging, including the three of us, have issued a position statement containing this warning: no currently

marketed intervention - none - has yet been proved to slow, stop or reverse human aging, and some can be downright dangerous. While the public is bombarded by hype and lies, many biologists are intensively studying the underlying nature of aging in the belief that their research will eventually suggest ways to slow its progression and to thereby postpone infirmity and improve quality of life. But anyone purporting to offer an anti-aging product today is either mistaken or lying. (Olshansky 5)

This claim was also published later in *Scientific American*, however, this time the claim was backed by 51 reputable physicians all claiming the same fact: that over the counter anti-aging products simply do not work. We are being emotionally manipulated to spend millions of dollars nationally each year on products that do nothing to reverse the signs of aging we so resolutely fight.

As a matter of fact, the cheap products Dove sells with the Campaign for Real beauty aren't good for your skin in general. According to Chris McCoy, many of the "soaps" we purchase are not soaps at all. Instead, the labels colorfully market "beauty bars" and "body washes," which noticeably leave the word soap out of the title. This is due to laws that state manufactures are not allowed to call their products soap if they do not include certain key cleansing ingredients (1). Instead, they are detergents because manufacturers remove specific chemicals during the manufacturing process and replace them with harsh chemicals, lathering agents and dyes (McCoy 1). McCoy states, "Commercial soap manufacturers make it a practice to remove the glycerin that is produced during the saponification (soap-making) process. The glycerin is a highly profitable substance, often sold to other companies who use it to make lotions and moisturizers, which your skin, now dried out from the harsh detergent 'soap,' desperately needs (1)." Dove's product line, according to their website, only sells beauty bars

and body washes, the word “soap” is nowhere to be found. This means emotions and insecurities are being exploited so we will purchase products that are harmful to our skin.

Even more alarming are the chemicals that Dove does include in their body washes. As consumers, most of us are disturbingly unaware of the damaging chemicals that are included in the body washes we use on our bodies on a daily basis. Over time, these harmful chemicals can have lasting, and sometimes deadly, side effects. These chemicals find their way into our bloodstream because, according to Shelia Jeffreys, cosmetics products and their counterparts are not screened for harmful chemicals. She states...

‘There is no requirement for testing cosmetic products in the way that food or medicines are tested in the USA. The skin, however, is a highly effective way of transmitting chemicals into the body, as in the use of skin patches for hormone replacement therapy. Thus the unregulated chemicals are absorbed into the bodies of the women who use conventional cosmetics products daily. The lack of regulation is maintained by the political influence of the immensely profitable cosmetics industry whose sales grew from \$7 billion in 1970 to \$28 billion in 1994 in the USA (125).’

When cosmetic companies, including Dove, profits increase so substantially over 25 years, their incentive increases as well. They continue to knowingly add harmful chemicals into our body washes and soaps in order to minimize manufacturing costs while maximizing consumer profit.

Dr. Stephan and Dr. Gina Antczak felt so strongly about cosmetic companies knowingly adding harmful chemicals into their products that they wrote a book titled “*Cosmetics Unmasked*,” which enlightens consumers about the chemicals they should avoid when purchasing their cosmetics. The Antczak’s state...

‘There are over 7,000 ingredients available to manufacturers for use in cosmetics and toiletries (including 1,000 aromatic chemicals), of which more than a thousand are known to have harmful effects, and many of these are subject to some level of legal restriction. Another 900 ingredients may have been manufactured in such a way as to be potentially contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals (5).’

With more than 7,000 ingredients available to manufactures, it is disturbing that Dove still adds a multitude of the 1,000 known harmful chemicals.

One of these chemicals is known as triethanolamine. In 1999, the National Toxicology Program conducted a study on the carcinogenic affects of triethanolamine. The Cancer Institute nominated triethanolamine for further research by the Toxicology Department due to its overabundant use in cosmetics and other consumer products (Toxicology 5). Triethanolamine is used in Dove products as a stabilizer and pH balancer. Before the 1999 study was conducted, the Toxicology Department reported in their introduction section that a study had been previously performed on mice and rats in 1990, and that this studies findings were cause to research the chemical more intensively. The Toxicology Department states that, in the 1990 study, when mice received a single 1,000 mg/kg dermal application of triethanolamine, 60% of the chemical was recovered in the urine and 20% was recovered in the feces, and less than 10% of the chemical was detected in the skin 48 hours after the chemical was applied. Also, 95% of the chemical recovered in the urine was identified as the parent compound; meaning triethanolamine is not broken down well in the body of the mice (Toxicology 19). This means that 10% or more of almost pure triethanolamine stayed in the bodies of the mice.

In the 1999 report, their findings showed that the most significant harm of triethanolamine was skin irritation. The report states that in the 13-week rat study, dermal

application of triethanolamine resulted in a significant decrease in body weight as well as visible crusting of the skin at the application site (63). Later on, in the conclusion of the 2-year study, the Toxicology report ultimately states, “Dosed rats and mice had varying degrees of acanthosis and inflammation, dosed rats had ulceration, and dosed female rats had epidermal erosion at the site of skin application (66).” The study also found an increase in serum alanine and aspartate aminotransferase activities, which is usually suggestive of liver damage (63).

The main focus of the study, however, was to determine the carcinogenic properties of triethanolamine. After the 13-week and the 2-year study, the Toxicology Department determined that there was equivocal evidence of carcinogenic activity. This conclusion is based off the marginal increase of the renal tubule cell adenoma and neoplasms (Toxicology, 66). Therefore, we can conclude from this report that triethanolamine can be irritating at the least, and possibly carcinogenic at it’s worst. This becomes even more disturbing news when you realize that this chemical is a main ingredient in Dove’s Essential Nutrients Creamy Foaming Cleanser, which is a facial wash. It is well known that our facial skin is some of the most sensitive skin on our body, and when unsuspecting consumers purchase this product because they have developed brand loyalty to the Dove’s Real Beauty Campaign, they are applying a chemical that can cause inflammation and skin lesions to their face.

As if that wasn’t bad enough, this harmful chemical is then coupled with propylene glycol, which is a known penetration agent. In 1989, *The International Journal of Pharmaceutics* published a study on propylene glycol and it’s role as a penetration enhancer. The study was conducted using the skin of human cadavers. After the study was conducted, it was concluded that propylene glycol is a confirmed penetration enhancer (Williams, 47). Shelia Jefferey’s wrote in 2005...

‘Propylene glycol is the most widely used delivery vehicle and solvent used in cosmetics in the place of glycerin. Its most well known use is in antifreeze and brake fluid. It is an acknowledged neurotoxin, has been linked to contact dermatitis, kidney damage, and liver abnormalities, and the inhibition of skin cell growth (124).’

Propylene glycol can be found in all of Dove’s body washes as well as their face washes. The penetration enhancer allows chemicals like triethanolamine to absorb into our bodies through our skin at a quicker rate and at a higher concentration. It also can cause damage to our skin and internal organs on it’s own, but more often it is coupled with other chemicals that harm our bodies.

Not only are the chemicals, synthetic lathering agents, and dyes that our damaging to our absorbent skin, the chemicals are also getting washed down our drains and harming our environment (McCoy 1). A report recently published by the UK's Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) revealed chemicals from the beauty bars and body washes we use on a daily basis are accumulating so heavily in our water, they slip through the filters at water purification plants. Citizens are then exposed to harmful chemicals such as phthalates, which can lead to birth defects and parabens, which have been linked to cancer (McCoy 2). Jeffery’s researched how cosmetics and their chemicals harm our environment. She states..

‘Apart from the damage to women's bodies directly, the chemicals used in cosmetics damage the environment in other ways. The petrochemicals used in makeup pollute waterways and destroy marine life. The by-products of the chemicals as they degrade interfere with the functioning of hormones and thus sexual development. These hormone disrupters devastate wildlife (125). ‘

The chemicals that are used in cosmetics are the same chemicals that are used in the body washes manufactured by Dove. These products are not just harming our skin; they are also harming our precious environment and wildlife.

Taking all this into account, we must acknowledge that, while Dove claims their goal is to change women's perceptions on beauty, they actually manipulate our insecurities and consumerist nature to spend millions of dollars on their products. If that isn't bad enough, these products have been clinically proven not to aid in the alteration of the aging process, to be harmful to our skin, and can even harm our fragile environment. With this in mind, it becomes apparent Dove's campaign advertisements are nothing more than a marketing ploy to make a profit for a greedy company that is more concerned about pushing their products than changing the current status quo.

Works Cited

- Aggarwall, Pankaj and McGill, Ann. "When Brands Seem Human, Do Humans Act Like Brands? Automatic Behavioral Priming Effects of Brand Anthropomorphism." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39. 2 (2012): 307-323.
- Antczak, Stephen, and Gina Antczak. *Cosmetics Unmasked: Your Family Guide to Safe Cosmetics and Toiletries*. London: Thorsons, 2001.
- Bickle, Marianne. "The Power of Super bowl Advertising." *Forbes.com*. 6 Feb. 2012.
<<http://www.forbes.com/sites/prospernow/2012/02/06/the-power-of-super-bowl-09advertising/>>
- Bayer, Kathryn. "Cosmetic Surgery and Cosmetics: Redefining the Appearance of Age." *Generations* 54 (2005): 13–18.
- Chioveanu, Ioana. "Advertising, Brand Loyalty and Pricing." *Games and Economic Behavior* 64.1 (2008): 68-80.
- Dye, Lauren. "Consuming Constructions: A Critique of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty." *Canadian Journal of Media Studies* 5.1 (2009): 114-28. Print.
- Etcoff, Nancy, Orbach, Susie, Scott, Jennifer, and D'Agostino, Heidi. "The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report." Sept. 2004. *Dove*. 22 Feb. 2008.
<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.ca/uploadedFiles/dove_white_paper_final.pdf>
- Festinger, Leon. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1962.
- Habermas, Jürgen, Lenox, Sara, and Lennox, Frank. "The Public Sphere." *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 49-55.
- Jeffreys, Sheila. *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*. London:

Routledge, 2005.

Loewenstein, George. "The Creative Destruction of Decision Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 28.3 (2001): 499-505.

May, Tim. "Dove Case." *Scribd*. 11 Apr. 2012. Web. 03 Nov. 2012.

<<http://www.scribd.com/doc/91826607/Dove-Real-Beauty-Case-Final>>

McCoy, Chris. "The Benefits of Using Real, Natural Soap." *Naturalnews.com*. 24 Apr. 2009.

<http://www.naturalnews.com/026110_soap_natural_clay.html>.

Muise, Amy, and Desmarais. Serge. "Women's Perceptions and Use of 'Anti-Aging' Products." *Sex Roles* 63.1-2 (2010): 126-37.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism*, 3rd ed. Oxford University Press. 1985. 803-816.

Olshansky, Jay, S. "No Truth to the Fountain of Youth." *Science of Aging Knowledge Environment* 2002.27 (2002): 5vp-5.

Pozner, Jennifer. "Dove's 'Real Beauty' Backlash." *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*. 30.1 (2005).

"Skinny Models Banned From Catwalk." *CNN.com*. 13 Sep. 2006.

<http://articles.cnn.com/2006-09-13/world/spain.models_1_association-of-fashion-designers-skinny-models-pasarela-cibeles?_s=PM:WORLD>

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. Dove.com. Web. 16 Oct. 2012.

<<http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx>>.

Toxicology, N. T. P. *Carcinogenesis Studies of Triethanolamine (CAS No. 102-71-6) in F344 Rats and B6C3F1 Mice (Dermal Studies)*. TR-449 [Draft]. Research Triangle Park, NC: National Toxicology Program, 1994.

Williams, A. C., and B. W. Barry. "Urea analogues in propylene glycol as penetration enhancers in human skin." *International Journal of Pharmaceutics* 56.1 (1989): 43-50.