A NOT-SO-BEAUTIFUL CAMPAIGN: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE DOVE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BEAUTY

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from several areas of research, this thesis explores the ways in which Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty appropriates feminist themes to sell beauty products, to the detriment of female consumers. Advertising and marketing have long held the power to create, shape, and reinforce cultural norms, and for years, advertisers have been able to propagate and strengthen gender stereotypes. Though there has been a push since the late 1990s to stem the flow of sexist and potentially dangerous advertising messages about women's bodies, ads still disseminate harmful messages that contribute to the further sexualization and oppression of women in the United States. Dove is just one of the many female-targeted brands that claim to hold progressive, woman-positive ideals, while still selling products intended to make women more beautiful—supposedly the ultimate goal for any modern female. While the campaign professes a desire to increase confidence and self-esteem for women and girls around the globe, it promotes a post-feminist, consumerist agenda that actually reinforces what Naomi Wolf titled "the beauty myth". Linguistic and visual analyses of Dove's print and viral marketing tactics within the contexts of advertising, feminism, and consumer culture reveal that instead of "redefining" beauty, the Dove campaign is, in actuality, reinforcing decades-old ideology about women's appearance and status in society.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) was launched in 2004 in response to a Unilever-commissioned study called *The Real Truth About Beauty.* Conducted by prominent researchers and feminist scholars Nancy Etcoff, Susie Orbach, Jennifer Scott, and Heidi D'Agostino, the report's goal was to "explore empirically what beauty means to women today and why that is" (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, and D'Agostino 2). Full of inspirational language and calls to action, *The Real Truth About Beauty,* quotes Darwin while professing Dove's desire to "further the understanding of women, beauty, and well-being" and reclaim and reexamine beauty from a 21st century perspective" (Etcoff, et al. 2).

The major findings of the study—that 75% of women between the ages of 18 and 64 "would like to see considerably more diversity in the images of beauty" and that only 2% of women around the world would describe themselves as beautiful—were the foundational

stones upon which CFRB was built. First appearing in the United Kingdom, CFRB ads depicted women who did not fit the traditional beauty ideal. These women all had "flaws" that are generally viewed as unattractive by society as a whole—they were "freckled, pregnant, had stretch marks, or might be seen as fat" (Johnson and Taylor 942). Others had grey hair or were flat chested, and all images in the campaign, Dove claimed, were free of digital retouching. These depictions of "real women" gained popularity in the UK and quickly spread to North America and across Europe. Today, the CFRB is a cornerstone of Dove's global marketing efforts.

In addition to producing advertisements, the CFRB "promotes itself as a progressive force for women, aligns itself with certain feminist ideals and scholars, and engages in 'grassroots' partnering to raise millions of dollars for eating disorder organizations and Girl Scouts programs to build self-esteem" (Johnston and Taylor 943). The campaign epitomizes cause-related marketing (CRM), or "the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by contributing a specific amount to a designated nonprofit effort" (Brønn and Vrioni 214). Dove's CRM strategies have paid off: since the campaign's implementation ten years ago, it has generated commercial success, celebrity endorsements, praise from professional associations and gender scholars, and general media acclaim (Johnston and Taylor 942). However, there has been quiet opposition from feminist scholars and skeptical consumers since the campaign's launch in 2004.

The goal of this thesis is to examine and explain the ways in which CFRB appropriates feminist themes, to the detriment of female consumers. This paper will use linguistic and visual analyses of three of Dove's advertising strategies—the Vote Ads, the viral video *Onslaught*, and the Real Beauty Sketches video— to show how despite the company's professed desire to combat inauthentic and unattainable beauty ideals, they actually take a post-feminist position,

and reinforce decades-old ideologies about women's appearance and status in society. In order to understand the ways in which Dove fails to achieve its stated objectives, we must first consider the history of female portrayals in advertising and existing feminist research.

II. WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

Many of the claims made by Dove in *The Real About Beauty* are irrefutable. As Nancy Etcoff stated in the report, "the diversity of human beauty has been strained through a sieve of culture, status, power and money and what has emerged is a narrow sliver of the full panorama of human visual splendor" (Etcoff, et al. 4). Though this declaration is slightly overdramatized, the basic principles behind it and the simple premise underlying CFRB—that much of advertising objectifies and undermines women—are undeniable (Piety 67).

Historically, advertising and marketing have undermined women in a number of ways. For one, women are frequently confined to traditional and domestic roles in many advertisements. If one were to judge women's place in society solely by their portrayal in advertising, they might come to the conclusion that we are living in a society that most closely resembles 1950's America. One need look no further than advertisements for household cleaning products to see this kind of gender stereotyping at work. Most ads for cleaning products feature women using them, and some even romanticize women's relationship with cleaning and housekeeping (see the Mr. Clean ads of the 1960s in which the brawny male cartoon character would sweep in and save the desperate housewife) (Piety 55).

Not only does advertising reinforce stereotypical gender roles, but it also belittles women. An influential study conducted by Erving Goffman in 1979 found that advertising weakens women via five mechanisms: by portraying them as smaller or lower than men (relative size), having them constantly touching themselves (feminine touch), showing them laying down or in vulnerable positions (ritualization of subordination), placing them in

stereotypical occupations (function ranking), and removing them from a scene by focusing their gaze into the distance (licensed withdrawal) (Kang 983). Perhaps the most troubling of these mechanisms are the ritualization of subordination and relative size, both of which contribute to the infantilization of women. In his study, Goffman concluded that in advertising, "women were to men as children are to adults of both genders" (Piety 70). This further promotes the belief that women are lesser than men.

Also very concerning is the overt commodification and sexualization of women in ads. Despite an increased awareness of negative media portrayals of women, "studies show that the sexually exploitative use of women in advertising has increased since 1970" (Renzetti, Curran, and Maier 162). A content analysis study of 58 U.S. magazines showed that "on average one out of every two ads that showed women depicted them as sex objects" (Renzetti, Curran, and Maier 162). It has become commonplace for half-dressed or naked women to be used as "decoration for any number of products that don't seem particularly directed at heterosexual men …and in advertisements for products in which their appearance seems somewhat incongruous" (Piety 56). Whether in ads for cars or for farming equipment, it would not be unusual to find a woman in a bikini draped over a Mustang or a John Deere. Though sexually suggestive images of women often appear in ads for everyday, non-appearance-related products, these images dominate in personal care and cosmetic ads" (Renzetti, Curran, and Maier 162). Not only do these ads convey "an implicit message that women's appearance is of critical importance to their success," but this kind of commodification "reinforces women's status as subordinate" (Piety 54-55).

There is an overwhelming consensus in research on the media and self-evaluation that the hypersexualized, beautiful women seen in a vast majority of ads are detrimental to women in more ways than the two listed above. One of the most common indictments of advertising is

that "exposure to images of female attractiveness… cause[s] body image disturbance" and that "beautiful models adversely affect young women's self-esteem and body satisfaction" (Micu and Coulter 79 and Posavac and Posavac 153). Women often compare themselves to advertising models that they deem more beautiful than they are, and these comparisons create feelings of frustration and anxiety, along with general negative evaluations (Micu and Coulter 84).

In light of this research, what Dove is attempting to accomplish with the CFRB is noble (if we are to believe that they their motivations are more altruistic than profit-driven). Indeed, all companies, especially those with heavily female consumer bases, should keep the well being of women in mind when they produce advertisements. However, instead of challenging the norm in beauty ads, Dove is actually reinforcing what Naomi Wolf entitled the beauty myth.

Drawing on critiques of societal and media messages about beauty, Wolf published her acclaimed work *The Beauty Myth* in 1991 (Johnston and Taylor 944). In her book, Wolf defines the beauty myth as "a violent backlash against feminism that uses female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement" (Wolf 10). "The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through," Wolf states, "the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon [them]" (Wolf 10). The beauty myth, she maintains, restricts women to the private sphere and creates a hierarchy of physical appearance that forces [them] to compete with one another, weakening them as a group and perpetuating male dominance (Lachover and Brandes 303-304). Not only this, but it "goes beyond physical appearance to constitute a dictate prescribing [women's] behavior and preserving the existing social order (Lachover and Brandes 304). The beauty myth is so potent, Wolf says, because the ideology of beauty is one of the last of the feminine ideologies in the West that still has the power to control those women who would have otherwise been made uncontrollable by the

progress made during second wave feminism—it is "the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance in tact (11).

III. POST-FEMINISM, POPULAR CULTURE, AND FEMINIST CONSUMERISM

Set in staunch opposition to Wolf's beliefs is post-feminist thought. However, before we discuss post-feminism, we must first look at feminism's relationship with popular culture. In their work *Feminism in Popular Culture*, Hollows and Moseley state that "most people's initial knowledge and understanding of feminism has been formed within the popular" (2). "Rather than coming to consciousness through involvement in feminist movements," they say, "most people become conscious of feminism through the way it is represented in popular culture. Thus, for many women of our generation, formative understanding of, and identifications with, feminist ideas has been almost exclusively within popular culture" (Hollows and Moseley 2).

While popular feminism has certainly made feminism more widespread and accessible, this accessibility has come at a cost. In order to become part of mainstream culture, feminist thought has been watered down and "harnessed to other discourses which neutralize its radical potential" (Hollows and Moseley 10). In order to be more palatable to the masses, popular culture, especially television, depoliticizes feminist discourse. This depoliticization can mainly be seen through the emergence of post-feminism.

Post-feminism is "an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" (McRobbie 255). In order to emphasize that feminism is a "spent force" that is no longer needed, post-feminism suggests that equality has already been achieved, while also implying that "by means of the tropes of freedom and choice which are inextricably connected with…young women, feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant" (McRobbie 255). As feminist media studies scholar Rosalind Gill put it, post-feminism is a "sensibility"

that includes "the notion that femininity is a bodily property…the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm…and an emphasis upon consumerism (Murray 86). Additionally, "the body is a site of attention for the postfeminist citizen since it is promoted as integral to female identity" (Murray 86). Like Naomi Wolf with the beauty myth, feminist writers such as Susan Faludi view post-feminism as a backlash against second wave feminist gains (Hollows and Moseley 7).

The post-feminist position is often compatible with corporate interests, "situating messages of women's freedom in the marketplace as empowered consumers" (Murray 86). As such, post-feminist ideology is very apparent in advertising, where advertisers claim that images of scantily clad women in commercials and print are not exploitation but an expression of women's sexual freedom. After all, feminism is dead and women no longer have to worry about sexist, oppressive, and harmful media representations. However, it is becoming more and more common for companies to claim that their advertising messages are **feminist**, not just defensively assert that they are not **anti-feminist**.

According to Johnston and Taylor, companies like Dove, who claim to disseminate empowering messages to women, are engaging in feminist consumerism (also known as commodity feminism),

> *a corporate strategy that employs feminist themes of empowerment to market products to women and that shares consumerism's focus on individual consumption as a primary source of identity, affirmation, and social change. This reformulation enables women to wear an identity associated with self-respect, independence, personal strength, and collective identity and community without doing any of the hard consciousness-raising work usually required to produce collective transformation (955-956).*

Feminist consumerism prioritizes commodity purchases above collective feminist goals such as "decentering the role of beauty in women's lives, processing negative emotions, or challenging men's relationship with feminine beauty" (Johnston and Taylor 960).

In order to increase sales, advertisers attempt to co-opt and appropriate "the cultural power and energy of feminism while simultaneously neutralizing or domesticating the force of its social/political critique" (Gill 39). This idea of co-option is central to criticism of post-and consumerist feminism, as they take "those elements of feminism that can be sold—for example, ideas of liberation, independence, and freedom" and use them to turn a profit (Hollows and Moseley 10). In the process, these elements become detached from feminist discourse and are "tamed and divested of [their] radical meaning, so that they can be articulated with more traditional notions of femininity" (Hollows and Moseley 10). This separation from true feminism is at the core of the denunciation of CFRB and similar campaigns.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative design was adopted for this study. An analysis of the major linguistic and visual characteristics of the Dove Vote Ads, the viral video *Onslaught*, and the Real Beauty Sketches video was conducted. These ads were selected for their popularity, virality, and similar problematic themes from a feminist standpoint. Though this thesis will first examine the language and imagery in each of these ads separately, the primary focus will be on how linguistic and visual components combine to promote the beauty myth and post-feminist ideology, which both undermine the gains of feminism and are detrimental to female consumers.

V. THE DOVE VOTE ADS

The first stage of the CFRB was comprised of five separate outdoor advertisements that first appeared in the UK and then quickly spread to the rest of Europe and the United States. These billboards, which were later adapted to print and digital media, are commonly known as the "Dove Vote Ads". The ads feature portraits of five regular (non-model) women taken by famed photographer Annie Leibovitz. Though the women pictured on the billboards are

conventionally attractive, each has some characteristic that could be deemed unattractive—one woman is heavily freckled, another flat chested; one woman is overweight; two older women are respectively wrinkled and grey-haired with age (see the Appendix for images of the billboards).

The primary linguistic device in these ads comes in the form of opposing statements (i.e. "Flawed" or "Flawless?" in Figure 1) situated to the right of the portraits. Visual context clues on the billboards, along with the antithetical composition of the language, implies that viewers of the ads are meant to vote on whether or not the depicted women should be described by negative statements (i.e. "fat", "wrinkled", "grey") or positive statements ("fit", "wonderful", gorgeous"). This binary voting mechanism is deeply problematic.

Through the copy on the Vote Ads, the women become objects to be judged solely based on their appearance. This is interesting considering Dove's mission to expand the definition of beauty beyond physical appearance. The ads appropriate the feminist themes of choice and empowerment to promote the Dove brand. Though the ads attempt to appear feminist, their underlying, democratic philosophy supports the post-feminist notion that challenging oppressive beauty norms is a consumer choice rather than a social imperative in world where over half the population is deeply and institutionally marginalized, and social status and respect are often based on sex, race, and other aspects of physical appearance. Furthermore, by attempting to empower consumers through co-opted elements of choice (voting), Dove is potentially disempowering the women in their ads whose bodies are now subject to public scrutiny. By promoting the idea that women's bodies are objects open to the judgment of the public, Dove is sending messages that contradict their professed campaign goals.

In addition to the main copy, each ad contains a question ("Does true beauty only squeeze into size 8?, Figure 3) that is meant to encourage consumers to carefully consider current beauty norms. These questions are all accompanied by the words "Join the beauty debate". The word "debate" in the context of a "campaign" connotes fiery discussion and possible political action. However, the either/or structure of the ads permits no room for debate. Allowing participants to only choose one option limits discussion and consumers' freedom of expression to the narrow confines of Dove's choosing. This is a common element throughout the CFRB. While at a glance the campaign may seem to challenge beauty ideals, when viewed up close the campaign does little to decenter or destabilize the role beauty plays in women's lives. It actually further cements beauty's role as a dictator of women's self-worth. In this way, the campaign supports what Naomi Wolf stated in her book: that the beauty myth dictates that the quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists and that women must embody it (12).

Visual aspects of the ads also support commodity feminist values. The white background of the ads simultaneously narrows the viewer's focus to the physical attributes of the women and separates the models from all social contexts. Though from an advertising standpoint, the stark layout can be attributed to the need for clean design, from a semiotic perspective, it removes the Dove campaign from the context of the feminist movement and narrows the campaign message to single individuals in order to speak to the consumer. As previously mentioned, a key aspect of feminist consumerism is a focus on individual consumption as opposed to collective social transformation.

Finally, the checkboxes that accompany the main copy of the ads resemble ballots. Whether done intentionally or not, within the context of the ads, the boxes conjure up images of first wave feminism and women's suffrage. This can be seen as a co-option of feminist values

that is used to sell more Dove products by associating the brand with themes of women's liberation and independence.

For Dove, this advertising format was a win-win situation: they could "promote [their] products as beauty solutions and at the same time express concern with narrow beauty ideals" (Johnston and Taylor 952). Additionally, it allowed the company to associatie conventional beauty (youth, thinness, facial symmetry, proportionality) with the Dove brand, while encompassing deviations such as freckles and grey hair that helped to construct relatability and brand loyalty. However, this advertising tactic not only supports the beauty myth by highlighting physical attractiveness as the height of feminine achievement, but also upholds post-feminism by emphasizing the body as the primary source of female identity.

VI. ONSLAUGHT

In 2007, Dove released a short, 80-second "film" entitled *Onslaught* online. The video opens with a close-up of an angelic, redheaded little girl who appears to be eight or nine years old. Then, to the music of Simian's "La Breeze", the film begins to rapidly bombard viewers with all of the ways in which the young girl will be pressured by the beauty industry to conform to the idealized standard. A barrage of hypersexualized images of women quickly filters across the screen. These are followed by a series of fictional ads in which women sell products that claim to make consumers "younger", "taller", "lighter", "firmer", "righter", "thinner", and "softer". Then, some disturbing images of a woman rapidly gaining and losing weight (hypothetically due to fad diets), a bulimic woman purging, some graphic images of plastic surgery. Finally, the ad closes with the words "Talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does".

The main linguistic communication in the ad comes in the form of the lyrics to the background song "La Breeze". As Simian, a now defunct English electro-rock band, never

gained popularity in the United States, it is clear that the song was chosen for its distinct semantic message. The portion of the song that plays during the short film is presented below:

Here it comes•
Here it comes•
Here it comes•
Here they come! •
Here it comes the breeze•
That'll blow away•
All your reason and your sin
Same with your minds•
So do your best to run away •
But take a breath and you will pay
You cannot hide•
There's no place to hide

In the context of the ad, the lyrics reflect Naomi Wolf's assertion that the beauty myth dictates that the quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists by conveying the message that beauty is an inevitable and inescapable fact of women's lives ("So you do your best to run away", "You cannot hide"). At the same time, the lyrics seem to agree with Wolf in that beauty is a brainwashing agent that is used against women ("That'll blow away, All you reason and your sin, same with your minds"). The contradictory nature of these linguistic cues may stem from that fact that Dove is insincere in its communications goals. By attempting to sell beauty products to women, while at the same time claiming that the beauty industry is a purveyor of harmful ideas, their advertising message becomes confused, and this is clearly seen in the contradictory nature of their chosen background music.

These contradictions extend into the visuals of the ad. The contrast of the thin, large breasted, scantily clad women in the film with the innocence and purity of the young girl seems to suggest that, like Naomi Wolf professed, images of beauty strictly and heavily weigh upon women. However, Dove itself is guilty of disseminating the kind of beauty ideology that so affects young women and girls. After all, the flagship product of the CFRB was a firming cream meant to correct women's physical flaws (Johnston and Taylor 942). Also, their parent

company Unilever presides over Axe, whose ads frequently portray women as sex objects, and Slim-Fast, which encourages the same kind of yoyo dieting *Onslaught* negatively depicts.

The appropriation of feminist ideals and the promotion of feminist consumerism are clear to see in this ad. While the film appears to be a form of social commentary, it is really just advertising intended to sell more products by positioning Dove as a responsible company that cares about harmful messages disseminated by beauty corporations. The film takes the real issue of female exploitation in the media and uses it to increase sales and brand loyalty. The post-feminist messages are hidden a little deeper. By urging parents to "talk to their daughters before the beauty industry does", Dove is diagnosing the problem as one created by capitalism and the beauty industry, not the deeply rooted social inequality that has existed in this country since its founding. The heart of post-feminism is the rendering of feminism as irrelevant. By portraying the solution to media brainwashing of young girls as a corporate appeal to parents to have a chat with their kids, as opposed to the more radical feminist objective of replacing the current oppressive system with a more equitable social structure, Dove simultaneously divests feminist ideas of their radical meaning and disregards the feminist movement as a solution.

VII. REAL BEAUTY SKETCHES VIDEO

The Dove Real Beauty sketches video went viral in April 2013. In fact, it was ranked the most viral video of the year by *Advertising Age,* with over 62 million views. The three-minute-long video begins with an FBI forensic artist asking various women (hereafter referred to as the subjects) to describe their facial features to him in order to create a sketch. At the prompting of the sketch artist, the subjects self-consciously critique themselves and describe their worst features. Next, another round of participants are asked to describe the subjects, with whom they have previously interacted. In contrast to the subjects, the second group of participants are much kinder and flattering in their descriptions. In a dramatic reveal, the

subjects view the two sketches of themselves side-by-side—one made based on their own descriptions and the other based on other participants' perceptions of them—and emotionally take in and comment on the differences between the two images. In every case, the second sketch is significantly more attractive than the first. The video closes with the words "You are more beautiful than you think".

First and foremost, the language in the Real Beauty Sketches video bolsters the beauty myth by implying that female beauty is not only the most valuable and important aspect of a woman, but that being attractive is key to happiness. One subject says outright, "[Beauty] impacts the choices and the friends we make, the jobs we apply for, how we treat our children. It couldn't be more critical to our happiness". Second, the video promotes post-feminist values by pointing the finger at women for having negative self-evaluations. One subject states, "We spend a lot of time as women analyzing and trying to fix the things that aren't quite right". Apparently it is women's fault for being too critical of themselves, not the fault of the media and corporations like Unilever that bombard consumers with unrealistic beauty images.

Post-feminist ideology is also seen through the visual aspects of the campaign. As a backlash against feminist gains, post-feminism trivializes or attempts to make feminist goals irrelevant. In the case of the Real Beauty Sketches video, Dove diminishes the importance of diversity that is highlighted by third wave and global feminism. Physically, the subjects in the ad form a very homogenous group. The four women with primary speaking parts in the video are young, white, and slender. Of those four, three have blonde hair and blue eyes. There are four non-white individuals who make brief appearances in the ad, but out of the three-minute video, they are shown for less than 15 seconds. Instead of challenging the beauty ideal, this lack of diversity only serves to reinforce the glorification of thinness, whiteness, and blondeness.

Finally, the sketch artist in the video is male. This means that in the ad, the subjects' view of themselves is first filtered through the male perspective. The notion that women should be free of the male gaze is consistent across almost all branches of feminism. In particular, second wave feminism highlights the importance of the female voice in gender discussions. The fact that the Dove ad chose to have a male figure essentially tell the subjects in the video how they should think and feel about their own bodies speaks volumes about the true nature of the CFRB.

Again, the Real Beauty Sketches video attempts to create brand loyalty among female consumers by associating their brand with the feminist values of self-respect and personal strength. However, the ad refuses to acknowledge the deeper reasons behind why women feel so uncomfortable in their own skin, and Dove fails to recognize that the industry they are a part of is a major contributor to women's low self-value, self-esteem, and self-worth. Furthermore, the video takes the scapegoating of these issues to a new level (beyond that of *Onslaught*) by placing the blame not on the beauty industry, but on women as a group. After all, as post-feminist doctrine dictates, social inequality based on gender is a thing of the past. We are an egalitarian society. Therefore, it *must* be the fault of women if they judge their own appearance too harshly.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to examine and explain the ways in which The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty appropriates feminist themes, to the detriment of female consumers. While CRFB provides a limited critique of the American beauty ideal, it ultimately promotes what Naomi Wolf described as the beauty myth and utilizes feminist consumerism to sell Dove products. Dove is not the first company to appropriate feminist themes to sell consumer goods.

As Johnston and Taylor point out, "corporations have a long history of incorporating emancipatory ideals into marketing campaigns, often with limited transformative outcomes" (941). For example, the Virginia Slims "You've come a long way baby" marketing campaign of the 1960's used feminist themes of independence to sell their highly-addictive, cancer-causing products. Advertisers and advertising agencies have found a way to make feminism work for them instead of against them. All they have to do is chain their products to feminist tenets and *voilà!*, political concepts like liberation and equality are transformed into personal, private desires that can be achieved through commodity purchasing (Gill 39). This blending of feminist thought with corporate profit imperatives illustrates that not every discussion of gender ideals is equally feminist or equally committed to eliminating institutionalized gender equality, "nor do they equally challenge the naturalization of women's subordinate status as it intersects with inequalities of class, race, and ethnicity". (Johnston and Taylor 948). This is clearly seen in the case of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty.

From the ads produced by Dove, it is obvious that the CFRB is intended to position the company as a brand concerned about women's health and well-being, and subsequently stimulate purchasing behavior among target audiences that care about the issues the campaign highlights. This strategy is diametrically opposed to the CFRB's stated aim to "redefine" what beauty means to women. But what can consumers expect from a company that belongs to the beauty industry, a business that "perpetuates and institutionalizes gender inequality by placing an inordinate emphasis on the personal appearance of women [by] reproducing largely unattainable aesthetic standards and perpetuating misogynist and harmful cultural practices" such as plastic surgery (Johnston and Taylor 946)?

The Dove Vote Ads, *Onslaught,* the Real Beauty Sketches video, and indeed the entire CFRB, perpetuate the beauty myth by promoting the ideology that beauty is a universal quality

that all women must want to embody. All three advertising tactics analyzed by this paper make it clear to consumers that "the social imperative for women to be and feel beautiful is not up for negotiation" (Johnston and Taylor 954). Why this social imperative exists or how to eliminate it are never examined, further identifying the campaign as an insincere feminist discourse.

Additionally, the CFRB advocates feminist consumerism as their primary form of social commentary (Johnston and Taylor 961). The campaign's critique of narrow and oppressive beauty ideology is weakened by its dual and contradictory goals of promoting self-acceptance while attempting to increase sales and profits. Such "feminism" also "tends to obscure and minimize both structural and institutionalized gender inequalities that are difficult to resolve and that might cause negative emotional associations with brands" (Johnston and Taylor 960). It is unclear whether Dove believes that viewers are either too oblivious or too unconcerned with the contradictions within the campaign to denounce it, or whether the goal of CFRB is to actually to inflame women's insecurities, even as the company claims to denounce the exploitation of these insecurities by other sources (Piety 82). However, it seems reasonable to conclude that Unilever and Dove do not want women to closely examine or overcome anxieties about their physical appearance "any more than the makers of cigarettes want the warning labels to effectively dissuade smokers from smoking" (Piety 82).

This examination of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty speaks to the need to promote and spread the feminist consciousness, the "recognition by women that they are treated unequally as a group and that their subordination is socially created and maintained by a system that can be replaced, through collective action, by a more equitable social structure" (Renzetti, Curran, and Maier 13). As corporations will almost certainly always be motivated by the need to meet the bottom line, it is only this type of critical consciousness that can begin to eliminate the dominant beauty ideology. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all consumers and citizens

who want to move towards a more egalitarian society to develop this consciousness in order to critically examine all forms of advertising and the motivations behind it.

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Appendix

Figure 1

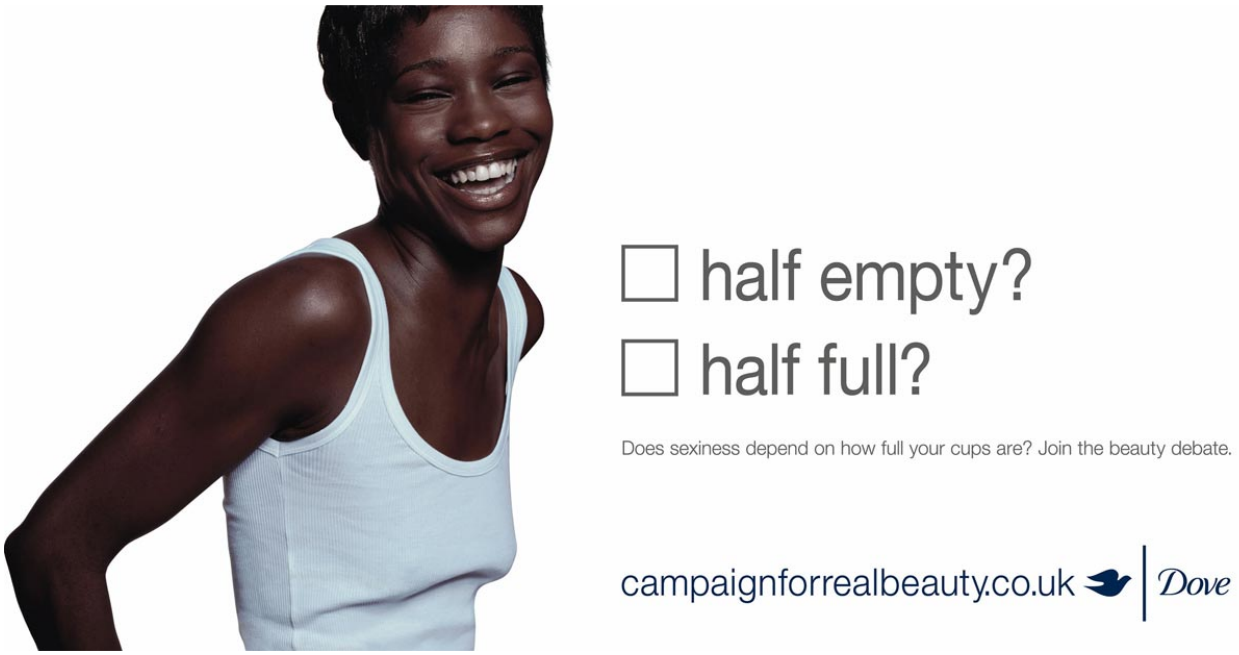

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

grey?
gorgeous?
Why can't more women feel glad to be grey? Join the beauty debate.
campaignforrealbeauty.co.uk
Dove