ABSTRACT

I AM WHO I AM. WATCH ME!

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

Analysis of the public discussion concerning the media campaign 'ideal beauties' realised in 2002 by the Flemish minister of Equal Opportunities, M. Mieke Vogels

In 2002 the Flemish minister of Equal Opportunities, M. Mieke Vogels, launched a sensitising media campaign against the beauty myth in media and advertising. The campaign was published as an advertisement in several magazines and on leaflets. In the ad are displayed several 'ordinary' men and women. On one picture they are dressed, on the other they are naked. None of them corresponds to the 'ideal beauty' standard. But their body weight seems normal. Not too thin, not too fat. The Dutch slogan sounds: “I am who I am, watch me!” The text covering the dressed people on the leaflets runs: “Four times differently built. Four times feeling good. Four ideal beauties”. The text covering the naked people runs: “Four times beautiful, four times being yourself. Because beauty comes from the inside. Not from the outside.”

Before analysing the content of the public responses, I will situate the campaign in the Flemish media landscape and dispute the need for such a campaign. The public responses to the campaign were debated in several newspapers, magazines and on Internet discussion forums. Very soon it became clear that the Flemish public opinion was divided. To the issue of ideal beauties in the media there were fervent supporters and ardent opponents. I will analyse the content of the responses of both sides and question their arguments for or against a change in the representation of women and men concerning beauty standards in media and advertising

Illustration of the campaign: