

GUTCHECK

Female Empowerment in
Advertising
Exploratory Research Group™

GutCheck® ®

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BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

In recent years, messages of female empowerment or feminism have found a greater presence in popular culture. Many women's issues have come to the forefront, with increased awareness of feminism and equal rights in the workplace, home, health, education, and more. These topics don't just come up in the news – they're more and more present on social media, in entertainment, and in the advertising space.

In response to these trends, companies in many different industries and verticals are attempting to make their products and benefits more realistic and relevant by embracing the full variety of women's everyday lives, not just airbrushed or photo-shopped models. Some are also hoping to strike a chord with more overt messages involving increased attention to equality and empowerment. While some campaigns have been very well received, many companies are wary about attempts to be too topical and political with their messaging.

This study focuses on exploring women's feelings toward empowerment in their daily lives and the media they consume. The findings can be used to help understand how female empowerment can fit into resonant and appropriate messaging and campaigns.

How resonant are female empowerment and feminist messages to women today, and what industries, products, brands, or spokes(wo)men are the best fit?

1. Explore what empowerment means to women in their daily lives and media consumption, and the relevance of different celebrities, movies / characters, brands, etc.
2. Understand reactions to female empowerment / feminist advertising / messages, and what products, categories, and brands are a good fit
3. Compare similarities and differences in sentiments across age groups

METHODOLOGY

Exploratory Research Group

This study was conducted online where respondents answered open-ended questions and follow-ups posted by a trained moderator.

This technology fosters a dynamic qualitative discussion where respondents are easily able to interact with others in the group.

Qualitative research is based on a small number of individuals and provides a rich source of information useful in understanding a given subject matter or population, in confirming existing knowledge or suppositions, and in providing direction for planning and strategy. Caution should be used in generalizing the findings to a larger population.

# of Groups	Total Respondents	Days in Field	Recruit to Report (in days)
3	63	1	9

Audience

	Quota #1: Teens Target N = 20	Quota #2: Millennials Target N = 20s	Quota #3: GenX Target N=20
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age	13-17	18-35	36-55
Employment	--	Capture	Capture
Marital Status	--	Capture	Capture
Children in HH	--	Capture	Capture



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women feel most empowered when they see women in advertisements who are easy to relate to, and who are in-control, successful, and confident.

Key Findings

Participants view intelligent, successful, and kind women as empowering role models.

Women are most empowered by seeing women in advertising who look similar to them.

Women's empowerment messaging fits best with beauty and athletic brands, although opportunities within other product types exist.

Implications

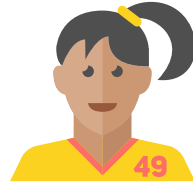
Highlight women—both well-known celebrities and “everyday” women—who embody these characteristics. Participants want to see a relatable woman succeed by using her wits, working hard, and supporting others. They're especially interested in seeing women in science/engineering-related fields traditionally dominated by men. They dislike when women are portrayed as intentionally stupid, as household martyrs, or as competing with one another for male attention.

Feature a range of women, including all ages, ethnicities and *especially* sizes. Women find it easier to relate to an empowerment message that comes from someone in the same perceived life stage, with the same ethnicity, and with a “real-sized” body. They're tired of the unrealistic bodies predominantly portrayed in advertising. Ideally, ads would also include trans women, women with disabilities, and women from lower socio-economic statuses.

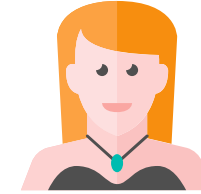
Show women as strong and capable, in charge of their looks and their bodies in advertisements for beauty and athletic products. Women want to see aspirational, but not unattainable images for these kinds of products.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Audience Comparison



Teens



Millennials



Gen X

Sources of empowerment

Empowerment comes from educational goals/ accomplishments.

More likely to find empowerment in being a mother, but also find empowerment in education or career.

Most likely to find empowerment in being a mother.

Preferred empowerment messages

Look for empowerment messaging from fellow teens; and find inclusive beauty messaging most relevant.

Found the largest range of messages empowering, including inclusive beauty, control over their bodies, and empowerment through mothering.

Find inclusive beauty messaging most relevant.

Examples of empowering advertising

Like Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign, as well as the Always #LikeAGirl campaign; dislike too-thin, over-sexualized models in some clothing companies' advertising.

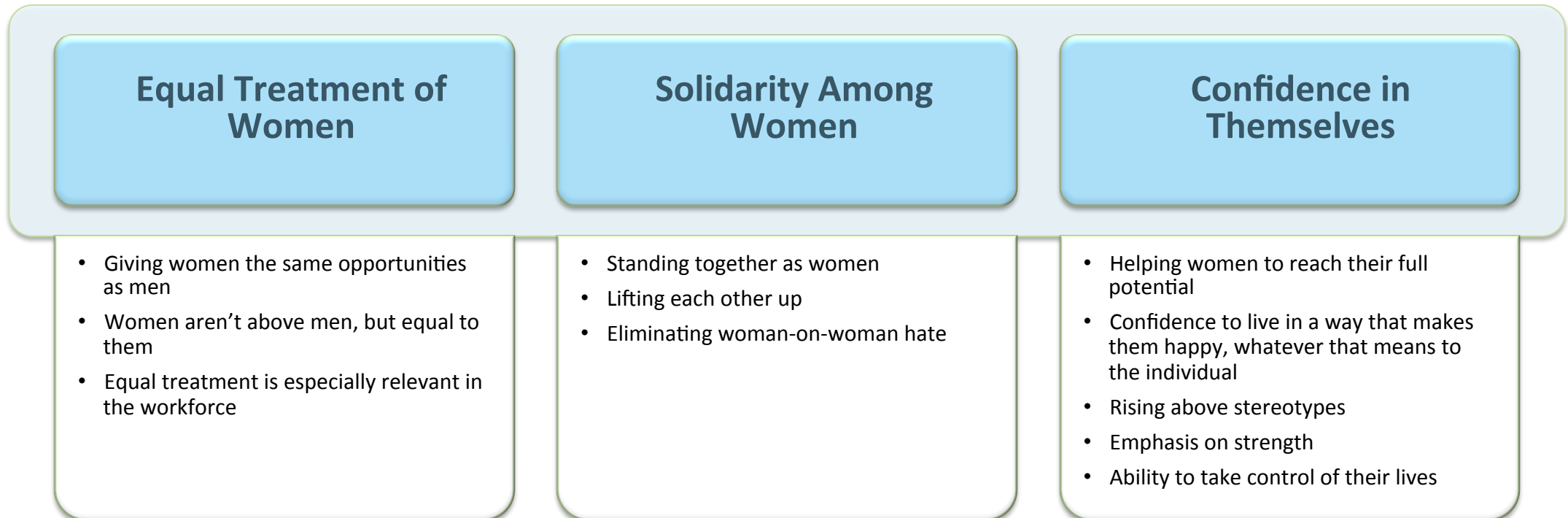
Like Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign, as well as CoverGirl's "comfortable in your own skin" messaging; dislike over-sexualized women in alcohol and lingerie ads.

Like Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign, as well as the Always #LikeAGirl campaign; dislike the over-sexualized models in alcohol and lingerie ads, as well as on the covers of some magazines.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Equality, solidarity, and self-confidence are the main tenets of women's empowerment.

As they discuss changing outdated norms and improving the lives of women for the future, women across generations note the same three elements that fall under the umbrella of "women's empowerment."

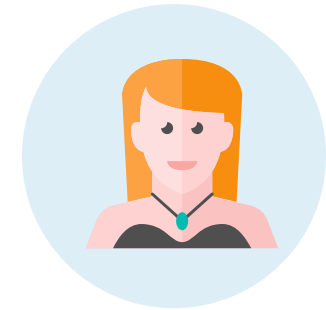




I believe woman's empowerment is the idea of equal rights for all women. Women's empowerment is the idea of striving for the same opportunities for women, basically a woman can do or be anything she wants.

- 13, San Tan Valley, AZ

Whether it be at the top of the corporate ladder or in the home, women need encouragement and positive support to utilize the skills and abilities that they possess. Women have the ability and the choice to be a great many things and empowering them to do so is highly important in our current culture. What I associate with women's empowerment is fulfillment and true happiness in what women are doing.



- 34, Denver, CO, Part-Time employee, Married, Kids

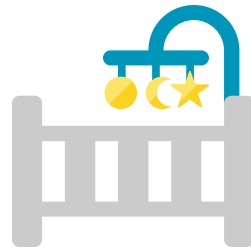
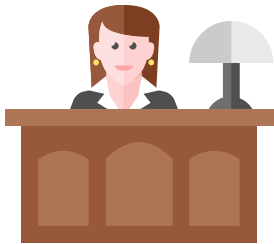


Women's empowerment is about women knowing they can do anything, in my opinion. It is encouragement to women both in general and individually. It also means standing for equality in the eyes of the law and society.

- 47, Santa Ana, CA, Unemployed, Never married, No kids

Empowerment comes from having the freedom to make their own choices and accomplishing their goals, whether in work, parenting or play.

Many add that their loved ones (parents, significant others, kids and friends) make them feel empowered. Teens also mention education goals, while Millennials and Gen Xers say being a mother.



My mom makes me believe I can do anything I want to. I like knowing I can learn the same things as boys and could become an engineer or scientist and my ideas will be respected the same as a boy's ideas.

- 13, Dripping Springs, TX

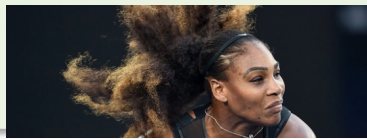
Empowering women are smart, successful and kind individuals who work hard to achieve personal and social goals.

Examples:

All Generations



Emma Watson, who is a voice for women and actively advocates for their rights.



Serena Williams, for her strength and power and for doing things her own way.



Oprah Winfrey, who pursued her dream and found success; she also promotes kindness.

Older Segments



Female politicians like Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren who have excelled in the male-dominated political realm.

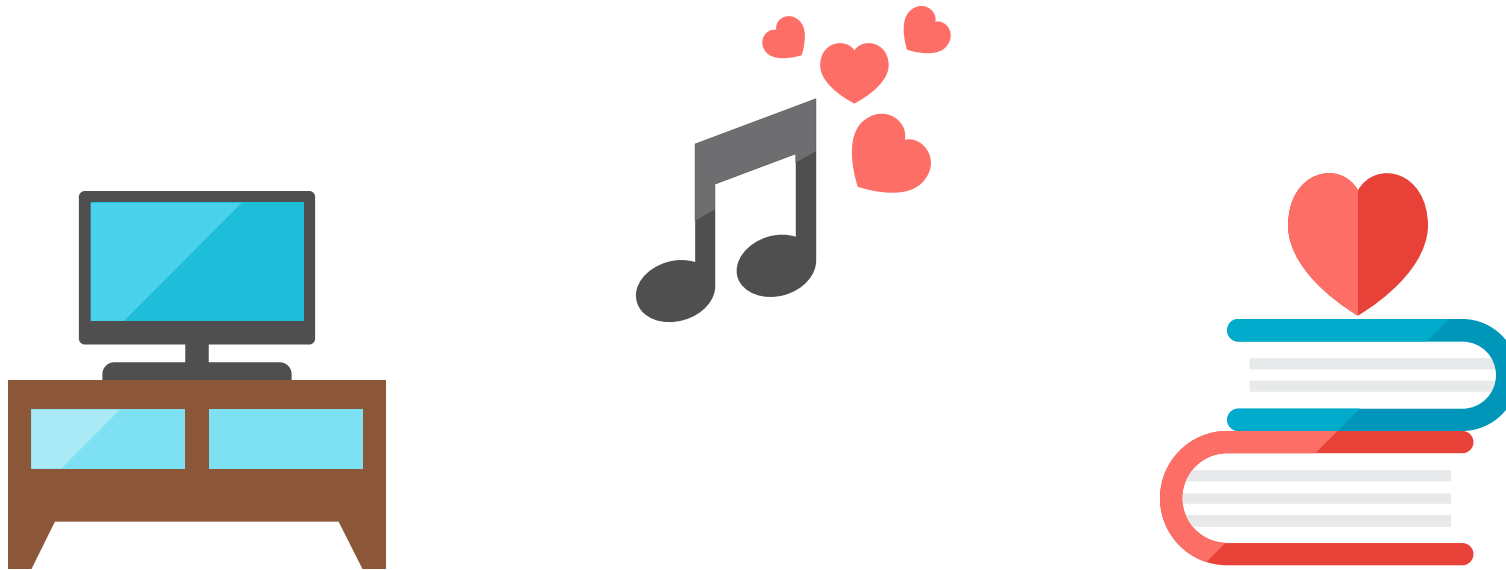


Michelle Obama who was a First Lady with her own mission to help others.

EXAMPLES OF NON-EMPOWERMENT

Illustrations of women as hypersexual, uneducated and disparaging toward other women aren't empowering; neither are those who rely on men.

Reality TV shows, certain music cultures, and romance novels are some of the things that come to mind when women think of non-empowerment examples.



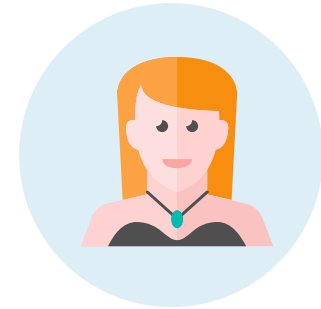


Emma Watson is a good example of women's empowerment because ... she describes herself as a feminist and constantly puts down female stereotypes. She also strives to make the idea of having men and women have equal pay a reality and speaks about it a lot.

- 17, Queen Creek, AZ

Venus and Serena Williams come to mind to me when I think of female empowerment. They are such strong women who lead healthy lives. They are doing something they love and are great role-models.

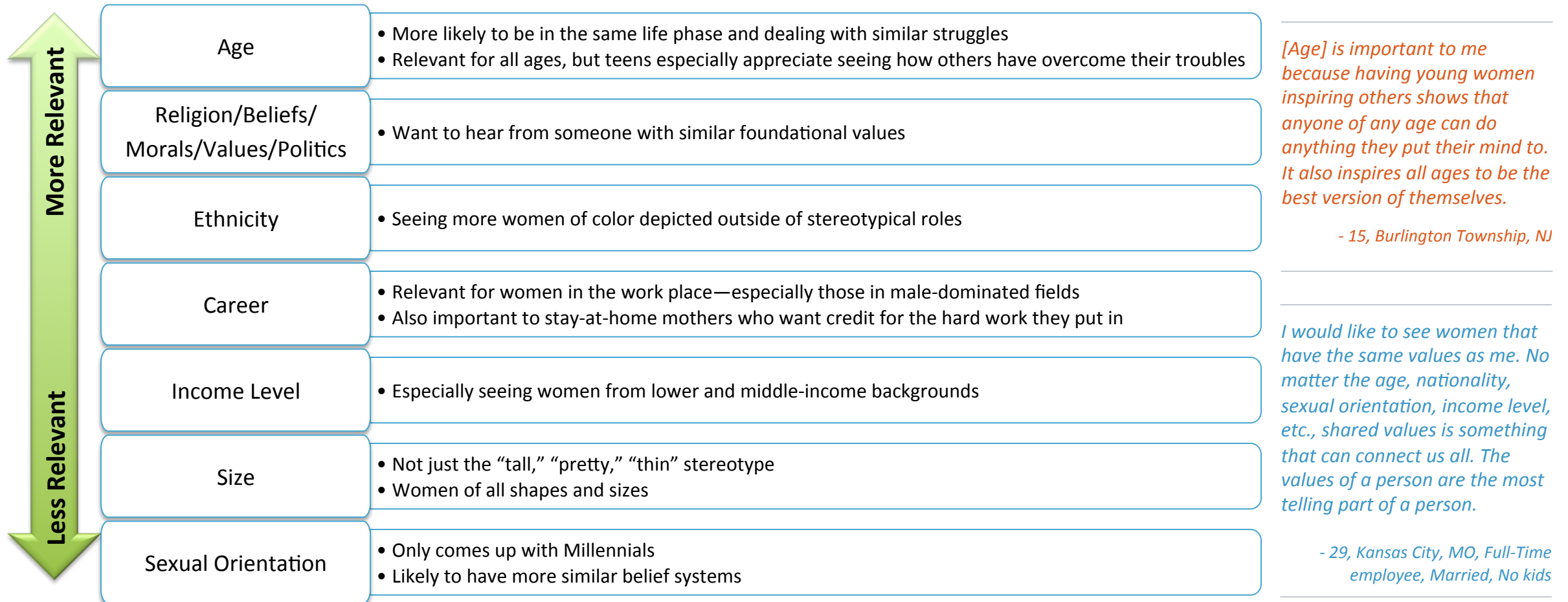
- 29, Kansas City, MO, Full-Time employee, Married, No kids



[Reality TV] is the first to come to mind. They seem to be all about their sexuality and exploiting their "looks" that unfortunately other women, most especially young girls, look up to them and strive to be too much like them. And when they can't reach their idea of "perfection," then other demons take place: i.e., eating disorders, depression, etc.

- 37, Livingston, TN, Unemployed, Never married, No Kids


To be relevant, empowerment messaging should come from someone who looks and thinks like they do.



Message Comparisons

Concept	Key Takeaway
Women can do anything that men can do	Double-edged sword: Women find this true in many fields traditionally dominated by men, but some say the differences between the genders should be celebrated, not erased.
Women, especially moms, should take time to take care of themselves	Good reminder for women, especially stay-at-home moms.
You should exercise to feel good about yourself, not to look good for someone else	It's agreed that exercise is about health, not looking good for a partner.
Beauty includes women of all shapes and sizes	The clear favorite; women appreciate feeling beautiful in their own skin.
Women should have more political and social power than they currently do	Doesn't feel relevant; some think women already have political/social power.
Women should have control and power over their own bodies and health	Agreed: Women (not Congress) should have control over themselves.
Women should feel in control and empowered in work environments	Some want to see more women in science fields, but others want reassurance that staying home with kids is valid too.
Women can be empowered through nurturing roles like mother or caretaker	Many women agree that being a mother is what makes them feel empowered.

Advertising should highlight women as multi-faceted and complex, while celebrating their different ages, sizes, shapes, races and professions.

 Beauty includes women of all shapes and sizes	Women can do anything that men can do	Women can be empowered through nurturing roles like mother or caretaker	Women should have control and power over their own bodies and health
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Clear favorite among all women✓ They hate that the media implies women should be tall and skinny (this body type shouldn't be shamed either though)✓ Messaging should highlight beauty as something a woman is born with; not that she can "skinny" her way into✓ Would help prevent body shaming✓ Also include different genders and racesx No more photo-shopping!x Don't overemphasize looks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Mixed reviews— near top selection for both most and least relevant✓ Promotes equality between genders✓ Suggests that women can be/do anything they want✓ Don't pigeonhole men/women into categories like blue/pink, strong/weak, etc.x Some say everyone knows this alreadyx This might not be true in some areas (e.g., physical abilities)x Don't make it into a contest between genders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Mixed reviews✓ Caring for others (especially kids) provides meaning to life✓ Many moms are thankful they can be stay at home moms✓ Shows the difficulty of caring for kids all day (not just cooking, cleaning)✓ Avoid stereotypes of both the perfectly put together and the totally run down mom✓ Teens are thankful for their momsx Not all women are caretakersx Include women who aren't (and/or don't want to be) mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Reminds that women's bodies are their own✓ Political undertones that women should decide what they do to their bodies, not a governing body (of men)

Self-care is a helpful message, but make sure it applies to women in all phases of life (with or without kids).

Women, especially moms, should take time to take care of themselves	You should exercise to feel good about yourself, not to look good for someone else	Women should feel in control and empowered in work environments	Women should have more political and social power than they currently do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stay-at-home-moms especially feel like this statement grants them permission to take care of their bodies x Easier said than done x No need to emphasize moms here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Shouldn't change for other people ✓ Promotes health, not just being skinny ✓ Exercise should be about health and happiness x Isn't relevant to everyone (some don't exercise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Show women of different ages and races in different career fields ✓ Highlight the ways that staying home with kids is work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x Women need more representation so that their needs are better met x No need to bring politics into it x Some feel like women are already treated fairly in politics x Some say women already have social power, but it's not for the best

I am a stay at home mom. I have two little boys who keep me pretty busy throughout the day. Often times when a mom takes time for herself, she is either made to feel guilty about it (how dare she have needs) or it is made to seem like someone is doing a favor for her by "allowing" her to—for example, to get her hair done or simply to have five minutes of quiet.

- 38, Emmaus, PA, Homemaker, Married, Kids

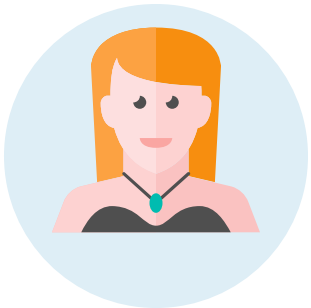


There's too much in the media about how you should look a certain way or be a certain size in order to be "somebody" or to be beautiful. A woman needs to know that "looks fade, but character remains" and beauty comes from within.

- Female, 37, Livingston, TN, Unemployed, Never married, No kids

I selected this statement because it emphasizes equality among men and women. If a man can pursue what was once considered a male-only career, then women can too.

- 17, Queen Creek, AZ



I feel that it is important to understand that men and women were created to be complementary to one another. Women and men should certainly be treated fairly in all situations, but it can be a mistake to think that women and men are exactly the same because they are not.

- 34, Denver, CO, Part-Time employee, Married, Kids

A woman doesn't have to be a mother or caretaker of someone to be valuable. Some women can't have children or don't have family, and they are just as good as other women.

- 13, Dripping Springs, TX



Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign strikes a chord with women across generations.

Women appreciate Dove's "Real Beauty" for lifting up women of different races and ages – women who might be considered outside of the "slim and pretty" stereotype. Respondents applaud Dove for encouraging women to be proud of their bodies and to take care of them.

Nike stands out for showing powerful women of different races. Respondents love the idea of an athlete without the "female" qualifier.



Teens and Gen Xers like the "#LikeAGirl" campaign from Always, which encourages young girls to be and do anything they put their minds to.

Millennials like that CoverGirl shows women comfortable in their own skin.

A couple mention Rosie the Riveter, which they recognize motivated women to step up in new ways during a time of need.

I like the Dove advertising when they portray women of all different types: short women, tall women, skinny women, curvy women, dark women, light women, etc. I like to see all types reflected in media, and I think this company does a good job of that.

- 14, Chino Hills, CA

Empowerment messaging should include a broad range of ages, ethnicities, and genders.

Women applaud these campaigns for the positive messages they're sending out, but they offer **a few points where improvement is possible**. Respondents would like to see more of the following in product messaging:

- Young girls and teens, as well as older/elderly
- Asian, Middle-Eastern and Hispanic women (in addition to the African-American women already featured)
- Women from less privileged backgrounds
- Transgendered individuals
- LGBTQ parents
- Disabled women
- Women with "imperfections," like stretch marks

Also, consider **showing women without make-up**.

Dove specifically could **include women in a range of undergarments** (e.g., shorts and t-shirts in addition to bras and panties), while Nike could include athletes with a larger build.

And all of these advertisers could **gracefully include men**, who are part of both the problem and the solution.

I would include even more of a variety of women. I would try to include more races and body types, including women in wheelchairs, women with stretch marks, C-section scars, the list goes on, but I would try to be as inclusive as possible.

- 29, Richmond, VA, Homemaker, Married, Kids

I really love the Dove real beauty campaign. I think that it could benefit from maybe showing some more diversity as far as men or individuals from the trans community. It could also showcase women in typically masculine jobs feeling beautiful.

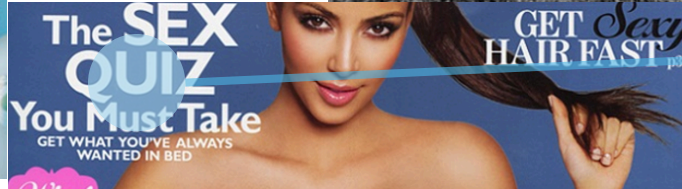
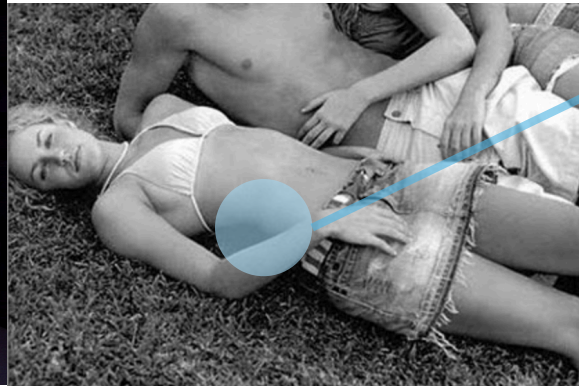
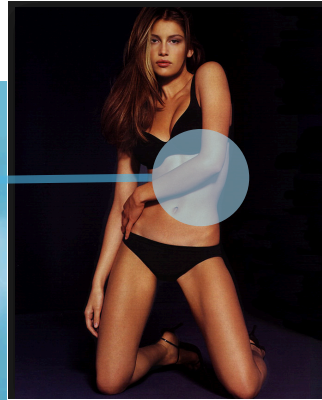
- 43, Rochester, NY, Full-Time employee, Married, Kids

Ads that show unrealistic body sizes or hypersexualized poses have a negative impact on women's empowerment.

Particular lingerie and clothing lines are far and away the worst offenders with women across generations taking issue with them. Millennials and Gen Xers also point to alcohol ads and magazines as showing women in a negative light.

A lingerie brand's heavily photo-shopped advertising suggests that women need to be thin and tall to be attractive. Older women add that these images show women in sexualized poses that imply women are only appreciated for their bodies.

Alcohol ads, especially those for beer, show scantily clad women whose sole purpose appears to be for the pleasure of men.



Teens frequently point to specific clothing lines which have notoriously claimed to be a brand only for skinny women

Many magazines, even those directed at women, highlight thin cover models and often include articles that suggest that women are sex objects.

[Lingerie ads] although sexy, doesn't make all women feel good about themselves. It also teaches young girls that they have to be skinny and tall in order to be beautified.

- 26, Lubbock, TX, Full-Time employee, Never married, No kids

Some messaging from athletic brands misses the mark.

Once again, women point to ads that focus on slender, attractive women—even when the models are in strong poses—as promoting an unrealistic ideal body.

On the upside, **companies like Nike, Under Armour, Athleta and Lululemon all show tough women working out. That’s empowering.**

However, they fall short because these women still tend to be:

- Impractically thin
- Too muscular
- Doing activities that “normal” women don’t do

Respondents suggest **featuring average-sized women** in these ads working out in **more common settings**, perhaps on the elliptical at the gym.

Other ads that attempt to show empowerment but that **fall short are those that show fuller-figured women but either label them as “plus-size” or fail to include multiple races.**

I feel like Target is trying very hard to be inclusive and to empower women with their new website and commercial models that feature "real-sized" women. My problem with it is that while the women are larger and more representative of the normal American woman, they have them labeled as plus-size with no models going over a certain weight.

- 29, Richmond, VA, Homemaker, Married, Kids

The only ad I can think of is possibly Nike. The women it features are not average athletes. I think the concept is empowering, but I'd like to see more average women be the focus.

- 43, Rochester, NY, Full-Time employee, Married, Kids

Beauty and athletic products are considered a good fit for women's empowerment messaging.

Quite a few women say any product would be a good fit for empowerment messaging if it features a broad range of ethnicities, ages and sizes. Others point to specific product categories:

Good Fit

Beauty products (hair and makeup items)

- Encourage women to be beautiful for themselves, not men.

Athletic products and apparel

- Encourage women to be active and healthy.
- Promote health for its own sake, not just to look good.

Mixed Reviews

Feminine products

- Some say women shouldn't be ashamed of a natural process.
- But many older women feel uncomfortable about this topic.

Cleaning products

- Women are using these products regularly.
- Others would rather avoid the implication that women are the only ones cleaning.

Lingerie

- Some think these items can give women a confidence boost.
- Others see their ads as suggesting a woman should work to please men. And since many of these products have been detrimental to body image in the past, empowerment messaging coming from companies like Victoria's Secret would seem like too little, too late.

Bad Fit

Alcohol and cigarettes

- Tying these products to women's empowerment should be avoided across the board.

Weight loss products

- They imply that women aren't good enough and need to change.

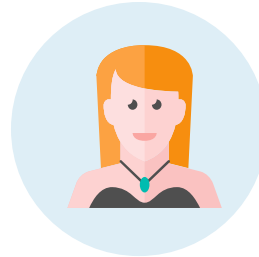
When respondents create their own empowerment messaging, ads show women in roles that aren't (stereo)typically for females.

Their ads would feature women as leaders in the workplace, often in science/engineering fields. Products would be shown as interchangeable between men and women and all races, ages, sizes would be included.



I would have an ad of a young girl using a tablet to study chemical reactions and then later using the tablet for taking notes in a chemistry class and then as a woman doing her job as a chemical engineer or a career in science. The ad would be supportive of women gaining knowledge at a young age.

-17, Sarasota, FL



I'd choose an Apple Macbook Pro. The ad would feature a career woman with a child using her computer for work, personal reasons, and parental duties (like couponing or making doctors appointments). Her husband could be in the background cleaning or making dinner to show that men and women should share responsibility with parenting and housework. Cooking, cleaning, parenting and working are not gender-specific and neither is your Macbook Pro. Your Macbook Pro can help in all aspects of your life.

- 19, Pawtucket, RI, Student, Never Married, No kids



I would have an ad for an app for shopping online from a place like Menards or Home Depot where you can get home improvement products. I would have a woman working on a home repair and finding a "surprise" that she couldn't have anticipated like a rotten board or something broken. She would be a regular-sized woman wearing just normal clothes, like a t-shirt and leggings. She would whip out her phone, go to the app and quickly order the additional part/product she needed to finish the project.

- 48, North Branch, MN, Homemaker, Married, No kids

APPENDIX

APPENDIX: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Female	20	23	20

Political Leanings	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Very Conservative	1	3	1
Somewhat Conservative	6	5	5
Neither Conservative nor Liberal	3	5	5
Somewhat Liberal	7	7	7
Very Liberal	3	3	2

Age	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Under 10	--	--	--
11-15	10	--	--
16-20	10	1	--
21-25	--	5	--
26-30	--	10	--
31-35	--	7	--
36-40	--	--	10
41-45	--	--	4
46-50	--	--	5
51-55	--	--	1
55-60	--	--	--
61+	--	--	--

APPENDIX: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Employment Status	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Full-Time employee	--	7	8
Part-Time employee	--	5	4
Homemaker	--	6	6
Self employed	--	1	0
Student	--	3	0
Unemployed	--	1	2

Marital Status	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Never married	--	8	4
Married	--	12	15
Divorced	--	1	1
Living with Partner	--	2	0

Children in the Household	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Yes	--	12	14
No	--	11	6

APPENDIX: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Movie Genre	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Romantic Comedy	3	6	3
Comedy	4	5	7
Drama	4	4	2
Action	5	1	1
Horror	2	4	0
Thriller	0	0	4
Science Fiction/Fantasy	2	3	3
Other	0	0	0

Social Media Platforms	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Instagram	15	17	9
Facebook	8	19	20
Twitter	8	12	12
LinkedIn	0	4	6
Snapchat	11	16	4
Other	5	1	3

TV Consumption	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
4 hours or less	2	3	0
5 to 10 hours	8	6	1
11 to 19 hours	4	1	8
20 to 29 hours	5	6	7
30 or more hours	1	7	4

Relevant Messaging Factors	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Age	9	5	3
Ethnicity/nationality	4	3	0
Sexual orientation	0	2	0
Income level	2	2	2
Political/activist interest level	0	2	2
Career	1	3	2
Other: (please specify in the space below)	4	6	11

APPENDIX: POLLING QUESTIONS

Advertising Sample Messages: Most Relevant	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Women can do anything that men can do	4	3	3
Women, especially moms, should take time to take care of themselves	1	2	2
You should exercise to feel good about yourself, not to look good for someone else	3	2	0
Beauty includes women of all shapes and sizes	8	4	9
Women should have more political and social power than they currently do	1	2	0
Women should have control and power over their own bodies and health	1	4	1
Women should feel in control and empowered in work environments	0	1	1
Women can be empowered through nurturing roles like mother or caretaker	1	4	3
Other (please specify in the space below)	1	1	1

Advertising Sample Messages: Most Relevant	Teens	Millennials	Gen X
Women can do anything that men can do	4	7	6
Women, especially moms, should take time to take care of themselves	2	4	2
You should exercise to feel good about yourself, not to look good for someone else	3	2	2
Beauty includes women of all shapes and sizes	1	1	1
Women should have more political and social power than they currently do	5	5	2
Women should have control and power over their own bodies and health	1	2	2
Women should feel in control and empowered in work environments	0	0	1
Women can be empowered through nurturing roles like mother or caretaker	4	2	4