



Photo Credit: ThinkStockPhotos

## **Connecting Strategic Marketing and Social Responsibility: Best Practices Resulting from Three Case Studies**

By Andrew Kovan

### **Capstone Project**

Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies  
Goucher College  
1021 Dulaney Valley Road  
Baltimore, MD 21204-2794

May 2016



# Swimsuit 2016

FIRST EVER  
VIRTUAL REALITY  
PHOTO SHOOT

ROOKIE  
BOMBSHELL  
ASHLEY  
GRAHAM

+  
WE BODYPAINTED  
RONDA ROUSEY  
*Twice*

*"Thank you to everyone who stood up for curves – our voices were heard and together we can help me win Rookie of the Year."*

~ Ashley Graham

Photo Credit: James Macari/Sports Illustrated



February 27, 2016, Former Model Cheryl Tiegs makes a statement to the news media that she thinks fashion's acceptance of the full-figured women sends a bad message, directly referring to the plus-sized model Ashley Graham's appearance on one of three 2016 Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition covers. "I don't like that we're talking about full-figured women, because it is glamourizing them, because your waist should be smaller than 35 inches," said Tiegs (Stump:2016).

Graham, on the other hand, posted to the social media platform Instagram, "Thank you to everyone who stood up for curves – our voices were heard and together we can help me win Rookie of the Year" (Almasy:2016). Further support came from proponents of body diversity, backing Sports Illustrated's decision to feature her on the cover.

On August 29, 2015, Amy Pence-Brown executes a social experiment to promote self-acceptance. In a busy public market in downtown Boise, Idaho, Brown strips down to a bikini and blindfolds herself and leaves a chalkboard at her feet with the following written on it: “I’m standing for anyone who has struggled with a self-esteem issue like me, because all bodies are valuable. To support self-acceptance, draw a ‘heart’ on my body.” So, spreading her arms (harkening images of a Christ-like self sacrifice) with markers in each hand, she waits and people walk by, slow and eventually stop – all exuding a variety of emotions. And, although she asked for hearts to be drawn on her body, and feared ridicule, what she got was so much more. On her body, hearts – as expected - were drawn. But she got even greater. Words like “hope” and “bad ass” were written. In the video telling the story of her hour in the marketplace, she states, “In a society that profits from self-doubt, liking yourself is a rebellious act.”

*“In a society that profits from self-doubt, liking yourself is a rebellious act.”*  
~ Amy Pence-Brown



Graham and Pence-Brown courageously presented themselves as content to counteract a tangible social issue; one that negatively effects young girls and women on a day-to-day basis. Tiegs, on the other hand, defended the received “thin as ideal” point-of-view while perpetuating the body ideal debate; one that she was an active participant in during her time as a model.

Social media has given a real voice to the efforts of Graham and Pence-Brown. As of May 2016, Graham has more than 1.7 million followers on Instagram alone – a single social channel; no doubt boosted by all the support from Sports Illustrated and corresponding coverage she received following her Swimsuit Issue debut. Compared to Graham, Pence-Brown’s Instagram audience is significantly smaller at only 2,647 followers. However, her video was viewed on Vimeo over 920,000 times and subsequently covered in national print publications such as People Magazine.

**Graham**



1.7 million followers

**Pence-Brown**



2,647 followers

These two examples serve as a bold reminder and shed light on the power and influence media has on us on a daily basis. Here, the topic is body ideals, specifically as to how it relates to women – and women positing distinct and disparate opinions with what our culture portends to be the “ideal” body type – using the image of a Barbie doll as the ideal – as

well as the point-of-view for those who are not “ideal” or plus-sized. However, my intent is not to establish a point of view on beauty, body type ideals or female empowerment topics. But rather, my intent is to take a close look at several case studies to establish a perspective of how marketers view and can embrace their social responsibility as they endeavor to achieve their fiduciary responsibility to their employers/clients; while using the topics of beauty, body ideals and female empowerment as a social platform to do so.

**Connecting Strategic Marketing and Social Responsibility**

Within every social issue exists the opportunity for a person or entity to make a positive impact by focusing on social good. For marketers, the opportunities represent a relatively new frontier for increasing connections with the communities they serve: their consumers. There seems to be varying levels of understanding and commitment to the cultural and social roles, responsibilities and impacts relative to the marketing and positioning of their brand, product or service. The goal of the paper is to illuminate the potential for social good and its potential for value creation, and, in the case of this paper to challenge decades-old, beauty-related marketing practice that contributed to the social issue. In the case studies to follow are examples of how marketers have taken a social issue with devastating outcomes to a community largely unaware of the challenges levied on them at a young age. However, as they get older, and as their awareness levels of the issue(s) increase, often times important values such as self-esteem, confidence and empowerment are stripped away.

This is a unique approach to marketing. These companies and their respective brands have made

a conscious choice to connect their vital-to-business marketing strategy and approach – shifting them from a traditional marketing focus – to a strategy that includes cultural marketing. Cultural marketing addresses social issues at the core of the communities the marketers serve. And, because these marketers have shifted their focus, they have been able to develop campaigns targeting community members who are willing to engage, participate with and, ultimately, further the brand’s messaging because of the cultural insights they have chosen to affect.

In doing so, cultural marketers are positioning their brands well within normative social and cultural boundaries. But they are doing so in a way – based on consumer behavior and cultural insights – that creates a highly affective point of impact in the minds of the audiences targeted, and even extends messaging into actual social programming.



At the other extreme, brands that are pushing messaging beyond widely-accepted, normative cultural boundaries are influencing young girls and women into a place where low-esteem is commonplace, where the non-perfect body diminishes their value as a human, and where doing something “like a girl” – their gender, the very way they were born – is wrong, is not good. Although this may be a good example of

unintended consequences in this space, there is no explanation of how these culture-marginalizing brands are making a positive impact on their community.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how successful brands, social constructs of sorts, have strategically integrated their messaging into the marketing and media-based communication channels to participate in consumer culture while also affecting social issues, principles and responsibilities. In an effort to demonstrate this integration, I will introduce and review several brand cases that have explicitly challenged the marketing strategy of creating, introducing and encouraging culture shifting trends beyond accepted boundaries; specifically brands that are targeting women of any age, and especially younger women, and their perceptions of beauty, body ideals, self-acceptance, empowerment and position in society. Based on this review, I will present several best practices in which marketers can engage to ensure that their brands are positioned in a way to sustain and promote socially responsible principles while also staying true to their brand’s business objectives, allowing them to build deeper, long-term relationships – in marketing lingo known as brand loyalty – with their consumers. In doing so, marketing will continue to serve its valuable role in the consumer culture while fulfilling a vested responsibility to the communities and consumer audiences it serves. So, through a combined lens of marketing, cultural sustainability and social responsibility, these best practices will be presented as a guide for companies that seek to promote their brands in a socially and culturally responsible manner, thus making a positive impact on the communities and cultures they serve.

## Toward Cultural Marketing

For the sake of clarity, there is a distinction between consumer insights and the concept of cultural marketing. When marketers begin planning and developing any campaign, they seek to learn as much about the consumer as possible, looking for small, but distinguishable shifts in behavior to use as insights from which marketers can position and market a product or service for greater success.

Considered to be “born” as a discipline in the early 1970’s, social marketing - on the other hand - was created out of the realization that the same marketing techniques used to sell products or services can be used to influence attitudes, awareness and perceptions of an issue. However, purely social marketing is more strictly focused on messaging solely created, designed and messaged to affect a social issue, with no specific ancillary beneficiary.

Cultural marketing, on the other hand, looks to align a product or service – and the respective brand – with a social issue with the hopes of sustaining positive culture among the community it serves. Cultural marketing goes well beyond traditional communications objectives – digging deep into “culture as the very fabric of experience, meaning and action” (Geertz:1983). When the brand’s marketing makes its impact on the marketplace, the brand makes positive change towards resolving the social issue, thus creating a mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationship. Better yet, the magic happens when marketers are able to integrate well-founded consumer insights with cultural needs and trends to address a social issue within a community of people – who are also consumers.

## Case Studies

As previously mentioned, the case studies to be reviewed focus on beauty, body ideals and female empowerment. It is only fitting that I began with Dove’s campaign and their quest to uncover “the real truth about beauty.” Dove is regarded as a leader in the space of beauty, body ideals, self-esteem and female empowerment. And for more than a decade, they have continued their quest for consumer understanding around the topic about “the real truth about beauty” and their consumers’ issues. Subsequently, I will review two campaigns—one for Lane Bryant “#iamnoangel” and the other for Always’ “#LikeaGirl” – that have benefited from the social successes created and established by the Dove campaign. Dove, after some serious psychology based research, is considered to be the pioneer of empowerment advertising (Diep:2015). According to a consultant who works with Dove, “There has been a shift toward trying to emphasize the positive contribution of brands to our society and to our lives. That has paralleled with a better understanding of the role of emotion” (Diep:2015).



Case Study

***“Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ -- that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”***

~ John Keats – Ode on a Grecian Urn

## Overview

The Unilever Corporation is comprised of over 400 brands focused on health and wellbeing. (Unilever:2016) Unilever states on the homepage of their website that they “... meet people’s everyday needs while creating a brighter future.” In 2004, Dove set out to change the way that people define beauty – by launching the Dove Self-Esteem Project (DSEP) – not solely for the sake of developing and growing their brand and its associated value, but also to address what they consider real issues in our communities. The real issue they are focused on within this community is the low self-esteem and anxiety in which young girls and women feel about their looks (beauty) and their bodies (body ideals). As a result, Dove created a social mission, “to ensure that the next generation

grows up enjoying a positive relationship with the way they look and to help them reach their full potential in life” (Dove:2016).

In a study commissioned in 2004 by Unilever for Dove, researchers hypothesized that portrayals of female beauty in popular culture were helping to extend the idea that beauty was not based on the trends and realities of the day, nor was it attainable by the masses. The Real Truth About Beauty research study discovered revealing insights into the perceptions young girls and women had of their bodies. Here is what they learned after surveying over 3,200 women in 2004 from the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, Italy, France, Portugal, Netherlands, Brazil, Argentina and Japan. (Etcoff:2004)

## By the Numbers

- 2% of these women describe themselves as beautiful
- About 75% of them rate their beauty as “average”
- Almost 50% of them think their weight is “too high”
- 13% of all women say they are very satisfied with their beauty
- 12% of all women say they are very satisfied with their physical attractiveness
- 17% of all women say they are very satisfied with their facial attractiveness
- 13% of all women say they are very satisfied with their body weight and shape

# 97% ...had an “I hate my body” moment.

Glamour Magazine, Dreisbach, 2011

In 2011, Glamour Magazine conducted similar research to investigate the thoughts, behaviors and dialogue occurring around the topic of beauty and body ideals. They asked participants in their study to document every negative or anxious thought they had regarding the topic during a day. The results were quite revealing. Over 97% of the participants had an “I hate my body” moment (Dreisbach:2011).

*“I struggled with my body image when I was younger. I’m of Bangladeshi descent, and when I was growing up, other girls were always thinner, blonder and more perfect and popular. I finally had this turning point where I actually decided to just give up. It sounds crazy, but I remember thinking I was so tired of trying to fit in and beating myself up and getting nowhere. I thought life couldn’t possibly get worse if I just gave up and decided to be myself. “*

—Tasneem Alam, 25  
New York City  
(Dreisbach:2011)

What is the source of Alam’s negative thoughts? To what ideal are these women choosing – or better stated being influenced – to compare their “self”? And what is the source of the rational logic from Gray – upbringing, counseling or wisdom? I posit that marketing strategists (and generally speaking, marketing as a whole) are culpable for the current state of beauty-related, self-esteem and body ideals. Marketers find themselves in the unenviable position of trying to create markets, trends, profit

*“I remind myself of what I have control over. For example, you can’t control the fact that things naturally get a little softer as you age, but you can feed your body healthy food and stay active. You can’t make your curly hair straight no matter how many irons you take to it, but you can have your stylist show you how to rock your natural texture. Taking ownership of your choices gives you power.”*

—Marie-Gael Gray, 30  
Athens, Ohio  
(Dreisbach:2011)

and, ultimately, shareholder value. Often times, they ignore the social implications of their work. It is in this space that we find the unintended consequences of marketing. While successfully achieving a goal for their product or service, they are also potentially negatively affecting individuals’ views of their looks and body ideals. It is also in this same “space” where I believe the Dove brand has made a significant key strategic breakthrough. They have recognized the power of combining marketing and a social mission, and aligning the two where they can create some common good. For example, in their most recent campaign update, #SpeakBeautiful, Dove has developed a tool that measures how positive or negative your tweets are, illuminating the social issue for the audience, with the audience’s own data. They are creating authentic, valuable content – specifically directed at sustaining a cultural issue. They are contributing equally to the business goals of the campaign and to the social goals and sustainability of the community as a whole.

According to a 2006 interview with Stacie Bright, senior communications and marketing manager at Unilever for the Dove brand, the campaign was not born from a specific issue. Rather, it was the result of a commitment to understanding the consumer and using research to come up with insights that can drive marketing strategy. (Holmes:2006) Partnered with Edelman’s International Public Relations, Ogilvy and Mather as well as the in-house marketing team, they began focusing on their audience and their audience’s perceptions of themselves.

## Insights

Unilever recognized the dialogue-in-play among the community of young girls and women, and chose to challenge their personal opinions of self. Ideally, each of us is taught that we are all beautiful in our own

ways. Yet somewhere along the way, we begin the damaging process of questioning our own beauty and self-worth; resulting in low self-esteem (Holmes:2006). After all, why wouldn’t we? We are constantly being bombarded with marketing-based images and messaging showing models, spokespeople and celebrities as the ideal. The majority of brands are choosing to use these “beautiful people” for their campaigns without a balance of “normal” people that make-up the communities in which we live. It is this lack of balance that has created an opportunity for Dove. Because of their unique position in the market, Dove is able to capture the hearts and minds of people as they wrestle with this self-doubt and low self-esteem. They sell the very products that may help solve many of these people’s problems. And, while some may see this opportunity as exploitation, Dove saw it as a way to participate in and shift the cultural mindset of young girls and women – to use their influence and participate in the narrative of the community through education, partnership and messaging (Holmes:2006).

To do so, they identified a core insight: many women do not feel beautiful every day or even any day. So, they extended the conversation to discuss what beauty is and to challenge the stereotype (no doubt created by marketers just like themselves) associated with beauty. Consider how the models and celebrities as well as “the pretty people” being portrayed through entertainment and messaging often influence young girls and women negatively. They shouldn’t be led to feel this way. When young girls and women feel less beautiful, they often feel worse about themselves in general. Dove recognized a market opportunity. Because of their position they can positively affect the direction of the trend of low self-esteem and misaligned body ideals in a research-based, truly authentic manner. And they did so by fueling the

dialogue created by their traditional advertising and expanded it through public relations and social media channels; remaining focused on “furthering the global understanding of women, beauty and well-being— and the relationship between them” (Holmes:2006). As of May 2016, Dove has over 26 million likes in their facebook channel alone where Dove is effectively sparking conversations like “share your #beautystory.” These conversations begin in TV and print and only expand as they continue in the digital realm. But there was also the potential for backlash; cynics in this space were also participating in the brand’s new messaging approach. Dale Lynn Gardner commented on Dove’s facebook page,

“As for this particular ad campaign, implying that women all hate themselves for stupid reasons that don’t exist is not empowering or comforting. It’s patronizing, insulting and belittling to women and girls everywhere. Stop pseudo-psychoanalyzing us in an attempt to make more profits for your soap products.”

The fact that Dove invites this kind of comment, even though it is negative, is further evidence of their effort to engage in honest dialogue.

Results

Since the launch of their efforts in 2004, they have reached over 17 million young people with information about positive self-esteem. Dove’s vision is “a world where beauty is a source of confidence, and not anxiety.” In 2014, Dove was chosen 188 million more times than the previous year - which represents an 18% increase in reach over the previous year – making them the leading brand for bar soap with a 40.5% market share. According to the Mintel database, Dove was the most bought brand for bar soap and body wash. (Aulia:2014)

Not only was Dove successful from a business perspective, but from a social perspective as well. Dove was able to develop social programs, programming, and support – like the Dove Self-Esteem Project – focused on their social mission of ensuring that women enjoyed a positive relationship with the way they look and to motivate them to reach their full potential in life. According to the Dove.us website, “the Dove Self-Esteem Project, created more than 10 years ago, has benefited more than 17 million young people in 112 countries through our programs. More than 625,000 teachers have delivered a Dove Self-Esteem Project workshop, and more than 1.5 million parents have benefitted from our online tools. No other organization is acting on the same scale or with the same impact.” (Dove:2016) This does not include the affects of the advertising and the impressions delivered through traditional and non-traditional marketing strategies and partnerships.

Samples from Over the Years:  
Dove’s Real Truth about Beauty Campaign



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpaOjMXyJGk>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5qZedMTkkE>



## *Best Practices for Cultural Marketing*

### **Know Your Audience**

Knowing your audience is key. Dove was able to conduct a significant amount of research to determine how young girls and women felt about their body and the corresponding self-esteem issues. This research led to a campaign that has created positive effects financially for Dove as well as create a positive social movement; the results of which have become popular within our communities. Dig deep. Spend time with the data and develop a holistic view of your consumer and their challenges. Then, and only then, will you be able to get the results you desire and change the unintended consequences into positive social change.

### **Recognize the Point of Need/Prepare for Hypocrisy**

Furthering the idea of knowing your audience, is meeting them at their social need. It is here, as a business, where the most impact can be made. The right message. In the right place. At the right time, is critical to make a difference in the world. For decades, through marketing and entertainment, women had been messaged to about what beauty is. And many felt it was time for a shift.

Fulfilling the needs of consumers with a product or service is commerce. This is the result of successful marketing. Combining it with the social mission creates an opportunity for the critics to question your intentions. Is the brand doing this solely for the financial or market share benefit? Dove was questioned about their true intentions – social change or profitability? Do they really care about the community and cause? However, if the campaign is well founded in research, and you truly desire to make positive social change,

then fight your fight and change the world.

### **Be Authentic**

For a while, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, authenticity was a marketing buzzword. Brands made every effort to be authentic to the category in which they participated. However, much of this “authenticity” was, in fact, contrived. Now, consumers are very aware of the personality of brands. They are savvy and able to detect whether the narrative of a brand is genuine. By creating alignment between a business objective and a social mission, as Dove did through the initial and ongoing research, brands can now demonstrate true authenticity by committing to a cause or purpose. By participating in and addressing an issue, a brand may be able to make positive steps towards enjoying a true relationship with their consumers.

### **Don't Be Overwhelmed by the Cultural Challenge**

Many of the social issues that need to be addressed are huge. Child hunger. Homelessness. Clean water. And the list goes on. They have been ingrained in our daily lives for a long period of time. These issues are not going to be changed overnight. In fact, much of them will take years to shift thinking and make true change. They are cultural issues. And, unless there is a major movement or crisis to shift the issue, understand that small, incremental steps are required to make change. And eventually, many small steps will add up to giant leap. Brands can shape culture and create social change. Just as culture can position a brand's opportunity in the market.

### **Communities Require Different Approaches**

The Dove Self-Esteem Project has gone global. And, as it enters various communities, they realize that each

needs a different approach. Although the insights remain the same, what has worked in one community needs may be adapted to work in another. Based on the culture, perceptions of beauty are vastly different. A good example of this is evidenced in Dove's latest mission in India. Directed by Indian film director Pan Nalin, Dove developed a :50 second short film showing the various faces of beauty and body shapes across India.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqorn7q3cz4>

According to an Adweek interview with Victoria Sjardin, senior global brand director, “India is a country growing and evolving at a rapid pace and yet the traditional beauty ideal remains narrow and restrictive. In fact, our new research suggests 76 percent of Indian women believe that in today's society, it is critical to meet certain beauty standards.” (Adweek:2016) This short film should help shift perceptions.

### **Create Partnerships with Community Organizations**

Seek out ways to create and develop strong partnerships. Consider Dove - a hugely successful brand within the Unilever Corporation. Even they needed help to address this issue. Regardless of potential partner size, they sought out organizations that could make a significant impact within the members of this community of young girls and women. Collectively, they are able to work towards a common goal while sharing insights, capabilities and

reciprocal benefits of the relationship. Dove currently partners with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, girls Inc., Girl Scouts of America and others.

### **Stretch**

Low self-esteem and body ideals are the focus of this case study. However, with regard to your mission, I encourage you to stretch. Dig beyond the top layer of research and consumer insight. See what lies beneath. The more you dig the more you will discover. Look for alignment between your business strategy and insight-based opportunities among the communities you serve. And, while this may be overwhelming at times, it will create more content and discussion points you can use to further the larger discussion and dialogue within your community. This creates a stronger bond between your brand and your consumer while increasing loyalty and the potential for a longer-term relationship, which can result in greater profitability and market share.

**lanebryant**  
Case Study

Building on Dove the success, Lane Bryant approached their consumer base looking to make a positive social impact – challenging the established point-of-view that women have to be skinny to beautiful, while making their brand and clothing line relevant.

### *Overview*

Lane Bryant is a US-based, women's retail clothing store focused on plus-sized clothing. With over 800 stores in 46 states, Ascena Retail Group owns Lane Bryant after they purchased the chain for over \$900

million in 2013. In an interview with Brian Beitler, Lane Bryant's EVP/CMO, Denise Lee Yohn asked about the current state of the brand. Beitler explained the Lane Bryant brand has long-suffered from being thought of as a conservative, traditional, off-trend and off-fashion brand. His challenge was to revive the brand and make it relevant to women. (Yohn:2015)

An important element in repositioning a brand is to evaluate what is currently going on in the marketplace. And, determine how your brand can disrupt and/or participate in the conversations currently being had by competitors and consumers alike. Lane Bryant took a close look at what market share leader Victoria's Secret was doing. And, based on Victoria's Secret's success, they discovered opportunity. While perpetuating the perception of the ideal body types, Victoria's Secret developed a marketing strategy designed to highlight their line of "Angel" lingerie. That marketing strategy grew into a simple, but bigger idea – models being referred to as angels. And, in doing so, Victoria's Secret has substantiated their perception of an ideal body type using their "angels" in every visual medium to sell their product. And they have done so in their catalogs, social media, TV commercials and in their self-produced, prime time fashion show programming on television (Lange:2013).

And, in every sense, their "angels" represent every bit of the epitome of fashion modeling body ideals. They are thin. Their hair is beautiful and flowing, and their legs are long. Their complexions glow. In the mind of women, they represent real beauty; the ideal with which so many women measure their beauty. This is the myth, born out of the fashion and advertising industries decades ago, Victoria's Secret openly and

honestly perpetuates, giving false hope to young girls and women within their market that they too can achieve the looks of these angels (or at minimum close the gap) if they too wear Victoria's Secret products.



*Insights*

Beitler of Lane Bryant saw Victoria's Secret influence as an opportunity – a chance to change the conversation. Building on their brand equity and social opportunity in the marketplace, Lane Bryant took advantage of current conversations about beauty and body ideals and made them relevant for the Lane Bryant brand. This chance to change the conversation was an opportunity to demonstrate to women who the Lane Bryant brand is and what it believes to be true about women. Beauty, to Lane Bryant is more than the skinny models being walked up and down the runway and

in the media. It was an opportunity to steal market share by taking on the opposing position established by the Victoria's Secrets brand, which controls more than one third of the lingerie market.

The simple reality is that Victoria's Secret and Lane Bryant are talking to the same audience: women (Victoria's Secret does not only sell extra-small and small but also large and extra large sizes.) The primary difference is that Lane Bryant is exclusively focused on plus sized women; with no smaller size lines available. Victoria's Secret, on the other hand, tends to focus their marketing on the ideal body shape, still providing products in the sizes that would be too big for their "angels" – suggesting to women, "Wear our line, and you may either feel and/or look <fill in the appropriate adjective>."



Recognizing the current trends and understanding the needs of their audience, Lane Bryant launched a campaign entitled "I'm no angel." This was a direct shot across the bow of Victoria's Secret; it challenged their position in the face of the public who wears their line. Lane Bryant entered the conversation with a splash, with TV spots and outdoor advertising, including such things as wrapping an F train and posting 20-foot wall on Sunset Boulevard – a perfect place for participants



<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%23imnoangel>

*Results*

The campaign was a huge success. Over 16 billion social media impressions were generated worldwide within just four weeks of the campaign launch. In addition to impressions and increasing the conversations within the community of women, Lane Bryant added new customers at a faster pace than any time in the history of the organization. (Yohn:2015)

Beitler, during the interview with Yohn, reported what I consider to be the most telling result of all. A woman – whose name is unknown – said, "When I walk across the threshold [into a Lane Bryant store], the "plus" drops and I'm just a woman (Yohn:2015). In the interview with Forbes' Yohn, Beitler offered the following planning principles that drove the success of the campaign.

1."Shift from brand storyteller to brand as conversationalist" (Yohn:2015). For years, marketers have tried to control the narrative and conversation around their brands. And for good reason. Brands create a significant intangible on organization's balance sheet. However, consumers are in control of the brand to a big extent. Great marketing lets the consumer participate in the brand – even direct – to further the mutual beneficial relationship. According

to Beitler, brands are shaped by the conversations around the brand. In the case of Lane Bryant, they take the dialogue from a story being told, to real conversations among the community of people, providing encouragement and support via two-way communication. These conversations can grow and develop into relationships between the brand and their consumer.

Lisa Curtis recently visited the Lane Bryant Facebook page and had this to share, “I came here to read the comments because I KNEW that there would be some people losing their minds because they’d say she’s not ‘full figured’. Fun fact: She is.

Meanwhile you’ve got thinner folks and older models like Cheryl Tiegs getting mad at Sports Illustrated for featuring this exact model and ‘glorifying obesity.’ This same size 16 model someone earlier called “fit size”, which is anywhere from size 0 to 6 depending on what traditional modeling agency you speak to.

Why don’t we all just take a moment to realize that all bodies have a place on this planet, and just because someone is on the smaller side of LB’s size range - which starts at 14, last I checked - and doesn’t look like your body, it doesn’t mean it’s not an accurate representation of Lane Bryant’s demographic. Because it totally is. Love yourself. Save the vitriol for folks who deserve it.”

Lane Bryant’s response was simple. “Thanks for sharing, Lisa! All bodies, regardless of size deserve respect.”

2.“Building a social brand is not about social media;

it’s about having a social perspective through every channel” (Yohn:2015). Shareable was part of the lead strategy – through every channel. When creating, disseminating and expanding the messaging – at every touch point – keep in mind that the more shareable the content, the better the end result. Lane Bryant knew that their shared channel was going to have to provide a platform for expanding the campaign. Knowing that, they created the messaging with that in mind. Every aspect of the campaign was shareable.

3.“The capability to engage in real-time conversation is key” (Yohn:2015). Beitler’s team anticipated the challenges with the campaign. Terms like “skinny-shaming” became a common response. However, pre-planning allowed the team to have a tongue-in-check public relations campaign ready at rollout. This meant having the people in place to respond as well as the talking points prepared to communicate the messaging with a common voice.

4.“Your most social media is your sales associate” (Yohn:2015). Enculturation throughout every level of the organization was key. However, the front line was a focus. Live the brand idea beyond the campaign ... make it part of the everyday process. In the store, every effort was made to attract and hire “associates of all sizes.” Beyond just hiring, Lane Bryant put training engagement programs in place to ensure associates understood the thinking behind the campaign.

5.“The most effective way to reduce media spend is to create a great idea” (Yohn:2015). The initial ad spend from Lane Bryant was \$6 million. However, because they recognized there was an opportunity for great conversation around the campaign idea, they knew the

number of impressions would extend far beyond what their budget would buy. This was a goal from the outset rather than a best practice. Something to strive for. If we were able to do this at every turn then this would be easy. However, it is not easy. Research, think time, collaboration, teamwork, courage, a loyal consumer base, and so much more are the foundation for the development of a big idea. Combined, all of these elements create a platform for an efficient campaign. One where the audience is highly engaged. And, the more that they (the audience) are engaged; the more they are willing to participate. Which allows the message to be carried by advocates, trusted word-of-mouth advisors – instead of marketers. Ultimately, this reduces the amount of money needed for paid marketing; relying on shared (social media), earned (public relations) and owned channels (website).

### Best Practices for Cultural Marketing

There are several common themes, which can be identified through the work of this campaign. Themes emerged as a result of the social objectives. The first was forcing the strategists and marketing teams to think beyond the typical campaign scenarios. The goal was to seek out opportunities beyond the norm. This required a completely new paradigm from which the team must work and, in this new way of thinking, look for ways to be as efficient as possible. Use the company’s owned and shared assets to the benefit of the community. The brand could have spent more money in media to make their campaign a success. However, the goal was more about engagement and recognition of the social good that could and did come from the work. By engaging the community to participate in the campaign, within the framework of

the company’s owned and shared assets, they were able to grow an important channel as well as develop a “herd” mentality among the community.

### Integrate the Idea

Lane Bryant seemingly took into consideration several of the consumer touch points, i.e. the sales associates, and took advantage of the opportunity to communicate their “#imnoangel” messaging. This expanded the conversation and created the opportunity for more people to hear (impressions) and potentially enter the dialogue (participation).



At times, as marketers, we lose sight of the fact that customers and consumers do not have the same perspective of our products that we do. How well are you listening to your consumers? Research, monitoring, listening and responding to the people who purchase and use the products or services you are selling is key. What they say and what they mean may reveal an illuminating insight into the audience as a whole. So be there and be prepared to hear the good and the bad relative to your campaign and respond with the respect each customer deserves.



How do you connect the dots between a drop in self-confidence, puberty, menstruation and feminine products, all the while creating a new conversation among a community of young girls – and older – alike?

### Overview

Founded in 1837 and incorporated in 1905, Proctor & Gamble (P & G) is a global provider of consumer-packaged goods organized in five business units – beauty, grooming, health care, fabric and home care, and baby, feminine and family care. Operating under the tagline “P & G is always here for you,” P & G claims (on their website) they – “work every day to create products that improve people’s lives.” They take this statement even further by stating, “We take leadership at P&G seriously. It’s our opportunity and responsibility to improve the lives of our consumers and employees, as well as serve the communities in which we live and work” (P&G:2016).

At the outset, a well-trained eye or ear can hear the social elements associated with P & G’s positioning in the marketplace. Messages like “improve the lives.” “Serve the communities.” “Responsibility.” This may seem like marketing speak. However, evidence of this authenticity exists within their product line under the health care segment where P & G manages and markets a line of feminine care pads for period protection – Always.

The Always brand also took a unique approach. They chose to focus on the emotional issue facing their audience and create aspirational messaging. In the end, the goal was to own the messaging and positively affect the community in a very public way; all the while avoiding the extremely uncomfortable topic of menstruation.

### Insight

Fama Francisco, vice president of Global Always, revealed in a Huffington Post interview that she and her colleagues looked closely at the data and found that girls experience a significant drop in self-confidence when they hit puberty. While many would view this as a negative and move on beyond this insight, they saw an opportunity and seized the chance to build up and advance this community (Berman:2015).

Of course, as in each of the previous cases, there were the typical critics of the campaign claiming this was an exploitation of a social issue for the sake of business gain and profit. However, there were also other critics of the campaign saying the campaign didn’t go far enough. In an article posted to huffintonpost.com, Elissa Stein, co-author of Flow: The Cultural Story of Menstruation, noted that the TV spot never discussed the experience of having a period. Companies have shied away from talking about menstruation since the 1920s, when the first feminine care products came to the market. Stein argued that’s because the best way to sell pads and tampons is to get women to feel like their periods are shameful, embarrassing and dirty episodes. Although Stein considered running the ad during the Superbowl to be “groundbreaking”, she added, “I thought they did a great job, but it has zero to do with menstruation, as do most menstrual ads,”

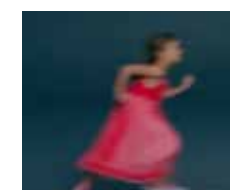
Stein said. “Everybody was talking about toe fungus,” she added, referring to a Super Bowl ad for the fungal treatment Jublia, “and yet you can’t about periods.” (Berman:2015)

### Results

The resulting campaign was strong. It quickly demonstrated some of the challenges girls face growing up in today’s world while placing the Always brand as a leader in empowerment among the community, which translates into top-of-mind awareness and loyalty at point-of-purchase. In a video, which was the brainchild of the Always marketing team, older participants were asked to demonstrate specific actions and asked to perform them “like a girl.” Run. Fight. The responses were what might have been expected – arms flailing, uncontrolled and uncoordinated movements. You know, girlie. One young man was asked, “Do you think you just insulted girls?” His response was priceless, “No. [pause]

Well, yes. Girls, but not my sister.” (Always:2014)

When young girls were asked to demonstrate the same actions, the results were quite different. We saw girls running with a passion, ready to race their way into the Olympics. We saw girls ready to jump into the ring with Mike Tyson, with fierce jabs and strong uppercuts. They were asked, “Is ‘like a girl’ a good thing?” The responses were amazing. “I don’t know if it’s a good thing or bad thing. Sounds like you’re trying to humiliate someone.” (Always:2014) Later in the video, one of the older girls who had demonstrated “like a girl” stereotypically, was asked what it means to her. She said, “The girls of the younger age who are just entering puberty are trying to figure themselves out. So when someone says you hit or run “like a girl” – and they believe they’re strong – the “like a girl” part is the equivalent of telling them they’re weak” (Always:2014).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs>

This is the payoff of the insight. It is about the education and empowering of young girls as they face a difficult and confusing time of their life and encouraging them to remain strong while maintaining healthy levels of self-esteem as their bodies change physically. This campaign focuses on connecting strategic marketing to a social issue in which the brand can claim a leadership position – social leadership in the sense of connecting Always to female empowerment and strategic marketing in the sense of top-of-mind awareness among the community and the parents of the community.

Elissa Stein is right when she says that the two – feminine products and female empowerment – have nothing in common from a feminine products marketing perspective. But they also have everything in common. They are connected via the consumer insights – drop in self-confidence, puberty and periods. Always connected the dots. They took the opportunity to build a relationship and a loyal audience while sustaining the God-given strengths of courage, hope and confidence to the whole community, which in turn, inclusively benefits our culture. This is the power of cultural marketing affecting a social issue; sustaining cultural values within the community they serve.

The previously mentioned Always video has been viewed over 61 million times on youtube.com. The :60 second commercial that debuted during the Superbowl was considered groundbreaking. Partnerships have been formed such as Always and TED – a unique partnership using #likeagirl mission as a confidence teaching partner. Launching the Confidence Summit series, which kicked off in 10 cities around the world, Always created and supported a speaking series

based on the Always Confidence Teaching Curriculum. Always has also focused on providing puberty and cycle education to millions of adolescent girls around the world.

These partnership opportunities allowed the brand to extend beyond the traditional roles of the marketing and extend into areas where they traditionally would never go. This is a great message for those in the not-for-profit sector looking to expand programming. If a not-for-profit initiative can demonstrate value in strengthening the mission of a for-profit brand, then pitch them the idea. And, most importantly, show them how the idea will connect with their community and will built brand loyalty, for the long-term.

### *Best Practices for Cultural Marketing*

#### ***Don't overlook the obvious.***

It is here in the detail where the simplest, most obvious of insights can make the biggest difference. There is no great wisdom in the idea that self-confidence drops when young girls hit puberty. However, to the Always brand there was wisdom and they have been able to not only increase their market share and awareness, but also make much-needed advances within a community of great need and importance. So, when spending time with research, consider what it really means. Put yourself in the position of the community/ audience you are studying. Try to understand how they would react to each data point. What does it mean to them? And, what does it really mean to them?

#### ***Challenge the Culturally Accepted Standards***

I think this is where the success of the Always campaign came to life. They looked to see what had become okay in our society. The idea that doing something

“like a girl” had become something real to people; not realizing the power and influence of words and the potential damage they can create. After all, not all of us have the running form of US Olympic athlete and track star Allyson Felix or the ability to fight like Ronda Rousey. However, if we challenge what others believe to be true, we can shift thinking by realizing that function trumps form. In the end, within these words “likeagirl” was great power and influence. And social media facilitated interactions that had previously been based on one-way communication.

Self-described Disruptive Speaker and Marketing Troublemaker Dustin Garis in a TED Talk, Life Profit, focuses on creating viable and enriching life experiences and removing the blah and routine from every day life. His insight would offer a perspective into the topic of strategic marketing connecting to social responsibility. “Brands, just like people, get to make choices. There is great, untapped capacity for brands to influence culture and make positive change in the world.” This, in turn, creates a convergence of participation and marketing, which results in a more loyal following among brands that choose to participate in/with versus market to an audience or community. When asked about best practices Garis suggested a couple of concepts to consider for best practices. (Kovan:2016)

#### ***Discover a Fundamental Human Truth (Garis:2016)***

This concept of a human truth was focused on looking for the single unifier of shared aspirations between a community and a brand. Brands that are able to understand these human truths – a collision of insights and actual lived cultural practices → and tap into them are not only benefiting from a business perspective

but also making valuable social contributions.

### *Conclusion*

Culture – the basis for our behaviors and traditions we choose to participate in – plays a key role in the marketing equation. In each of the case studies, we see how research has benefited the development of strong consumer insights. And strong, well-developed consumer insights can play an invaluable role in the subsequent creation of an impactful marketing campaign designed to have an affect on cultural elements within the various communities.

The difference in these case studies, when compared to others, however, is the focus on the social roles and responsibilities associated with the audience/ community being targeted. As opposed to solely trying to influence an audience to buy a product, these brands have remained true to their business objectives while fulfilling a higher social responsibility and calling.

Another common thread for each of these brands is a very large marketing budget. However, even brands of smaller companies who look to fulfill their cultural and social roles and responsibilities within the communities they serve can make an impact by focusing their efforts and employing the best practices outlined in this paper. For sure, large marketing budgets make the job a lot easier. However, it is the passion, work and patience – not budget – that will drive these efforts to success. Extending the benefits of the effort internally is also positive. Through efforts from human resources – from an organizational adaptability perspective as Lane Bryant did – and marketing – from an internal communications perspective - employers can instill pride and shift the culture of the entire organization

based on their commitment to a social cause.

There is an opportunity for brands to do good. The list of companies who do good is long. But the list can be made longer. And do so for good reason: increasing the value of the brand, which ultimately increases the company's market capitalization. However, many social activists question the true intent of brands participating in this social space. Cynics who question the intent of these brands are passionate to resist the good that can come from the brand's efforts. Are they really in it for the social benefit or simply taking advantage of strong consumer insights and culture and participating for their own benefit? As long as there is a mutually beneficial relationship – where the community needs are being addressed and the brands are positively advancing their business and the social issue they are addressing: look to embrace

them and let them be part of the change. However, if the approach is flawed, get involved and look for opportunities that do mutually benefit the issue that they – and you – truly care about.

In the end, marketers are marketers not social activists. They are looking for ways to participate in a social space of which they are not fully aware. They are taking bold steps into an unfamiliar area. They need guidance from people close to and engaged in the issue. They relish consumer and cultural insights. They seek wisdom. After all, their goal is to increase their company's market share and profitability while doing some good.

Or is it their goal to do some good while increasing their company's market share and profitability?

## Bibliography

Adweek. "Dove's Latest Mission? Revamping Beauty Ideals in India." AdWeek. 28 Apr. 2016. Web. 29 Apr. 2016.

Almasy, Steve. "Plus-sized Model Ashley Graham Is SI Swimsuit Model." CNN. Cable News Network, 10 Feb. 2016. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.

Always. "Always #LikeAGirl." YouTube. YouTube, 26 June 2014. Web. 24 Feb. 2016.

Aulia, Carrine. "Dove - Marketing Plan." Dove - Marketing Plan. 16 July 2014. Web. 14 Jan. 2016.

Diep, Francie. "The Psychology Behind The "Like A Girl" And Nationwide Super Bowl Ads." Popular Science. 4 Feb. 2015. Web. 14 Mar. 2016.

Dove. "Our Vision | Dove Self-Esteem Project." Our Vision | Dove Self-Esteem Project. 14 Jan. 2016. Web. 14 Jan. 2016.

Dreisbach, Shaun. "Shocking Body-Image News: 97% of Women Will Be Cruel to Their Bodies Today." Glamour. 2 Feb. 2011. Web. 14 Jan. 2016.

Etcoff, Nancy, et al. 2004. "The Real Truth about Beauty: A global Report" Findings of the Global Study on Women, Beauty and Well-Being. Commissioned by Dove, a Unilever Beauty Brand.

Geertz, Clifford (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books. (1983), *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books.

Holmes, Paul. "Real Beauty in the Age of the Extreme Makeover." *Real Beauty in the Age of the Extreme Makeover*. 16 July 2006. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

Lange, Maggie. "Victoria's Secret Angels: A Historical Perspective." *The Cut*. 2013. Web. 6 Feb. 2016.

Stump, Scott. "Cheryl Tiegs Criticizes SI for Ashley Graham Cover: It's Not 'healthy'" *TODAY.com*. 26 Feb. 2016. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.

Unilever. "About US." Unilever Global Company Website. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.

Yohn, Denise Lee. "Lane Bryant Changes The Conversation About Women And Perceptions About Its Brand." *Forbes*. *Forbes Magazine*, 2 Sept. 2015. Web. 19 Jan. 2016.

Special thanks to the team of advisors who watched over and guided me throughout the capstone experience.

**Capstone Committee**

Robert Baron, PhD, Advisor

Tiffany Espinosa, PhD

Barry Dornfeld, PhD

Thank you.