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Speaking Out: How Women Create Meaning from the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

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SPEAKING OUT:

HOW WOMEN CREATE MEANING FROM

THE DOVE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BEAUTY

by

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As Chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read in its final form the thesis of Valori Infanger and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials, including figures, tables, and charts, are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

SPEAKING OUT: HOW WOMEN CREATE MEANING FROM

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The purpose of this study was to determine whether the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty could be used to effectively expand the media-narrowed definition of beauty. This study focused on the *Onslaught* video and corresponding message board. The sample included 119 posts written by 85 different message board users. Both a descriptive and interpretive content analysis based on reception analysis was used to deconstruct the message posters' interpretation and construction of individual beauty. The posters used the board primarily to express themselves, attach blame to the media and arrive at consensus. Overall, the users responded positively to the campaign. Twenty themes emerged from the posts, with the most prevalent attaching blame to the media for societal problems. The findings of this study suggest that Dove effectively created an online community where women could find a voice to express themselves and share experiences. More importantly, Dove initiated a public discussion that is a preliminary step in changing social norms. As such, the campaign should be viewed as having been effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A substantial body of literature has linked exposure to ultra-thin body images presented in the media with body image disturbance among women of all ages (Birkeland et al., 2005; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Posavac, Posavac, & Weigel, 2001; Stice, Schupak-Neubery, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Stice & Shaw, 1994; Tiggemann &McGill, 2004). The mass media send out the message that women need to conform to a very thin body type if they are to be considered ideal (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). This influence has been connected to a prevalence of eating disorders, especially among young women (Heinberg, 1996; Mazur, 1986; Thompson & Heinberg, 1999).

In order to help combat this narrow definition of beauty and to try and reverse the negative effects which result, Dove, a Unilever subsidiary, established the Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004 with the goal to have beauty defined by the eye of the beholder rather than by an agenda-driven media. One of the aspects of the campaign was the release of several videos, mainly via the Internet. This thesis will focus on Dove's *Onslaught* video. The main thrust of this video is to motivate parents to speak to their daughters about beauty before the media does. In addition to the videos, Dove also established online message boards for members (anyone who wished to sign up with no charge) to voice their opinions. One of these boards was dedicated specifically to facilitate discussion about the *Onslaught* video. This thesis analyzed the content found in the messages posted to that board in order to determine whether overall the campaign is effective in achieving its stated goal of creating a forum in which women can voice their

opinions and negotiate newly constructed meanings regarding beauty and the feminine ideal.

Chapter Two of this thesis contains a review of the literature relevant to this research. Descriptions of body image, body types, body image disturbance among women, media messages, and standards are discussed. The review then describes three prevalent theories that show how great a force the media can be in terms of influencing perception of body image. Following the description of the theories, I provide a more in-depth look into media exposure and body image. This section includes research conducted on media exposure and body image, body image disturbance and disordered eating, and evidences of change. One example of the evidence of change is the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. The literature review outlines how the campaign was created and outlines its purpose: to expand the definition of beauty which has been narrowed by media. The focus of chapter two then turns to the *Onslaught* video and message board created for those who wished to share feelings about the video and what it says about beauty.

The second chapter also identifies the research question and purpose of the study. The seven research questions seek to identify and analyze how women experience, create, and negotiate meaning on the message boards; if the message board users respond positively or negatively to the campaign; what primary themes are discussed; if the themes or threads indicate any shift or change in attitude regarding the posters' definitions or perceptions of beauty; what the communicative nature of the board is; the most commonly presented functions; and the most pertinent of all the questions, the very crux of the study, to see whether the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is effective.

The methodology used for this thesis is outlined in Chapter Three. A description of the sample is provided. The methodology first utilizes a descriptive content analysis, coding for form, function, content, and tone. Following this quantitative, descriptive foundation, an interpretive analysis is conducted. This qualitative approach is based on a modified form of reception analysis wherein the researcher sets out to identify what types of meaning were created by deconstructing the comments posted to the message board created for the *Onslaught* video.

Following a description of the methodology, the results are identified and discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Analysis of the content of the message boards found 20 emergent themes. The most common of all the themes was blame being attached to the media, a theme found in more than half of all the posts. The identified themes and their implications were used to determine how users constructed or reconstructed their concepts of beauty. Overall, the messages reflected a general consensus among the women that beauty was both individually and socially constructed, allowing for broader definitions that rejected the media's reification of unrealistic and unobtainable ideals. More importantly, was the author's impression that women needed this online community to give voice to their pent-up frustrations and anger.

Chapter Five summarizes and concludes the study. The most crucial finding of this study was that Dove has been effective in initiating change by virtue of the fact that is started the public dialog detailed and explicated in Chapter Four. The initiation of public discussion—a dialog among women—is a crucial first step in the manufacture or engineering of any social movement seeking to change socio-cultural values and norms.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact of media advertising campaigns on how an audience internalizes and creates meaning from content is integral to the analysis of this paper. Understanding how an audience interacts with and adopts the messages presented via the media requires a baseline understanding of body image as related to the media. Any measured effects on an audience that are greater or lesser than the intended effects are especially important as they reveal the contours of public susceptibility to media influence regarding body image.

Body Image

Body image, as generally conceived, represents a variety of facets related to the way individuals understand their physical presence and the effects that understanding have on the behavior, social interaction and psychology of those individuals. Body image is especially important to the process of interpreting others social behavior, nonverbal expressions, and feelings, both physical and emotional (Van der Velde, 1985). Extensive research indicates the socialization process, which is influenced by media, peer pressure, and family affects women and their attitudes towards their concept of self. Media presentation of body image can and does affect individual concepts of body image, including perceptions of ideal body image (e.g., Benedikt, Wertheim, & Love, 1998; Kostanski, Fisher, & Gullone, 2004; Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994; Paxton, Shutz, Wertheim, & Muir; 1999; Thompson, Coovert, Richards, Johnson, & Cattarin, 1995; Wertheim, Mee, & Paxton, 1999). While the media cannot be found entirely at fault for negative body image, research shows that it does have an influence and more often than not, that influence is negative.

Gender and Body Image

The media generate a large volume of messages, typically directed towards women, to lose weight or change their appearance in some other manner in order to conform with a socio-cultural ideal. Recently a body image researcher stated, "The promotion of the thin, sexy ideal in our culture has created a situation where the majority of girls and women don't like their bodies." (Hellmich, 2006, p. 1a). Eating disorder prevalence in countries with high media saturation have shown to be continually on the rise. Research also indicates that this problem is grossly under-diagnosed and may affect up to 20% of all girls and women (O' Dea, 2004).

Gender is a large factor in dealing with body image. Research by Ogden and Mundray (1996) strongly indicates that body satisfaction is traditionally lower in women, and women are more likely to engage in restrictive behaviors to manage or achieve a thinner body. Without question, the majority of research conducted on body image has been focused on women.

Body Types and Standards

Psychologists have classified body types into three principal types, based on physical build and stereotypes. The first is an ectomorphic or thin build. The second type is an endomorphic or fat build. The third type is a mesomorphic or muscular build. Traditionally, the mesomorphic type has been the most sought after and desirable. However, cultural standards of beauty have changed over time. While the muscular build is still sought after, Western societies exhibit a general preference for the thin, ectomorphic build (Wykes & Gunter, 2005).

Preferences in terms of beauty have changed drastically. Plump, full body types were once considered to be the attractive ideal for women, but an increasing preference

for thinness has since taken over (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). This preference is most

visibly evidenced by the increasingly skinny models portrayed in magazines (Sypeck,

Gray, Ahrens, 2003) and the ever-growing popularity of dieting among women (Wykes

& Gunter, 2005).

Selling the Body

Obviously, this desire among women to be thin cannot be attributed to any single

cause; however, among the many factors, the media are a major force which cannot be

discounted. The United States is home to the world's largest beauty care industry with

over $45.6 billion in annual sales (Miller, 2009). This vast tide of marketing, (not limited

to America alone) is often scapegoated for the effects it may have on womens' body

image because of the endorsement of an unrealistic, idealized standard of beauty in

beauty care advertising (Harrison, 2000; Polivy and Herman, 2002; Sypeck, Gray, and

Ahrens, 2003; Thompson and Heinberg, 1999; Tierney, 2001).   Wykes and Gunter

(2005) assert that the beauty industry sets certain standards and ideals for beauty and then

markets those ideals. Women are taught to don a disguise, to remake themselves, to

adorn themselves in countless and ever-altering wardrobes, to change their hair style and

color, and to even change their body type through surgical remodeling if necessary.

Change is commonplace for women; some researchers go so far as to suggest that

the tendency to adapt and modify oneself to any given situation is an inherently feminine

trait (Wolf, 1992). Yet such adaptability can be taken too far. Women are being

marketed how to view and think of their own bodies; they are told what to wear in a mall,

they are told how to paint themselves at a make up counter, they are told what size to be

at a gym, and they are told how to smell by each perfume vendor (Wykes & Gunter,

2005). There are now few public places a woman can go and not be bombarded by some pitch of how she needs to look, dress, feel or be.

The mass media (as opposed to the beauty industry in specific) have also been criticized for the promotion of this industry-generated form of beauty. Although the public can be influenced through means other than the media (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999), the media still have been suggested to be one of "the most potent and pervasive communicators of sociocultural standards" (Thompson and Heinberg, 1999; Heinberg, 1996; Mazur, 1986).

Theories

Several current theories propose and explicate the type of effects the media and the beauty industry have on the development of body image in women (Wykes & Gunter, 1995). The most important are described below. This purpose of this section of the paper is not to provide an in-depth analysis on the following theories, but rather, to show that enough research has been conducted that these theories were emergent.

Social Comparison Theory. Festinger's (1957) social comparison theory offers an assessment of how our ideas, opinions, traits and attributes match up against those we choose as targets of comparison. The theory states that people have an innate drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities and they do this by comparing themselves to others. These comparisons may be categorized as upward or downward comparisons. An upward comparison is when one compares him or herself to someone who is considered better in some dimension. The purpose for this comparison is initially for improving oneself—in other words, such a comparison is assumed to generate aspiration toward a superior trait possessed by the other individual. A downward comparison is when one compares him or herself to someone that is judged to be inferior is some aspect; thus the

person does not need to feel threatened (Heinberg & Thompson, 1992). Often the images shown in the media would cause a person to perform an upward comparison to a target that represents a socio-cultural ideal. This theory adequately explains how advertising can cause dissatisfaction with oneself due to the idea that consumers compare themselves with something that has been unrealistically idealized (Richins, 1991).

Cultivation Theory. While social comparison theory focuses on upward or downward assessments, cultivation theory is concerned with the number of times images are seen; claiming that if those images are seen often enough, they will start to become reality. The theory posits that people gradually come to accept the view of the world, or reality, as it is portrayed in the media. The more someone watches television, for example, the more likely they are to begin to see what is portrayed on it as truth. These effects do not take place instantaneously but over time and are the result of cumulative exposure to the media's representation of the world (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). According to this theory, young women would not only assumedly internalize what the media determines to be as "normal," but they would also hold themselves to that standard (Wykes & Gunter, 1995).

Schema Theory. Schema theory, in some ways, shows the long-term effects of cultivation. Schema have been defined as stereotypes that are developed in long-term memory that contain beliefs about a certain concept and/or idea (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). A schema could be viewed as an expectation of sorts; something we have grown to anticipate because of our culture and our experiences (Bobrow & Normon, 1975).

Body image is an example of schema that is applicable both universally and individually. Most human beings develop some sort of an idea concerning their own body size. For some, however, this idea of size becomes a definition of themselves—as a

whole person— instead of just their shape (Wykes & Gunter, 1995). Markus, Hamill, and Sentis (1987) defined those who become preoccupied with their bodies as "schematic" and those who are not as concerned as "aschematic." Two people with very similar body types, but with differing schemas could have diametrically opposing views when it comes to how they conceive themselves. A schematic person would be very concerned with their body image, more susceptible to dieting, more reactionary to what they saw in media, et cetera. An aschematic person would be less concerned about their weight, they would not be as prone to be influenced by what was presented in the media, and they would not be as prone to dieting (Markus, Hamill, & Sentis, 1987; Wykes & Gunter, 1995).   In terms of media and body image, a schematic person would be much more likely to be influenced and cultivated by what they saw.

The purpose of this study is not to specifically focus on any of the aforementioned theories; however, these theories do tie in to the research being conducted and give an example of what influences the media can have in terms of women and body image. The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty notes that women are making upward comparisons, as defined by social comparison theory. The campaign also highlights the stereotypes that are prevalent in the media and the effect they have on society; an issue relevant to schema theory. The effort for change Dove is attempting is most closely related to cultivation theory. While this is not a cultivation study, Dove is trying to cultivate a new or revised normative belief that beauty should have a broad, or at least broader, definition.

Media Exposure and Body Image

Understanding body image and how a typical advertising campaign cultivates idealized beauty is critical to analyzing how meaning is created in those advertisements. Women who observe advertising campaigns which involve unrealistically idealized

forms of female beauty are more likely to have negative self-reported body image (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Women, both adolescents and adults alike, commonly posses such a negative body image that it is now considered to be a normative component of everyday living in modern Western society (Rodin, Silberstein, & Streigel-Moore, 1984). In a national survey with over 800 women participants, nearly 50% of those surveyed had an unfavorable body image (Cash & Henry, 1995). A decrease in women's positive body image has become a "normative discontent" (Cash & Henry, 1995).

Research Conducted on Media Exposure and Body Image. The media seem to have an ever-increasing power to define standards of appearance. This power, combined with advanced technology, further escalates the problem of the media influencing their target audiences to develop a negative body image (Fredmand, 1984). That power was shown in a study in which high school girls were exposed to a series of beauty commercials for 15 minutes. The girls were tested on their perceptions of beauty both before and after their exposure to the commercials. The results showed an increase in the importance of beauty to their personality and the importance of beauty in being popular with boys after the second test (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). The study echoed previous research which indicates that these advertisements transform girls into mere objects that are supposed to be beautiful instead of people (Umiker-Sebok, 1981). Advertisements for cosmetics and other beauty products can have an effect on high school girls' perceptions of reality in social settings (Tan, 1979). A girl is simultaneously encouraged to put her best face forward and to become something she naturally isn't. As ads encourage females that they must be made-up or made-over to be acceptable, this has a negative effect on their body image. (Derenne & Beresin, 2006).

This negative effect on body image was also demonstrated in another study. This research was conducted by giving the subjects, children, a picture scale of body types. The participants circled which body image best described them, and then circled the body image which represented how they would prefer to look, or their ideal body type. The findings showed that over 40% of the entire first-, second-, and third-grade girls preferred a body figure that was different and thinner than what they perceived to be their own. The study concluded that children are beginning to develop a stereotype of attractiveness and beauty at very young ages (Collins, 1991).

These studies indicated that the exposure to media may have an immediately negative effect on body image (Birkeland, Thompson, Herbozo, Roehrig, Cafri, & van den Berg, 2005). A recent meta-analysis study showed that an exposure to thin and ultra-thin images tend to instantly decrease body satisfaction (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). When women look at an image that is considered to be "ideal" and make a comparison of themselves towards it, they typically find themselves to be less attractive. As a result, the women feel as though they have somehow failed to look as they should (Wertheim, Paxton, & Blaney, 2004; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999).

These feelings of failure and wanting to change one's body type in response to media stimuli were strongly evident in one study. The results of this study are both dramatic and unequivocal enough that it must be highlighted when discussing body image and the media (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). Fijian women have traditionally encouraged being healthy and women there have customarily fuller body types. A rotund woman customarily signified affluence in that the family had enough to feed themselves (Becker, 1996). Prior to 1995, there had only been one case of anorexia nervosa reported

on the isles of Fiji. In 1995 television made its debut to the South Pacific islands. By 1998 the rate of dieting had jumped from approximately zero to 69%. New dieters cited attractive actors from popular television programs as inspiration for weight loss (Becker, Burwell, & Gilman, 2002).

   Body Image Disturbance and Disordered Eating. The images seen on television programs, magazines, advertisements, movies, and in fashion shows typically send a message to women that perfection is found in thinness (Leutwyler, 1998). This message is increasingly taken to the extreme, as evidenced by a steady climb in the instance of eating disorders. Eating disorders come in many forms: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating, and any combined or modified method of these.   A person with an eating disorder has serious disturbances in eating and/or body shape and size. It is estimated that eating disorders affect approximately 5 million Americans each year (Becker, Grinspoon, Klibanski, & Herzog, 1999). Of those 5 million, 90% are female (Leutwyler, 1998). While some still view anorexia nervosa as just young girls refusing a few meals or thinking of themselves as fat, the disease goes much deeper than that. Eating disorders affect those dealing with them psychologically, emotionally, socially, and physically. The mortality rate associated with anorexia nervosa alone is at nearly 6% (Becker, Grinspoon, Klibanski, & Herzog, 1999).

   These complex disorders can be brought on by a mix of factors: environmental, social, and biological. The media is not the only determining factor in the development of an eating disorder. However, waiflike figures in fashion certainly can be persuasive. At vulnerable times in their lives girls are being sent the message that they need to obtain that impossible look of Twiggy or Kate Moss. Fashion can be described as a mirror and

many girls are constantly trying to become the images they see reflected in the media (Leutwyler, 1998).

Evidence of Change. With the evidence of media's connection to eating disturbance, it seems natural that a change is needed. Movies, television programs, advertisements and other various forms of media are likely to continue to show thin models and skinny actresses. However, there seems to be at least a hint of a change in the air.

In 2002, actress Jamie Lee Curtis posed for *More* magazine. There were two separate shots displayed in the magazine. The first was what would typically be found in any fashion magazine: a glamorously displayed actress. The second, shown for direct comparison, was of Jamie Lee Curtis in a sports bra and shorts with no make up or computerized touch ups or enhancements (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). The actress wanted women to realize that the figures women so often compare themselves to are typically not real (Wallace, 2002).

The second hint of change came from Spain. The organizers of Madrid's fashion week, a very chic venue of trends, established the first-ever ban on models that were considered to be too thin. The organizers defined thin by those with a body mass index (BMI) of less than 18 (USA Today, 2006). Following the ban, France established one and Italy also considered it. Even if the idea spreads no further, the fact that Spain was willing to make such a move shows that the world may be ready for change.

The Dove Campaign

A number of women's groups have launched anti-media and media literacy campaigns designed to help women accept their body sizes and resist unrealistic and dangerously thin ideals. Among these efforts is a relatively new and "bold" campaign

(Wasserman, 2005). In 2004, Dove, a product of Unilever, set out to expand the current definition of beauty by promoting the concept of a healthy self-image regardless of one's body shape or size. Dove wanted to impress upon the general public the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and not to be narrowly defined by media. The result of Unilever's efforts and internal research was titled: *The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. The campaign, created by Ogilvy & Mather Chicago, won the grand Effie award, an annual advertising award given by the New York American Marketing Association, in 2006 (Milner, 2006).

The groundwork for the campaign's creation began when Dove teamed up with StrategyOne, a New York based applied research firm, to conduct a quantitative study of over 3,200 women, ranging in ages from 18 to 64, from all over the world (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D'Agostino, 2004). The products of the research are two full-length reports from Dove. The first report highlights the research process, methodology, and findings, and is titled, "The Dove Report: Challenging Beauty" (Unilever, 2004). The second report is termed, "The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report; Findings of the Global Study on Women, Beauty, and Well-Being" and goes into greater detail about the findings of the first report (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D'Agostino, 2004).

Creating the Campaign for Real Beauty. Dove began by first reviewing all the literature (studies, surveys, media reports and academic literature) regarding women and beauty. Dove wanted to come to terms with what research had or had not been previously conducted. Second, Dove set out to test the hypothesis that American women radically underestimate their own beauty. Their hypothesis proved, through surveys, to be incorrect (Lowe & Bright, 2004). Third, Dove conducted qualitative research by interviewing more than 200 women in their homes. The women were taken on beauty

excursions, asked to keep journals, photograph their individual ideas of beauty, and observe themselves in the mirror, among other things. Finally, the data were analyzed and presented to a board (organized by Unilever) for feedback. All those involved in the process—the researchers, The Dove Report Advisory Board, and Dove—believe that this study presents the beginning of a very important new discussion about beauty (Lowe & Bright, 2004).

The report of findings is broken into four main areas: feeling positive, claiming "looks" not beauty, redefining beauty, and owning beauty. The statistics from the Dove report show that:

- 90% of women in the United States consider their looks average or above
- 36% of women say their "looks" are above average, only 18% say their "beauty" is above average
- 75% of women agree that beauty does not come from a woman's looks, but from her spirit and love of life
- 79% of women wish a woman could be considered beautiful even if she is not "physically perfect" (Lowe & Bright, 2004; Unilever, 2006)

Study data reveal that "beautiful" is not a word women willingly associate with themselves. By an overwhelmingly majority, women around the world are most comfortable using the words *natural* (31%) or *average* (29%). Only 2% of women around the world choose *beautiful* to describe their looks, fewer even than choose "attractive" (9%), "feminine" (8%), "good-looking (7%), or "cute" (7%), (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D'Agostino, 2004; Unilever, 2006).

Motivated by these results, Dove has set out to try and initiate discussion and encourage contest about the nature of beauty (Unilever, 2006). The Campaign for Real Beauty asks women to deeply consider the ideas and issues surrounding the concept of beauty. The Campaign for Real Beauty is using a variety of means to invite women from all over the globe to participate in the online discussion. Dove launched a global

advertising campaign in October 2004 in which average women were featured on billboards and on the internet. Anyone wishing to participate was asked to vote on the women to see if they fit into the idea of beauty or not. Irene Sinclair, a 95 year-old English woman, was one such featured model. Next to Irene's aged face are boxes in which readers and viewers may vote: "Wrinkled?" or "Wonderful?" (Unilever, 2006).

In conjunction with the website, billboards were being placed in major cities urging women to cast their votes. New York's Times Square featured an interactive billboard that features the "Wrinkled? Wonderful?" ad and kept a running tally of the votes submitted for that issue (Unilever, 2006). Several panel discussions about beauty were hosted by individuals ranging from radio and television celebrities to the average person (Unilever, 2006). Several commercials featuring expanded ideas of beauty, all designated to touch the heart (Keneally, 2006) were also being aired as of the writing of this paper. One such commercial, the *Onslaught* video, will shortly be highlighted.

The same year the campaign won the Effie award, it introduced the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, centered on using education and inspiration to help young women who do not include themselves in their own definitions of beauty (Wentz, 2007). The fund aims to increase awareness of the link between beauty and body-related self-esteem (Unilever, 2006) sponsors the program *uniquely ME!*, in alliance with Girl Scouts, which focuses on building self-confidence in girls ages 8-14. The fund also supports *BodyTalk*, which is an educational program for schools in the United Kingdom and Canada (Unilever, 2006; Magruder, 2006). Dove hopes the campaign will inspire women to love themselves just as they are.

Expanding the Definition of Beauty. Several studies conducted by Dove indicated that the public was looking for something besides the tall, thin, blond models typically

portrayed in advertisements. "When only a minority of women is satisfied with their body weight and shape in a society captivated by diet and makeover programs, it is time for a change" (Unilever, 2005, p.1). Dove has answered the call of providing something else to look at in advertising besides skinny models. In discussing the potential that advertisers possess to help change what is typically portrayed in advertising spots, Sheehan (2004), a published author on the subject of advertising discussed how marketing can shape social roles and affect cultural beauty. They stated, "One way to influence the beauty ideal is to produce advertisements featuring women who do not have thin, perfect bodies" (p. 111).

The Dove Campaign is beginning to feed that hunger for something new, but it is competing with a huge, established market. Advertising no longer is seen from magazines, but from a variety of venues, including: radio, television, internet pop-ups, and billboards. The Dove campaign, in stating that many of these advertisements create low self-esteem amongst girls and woman because they portray an unrealistic definition of beauty, carries on the assumption that beauty defines a woman's worth (Tichnor, 2006). Despite the bombardment of other advertisements, Dove seems to be making headway with the greatly-talked-about ad campaign" (Lowe & Bright, 2004) that's been termed a "gutsy effort" (Prior, 2004, p. 1).

Finances. The efforts are coming with a price. Unilever invested heavily to get the campaign on its feet; so much that the company rose from the seventh- to the fourth-highest brand spender (Orsini, 2005). Dove could argue that changing the world's opinion of beauty from so narrow a definition is well worth any price (Prior, 2004). However, Unilever is a business and not a charitable organization. Amidst all the feel good hype of being beautiful, Dove is still marketing their beauty product lines (Howard,

2005). Of course, women, as consumers, can decide whether or not they will buy into it (Tichnor, 2006). Still, the campaign seems to be working. Unilever has also reported that their Dove products have had a steady increase in sales over the last several years (Neff, 2004).

Risks. Dove took a major risk in going against the norm and refusing to feed the consumers who appear "so driven to worship perfection" (Prior, 2004, p. 1). One of the obvious risks "was that Dove would become the 'fat girls' brand and rivals would stand for glamour" (Wasserman, 2005, p. 16). On the other hand, "Dove has always striven to speak its marketing message through real women" (Prior, 2004, p. 1). The main difference this time around is that Dove has never endeavored to speak "this loudly" (Prior, 2004, p. 1) before. "As an insight, it wasn't that deep. But as a position statement for a major global beauty brand, it was pretty bold" (Wasserman, 2005, p. 16).

"Some advertising insiders view the campaign as more philanthropic than revolutionary" (Prior, 2004, p. 1), however, "any change in the culture of advertising that allows for a broader definition of beauty and encourages women to be more accepting and comfortable with their natural appearance is a step in the right direction" (Howard, 2005, p. 1). While a desire to have women "feel they are lovable and worthy just because they exist" (Magruder, 2006, p. 1) maybe too fleeting to measure, Dove has provoked the debate they were looking for (Lowe & Bright, 2004). If nothing else, "this study uncovers that beauty is never going away and has enormous power" (Unilever, 2006, p. 1).

Onslaught Video

Dove continued to expand its campaign and tap into this power by becoming "progressively more active" in the area of promoting "genuine and diverse shapes, sizes,

and ages of women's bodies" (Scriven, 2007, p. 256). As a part of its ongoing strategy, Dove has created several videos all promoting the idea of expanding the definition of beauty. One such video is *Onslaught*, which displays the negative reactions that can be created in the audience as a result of viewing advertisements that stress an idealized notion of beauty in women. *Onslaught* begins with a plain black screen. In white letters appears "a Dove film" followed by the title of the film, "Onslaught." The letters appear almost as they would be written on a blackboard with white chalk. The camera then moves onto an innocent-faced, red-haired girl of grade school age, adorned with a backpack and presumably heading to school. The girl stares directly into the camera, at first neither frowning nor smiling but eventually a small grin crosses her lips. Background music becomes louder and more prominent with lyrical lines which repeat, ". . . here it comes. . . " This beginning scene, which lasts less than 30 seconds, creates anticipation which is emphasized by the music.

The viewer is then assaulted with images from billboards, commercials, posters, etc., all showing the measures taken to reach a popularized idea of beauty. Snips from commercials advertising weight loss pills, face beautifying products, skin softeners, etc. are shown. Different camera shots of women binging, dieting, and having cosmetic plastic surgery done to various parts of the body are shown. Some of the images come at the viewer so quickly that they are nearly imperceptible. The pace slows down for other snippets so the viewer has time to focus on scenes of scantily clad women dancing together in a suggestive nature, an infomercial-type display advertising products to make one look "younger, taller, lighter, firmer, softer." The camera shows a woman on a scale in a bathroom who rapidly transitions from having an overweight body to having a very thin frame and back again. Another bathroom scene quickly depicts a woman with

bulimia bent over a toilet. The juxtaposed scenes are an "onslaught" to the viewers with jarring images from the beauty industry.

The video then cuts to a group of girls of various races (one Asian-American, two African-American, one white, and another that is undeterminable).   They walk past the camera, giving their profile as they head, presumably, to school with their backpacks on. After they pass, the cautionary words, "talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does," appear onscreen, thus warning parents of the persuasive nature of media. Again the little redhead girl comes on screen. She, however, is looking at the camera. As she walks out of view the campaign's website is publicized.

The viral videos Dove has produced in line with their campaign, including *Onslaught*, have been looked at as "one of Dove's must successful elements in the Campaign for Real Beauty" (Cobaugh, 2008, p. 27). Another published report called it a "powerful short video" (Miller, 2009, p. 146).

One such report went so far to state that much of the material in advertising "offers a particular representation of sexuality, on in which women are presented as bubble-headed, gold-digging arm candy whose main job is to appear attractive at all times and whose worst nightmare is to get caught without make-up or to grow old" (Piety, 2009, p. 14). The article then presents Dove as perhaps the only advertiser to challenge such a representation (2009).

Message Boards

Taking the boldness one step further— and further solidifying the assertion that it is really trying to foster change, Dove set up message boards on its website as a method of collecting feedback on the campaign and to allow audience members to directly communicate with one another. Dove encourages participants on the message board to

voice their opinions regarding the campaign in general and also to respond to the views of others on the board.

Internet-based message boards are a method of interpersonal interaction that allow multiple users to simultaneously access, view, and post content. Message boards allow for the communication of views on specific topics while enabling discussions on those topics by multiple online users. Message boards are the offspring of online bulletin boards which have been around for approximately 20 years before the World Wide Web was invented (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003).

Message boards are one way by which online communities are formed. An online community may be defined in several ways, but the definition which this paper will use was termed by Preece (2000), "An online community is a group of people who interact in a virtual environment. They have a purpose, are supported by technology, and are guided by norms and policies" (p. 8). The message board users of Dove's Campaign utilized the technology Dove provides to establish online communities.

Dove has established variously themed message boards to cater to their different audiences. One board that was created was specifically for the *Onslaught* video. Users were allowed to post comments, questions, replies, and personal feelings concerning the video or any ideas they felt connected to the video. Message boards, similar to the idea of blogging, allow researchers to observe participants "talking" about their opinions through online interactions.

Purpose of Study

The objective of this study is to understand how women experience and create meaning from The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty's *Onslaught* video and how viewing this video (and talking about it with others) impacts their perceptions of beauty and self-

worth. To do this, the author will be examining the message boards that center on the *Onslaught* video. The message board posts will serve as the source of data. In summary, the purpose of this study is to see if the campaign is effective by examining the impact of *Onslaught*.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do women experience, create and negotiate meaning about

beauty and body image based on the video *Onslaught*?

Research Question 2: Do most message board posters respond positively or negatively to

the *Onslaught* video?

Research Question 3: What are the primary themes discussed in message board posts

regarding the video *Onslaught*?

Research Question 4: Do the themes and major threads indicate any shift or change in

attitudes regarding the users' definitions or perceptions of beauty?

Research Question 5: What different types of forms (see method section for a detailed

explanation of how "form" is operationalized) are most frequently represented in

the message board posts? In other words, how can the communicative nature of

the message board be characterized?

Research Question 6: Based on Kaye's (2005, 2007) typology (see method section for a

detailed explanation), what are the most common functions that these messages

serve for the poster?

Research Question 7: To what degree does the interpretative analysis indicate that the

Dove Campaign has accomplished its stated objective?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to determine if the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is effective. To do that, the author used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to determine how women experience and create meaning from the *Onslaught* video. The author has used a modified reception analysis method.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases. The first phase followed a quantitative approach and the latter phase followed a qualitative or interpretive approach. The author set out to both describe and interpret what was being said about Dove's *Onslaught* video by the women participating in a message board hosted by Dove's parent company Unilever. The study examines the data from several angles using a sequential triangulation. First, by using a content analysis, the study quantified the general types of reactions found in posted messages about the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. Second, using a reception analysis approach, the study provided an interpretive analysis of the themes found in the messages and the implications of those themes for determining how users construct (or reconstruct) the concept of beauty and their physical self-concepts based on the messages in the *Onslaught* video.

Quantitative Phase

Sample. In the quantitative phase, all messages posted to the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty's *Onslaught* site during its first year (beginning from December 10, 2006) were downloaded by the author. This time period marks the introduction of the video and includes approximately 70% of all posts for the entire duration the *Onslaught* video message board was online. During this time period, 126 messages were posted. Of those, 119 posts were included in the sample, (seven posts were excluded because they were of a technical or administrative nature). The reason for eliminating the second year

of the message board posts was due to a decision made by the thesis committee. The committee came to a mutual conclusion that of this relatively light response (there were only 56 posts in the second year) the main attitudes and meanings could be identified within the first year.

Descriptive Content Analysis

Coding. Each complete individual posting was treated as a unit of analysis. Following a process developed by Sias (1996) and used by Thomsen (1996), the messages were coded for form, function, content, and tone by the author and an assistant coder.

Form. The form of the actual posts was classified as either a question, answer/reply, or statement. "Questions" are defined as those postings with an interrogatory force, generally requesting that others in the group respond and typically containing signal words, such as; "who," "what," "where," "how," "why," or "when." "Answers/Replies" designate postings whose primary purpose was to provide information for a previously posed question, or posts that maintained focus on the same topic or subtopic from a previously posted message. "Statements" are categorized as postings that were of a declarative nature that focused on a particular topic or subtopic and that did not request others to respond nor was a response itself to a previous posting's topic or subtopic. While a number of posts could technically fall into more than one category, the author determined the main purpose for the post and categorized it accordingly.

Function. Next, the messages were coded according to their function based on the motivations for using message boards following a method developed by James, Wotring, and Forrest (1995) and adapted by Kaye (2005, 2007). The functions were not

coded to be mutually exclusive—in other words, an individual post could serve multiple functions. The messages were coded for the following functions as to why the individuals posted their messages:

1. *Information seeking*. These posters were motivated by searching out information concerning the Dove Campaign. Such message board users also analyze information about Dove and compare it with other media sources.

2. *Personal fulfillment*. These users are motivated to use the message board as a sounding board to state what the Dove Campaign means to them as well as their initial reactions to the campaign.

3. *Expression*. Users are motivated to express their feelings towards the campaign itself; whether in favor of or against the campaign.

4. *Affiliation with other message board users*. These users want to establish contact with like-minded people, to find out issues affecting people like themselves for activism, grassroots or advocacy.

5. *Research based*. Postings in search of specific information of interest; to keep up with current events or seek general information; for research; for accurate accounts of news and events.

6. *Intellectual/aesthetic fulfillment*. These users are using the message board to hone critical thinking skills concerning intellectual discourse, debates or arguments.

7. *Anti-traditional media sentiment*. These posters want information that they cannot get from traditional medial. They are trying to avoid liberal media bias. They use the message boards as an alternative to traditional media because they do not like or trust traditional media.

8. *Guidance/opinion seeking*. These message board users want to get a variety of opinions. They want to see what the other side thinks. They want to gather others' opinions to help them make up their mind about important issues. They look for support for their opinions, seek validation or wish to compare their opinions to others.

Content. Each message was coded for content using key descriptive terms compiled by the author. The author then recorded the frequency of each descriptive term. Examples of descriptive terms included "God," "church," and "scriptures" for religious references. Similar to the "Case Formulation Content Coding Method" (CFCCM), the author devised categories based on recurring words and themes found throughout the units of analysis. CFCCM was created as a tool intended to help with reliability and comprehensive categorization. The process involves initially gathering reliable data and then looking at cases or units of analysis and assigning a specific category, or categories, in which the unit could be defined. The categories then need to be defined to see if they are sufficiently inclusive (Eells, Kendjelic, & Lucas, 1998). After evaluating each unit of analysis, the author compiled a list of categories from the results. The author and committee chair reviewed the list and the author then recategorized the list into broader compartments. The committee chair then reviewed the list and made suggestions for additional areas that could be collapsed. Once those changes were made, the list was approved by the committee chair.

Tone. In relation to the message board users regard for the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, the overall tone for each message was coded as positive, negative, neutral, or mixed. Coders were given an allowance if they were not able to determine the overall tone for the posted message. A positive tone was indicated by words such as "thank you" which were directed towards the campaign, mention of how "helpful" or "needed" the

campaign was, expressed desire that more media sources would create campaigns similar to Dove's, or indicated that the writer "supported" the Dove Campaign. A negative tone suggested or implied that the campaign was "hypocritical," included expressions of disapproval or cynicism towards the campaign and its motives, or attributed blame to the media. A mixed tone suggested that there were both positive and negative associations presented in an equal balance. A neutral tone suggested that the message board user has neither a positive nor negative impression of the campaign.

Reliability. Two independent coders, who were previously trained, coded 18 randomly selected message board posts (15% of the sample).   Intercoder reliability was established through Holsti's (1969) method. Although Cohen's kappa has become a more validated method for establishing intercoder reliability, it requires more than two options per question during coding to be accurate. To allow the author to have the function and content areas not be mutually exclusive, they were coded for either "yes" having the function/content or "no" not having the function/content. With a depth of only two possible options for coding, Cohen's kappa did not work on this study. The two coders used Holsti's formula to calculate agreement on the identification of form (72% agreement), function (90% agreement), content (92% agreement), and tone (100% agreement).

Interpretive Analysis

Reception Analysis. The second phase of this research focused primarily on the meaning that can be derived from the messages following an interpretative approach known as reception analysis. Reception analysis states that "there can be no 'effect without 'meaning'" (Jensen, 1991, p. 134). The purpose of this phase of the study was to

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explore and explicate what meanings have emerged from the commentary created by audiences of the Dove Campaign on the campaign's message board.

Reception study was a precursor to reception analysis. Reception studies, an approach that stemmed from Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School in the 1970s, states that media texts have multiple meanings and that the audience itself constructs those meanings. Reception study is thus named because the study of media is focused at the point of reception (Machor & Goldstein, 2001). Reception analysis has a fairly short history but rather profound as it had a recognizable impact on theoretical implications. It combines two ideas which seem to be at opposing ends of a single spectrum. The first idea is one that focuses on the *texts* as a source for information to be extracted from (Gitlin, 1978). The second concept follows more along the ideas of a *uses-and-gratifications* approach that doesn't focus on the texts *per se*, but more on what the audience does with them (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Reception analysis suggests that both the audience and the context of communication need to be studied (Jensen, 1991).

Reception analysis posits that the audience and the context of the mass communication they are exposed to need to be examined in order to properly understand how the message was experienced and how meaning was simultaneously created (Jensen, 1991). In reception analysis, audiences are seen not merely as consumers of the media's intended meaning, but as active producers of their own meanings. They decode texts from their own perspectives and attach meaning in conjunction with their individual circumstances and experiences (Fiske & Hartley,1989). More specifically, reception analysis posits that meaning is created both intra-personally (as a message is received and processed) and interpersonally, as an individual interacts with others.

Applying reception analysis through a more female-based focus is nothing new. This form of research has been used to look at how women create meaning from soap operas (Ang, 1985; Hobson, 1982) and romance novels (Radway, 1984). These studies first researched the texts themselves and then the recipients or viewers of those texts. What makes this thesis unique is that the textual media discourses *are* the audience discourses.

The textual media discourses, or online message board interactions, were used in accordance with a modified version of reception analysis. While reception analysis typically analyzes statements made by the participants for data collection, as did this study, it also engages in in-depth interviewing and exploration, which this study did not (Wood, 2007). The reason for not utilizing interviews is because the names and contact information of the participants is kept confidential and therefore was not available to the author. Also, there was no resource provided on the message board to try and contact the posters privately offline.

Traditionally, reception analysis involves in-depth interviewing to "describe and understand the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the interviewee" (Kvale, 1983, p. 175). Although reception studies have begun to explore e-mail and other forms of electronic interaction, it is the author's contention that this approach can also be applied to message board interaction. The initial posts, for example, represent the intrapersonal component of meaning construction as individuals express their initial reactions to the video. In turn, the interpersonal component can be observed by following conversation streams and ongoing dialogues that occur in response to, or as replies to, the initial post. In this way, the negotiation of meaning can be observed. In other words,

analyzing the posts will give insight into the interpretations created by the users without having to prod for answers.

Interpretive Trustworthiness. The reception analysis phase involved an iterative approach to identifying emerging themes (Davey & Butow, 2006; Thomsen, 1996). Each posted message was coded to reflect the themes addressed by the poster. The author met with her committee chair to discuss the accuracy and interpretation of the emerging themes. These themes were then collapsed into higher order themes to produce a typology that was supported by illustrative quotes.

The first manner in which the author chose to establish validity for this research was by using multiple angles to look at one idea (e.g. both qualitative and quantitative research). This allowed the author to rely on multiple forms of evidence in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The second manner used to create validity followed the example set by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1989, 1994) who originally established a four-point criterion for trustworthiness in qualitative research. Several years later, after acknowledging a flaw in their work, they added a fifth point. The five-points are: credibility, transferability, dependability, reflexivity, and authenticity. In order to establish credibility and dependability, the researcher needs to have someone else of established credibility check their work. To do this, the author had her committee chair review her list of descriptive terms, as was previously described.

For transferability and reliability, a detailed account of how the research was conducted must be given.   Unlike quantitative research wherein a theory or hypothesis can be tested and applied to a multitude of situations to the point where it becomes generalizable, qualitative research looks in depth at a specific situation. Thus,

generalizability is much more difficult to obtain. Rather, transferability is sought for.

Lincoln and Guba describe this as a follows, "whether [working hypotheses] hold in

some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue,

the resolution of which depends upon the degree of similarity between sending and

receiving (or earlier and later) contexts. Thus the naturalist cannot specify the external

validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to

enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether the

transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (1985, p. 316).

The author will describe precisely what she did so that her readers may come to

the conclusion of whether or not her conclusions "can be contemplated as a possibility."

In order to identify themes the author first read through all the posts. The author made

note of any idea that was mentioned within a post, using verbatim the wording of the

original writer. After compiling the initial list, the author looked for disconfirming

evidence, or views that might not have been found after the initial search, and the posts

were then read through again to add any additional ideas. These words or phrases were

then grouped into similar categories. The categories were collapsed several times until

the list of twenty themes resulted. The author has provided the quotations from the

original message board posters so that any reader of this thesis will be able to look at the

quotes and have the same material and resources the author had from which to make their

own conclusions. The author will later identify what additional research could be used

following a similar methodology.

The final point of Lincoln & Guba's paradigm is authenticity. Authenticity is

identified as "Being consistent with the relativist view that research accounts do no more

than represent a sophisticated but temporary consensus of views about what is to be

considered true" (Seale, 1999, p. 468). Authenticity is said to be demonstrated if the author(s) have "represented a range of different realities" (Seale, 1999, p. 469). In other words, the research needs to show that the author exercised fairness, with the intent to help the audience understand more of what was being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). To create research that is in line with Lincoln & Guba's definition of authenticity, the author tried to be open to all possible themes, identify those themes, and then present examples of those themes in unadulterated forms from the original posters themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter the author will present the results for each of the seven stated research questions. The author will triangulate both the quantitative and qualitative results.

Research Question 1: The Experience, Creation, and Negotiation of Meaning. Eighty-five various message board users wrote 119 posts. Research question one asked how women experience, create and negotiate meaning about beauty and body image based on the *Onslaught* video.   Most of the users of the message boards (more than 50%) at the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty did not ask questions or reply to other users; they made statements (71.4%, $n = 85$). These users took the opportunity to express themselves (95.0%, $n = 113$), affiliate with other board users (51.3%, $n = 61$), and often to blame the media for various problems in society (54.6%, $n = 65$). In this section, the author will look at the messages from the perspective of this majority of message board users; discussion of the experience, creation and negotiation of the meaning of beauty and body image will be examined as it is expressed by these users. The author will refer directly to the message board postings, sometimes quoting without correcting grammar in order to preserve the voice of the writer. Screen names of the writers will be included in ***bold and italics***.

Usually message boards are threaded, meaning that messages on similar topics are associated with each other. In the case of Dove's message board, this board itself is considered the thread. With the exception of being able to quote (repost the original message and comment directly beneath the quotation) there is no organization of threads on the board. Within the board itself, the only threads are informal mentions of similar

themes. Those references and quotes do form threads, but are not as formal as the threads

found on other message boards.

Forty-one of the posters referenced another post. Of those forty-one, twenty-five

thought enough of a post to officially quote it. ("Quoting" a post was simplified on the

message board by a direct link.) Of those replies, only one indicated that the responder

did not whole-heartedly agree with the original statement. That example is as follows:

> *BeautifulSoul6* wrote: "'Ugly is irrelevant. It is an immeasurable insult to
> a woman, and then supposedly the worst crime you can commit as a
> woman. But ugly, as beautiful, is an illusion.'-Margaret Cho. This is a
> wonderful quote. I love how it says 'ugly, as beautiful, is an illusion'."

The response to this by *Arkyin*, stated:

> "I agree to some part of that .... we shouldn't be influenced by media, but
> in most cases we are in some way or another, directly or indirectly we will
> be affected by the society and media in ways that we may not immediately
> aware of. How we chose to be is what we want to be is most important."

This was the strongest statement in all of the 119 posts to indicate that the

responder did not entirely agree with the original post. What can be derived from this

lack of contradiction and dearth of disagreement is that the women did not use the

message board to dispute meaning one with another; at least not in textual form or as a

direct response or reply. The women appeared to not want to come across as

argumentative towards each other. The posters did negotiate meaning and came to

mutual conclusions and consensuses. When reading through the posts it appears that the

users had formed an online community focused on commonalities like shared concerns

and perspectives, rather than one which highlighted differences.

The most commonly quoted post (quoted on six occasions) was written by

Amezher:

> This movie shows us the world's perspectives on such matters. Media has
> released these falsified beauties to help promote the "if your [sic] not like

this, your [sic] not pretty" standard. People today do so much to look "beautiful." Stupid plastic surgery and liposuction are common surgeries for women to be beautiful. But this beauty is fake, its cold hard shiny plastic, which doesn't encompass who we really are and our essense of human nature here on earth. Maybe one day, the blind (the people who dont understand what true beauty is) will have an eye opener, and everyone could love themselves for WHO THEY ARE...

Every post which quoted or referenced this post agreed with *Amezher*. The majority of posters took the opportunity to converge on the common ground typified by *Amezher* and to state thoughts that the *Onslaught* video had inspired in them, whether directly related to the video or not. This is not to say that they agreed on all points; some took the position of praising the media while others blamed it for many wrongs in society. Regardless of the particulars of their opinions, each of the posters shared their ability to express themselves.

Their freedom of expression concerning beauty frequently referenced the idea that Dove was trying to portray: that it remains in the eye of the beholder. As *grichman* wrote:

> The idea of beauty is entirely subjective. No two people are going to share the exact views on what is beautiful. As long as people accept that not everyone will find them beautiful, and they themselves are confident in their appearance. The beauty industry perverts our idea of beauty and change[s] it into something that they can market. As long as people realize this and remain comfortable with their own body a lot of these problems will shrink or vanish entirely.

As *jsy* summarized, "All people should feel beautiful on their own definition of 'beauty.'"

Research Question 2: Responses to the Onslaught Video. That the Dove message board users wanted to associate with one another was shown through the formation of their online community.   The message board users demonstrated this sense of community by using the message board to hold makeshift conversations through direct

responses to or by quoting other posts. Not only was this sense of community and

emerging conversation evident in posts that were coded as overall questions, but also in

statements which still urged action from their online friends. For example, *TCampbell*

wrote:

> …It's time for us all to accept who we are and turn away from society.
> Why should we care about what other people think about us? Let's do
> what our hearts desire and not be held down. It's time to be ourselves.
> Anyone with me?

The message board users had created a space, through the help of Dove, wherein

the community members were able to air their thoughts in a forum where they really felt

listened to.

Whether their voices would be heard for or against the campaign was, of course,

entirely up to them.   Research question two asked if message board posters responded

positively or negatively to the *Onslaught* video. Of the 119 posts which were coded,

31.9% ($n = 38$) were coded as positive, 5.9% ($n = 7$) were negative, and 62.2% ($n = 74$)

were coded as neutral or indeterminable (see Table 1 in the Appendix A). It should be

noted that the majority of those who were drawn to the campaign and wanted to discuss it

were those who were in favor of the campaign, as reflected by the nearly 5:1 ratio of

positive to negative posts.

The positive commentary ranged from being very short and simple, such as

Wendy1's, "I love this campaign-it's overdue" to posters like *auntb* who wanted to

express, in greater detail, what the *Onslaught* film had meant to them:

> I really love this film!! I have two daughters ages 4 and 5 and I'm already
> having to teach them what is truly beautiful and what is not. I applaud
> Dove for reminding parents that it is our responsibility to talk to our kids
> and teach them about reality when it comes to beauty. It's becoming more
> and more difficult to navigate the world because we are so overcome with
> unrealistic images of beauty. It's not just advertisements for fashion or
> Hollywood stars that are making this difficult for parents, but dolls and

toys targeted to our little girls. Every time we go to the store there is another bedroom eyed doll with a skimpy skirt and a bare belly peeking out from the shelves. OH, and nevermind the Halloween costumes that scream "sexy" to my little girls!! Dove, thank you for your amazing effort. I hope parents across the country and around the world pay close attention to your message and help make the world a better, healthier place for our children....starting in our own homes.

A common theme germane to those who posted a remark which reflected a

positive reaction to Dove was the willingness to share more details about how the

campaign affected them and more background into their individual lives.

kristinseeley was one of these.

My reaction to "Onslaught" is that I want to cry. Then, I watched "Evolution" and the tears did well up. I, too, took a few gender studies courses in college more than 15 years ago, and the research, media message and culture were clear then about the objectification of women. What I took away from my studies and life thereafter was to try not to let anyone else --not Glamour magazine, not my career, not my husband, not my friends-- define who I was. Now that I am the mother of two very young daughters, the importance of real role models is more paramount. Good for Dove to tackle the "real beauty" of women. As a former, public relations professional it's hard for me not to be cynical of the company's dollar-driven agenda, but I'm moved by the campaign and hopeful that others will follow suit in responsible social marketing.

Reading through the various posts and comments, it was very interesting to see

how willing those in this online community were to express thoughts and concerns that

were obviously very personal to them. Dove had created an atmosphere where women

felt comfortable sharing thoughts and feelings that they considered important and that had

had an impact on their lives. Of course, not all the posts reflected positively on the video

and campaign. The following post by *cre8pc* was perhaps the most negative towards

Dove of all the comments:

This ad is creative, compelling and gets its point across. However, it infuriated me because it clearly puts the blame for the upsetting images of women physically torturing themselves on the parents, rather than the source of the problem…Please direct your campaign to your industry.

In an online community where the majority is in favor of one idea, a statement that goes against it was not very supported. However, as previously mentioned, it seemed that none of the message board users wanted to upset or offend any in their community. The post by *cre8pc* was never quoted or directly referenced, but the ideas presented in it were not supported, as shown most directly by *Shannonmari*:

> I'm curious as to why some of the women here are getting upset with Dove, stating it's not their job to "parent" our child? Since when is Dove making that statement?? I don't see this at all!! KUDOS to Dove for their campaign! I, for one, applaud it!

Others, such as *1stchairbflat* were not quite as direct as *Shannonmari* but still showed a difference of opinion from one that had been previously stated:

> You certainly have a right to your opinion. But I applaud Dove for taking the initiative in trying to educate our young daughters about the dangers of "beauty" advertising. I think it is laudable that any company in the beauty industry would step back from the normal ad campaign to assess the impact of our current "beauty culture" our children and try to take action to warn their potential future clients about that impact. To me, that's extraordinary! Unheard of in todays dollar driven society! So, I want to work with them, use them as a resource, to help educate my daughters and grand daughters that they don't need advertisers to tell them what is beautiful. I am amazed that Dove is doing this and am glad for my children and grand children.

Overall, if a post did directly refer to the *Onslaught* video or the Dove campaign, it was much more likely to be expressing a positive rather than negative sentiment.

Research Question 3: Primary Themes. The thoughts, positive or negative, which were expressed from the 85 posters who penned 119 messages, were eventually categorized into 20 theme-based areas. Research question three asked what were the primary themes discussed in message board posts regarding the video *Onslaught*. After analyzing the main themes or messages represented in each of the different posts, the identified themes were then collapsed into 20 categories. They were not coded for being mutually exclusive (many posts had multiple themes) and are represented as follows:

38.7% (*n* = 46) of the message board posters used the message board to vent frustrations; 37.8% (*n* = 45) of the users referenced responsibility for teaching children; 15.1% (*n* = 18) of the participants made some sort of religious reference; 41.2% (*n* = 49) attempted to define what beauty is; 20.2% (*n* = 24) attempted to define what beauty isn't; 24.4% (*n* = 29) of the participants gave advice for parenting; 25.2% (*n* = 30) reacted to a previously listed post; 25.2% (*n* = 30) of the message board users offered encouragement; 17.6% (*n* = 21) made reference to an eating disorder; 10.1% (*n* = 12) mentioned plastic surgery or similar extremes; 5% (*n* = 6) of those who wrote on the message board offered suggestions and/or advice for the Dove campaign; 10.9% (*n* = 13) offered suggestion and/or advice for a healthy living; 21.8% (*n* = 26) thanked Dove or expressed gratitude for Dove; 54.6% (*n* = 65) attached blame to the media; 4.2% (*n* = 5) stated that the media was not to blame; 29.4% (*n* = 35) made mention of self esteem and/or self image; 9.2% (n=11) mentioned obesity or fatness in their message board post; 41.2% (*n* = 49) directly referred to the *Onslaught* video; 10.9% (*n* = 13) made a reference to their own personal body type or looks; and 11.8% (*n* = 14) mentioned celebrities or models in their message (see Table 2 in the Appendix A).

In order to focus on the most common and prevalent discussions that were derived on the message board, I will focus on those themes which were mentioned in at least one-third (33%) of the posts.

From the established themes, the most common was for the message board users to attach blame to the media. This has weighty implications. Many studies have been conducted to determine if the media is to blame for negative body image and behavior (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Birkeland et al., 2005; Stice & Shaw, 1994; Stice, Schupak-Neubery, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen,

2002; Posavac, Posavac, & Weigel, 2001; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Regardless of

what those studies claim, 54.6% of the public (as represented by those who message on

the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty) find the media to be at fault.

This sense of blame toward the media is reflected in these representative posts:

ElJae: This film confirms the power of media and how it impacts perception. Both men and women are victims of both direct and subliminal standards. Continuing to accept and literally buy into these messages makes us all guilty.

Beanster: Almost all of the cosmetic, hair, and make up ads on TV are MEANT to make women feel inferior. We are too short, too tall, too fat, too skinny, hair too curly, hair to straight, etc... It just doesn't stop. Nothing that we were born with seems good enough. We have a whole generation of women with problems because of ads like the ones shown...These ads are right up there with cigarette commercials...Those were stopped and these should be also....Parents can tell their girls the truth, however, they are more likely to believe what they see or hear in the media....

Sushmayb: I'm currently taking a women studies class and we were just discussing how media essentially governs every aspect of our life. More importantly how advertising has reduced the female's body in an object which can be tweaked to perfection. Also, the fact that perfection can be achieved through fad diets and cosmetics are stepping stones to achieve the "ideal" image of perfection. It's actually quite disturbing at how fast girls get influenced by the media. In a recent article I read, it stated that more than 65 percent of teens in high school diet and about 1/3rd of fourth graders are under a diet....What has the world come to? We're sucked into this dark void of cosmetics, perfect proportion, size, weight, color, that women have been subjected to dehumanizing techniques....like using touch-ups to make women have flawless skin (even if it means "invisible pores"). A girl's self-esteem is ridiculed to the brink of her contemplating suicide because she failed to achieve this false perfection...it's all very sick and I'm so disturbed by the media's grasp around the concept of beauty. I hope this commercial opens many eyes to the realities of advertising because, more than 50 percent of the suicide cases reported in high school is due to a weight issue...Social problems are anorexia and bulimia surround us and its our job to find the strength to break free from these chains that the media in the form of advertising has placed on women today.

Following this most prevalent theme to blame the media, the next most addressed

topic was for the message board users to attempt to define what beauty is. Most often,

those definitions fell in line with Dove's reminder that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. As *msbgz* summarized, "Every woman is beautiful in their own way, and when you are confident in yourself your beauty comes through." To add a similar thought to that sentiment, *bmarquez* wrote,

> …everybody is beautiful to me and i respect the diversity and uniqueness of every individual. Regardless of what people tell me or what people tell you, you are a human being and you are beautiful and worth every amount of respect or even more as that supermodel on the billboard.

SANDIGULLEY's sentiments echoed those expressed by *bmarquez*:

> The old adage still stands firm as saying beauty is on the inside. It still holds truth today. So what I can say to these young girls is, "You are made in the image of God and you are beautiful just the way you look. Unique. No carbon copy (CLONE) can match you.

The message board users on Dove's website, about 41% of which discussed the "true" definition of beauty, addressed the *Onslaught* video in about equal numbers. This is both appropriate and expected because the message board was dedicated to and in direct reference to the video. However, it is also interesting to note that nearly 60% of the messages did not directly or indirectly reference the message board's main topic. The opening question to the message board, written by Dove's administrators (*importadmin*) asks, "How did the images in the film affect you? How do you feel they affect young girls and their self-esteem?" Even with the direction provided by these introductory questions, the majority of the message board users focused on the themes previously discussed. The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is that while the *Onslaught* video was found compelling enough to bring users to the message board, once there they felt comfortable within their community to address other topics they considered worthwhile.

The next most prevalent theme (addressed by 38.7% of users) among the posted messages were those written to vent frustrations. The posters used this virtual community to express what had been bothering them or something negative which was on their minds. *Wecalove* had some frustrations she wanted to make public:

> You shouldn't be worrying about what other people say about your physical appearance because chances are they problems of their own. Whenever I hear my friends talk smack about an actress or actors appearance or say "their nose is too big" or "he's so short …" I just think to myself that your [sic] not perfect yourself either and just because your jealous of their level in society, it doesn't mean you need to try to make yourself feel better. For example, if you see the ugliest or dumbest kid at school, do either one of two things. Mind your own business or give them a smile to give off the effect that you have nothing against them.

LiRose also wanted to use the message board to get some of her thoughts across:

> …watching those ads flash by me i relaized that they were all saying the same thing. Dont be Fat Dont be Ugly Dont have Acne Dont be Normal.WHAT IS NORMAL ANYMORE? All these pictures you see of celebrities with their tan orange bodies and their blonde highlights and buffnesss and anorexicness isnt real. They have people make them orange people make them change. People who change them. People want to be perfect but no one is perfect ever.

Those who vented frustrations did not exclusively make mention of the media and the images portrayed therein; (although a number of them did reference it) instead, they wrote about the fear of pushing their own insecurities on those they love. They spoke of their irritations with their own bodies. They expressed their exasperation with others who found faults in their physical makeup when it was invisible to all those who care for them. Finally, many chronicled their struggles with getting children to listen to them or other caring, rational voices. It is unsurprising that so many would mention their worry for their children and grandchildren when the next most touched-on theme (mentioned by 37.8%) made reference to the responsibility of teaching children.

Exceptionallycrazy seemed to best summarize what most of the other posters

wrote:

> I believe that the source of the problem is the direct teacher of the child,
> not the media industry. I realize that my belief is only about 1 percent of
> the population, but I feel that parents are responsible for what their
> children watch or see, and when they can't be around to censor, I feel it is
> up to the parent to arm their child with the truth. Why can't parents counter
> untruthful or misleading ads? Granted, it takes a lot of communication,
> patience, and time. It's worth it for me.

Research Question 4: A Shift or Change in Attitudes. Research question four asks

if the themes and major threads indicate any shift or change in attitudes regarding the

users' definitions or perceptions of beauty. Only 21% ($n = 25$) of the message board

users quoted another message board post. Forty-one of the 119 posts were in response to

another post ($n = 41$; 34.5%). Of both those who responded to another post and those

who quoted another post, none showed any shift or change in attitude regarding the user's

definitions or perceptions of beauty.

Perhaps the reason for this was because of the online community which had been

created. Although Dove set up the board so people could give their reactions to the

Onslaught video, the users did not directly focus on the campaign, but more the ideas

surrounding it. The message board users had found a place wherein their own personal

expressions, some deeply personal, could be written for the world to see. Many

expressed the things they'd come to know over time. A few wrote about how time had

not changed any of their conviction.

Andied gives an example:

> When I was a little girl, I always wanted to have blond hair and be stick
> thin. That was in the 60's. As a 47 year old woman, I don't care about the
> hair, but I still want to be thin. This is a carryover from when I was young.

While a few users made mention of changes they had made in their lives, none attributed those changes directly to the message boards or gave sole credit to the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty.

Research Question 5: Forms Represented in the Message Board Posts. Research question five asks what different types of forms are most frequently represented in the message board posts. In other words, how can the communicative nature of the message board be characterized? Three ($n = 3$), or 2.5%, of the 119 posts were coded as "questions." "Answer/Replies" were represented by 26.1% ($n = 31$) and there were a total of 85 (71.4%) of "Statements." The overwhelming majority (71.4%) of the representation of how the message board users utilized the board was through statements (see Table 3 in the Appendix A). To better understand what the statements entailed, research question 6 gives a summary of the functions of the messages.

Research Question 6: Common Functions. Based on Kaye's (2005, 2007) typology, research question six asks what are the most common "functions" that these messages serve for the poster. "Functions" were not coded for being mutually exclusive. Function One: Information Seeking was represented at 0.8% ($n = 1$); Function Two: Personal Fulfillment was represented at 36.1% ($n = 43$); Function Three: Expression had had a percentage of 95 ($n = 113$); Function Four: Affiliation with Other Message Board Users was identified by 61 message board posts, or 51.3%; Function Five: Research-based had a representation of 10.9% ($n = 13$); Function Six: Intellectual/Aesthetic Fulfillment was identified in 21.8% ($n = 26$) of the posts; Function Seven: Anti-traditional-media Sentiment had a frequency of 22 (18.5%); Function Eight: Guidance/Opinion Seeking was represented by 21.8% ($n = 26$) of the messages (see Table 4 in the Appendix A).

The vast majority (95.0%) of all the posts could be coded for being an expression function. Many examples of expression were listed in relation to research question 4, as was *exceptionallycrazy*'s expression of her thoughts on where responsibility lies. Following expression, the next most popular function was that of affiliation with other message board users (51.3%). The first thing to note is the great difference between the two most common functions; expression is used with 43.7% greater frequency than affiliation. The affiliation with other message board users is shown by the desire of the user to build an online community with others who are perceived as like-minded people. They never had a single directly negative or anti- comment in all the posts towards another message board user. While various points of view were expressed, there was a culture of building on common ground rather than trying to prove one another wrong. As for those who focused on the next most common function: personal fulfillment (36.1%), they used the community as a sounding board to state their opinions regarding the Dove campaign and their reaction to the *Onslaught* video.

The next most commonly used function was that of intellectual or aesthetic fulfillment (21.8%). These users appeared to access the message board to hone critical thinking skills concerning intellectual discourse, debate, and/or argument. In the aspects of debates and arguments, the community established was more of a sounding board than a conversation. If a person wanted to argue and even posed an argumentative or debatable post, it was not quoted and only referenced vaguely if at all. In the case of intellectual discourse, users spent their time discussing their thoughts and feelings directly and indirectly associated with the *Onslaught* video.

Just as common as the intellectual or aesthetic fulfillment function was the guidance and opinion seeking function. As much as the users wanted intellectual

discourse, they also wanted help with problems and concerns. One such poster, *cre8pc*

wrote the following story which was the greatest of the cries for help:

> My daughter, from toddler age on, has been subjected to the theory that
> she is for viewing pleasure only. Nothing else about her could possibly
> matter.
>
> We had attended one church specifically that held separate classes for the
> girls from the boys, so that the teachers could work with the girls' self
> esteem. This church took the problem facing girls seriously. And even at
> that, my daughter found little help. I think in some ways she felt worse,
> despite being given tools intended to empower her.
>
> It confused her that she HAD to do that. She was a kid! Why was the
> world mad at her? What had **she** done wrong?
>
> I watched my Honor Roll daughter fall into the fathom of hell in her 9th
> grade year because she felt "ugly". She insisted on shaving her entire
> body, including her eyebrows and arms. She could find no logical reason
> for body hair because she didn't see it on models anywhere. It took
> everything I had to keep her alive during this time because she felt so bad
> in her own skin.
>
> What was I supposed to say and do? What hadn't I tried?

Immediately following those users seeking guidance were those who expressed

anti-traditional-media sentiment (18.5%). As was expressed in the posts that showed the

disdain several of the users had towards the traditional media, they had turned to Dove

for something different. This could also be interpreted by the figures that represented

54.6% of the users in blaming the media and yet 41.2% are doing exactly what Dove—in

a media-based campaign—had requested and that was expand or discuss the idea of

beauty. To take that one step further, 21.8% of the users even specifically thanked Dove

for the campaign.

Research Question 7: Dove Campaign and Its Objective. All the previously

mentioned information leads up to the most pertinent question of this study: is Dove

reaching its goal? Is Dove reaching its stated object to "expand the definition of beauty?"

Research question seven asks to what degree does the interpretative analysis indicate that the Dove Campaign has accomplished this. Dove's objective to expand the definition of beauty is represented throughout their campaign. Thirty-eight (31.9%) of the message board posts could be identified as being positive towards the campaign. There were seven (5.9%) comments that could be coded as being negative towards the campaign. Most of the posts ($n = 74$), however, were coded as being neutral towards the campaign or indeterminable as being positive or negative towards the campaign (62.2%). However, a negative or even positive response to the Dove campaign does not necessarily imply that Dove is reaching its goal.

An answer in either the affirmative or the negative would be debatable. The only thing we know for sure is this: Dove has managed to get at least 85 members of the community to care enough about the subject to start talking about it. In essence, Dove has had a successful campaign for at least 85 people. As *NAbeug* summarizes:

> you don't need media. you don't need magazines.
> its simple.
>
> beauty comes from yourself, but not from your looks.
> the defenition isn't "perfect" as the societey potrays it as...
> beauty i[s] being yourself and loving it!
> you don't gotta look like those models or celebs to be beautiful….
> God's given skin is beautiful! you don't have to compare it to anyone!

An in depth discussion as to whether or not Dove has reached its goal will be provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to see if the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was effective. Dove's stated purpose was to expand the media-narrowed definition of beauty to one which embraced "real" beauty, a definition limited only by the eye of the beholder. In an effort to get people talking about beauty, Dove launched, among others, the *Onslaught* video, which encourages parents to talk to their daughters about body image. Another way that Dove encouraged dialogue regarding beauty was by providing online message boards. A particular message board was dedicated solely to the *Onslaught* video. From this board, 119 messages posted by 85 different user names were coded and analyzed.

The researcher set out to find how women were experiencing, creating and negotiating meaning about beauty; how message board users responded to the campaign; what primary themes were discussed in the message board postings and whether those themes indicated any change in the posters' attitudes regarding definitions and perceptions of beauty; the communicative nature of the board; the most common functions; and to see if the Dove campaign accomplished its stated objective to expand the definition of beauty. In short, was the campaign effective in achieving Dove's declared goal?

In order to evaluate effectiveness, the author first used a descriptive content analysis, coding each of the individual posts connected to the *Onslaught* video for form, function, content, tone and reliability. Following this analysis, the author used a methodology based on reception analysis. Although reception analysis typically utilizes in-depth interviewing, this research analyzed message board posts to discover how the

message board users created and negotiated meaning about beauty and presented those meanings through identified themes and functions.

What the author found was that most of the users on the message board used Dove's site to express themselves, make statements and affiliate with other message board users. The message board users responded much more positively than negatively to the Dove campaign. In the themes that emerged, the most prevalent were to blame the media, give a personal definition of beauty, vent frustrations, and to discuss the responsibilities of teaching children.

Key Findings

This study is valuable because of the key findings that were discovered. Originally, Dove hypothesized that women would underestimate their own beauty (Lowe & Bright, 2004). Instead of proving that true, what they found was that women didn't consider physical perfection to be the definition of beautiful, but rather a woman's spirit and love of life defined it (Unilever, 2006). The creation of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is a reflection of what those women said in their definitions. Instead of focusing on a woman's size to define her worth, these women are focusing on her spirit and zeal for life.

While Dove was most likely not the first corporate voice in the media to state this opinion, we do know that they are saying it more loudly and boldly than anyone has before. As a result —or maybe just a reflection—of Dove's position, more and more supportive voices are coming forward. Movies, while still showing thin actresses, also have more that are average sized. Television programs, both scripted and reality, are showing regular to plus-sized participants. NBC's hit program *The Biggest Loser* has made all of its money by displaying obese people losing weight through diet and

exercise. There are no waif-like models on the show and yet it consistently maintains high ratings. News articles that reported on Spain's BMI cap for models received hundreds of posts with congratulations and applause for the decision. T-shirts can be seen with slogans of "0 is not a size" written on them. The shirts are being sold online and even advertised in different media venues.

Was Dove Effective?

While Dove cannot directly be given credit for any of the aforementioned events and trends, indirectly they are all connected and reflect each other. They are all working towards, or perhaps unintentionally contributing to, the movement for change. In order to make a change an atmosphere which will support a new paradigm must be created. Within that atmosphere, a clear idea needs to be stated. That idea, if it is to make a difference, must gain a following of some sorts. There needs to be time given for the change to take place. Also, there needs to be room for adjustments and growth allotted as the change begins to take hold.

Dove can be considered effective if for no other reason than it created a community where women felt safe and free to share their opinions. The campaign stated clear objectives to undo the media-narrowed definition of beauty. They allowed women to have a community to share their voice. Because of the nature of the community and the idea, the campaign gained a following. While Dove might have initiated this movement thinking it would go in one direction, they allowed supporters to take ownership and drive the direction of the discussion. More time is required to evaluate the extent to which Dove has been effective, but thus far it is clear that they have made an impact by getting things started.

Dove's overall purpose was to have beauty be defined by individuals and not media. The message board posts indicate that the users whole-heartedly agreed that they should be able to identify beauty on their own. The posts also indicated that the message board users did just that. They signified this by the most prevalent themes and functions. They used the message board to express their opinions of beauty, to blame the media, and to affiliate with others who wished to do the same. Dove provided the needed platform or location for participants to define what they thought beauty was.

Dove created a space wherein a community could be created that women (primarily) felt comfortable sharing their own personal thoughts and insights. This community was so strong that the participants chose to avoid directly disagreeing or arguing with other participants rather than infringe on other's right to express themselves and their opinions.

Although Dove launched a global campaign, only 85 various message board users posted and were analyzed in this study. Dove did not set a numerical goal as to how many opinions they would change or definitions they would expand, so the campaign could still be considered effective, at least to those 85 who spoke out on the *Onslaught* video's message board. The small number also only reflects those who felt strongly enough about the campaign to comment on it and had the time and means necessary to do so. Creating change, of any sort, takes a great deal of time. With the Dove Campaign still relatively new, all the changes and effects cannot now be fully realized in the public at large.

There is a still a prevalence of skinny models and actors found in the media. This prevalence could indicate that the efforts of Dove have been in vain. However, to expand a definition of beauty does not mean to exclude a major part of it. There will, most

likely, continue to be thin body-types represented in media. That alone is not an indication that Dove has failed to achieve its goals. The future would have to prove that only thin models and actresses are accepted as being beautiful in order to show that Dove had not accomplished its purpose. For the time being, Dove has been bold enough to offer an expanded definition of beauty and foster a community where people can discuss and expand on Dove's ideas and their own.

Contributions to the Existing Body of Literature

This study confirmed previously made statements that the media is highly influential on the construction of one's idea of body image. While this has been discussed quite extensively in a myriad of other studies, this research added a new element. The participants of the *Onslaught* video's message board acknowledged the power the media has in terms of influence on individual lives; however the participants went one step further and took many opportunities to speak out against the media. They stated the opinion that while the media had influenced their core values, ideas, and beliefs, they would not allow the media to completely change them. They were strong and outspoken in stating that they would not allow their traditions concerning beauty to be altered by television, movies, newspapers, magazines, etc., regardless of whatever new "normative beliefs" were presented to them.

While this research was qualitative and therefore, by design, harder to apply to the greater population, the findings show that the women who participated on the message boards wanted to share what they know. They wanted a place to express their opinion and vent their frustrations. They wanted the world to know what was on their mind and Dove gave them a place to do it. This research shows that an organization, or even an individual can create an atmosphere which will allow a change to take root.

Limitations and Future Research

This study tried to expand on reception analysis by moving away from the traditional method of in-depth interviewing and instead focus on applying the principles to message board interactions. As such, there are many limitations as well as many opportunities to expand in future research.

The author acknowledges the imperfections of this method. The message board posts from which the research was based were only available for a relatively short amount of time (approximately two years). Such a time frame could perhaps have been more beneficial if there would have been a heavier response from message board users. In two years there were only 177 posts—a relatively light response. Approximately 70% of those responses were written within the first 10 months. Some of the greater limitations were that because of the nature of this research, it was not possible to know what types of conversations were being held off-line. The researcher was not able to contact the posters to further inquire about their commentary and to clarify or explain in further detail what they said and why. The message board posts provided only a very small peek into the process of constructing meaning.

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty produced another video which was launched a few months prior to *Onslaught* titled *Evolution*. As of August 1, 2009 the *Evolution* video had been watched on youtube.com over 9 million times. As of the same date, the *Onslaught* video had been viewed slightly less than 500,000 times. Perhaps a greater response could have been generated had Dove dedicated a message board to the *Evolution* video. The *Onslaught* video was, however, the only video to have its own message board. Should another message board be dedicated to a specific video produced

by Dove, perhaps it would yield a greater volume of participants and thus have more information available for subsequent studies.

Future research for expanding and perfecting reception analysis into areas of study not susceptible to interviews has limitless possibilities. The internet is readily available with blogs, message boards, and other forms of communication whereby researchers could study and apply the reception analysis principles. A study including the participants of similar message boards wherein you could actually contact the posters would be especially insightful. If this research could have been conducted with accompanying surveys given to the women to assess their level of exposure and comprehension of the Dove message, it would have provided more in-depth information.

Due to the qualitative research conducted, there are several given limitations. The small sample from which data was collected makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the larger population. The findings were very dependent on the interpretations of the researcher, as is typical of qualitative research.

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APPENDIX A: RESULTS SECTION

Table 1

Response of Message Board Posters to *Onslaught* Video

	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	38	31.9
Negative	7	5.9
Neutral/Undeterminable	74	62.6

Table 2

Identified Themes Listed in Order of Frequency

	Frequency	Percentage
Attaches Blame to Media	65	54.6
Attempts to Define What Beauty is	49	41.2
Directly Refers to the *Onslaught* Video	49	41.2
Venting Frustration	46	38.7
References Responsibility for Teaching Children	45	37.8
Mentions Self Esteem or Self Image	35	29.4
Reacts to Other Posts	30	25.2
Offers Encouragement	30	25.2
Gives Advice for Parenting	29	24.4
Thanks Dove or Expresses Gratitude for the Campaign	26	21.8
Attempts to Define what Beauty isn't	24	20.2
Mentions an Eating Disorder	21	17.6
Makes a Religious Reference	18	15.1
Makes Mention of a Celebrity and/or Model	14	11.8
Offers Suggestions/Advice for a Health Living/Lifestyle	13	10.9
References Personal Body Type or Looks	13	10.9
Mentions Plastic Surgery or Other Extreme Measures for Beauty	12	10.1
Mentions Obesity and/or Fatness	11	9.2
Offers Suggestions/Advice for the Dove Campaign	6	5.0
States the Media is not to Blame	5	4.2

Table 3

Communicative Nature of the Message Board

	Frequency	Percentage
Questions	3	2.5
Answers	31	26.1
Statements	85	71.4

Table 4

Common Functions Listed in Order of Frequency

	Frequency	Percentage
Expression	113	95.0
Affiliation with Other Message Board Users	61	51.3
Personal Fulfillment	43	36.1
Intellectual/Aesthetic Fulfillment	26	21.8
Guidance/Opinion Seeking	26	21.8
Anti-Traditional-Media Sentiment	22	18.5
Research-Based	13	10.9
Information Seeking	1	0.80

APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET

Coding Scheme: Onslaught Study
Coder _____ Message Board Post #_____
Date of Post _____ Name of Poster _____
Time of Post _____ : _____AM/PM   # Of Posts by this poster at time of post _____
Day poster became a member _____

_____ Form
1. Question   2. Answer/Reply   3. Statement

Function (Circle all that apply)
1. Information   4. Affiliation with   7. Anti-Traditional-
    Seeking   Other Message   Media Sentiment
2. Personal   Board Users   8. Guidance/Opinion
    Fulfillment   5. Research-Based   Seeking
3. Expression   6. Intellectual/Aesthe
                               tic Fulfillment

Content (Circle all that apply)
1. Venting   8. Offers   14. Attaches Blame to
    Frustrations   Encouragement   Media
2. References   9. Mentions Eating   15. States Media is
    Responsibility for   Disorders   Not to Blame
    Teaching Children   10. Mentions Plastic   16. Mention of Self-
3. Makes Religion   Surgery   Esteem
    Reference   11. Offers Suggestions   17. Mention of
4. Attempts to Define   or Advice for the   Obesity and/or
    What Beauty Is   Dove Campaign   Fatness
5. Attempts to Define   12. Offers Suggestions   18. Directly Refers to
    What Beauty Isn't   or Advice for   Onslaught Video
6. Gives Advice for   Healthy Living   19. References
    Parenting   13. Thanks Dove or   Personal Body
7. Reacts to Other   Expresses   Type
    Posts   Gratitude   20. Mentions
                                                          Celebrities/Models

____ Tone
1. Positive   3. Neutral/Undetermi
2. Negative   nable

Is this post quoting another post? _____
Is it in response to another post? _____
Whose? _____
If yes to either of the above questions, answer questions A and B:
    A. Does the poster admit to the validity of an opinion differing from their own? Y N
    B. Does the poster's opinion indicate any change from previous posts? Y N