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In researching an advertisement to act as the subject of my ideological analysis, I immediately thought of the Dove Campaign for Beauty. The particular advertisement that I chose to analyze is a print ad picturing a woman in white underwear displaying her backside. The model is pictured from behind and is standing in front of a white screen. There is a caption under her picture that reads “New Dove firming. As tested on real curves”. Under that, there is a picture of three bottles of Dove lotion. I chose this advertisement primarily because of the way that the woman is depicted. I was particularly interested in how Dove is trying to gravitate towards new, more natural looking women. I feel that this advertisement and many other Dove Campaign for Real Beauty advertisements have made strides in their portrayal of women but still gravitate to traditional societal expectations. For the purpose of this ideological analysis, I argue that the Dove print advertisement objectifies women and strengthens feminine body image stereotypes that are currently present in our society.

The main ideology that I will focus on is women as objects. This ad strengthens this ideology because even though the model is not traditionally thin, Dove is promoting firming crème through the exploitation of her image. In addition to the visual image itself, the implied message is the real driving force behind the ad. Essentially, Dove is trying to convey that firm skin is desirable and should be important to women. In addition to this, the ad focuses on the model’s backside and emphasizes her thighs and butt. This struck me because Dove’s target audience is women and they still relied on traditional feminine model poses and the exploitation of the model in the ad. I was able to determine the target audience because this ad first appeared in last year’s fashion magazines. These magazines, such as Vogue and Elle are targeted towards middle class women. Not only does this ad support cultural ideologies such as women portrayed as objects but also that women should be subservient and try to please men. The way the model is dressed and posed introduces an almost sexual element. I saw this as a subtle way that Dove could market their product in a way that their target audience would find firm skin attractive and desirable. This plays into the ideology that women are objects and should strive to be attractive to men.

Upon analyzing this ad further, I came to the assertion that these ideologies are present driving forces behind this ad that is supposed to portray the “common woman” and “real beauty”. As stated before, the Dove campaign prides itself on presenting women in a natural light and depicts models that have bodies more similar to natural women than traditional fashion models. Although Dove has made efforts to depict women like this, their ads still play into traditional stereotyping. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, this ad perpetuates these ideologies through the use of makeup on the model. The fact that the model is presented with her hair and makeup done acts as another example of how this ad includes subtext meanings and messages. There are many subtle indications throughout the ad that tell the audience that Dove products still support and promote traditional expectations of women. The case in point here is firm and toned skin. This is dangerous because Dove is being hailed by the media for making these leaps in marketing in regards to their portrayal of women but the subtext and subtle marketing strategies still reinforce ideologies about women. When looking at this on a broad scale, it is possible to see how this could have detrimental effects on our society.

When looking at these ads in regards to social learning theory, there can be repercussions for Dove’s message. The message that women should place value on their outward appearance, primarily their body, is already a major influence in our society. In this case, we find the more responsible advertisements in regards to feminine body image still reinforcing ideologies about women’s place in society. On page 48 of Gendered Lives, Wood outlines social learning theory as a theory that claims that individuals learn to be masculine or feminine primarily by imitating others and getting responses from others to their behaviors. Children imitate communication they see on television, films, and DVDs, as well as the communication of parents, teachers, siblings, etc.

The most important aspect of this is the media’s influence on social learning theory. As Wood explains, we form our own ideas about masculinity and femininity through both social interactions and exposure to media (Wood, p 48). This Dove campaign, because it has received so much recognition, is able to use both channels of social learning theory. For example, we are exposed to this ad through media outlets such as magazines and television. In addition, because of the recognition that the ads have received, many women sympathize with and support Dove’s message.

Stanford University’s Albert Bandura addresses social learning in relation to media in his article entitled “Influence of Models’ Reinforcement Contingencies on the Acquisition of Imitative Responses”. He outlines the phenomena that part of social learning theory is repeated exposure to certain stimuli (Bandura, p. 589) In this case, Dove’s portrayal of women acts as this repeated theme. Not only does Bandura’s article support this, but he goes on to say that we will depict feminine and masculine forms predominantly because of societal acceptance and even praise. In this situation, women are praised for having toned skin and are depicted as happy and fulfilled. Although this can be empowering for women, the ad still stresses the importance of beautiful skin and depicts women with beautiful skin as happy. The exposure to this advertisement and subsequent subtext of the ad further perpetuates the stereotype and ideology that women are subservient to men and are really just objects in society’s eyes.

Taking all of this into account, it is evident that this ad sheds light on the ideals of our society. Although this ad can be viewed as “progressive” there are still subtle messages throughout the ad that draw attention to the desirableness of the traditional media influenced image of a woman. I feel that it is imperative to recognize the subtext of this advertisement and realize that it just reinforces values that objectify women and their bodies.

In conclusion, I feel that I have learned a lot about our society, media influences on society, and the depiction and representation of femininity throughout researching and writing this analysis. I especially focused on breaking the ad down so that I could truly evaluate its message and subtext. Throughout writing this paper, I also realized how important social learning theory is to the development of our own identities and our expectations of society. I am aware that this is one of the first ideological analysis I have completed, however I can already sense a better understanding of the link between media and societal ideologies. With a better understanding of the driving forces behind our society’s ideologies it gives me hope that in the future these ideologies will shift and usher in a new era of societal values. This Dove ad does take steps in the right direction, however, I hope that my and future generations can use our knowledge of principles of communication and media influence to change stereotypical masculine and feminine roles.

Works Cited

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\*Dove advertisement image retrieved from: http://jjpropaganda.wordpress.com/

