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### Edited Beauty and The Isolation That Follows

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Paige Hokunson

Communication Analysis

### Edited Beauty and The Isolation That Follows

The object that I have chosen to examine this semester is Dove's "Reverse Selfie" video ad. I chose this ad for many reasons, but ultimately because I think it is important. The message that, I believe, Dove intended for the audience was that social media during the pandemic has heightened insecurities in young girls and is creating unrealistic standards. The message I found from this, however, after diving deep my study is that beauty standards cause loneliness starting at a young age.

The video is full of rhetorical devices and the sequencing of the video is crucial to look at. The ad starts with a black screen, the dove logo, and the words "Dove presents reverse selfie." Then, the video quite literally does this—it shows the process of a girl posting a selfie in reverse. It goes from a zoomed-in image of a woman on social media that has a lot of likes and positive comments. Then, the likes go down and a comment gets erased. We then see the edits of the photo slowly come off the picture. Everything from hair, to eyes, to nose, to face structure was changed for the sake of the photo. Then we see the girl in real life doing things in reverse such as painting her nails, taking her hair down, doing her makeup, and the actual act of taking the selfie—again, all in reverse.

By the end we see a clip of a young girl sitting next to a mirror, then the camera zooms in on her face. She is alone the whole video and never once looks realistically happy. The last devices across the screen are a white background, the dove logo, and the following words fading on and off the screen: "The pressure of social media is hurting our girls' self-esteem. More

screen time during the pandemic has made things worse. Have the selfie talk today. Go to [dove.com](https://dove.com) to find out how. Dove self-esteem project.”

Another important note to pay attention to is the music and how it is soft but has a sense of anxiousness to it, and it slows down at the end when the words are on the screen. These notes display that not only is this video full of rhetorical devices, but that it was also intentionally created with a purpose. I know this because a lot of work goes into making a video like this, and it also puts out an image that Dove wanted people to associate with their company. They spent time and money of producing this video.

As I transitioned into my next steps of this study, I thought of all kinds of themes: unrealistic beauty standards, Dove cares about young girls, etc. When I really started concept mapping and diving deep into the rhetorical devices, I started to see more. Some major things to note from my analysis discoveries are that the photo that was posted and the actual girl who posted it not only look like two different people, but they specifically look different ages. The woman/image on social media looks stunning (according to beauty standards) with her perfectly done hair and makeup. The actual girl behind the post is young — I would guess maybe thirteen. Not that she isn't beautiful, but from the standpoint of society and what is beautiful in their eyes, she is seen as just a young girl. Comparing these two “different” people shows the reality behind what this girl wanted to portray to the outside world on social media.

Also, the context of the Covid-19 pandemic is important. The pandemic is mentioned towards the end of the video, and the video itself was posted over a year ago. This represents the time when the pandemic was starting to “end,” or rather when things started opening up more and mask mandates were being lifted. This is the part of my study where I first started to really think of the theme and message of loneliness. The pandemic was full of death, heartache, and

true *loneliness*. Yes, Dove shined a light on the fact that beauty standards are unrealistic for young girls — but I also think an underlying message here is that beauty standards have played a part in the loneliness young girls feel.

Social media and beauty standards aside, there are all kinds of reports/studies that represent an increase in loneliness since the pandemic. For example,

“People around the world experienced an increase in loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, although small, could have implications for people’s long-term mental and physical health, longevity and well-being, according to research published by the American Psychological Association” (APA).

There are all kinds of reasons for people to feel lonely, so it is no wonder to infer that something like a beauty standard would make a young girl feel not enough in her own skin, and lonely as an individual. The way that Dove includes the pandemic as context only strengthens the message.

To further my essay, it is important that I note a major interpretation question I asked while studying this message: what do the rhetorical choices and patterns indicate about the audience, society, or culture in which the message sits? The Dove “Reverse Selfie” ad makes a claim about the beauty standard in society through the video itself *and* through literal verbiage/dialogue written on the screen, “The pressure of social media is hurting our girls’ self-esteem” and “More screen time during the pandemic has made things worse” (Dove). These are two topics that have a direct relation to society, so I needed to ask the question of what the rhetorical choices said about society.

The more obvious inferences here are along the lines that there are really high beauty standards affecting the way young girls view beauty. More specifically, however, is that the rhetorical choices and patterns made by the rhetors are indicating that young girls who had social

media during the pandemic are more likely to struggle with loneliness—and, that without social media young girls would be less influenced by the beauty standards pushed into culture.

Dove is a brand that promotes beauty, yet they are also trying to say that they promote a more natural and authentic beauty than your day-to-day beauty brands. I know this through looking at their project called “The Dove Self-Esteem Project” on their website. This is from where my object video was made. The mission statement includes sentences such as “The Dove Self-Esteem Project was created from a vision where beauty is a source of confidence, not anxiety. We’ve reached over 82 million young people with self-esteem education” and “We’ve partnered with leading experts in the fields of psychology, health, and body image” (Dove). This kind of mission statement tells people, especially parents who have young girls, that Dove cares about the self-esteem issues and pressure put on girls. And, they have legitimate sources to back up their claims. Between the video, “Reverse Selfie,” and this mission statement, one may think right off the bat that the goal of Dove is to show how much they care and that they want to make a difference in the beauty world.

However, this mission statement along with my video object has only made me believe further that, ultimately, there is a message that beauty standards cause a problem of loneliness and that Dove claims that they know how to help that problem. What does this say about society, then? About a culture that makes young girls feel alone and unworthy because of the body they live in every single day? Well, it says a lot about how companies thrive off people wanting to change how they look. It tells us that most girls grow up in a culture where they are taught a beauty standard, that (quite possibly) no one could ever reach naturally — not to mention that the beauty standards are constantly changing. And, it tells us that through social media, young girls are influenced every single day. This plus the pandemic really can be a recipe for loneliness.

To reiterate the message I have studied, it is clear that (based on research, criteria, and specific judgments) Dove has created the video “Reverse Selfie” to show the negative effects of beauty standards. However, there is also the idea that as a young girl grows up, what she sees and experiences shapes her mind. Thus, there is the message that when young girls are told what products they need to spend money on and what to change to look “better”, girls may develop feelings of loneliness starting at a young age. A lot of research and information has brought me to this conclusion. A key piece of that research will be presented to you in this paper shortly.

In evaluating this message I leaned on the following criteria: Does the message have social value? What kind? Does the message uphold desirable values? Specifically, what do those values mean for those influenced by the beauty industry? And, ultimately, I judged this object by looking specifically at the ethics and values behind the message.

Nearly all of the rhetorical devices used in this video make reference to society and social values. For example, social media is used in the video, and at the end, Dove talks about the low self-esteem issue among young girls. All the rhetorical devices I discussed at the beginning of this paper work together to show how one young girl was impacted by social media and beauty standards — and it was a negative impact. The video moving in reverse showed the audience what one young girl will go through to show the world what *she thinks* is beautiful and what they want to see. At the end of the video she is alone and unhappy, but the key thing to remember here is that for her, it is not just the end of a video, it is how she looks and feels behind the screen. No one is there with her, she is just alone with her wishes to look different.

This is not good for society, specifically women. Young minds are shaped every single day by what they see and what they are told. If young girls are told that they need to change how they look at such a young age, those feelings will only increase as they grow older into women.

Society revolves around trends and popularity — but in this case, the beauty industry takes something that can really damage a girl’s self-esteem and call it a “must-need product to look beautiful.” This is great for the industry, as they will constantly generate revenue. Over time the “ideal” body image and beauty standards have changed. Thus, there will always be something that they tell women to change.

The following quote is from the National Library of Medicine based on a study. It may seem long, but it specifically backs up my claim about the negative implications of the beauty industry and it is key to look at:

“From a very young age, [women] are told that how you look is important to them and others who look at them. Cultures all over the world put women and girls’ bodies at the center of intrigue based on connotations attached to beauty such as goodness and sexuality. Studies have showed that young girls may obsess over their appearance making other aspects of development less important, such as education or independence.”

Now that it is clear that the beauty industry does in fact have a negative impact on society, let’s look at what this specifically means in relation to Dove’s “Reverse Selfie.”

In regard to the video itself, it not only is good for society, but it shines light on this exact issue I just talked about. More people need to understand the negative effects of the beauty industry and how it can lead to loneliness and poor self-image. If a young girl sees this video, they may be able to sympathize with it, but will they really know the right next steps to take? Maybe, but maybe not. That is why it is important that this video is reaching more than one audience. Parents, teachers, and caretakers may come across this ad because they wanted to order a new Dove soap, but then be reminded of a real issue that perhaps their child or student could have.

Ultimately, the video raises awareness. It is easy to look at a video and make a judgement based on beliefs of who the company is or what the rhetors could have done better. And, though I may never know the true intent that Dove had for this video, based on the video's verbal communication, rhetorical devices, and the research I have conducted, I believe it is a fair judgement to say that the video, though a negative concept, does put out an important message for society to look at and change from.



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