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The Fight Against Bullying in Schools Expands to Store Shelves

By ANDREW ADAM NEWMAN

AMONG 12- to 17-year-olds, 47 percent of girls and 34 percent of boys report having been bullied either face-to-face or online, according to a survey by Mintel, a market research firm. And prominent cases of teenagers committing suicide after being harassed on social media networks have, along with strengthening the resolve of antibullying organizations, prompted brands to take up the issue.

The latest is Green Giant, the General Mills brand of frozen vegetables, which is introducing a cause marketing campaign, “Raise a Giant,” that aims to help prevent bullying.

The effort includes an online animated video directed at parents that features a child narrator. The video uses speech bubbles to present its characters: an angry gray scribble for a bully and frowning expressions as victims and onlookers.

“Bullying happens every day,” says the video’s narrator. “Just imagine what would happen if every school had one kid with the courage to stand up in the face of bullying — but we need your encouragement to find that courage. Help your child be the one.”

The commercial urges parents to “Write a letter to your kids and help them stand up to bullying.” It closes by promoting a Web site for the effort, RaiseAGiant.com, where parents are encouraged to post their letters to their children and to share them over Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.

The commercial, by Ultra Creative in Minneapolis, will be introduced on Oct. 7 on Web sites including ABC.com, NBC.com and YouTube. Green Giant, which declined to reveal advertising spending for the campaign, spent \$19.3 million on ads in 2012, according to Kantar Media, a unit of WPP.

The ads will run in heaviest rotation during October, which is National Bullying Prevention Month, introduced by PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center in 2006. Green Giant is teaming with PACER on Raise a Giant.

John Stockman, associate marketing director for Green Giant, said that “our primary target is moms,” and that the bullying issue resonates with them. Helping prevent bullying is akin to promoting the brand’s frozen vegetables as being as nutritious as fresh produce, he continued.

“At Green Giant we’ve always had a brand purpose of getting people to grow and thrive, either by getting their vegetables” or helping them attain “emotional health,” Mr. Stockman said.

Emily Bazelon, author of “Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy,” reviewed the original video and RaiseAGiant.com, and noted that a figure cited prominently in both — that nationally 160,000 students stay home from school daily because they fear bullying — was ruled “mostly false” by PolitiFact.com in 2011.

After reviewing PolitiFact’s analysis, Green Giant removed references to the figure from its video and site.

While Ms. Bazelon wrote in an e-mail that the campaign’s “graphics were kind of cute,” she questioned the effectiveness of urging parents to write open letters to their children.

“How is parents writing letters going to do anything?” Ms. Bazelon wrote. “What about asking your kid about bullying at his school or in his life, and trying to have a real conversation about what kids are experiencing?”

“Mean Stinks,” an antibullying effort directed at girls by Secret, the Procter & Gamble brand, was introduced in 2011. In 2012, Secret introduced a Mean Stinks deodorant and a body spray with a “fearlessly fresh” scent, and through June 2013 donated \$1 from every purchase of the line to Girls on the Run, a nonprofit group that fosters empowerment of girls from third through eighth grade through training for a 5K running event.

A Mean Stinks Facebook page, which has more than 488,000 followers, urges girls to “pinkie swear” against bullying by painting the fingernails of their pinkies the same blue as the Secret logo.

In August, Secret announced that it had teamed with the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center to develop antibullying curriculum materials to be distributed free to schools. And Secret is promoting a national in-school assembly on Oct. 23 that it is calling “Biggest. Assembly. Ever.” The event will feature young female celebrities via live-streamed video, including the actress and singer Zendaya, who is 17.

Maria Burquest, a P.& G. spokeswoman, said that along with being philanthropic, helping teenagers address bullying has benefited the brand.

“The overall business has been stronger for the last several years in this age group, and we feel that a platform like this helps with building overall brand equity,” Ms. Burquest said.

According to an annual study by the Edelman public relations agency, when quality and price were equal, 53 percent of consumers ranked a brand’s purpose-driven activities as a deciding purchasing factor in 2012, up from 42 percent in 2008.

In May, Office Depot, in a partnership with the band One Direction, announced it was introducing a line of back-to-school products called 1D + OD Together Against Bullying. Through the campaign, which includes antibullying videos featuring the band, the company is pledging \$1 million for the cause, including underwriting school assemblies run by Brooks Gibbs, a youth crisis counselor and bullying specialist.

Sears introduced its antibullying initiative, “Team up to Stop Bullying,” in 2012. Among the celebrities attached to the effort are the sisters Kourtney, Kim and Khloe Kardashian.

As for the statistic that 160,000 students avoid school daily because of bullying, two years after the figure was discredited by PolitiFact, it is still widely cited by advocacy groups and by brands — including Secret, Office Depot and Sears.