

Self-Esteemed

Cause branding picks up on a new issue for women and girls

Only 2 percent of women worldwide describe themselves as beautiful.

Research by StrategyOne, Dr. Nancy Etcoff, and Dr. Susie Orbach for Unilever's Dove soap brand



Ladies, how do you feel when you look in the mirror? ¶ Advertisers have been asking women this question since companies have been selling products. In the current wave of social activism, marketers are tweaking their inquiry to tap into new generational and behavioral trends among women and girls toward causes and products that cater to—and support—women’s empowerment and self-esteem.

There is certainly an audience for it. According to San Diego State University psychologist Jean Twenge in her 2006 book, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, studies on self-esteem/narcissism done on more than 60,000 college students between 1968 and 1994 show that many of today’s young people have come to expect the world to cater to their whims and completely overlook their shortcomings—more so than any generation before it. (Twenge labels this group of

young people Generation Me, as a result.)

Whether today’s under-35 women and girls are, indeed, more narcissistic than others and demand the unconditional respect revealed by these survey findings, it’s clear that the pressures on girls and women in today’s society to “be perfect” remain strong, nonetheless. According to a 2006 study by the nonprofit Girls Inc., “Girls today experience intense pressure, at ever-younger ages, to be everything to everyone all of the time.” Seventy-four percent of the 1,059 girls surveyed agreed that girls are under a lot of pressure to please. Inevitably, the pressures they face can interfere with their development of a healthy and strong self-image. As well, a recent study from Dove of 3,200 women in 10 countries found that only 2 percent worldwide would describe themselves as “beautiful.”

Popular culture, and the media, meanwhile, also are cashing in on the trend. Oprah, of course, is the self-esteem movement’s high priestess: her entire franchise preaches empowerment, and her latest

“Live Your Best Life” Tour offers wisdom on how to “tap into...something more powerful living inside... to ultimately live the glorious life.” Or think about the advice espoused in Rhonda Byrne’s recent bestselling book, *The Secret*, which discusses how the power of positive thinking can pay off in better health, more wealth, and greater happiness. Positives, Byrne says, attract. How else to explain the success of such prize-winning television shows as *Ugly Betty*—about an ordinary girl from Queens who tries to fit into the world of high fashion?

To be sure, self-esteem is emerging as a powerful issue for companies and nonprofits alike—from Dove to CARE—to refresh age-old brands and recruit women as consumers and donors worldwide.

Like many advocacy movements, this one started on Madison Avenue. The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, which debuted in 2004, took a gutsy stand on the emergent issue of self-esteem-as-cause—indeed, it

ILLUSTRATION: CELIA JOHNSON



20,000

The number of people who have joined the online CARE Power Circle, showcasing their support for thousands of women living in poverty.

helped to define the movement. The power of Dove's work since has been its ability to simultaneously encapsulate the private insecurities, public frustrations, and future aspirations of its female audience.

And here's where "cause" comes in: rather than simply tout the marvels of its product line, Dove sparked a tangential dialogue, buttressed by philanthropic and marketing dollars to bring the issue to life. Since the campaign began, the company has produced advertisements featuring "real" women in their underwear; launched the Dove Self-Esteem Fund to positively affect the lives of 5 million girls worldwide by 2010; and developed short films, online communities, and events to reassure Generation Me and its middle-aged moms that beauty is more than skin-deep.

Indeed, imperfection sells today: revenue increases and public response have been remarkable. According to Dove, sales for products featured in the campaign ads increased 600 percent in the first two months, with an overall sales increase across the entire brand reaching 20 percent in 2005 and 7 percent in 2006. The campaign generated more than 650 million impressions during the summer of 2005 with its Web site message boards containing more than 13,000 posts sharing women's intimate experiences with aging, body image, and self-esteem. Here's one of them:

"...My husband of 18 years told me, 'I never loved you. You are old and nobody wants a 55-year-old woman in a wheelchair.'...I found myself beginning my life all over again. Ladies, I'm here to tell you, I may be in a wheelchair, but disabled is a dirty word in my vocabulary...As far as being old: I will be 56 in a couple of weeks, but I...don't look a day over 37. I believe it, girls. Mirrors don't lie either. I am a lifelong DOVE [sic] girl after all."

CARE, in a quest to engage new donors, also is linking to the empowerment theme to woo new hearts and minds to the cause of eradicating poverty worldwide. The nonprofit's "I Am Powerful" campaign, launched in April 2006, taps into today's emerging new women's movement and uses a highly personal, woman-to-woman strategy that links female donors in the United States to women in developing nations striving to rise out of poverty. To increase awareness, the campaign kicked off International Women's Day

on March 8, 2006, and features a speaker series in partnership with Borders bookstores, influential women ambassadors, airport dioramas, and print, radio, and television public service announcements.

The campaign has paid off: since it began online, it has generated more than 16,000 new donors with direct mail, formalized long-term partnerships with 17 national women's organizations, and generated more than \$3.8 million in media value through corporate and media alliances. To date, more than 20,000 people have joined the online CARE Power Circle, showcasing their support for the thousands of women living in poverty. Here's one of those testimonials, from someone who identified herself only as Michelle M. of the Philippines: "To all the women in the world: own your power. Believe in it and use it to transform your life—be a good mother, a good daughter, a leader, change the world, stand up for your rights, dream, learn, and DO."

As with Dove, CARE's testimonials demonstrate that women need movements to bring them together and make their voices heard. As the relevance of the topic draws them in, their desire to reach out to others lifts them up, and they become ambassadors for the cause, making self-esteem a hot-button issue.

As with any marketing campaign linked to cause, there are some skeptics: Dove's selection of cellulite and wrinkle creams to cross-promote with the Real Beauty campaign, for example, seemed contradictory, and there have been other criticisms. Dove, for its part, defends its altruistic intent, and parent firm Unilever supports the work as unique and

reflective of the target audience.

The bottom line? Most "game changing" is not without controversy and the best cause campaigns have business or marketing objectives in addition to social goals. To deliver meaningful, shared impact, the crucial components are transparency and authenticity. What do you stand for? ▲

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Carol Cone is chairman and founder of Cone LLC, a Boston-based strategy and communications agency and the nation's leading firm in the field of Cause Branding. Colleague, **Kristian Darigan**, is vice president of cause branding at Cone. Comments? Write to editors@contributemedia.com.



Carol Cone



Kristian Darigan