

The Usual Business

Peter Dey, 14 Oct 2004

Anita Roddick's "Business as Unusual" (2000) takes an extremely negative view of both the media and the beauty industry, with claims that the industry is intentionally making women unhappy with what they look like. In reality, the industry is empowering women to feel good about themselves and the way that they look, and gives them a goal to which they can strive for. It allows women to create an image of themselves so that others can perceive them as a well-off individual, in a similar way to purchasing an expensive car, or a mobile phone.

The feminist movement has achieved the exact opposite of what it's trying to achieve. It tells women that they're insecure, and as a result, they feel insecure. Instead of empowering women, it's making women feel even more insecure about themselves by claiming that the fashion and beauty industries are playing on their insecurities and taking advantage of them.

On a positive note, the beauty industry is doing a service to society. Obesity rates in the USA are reaching epidemic proportions, with 8 out of 10 adults over the age of 25 being classed as overweight¹. And more adult women are classified as obese than adult men². By showing images of slim subjects in the media, it's showing the public that obesity is not healthy, and not attractive. It gives both men and women an image that they can strive for, and as a result, doing a service to society by making it healthier.

Ms Roddick claims that the industries influences have directly influenced the rises in the rates of mental illnesses such as anorexia, stating that 80% of 10-year-olds are already on a diet. The reality of the matter is that over 25% of children in the USA are overweight³, and this number is rapidly rising. Medical studies have shown that obese individuals are twice as likely to develop heart disease than those with a normal weight⁴. By encouraging people to diet from an early age, it leads to good eating habits in later life, allowing individuals to be happy and healthy in their old age.

Anita Roddick's intentions in her writing is clearly motivated to discredit the beauty industry, and promote the products sold by the Body Shop. She writes that the products sold are working to "promote self-esteem" and "physical diversity", however, the Body Shop's motives are essentially the same as the Beauty Industry's: To sell products. Like it or not, The Body Shop is just another Revlon or Maybelline. They've simply used a different marketing strategy to achieve this.

Marketing is all about product differentiation. How is your product different to your competitors? The Body Shop has differentiated their product by associating it with the image of 'normality', as opposed to an image of beauty. It still appeals to women's insecurities, but instead of saying "You *could* look like this," it says, "You *do* look like this." Consumers associate with this, and are motivated to buy their product. I challenge The Body Shop to the following marketing campaign: Promote products with an unhealthy obese model. Since 33% of Americans are clinically obese, you're simply promoting "real women".

¹ "Obesity: USA & UK", Weight Loss Information Ltd [Online]

Available: <http://www.weight-loss-i.com/lose-weight/obesity-usa-uk.htm> [14 Oct 04, 9:33 AM]

² "Further damning evidence on growing obesity rates", NOVIS [Online]

Available: <http://www.nutraingredients-usa.com/news/ng.asp?id=24084> [14 Oct 04, 9:54 AM]

³ "Obesity in Children", Weight Loss Information Ltd [Online]

Available: <http://www.weight-loss-i.com/obesity/obesity-children.htm> [14 Oct 04, 9:46 AM]

⁴ "Medical system feels the weight of obesity", Centre for the Advancement of Health, 2002 [Online] Available: <http://www.hbns.org/newsrelease/obesity6-28-02.cfm> [14 Oct 04, 9:55 AM]