

Free advertising

Yesterday, I was watching the local evening news. The anchor was reporting on health issues, including how teenage girls view their bodies. The anchor said that media images, which are often manipulated, affect body image, giving women an unrealistic expectation of what is perfect. So far so good. However, the anchor started talking about a new COMMERCIAL from Dove, regarding how the media manipulates these images.

A year or two ago, Dove started an ad campaign to “celebrate” women’s bodies by using “real” women as models. Apparently, they have upped the ante and now are using documentary style commercials to criticize the media. There are a couple of issues here. First of all, this entire campaign was created to generate buzz for Dove. To obtain free publicity in the form of media reports about a different campaign, etc. So the anchor of this local newscast became a publicity agent for Dove, and used their images to talk about the serious issue of teenage body issue. OK, but what is Dove trying to do? It is trying to position itself as a company that does not exploit women’s issues with body image. Why? To sell product, of course! Dove does not advertise purely to help women deal with their body image issues. It is trying to make viewers think that it cares about women, that its products are “women-friendly.” Clever? Yes. Different? Yes. Why do I have an issue with it? Because in the end, no for-profit company is doing any public service without expecting something in return. And when their commercials are being touted as if they were bona fide documentaries, we have a problem.