

Botox and Youth: One and the Same?

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We have all experienced it: sitting in the waiting room at the doctor's office, leafing through a magazine, and waiting for our name to be called. There is nothing of interest in the magazine because it is simply filled with advertisements. There seems to be very little content and at times it can be difficult to distinguish between ads and articles. It is no small wonder that over the last few years, the amount of money spent on advertisements has increased considerably (Wikipedia, 2008). In 2007, advertisers spent over \$186 billion in North America and nearly \$465 billion worldwide (ZenithOptimedia, 2008). Furthermore, it is predicted that by 2010, over \$553 billion will be spent worldwide on advertising (ZenithOptimedia, 2008). For the most part, advertisements – including print, television, and Internet ads – can be misleading or illogical and contain incomplete or distorted messages (Silverblatt, 2008). However, when the cultural context – and in particular the worldview – is taken into account, the message becomes more clear. In this self-absorbed world, one sees that there is a tremendous need to look young, thin, and attractive in order to be accepted...and there is a product that can help you accomplish that goal.

One of the central themes found in advertising is the selling of youth and beauty. For example, an advertiser will ask potential customers to use the product to achieve a younger appearance, to lose weight, or to attract members of the opposite sex. Products are supposed to make you look younger, feel younger, or both. Pills and creams will help *you* shed excess pounds and unwanted fat. Body sprays and perfumes will make *you* irresistible. But what does this say about our culture? It implies that we live in a society that values youth, a slender body, and sex appeal. If we don't use the products that the advertisers are trying to sell us, we are

doomed to a life of loneliness and despair. After all, you can't be fat, old and wrinkled and still be happy and have friends. At least that is what advertisers want us to believe.

Two such advertisements appeared from one page to the next in the April 2008 edition of *Self* magazine. This magazine is geared toward working women – perhaps mothers and wives – in the thirty-something age range. Most of the articles featured in the magazine regard topics such as weight loss, stress relief, beauty tips, sex advice, easy-to-fix recipes, and self-help strategies. Strewn between the articles, the reader will see page after page of ads for make-up, clothing, shampoo, hair coloring, active wear, prescription medication, perfumes, diet soft drinks and weight-loss products. The two ads that will be discussed are both for the prescription cosmetic treatment Botulinum Toxin Type A...better known as Botox Cosmetic. Botox is manufactured by Allergan, Inc. of Irvine, California and is used to temporarily diminish the appearance of wrinkles and frown lines on the face. Botox is injected by a physician directly into the wrinkle to paralyze the skin which somehow makes the wrinkles disappear – at least temporarily. Eventually, the patient will have to go back to his or her doctor for additional treatments as Botox does not permanently remove the creases and lines in one's skin. From the web site HowStuffWorks.com:

Botox[®] Cosmetic has been successfully used to treat severe glabellar (frown) lines and is approved for use in adult patients up to 65 years of age. Also a form of botulinum toxin type A, when Botox[®] Cosmetic is injected into the muscles surrounding the brow area for instance, those muscles can not "scrunch up" for a period of time. They are paralyzed. So the wrinkles in that area, often referred to as furrows or frown lines, temporarily go away (Neer, 2001, "Botox in the Body").

The first ad for Botox displays three pictures of the same young woman in various stages of bliss. In each of the three photos, she is smiling, laughing, and appears to be the happiest woman alive. The top of the ad reads "It's all about freedom of expression...ask your doctor about BOTOX[®] Cosmetic" (Allergan, 2007). The model used in the ad is an African American woman who is probably in her early-twenties at the most, perhaps as old as 25 years of age. She has perfect skin: no wrinkles, no blemishes, and no marks of any kind. The skin on her face is firm and radiant, arguably the most perfect, youthful skin possible. The ad goes on to say, "Don't hold back! Express it all! Express yourself by asking your doctor about BOTOX[®] Cosmetic. Millions of women already have" (Allergan, 2007). This ad is implying that this young woman's perfect face and youthful glow is the result of Botox treatments. The ad also suggests that everybody is doing it so if you want to fit in you should do it, too. However, this seems to contradict the command to "express yourself" as if you are unique; if everyone else is doing it, how would you stand out from the rest?

The very next page features another ad which reads "From the creators of BOTOX[®] Cosmetic" for another wrinkle treatment called Juvéderm[™] Injectable Gel (Allergan, 2008). This ad shows a white woman who is probably in her early forties; across her face appear large parentheses from her cheeks to her chin, as if enclosing her nose and mouth in the parentheses. Also across her face, written just above the parentheses, are the words "Parentheses have a place but not on your face" (Allergan, 2008). This implies that lines and wrinkles on the face are unnatural and objectionable – even those that occur naturally from smiling. The ad goes on to say, "So smooth and natural, everyone will notice (but no one will know)" (Allergan, 2008). The model does not have the marks that the ad is implying are so unbearable; her skin is perfectly smooth and one can only assume it is because she uses Juvéderm. However, no one will ever

know that she uses the product because that is her beauty secret. Everyone will think her wrinkle-free face is the product of nature, not the result of toxic injections. Yet such lines on the face are a natural occurrence on anyone who ever smiles. Wouldn't the sudden disappearance of such lines raise a red flag to others that something is quite *unnatural* about this?

Neither of the women in the ads is in need of Botox or Juvéderm treatments. Each has a bright complexion, no lines or marks on the skin, and a healthy smile. Yet the advertisers want the audience – thirty-something female readers of *Self* magazine – to believe that both of these women used the prescription treatments being marketed. The first ad featuring the African American model is targeted at women approaching the 30-year-old range, perhaps late twenties to early thirties. The second ad featuring an "older" white woman, approximately forty years of age maximum, is targeted at women who have hit the forty-year mark and beyond. These are the women who may be going through a sort of midlife crisis – maybe even a divorce – who may need a boost of self-esteem. Luckily, the advertiser recognizes this need and comes to save the day.

What these ads indicate is that we live in a world of narcissistic people who crave nothing less than perfection. By using the product, one will be admitted into the world portrayed in the ad (Silverblatt, 2008). The products (in this case, Botox and Juvéderm) are marketed but the people *using* the products are more important; the actual products are insignificant (Steinhauer, 1999 as cited in Silverblatt, 2008). The marketer seems to want to pull the audience into this world of a beautiful woman with radiant, flawless skin, a woman who appears much younger than her actual years. The ads also indicate that we live in "an uncomplicated world" where "all issues can be resolved by purchasing the right product" (Silverblatt, 2008, p. 284). The advertiser seems to be saying, "If you use this product, all your problems will be solved." What

is communicated to the audience is that aging gracefully is an antiquated notion. If one wants to be up with the times, Botox treatments are the answer.

We live in a world that celebrates the young and beautiful, and anyone who is neither will have a much more difficult time finding happiness and success. Advertisers know this; they are the ones who fed it to us over and over again until we began to believe it. No matter what your needs or goals are, there is a product to assist you. We no longer think for ourselves because we let magazine ads tell us what to think. We let the ads dictate what we should wear, how we should smell, and what we should drive. Once society learns to interpret such messages accurately, advertisers will have a difficult time selling anything. Fortunately for them, that day will probably never come.

Resources

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- Allergan, Inc. (2008). Juvéderm[™] Injectable Gel [Advertisement]. *Self*, April 2008: 45
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