

BRANDING “REAL” SOCIAL CHANGE IN DOVE’S CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BEAUTY

Dara Persis Murray

This article examines the cause branding strategy of The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) as a case study in the production and consumption of contemporary popular meanings of feminism, social change, female citizenship, and female beauty in global consumer culture. A feminist semiotic analysis of the print, television, and new media texts that launched CFRB and its brand extensions reveals a juxtaposition in its “real beauty” messaging: signs reference a key opposition in feminist politics (liberation and oppression) while dictating a beauty ideology that encompasses appearance and behavior. Further, the texts situate the brand as the site for female activism about the dominant ideology of beauty; this strategy positions the corporation to usurp the feminist role of engendering social change for women and displaces the influential mentoring role away from women who share girls’ everyday lives onto an agent of institutional power. Finally, the author argues that this postfeminist-supported campaign encourages the global spread of and individuals’ enlistment in postfeminist citizenship via becoming a “real beauty” who self-brands her neoliberal identity ideologically and materially in the name of empowerment. This “social change” denies agency regarding beauty, sanctions postfeminist citizenship, and holds danger for future meanings and practices of feminism.

KEYWORDS cause branding; beauty ideal; commodity feminism; postfeminism; interactivity; self-branding

In June 2010, the Dove Movement for Self-Esteem launched at the G(irls) 20 Summit. Modeled after the G20 Summit, this convention brought together young women from the same countries¹ represented at the G20 Summit to discuss education, health, and economic initiatives that could stimulate girls’ activism and advancement in their communities. The ideological intersection of the Movement (a brand extension of Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty, or CFRB) and the G(irls) 20 Summit reflects the complex and often problematic meanings of feminism that circulate in popular culture: the blending of active female citizenship with empowerment via consumption in the marketplace.

This paper explores CFRB’s branding strategy, wherein its “real beauty” messaging merges co-opted feminist discourse and “a postfeminist sensibility” (Gill 2007, p. 254). A feminist semiotic analysis suggests that, under a guise of corporate altruism that democratizes female beauty, CFRB endorses global postfeminist citizenship. The findings

suggest that CFRB may reflect a social change in the relationship between corporations and audiences that carries perilous meanings for the future roles of feminists and practices of female citizenship in global consumer culture. CFRB offers a rich site for unpacking the production and consumption of popular meanings of feminism, social change, female citizenship, and female beauty at this cultural moment.

Dove Gets the Word Out

Dove is a brand of personal care products such as soaps, body washes, and body lotions manufactured by the Unilever Corporation. Since 1957, Dove's mainstay product has been the Beauty Bar. In 2002, Unilever reassessed Dove's marketing strategy with its public relations firm, Edelman, and its advertising/marketing agency, Ogilvy & Mather, to create a unified global image to generate brand loyalty. Discussing her view of the global brand, Ogilvy's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Shelly Lazarus stated, "It means figuring out what is universal about the brand—those things that transcend where it happens to be manufactured, or where it started" (O'Barr, Lazarus & Moreira 2008). Lazarus's statement indicates that in today's market, a brand needs to reach audiences' emotions by building a platform that drives ideological alliance with the corporate identity before the act of material consumption.

CFRB was largely shaped by women in industry and as research subjects. Female members of Ogilvy & Mather's CFRB team included Lazarus, two creative directors, an art director, a writer, and producer. Lazarus is a graduate of Smith College (an all-women's institution listing numerous feminist icons among its alumni), where she sat on its Board of Trustees. Although Lazarus has not publicly aligned herself with feminism, others have identified her as "a strong feminist... Yet Lazarus's feminist love of economic empowerment prevents her from acknowledging the ways in which capitalism can hurt the powerless" (Dyer 2004, p. 191). Moreover, Dove commissioned women² to direct its foundational research and conduct much of the Campaign's research.

The construction of CFRB was based on Dove's 2003 global research study, "The Real Truth About Beauty." This research involved the participation of thirty-two hundred women, ages eighteen through sixty-four, in ten countries, in a twenty to twenty-five-minute long telephone interview. The study found that less than 2 percent of women feel beautiful; 75 percent want representations of women to reflect diversity through age, shape, and size; and 76 percent want the media to portray beauty as more than physical (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott & D'Agostino 2004). These responses suggested a market for a new philosophy of beauty that was "a great opportunity to differentiate the brand from every [other] beauty brand" (Fielding, Lewis, White, Manfredi & Scott 2008), according to Alessandro Manfredi, Dove's Global Brand Director. CFRB has been identified as a cause marketing effort (Lachover & Brandes 2009), which associates corporate identities with social problems to benefit the corporate image, "distracting attention from their [the corporation's] connections as to why these social problems continue to exist" (Stole 2008, p. 21). This article advances that CFRB is a *cause branding* strategy that merges messages of corporate "concern and commitment for a cause" (Cone 2000) with the participation of women and girls for the same social goals, further concealing corporate aims.

In line with their findings, Dove announced its challenge to the dominant ideology of beauty: it would feature "real" women and girls of "various ages, shapes and sizes" (Campaign for Real Beauty 2008). The campaign launched in England in 2004, and was soon exported to Canada and the United States; CFRB is currently marketed in thirty-five

countries.³ The branding strategy was executed through television and print advertising, billboards, new media, and national and grassroots outreach. The Dove Self-Esteem Fund is a brand extension that serves as the site for in-person and online workshops that provide "self-esteem toolkits" for girls and "parent kits" for mothers/mentors. In the United States, the Fund has partnered with multiple national nonprofit girls' organizations (Girl Scouts, Girls Inc., and Boys & Girls Clubs of America) to facilitate these workshops. As an example of CFRB's international events that engage female audiences, Dove "call[ed] on women from the Middle East to write about someone they find beautiful and the reasons they see a different kind of 'real beauty.'" Participants could be treated to a luxury five-star treatment for two" (Dove Exposes the Beauty Myth 2007) in return. The Dove Movement for Self-Esteem launched in Canada and the United States in Fall 2010.

In the worldwide exportation of CFRB texts,⁴ Dove positioned their global brand through unified messaging that translates its main idea in images and language suiting the customs of each target geographic area. This analysis interrogates the branding texts launched in the United States: six print texts that communicate the "real beauty" ideology, a television commercial and a viral video ("True Colors" and "Evolution," respectively) that promote the Fund, and a website that advances the Movement.

Meaning Making about "Real Beauty": Revealing Textual Meanings through Semiotics

Semiotics is a useful approach for teasing out denotative and connotative meanings in media texts. Interrogating signs' oppositional relations is central to examinations of ideological meaning and power (Williamson 1978), as illuminating differences in meaning leads to an understanding about the unfamiliar by comparing it with the familiar. The semiotic analysis presented here decodes the ways in which CFRB's signs about "real beauty" communicate meanings of liberation and oppression. It unpacks CFRB's print texts via their language, logos, and positioning of bodies, thereby linking connotative chains of meaning that exploit similarity and difference (Danesi 2002). To analyze CFRB's television advertisement and viral video, the latter of which bears similarity to the codes and conventions of television, media scholar John Fiske's (2000) work is helpful. These analytical categories include camera work, lighting, editing, music, casting, setting, costume, make-up, and action.

Signs develop through social convention and audiences interpret them through learned social codes that cohere to maintain hegemony (Seiter 1992). For semiotician Roland Barthes, signs contribute to the creation of social myths, which convey social and political meanings (Bignell 1997, p. 22). The myth's veracity is shaped by its "distortion or forgetting of alternative messages, so that the myth appears to be exclusively true, rather than one of a number of different possible messages" (1997, p. 22). At this level of signification, many connotations attach to a sign to comprise a social myth, such as "real beauty." Myth in CFRB is examined as a means of branding the corporation as a feminist advocate for women (although this strategy oppresses women) as well as a process of self-branding women and girls as empowered "real beauties" (although they circulate in culture as signs of corporate identity).

A Feminist Perspective on Beauty

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the beauty and fashion industries have produced powerful media images communicating the dominant ideology of female beauty

as ultra-thin, tall, sexual bodies. Consumption of these images has resulted in a cultural norm of women and girls disciplining their bodies (Bordo 2003). The beauty industry's discourse connects ideological and physical nonconformity to the dominant ideology with a woman's inability to fulfill her gender role or experience happiness (Bartky 1990). The struggle of women and girls to physically emulate media images has manifested itself in eating disorders and body image issues, while the lack of a fulfilled identification may result in low self-esteem (Kilbourne 1999).

Dove's stated call to arms echoes feminist and feminist media studies scholarship that addresses how representations in popular culture convey often-problematic meanings of gender and beauty. In its advocacy of women's rights and egalitarian roles, the feminist position argues for social change of oppressive social structures (Dworkin 1974). By contrast, the postfeminist position contends that gender equality and female empowerment have been achieved in the public sphere. Postfeminism has immense power in western culture, as noted by feminist media studies scholar Rosalind Gill, who names our current time a "postfeminist media culture" (2007, p. 249). Significantly, she advances that postfeminism can be interpreted as "a sensibility" (2007, p. 254) whose messaging includes:

the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; the articulation or entanglement of feminist and antifeminist ideas... and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. (Rosalind Gill 2007)

The postfeminist position easily aligns with corporate interests, situating messages of women's freedom in the marketplace as "empowered consumer[s]" (Tasker & Negra 2007, p. 2). This identity lies at the intersection of consumerism and neoliberal governmentality, thereby separating meanings of female citizenship from civic engagement (McRobbie 2008, p. 533). The emergent neoliberal postfeminist citizen links meanings of empowerment and choice to ideological and material consumption.

The postfeminist citizen's pursuit of beauty engages her consumer power and self-governance, aligning her identity with the goals of institutional power. In postfeminist media culture, the body is a site of attention for the postfeminist citizen since it is promoted as integral to female identity (Gill 2007, p. 255). Consumption of the dominant ideology of beauty involves absorbing representations and meanings of hypersexual women and, increasingly, girls. Agreement with these messages may make it difficult for postfeminist citizens to understand their sexuality in "healthy, and progressive ways" (Durham 2008, p. 39). This feminist analysis will consider the political, social, and economic meanings in CFRB's texts and address how female identity may be shaped as postfeminist citizenship through the myth of "real beauty."

Self-Branding by Embracing Popular Feminism

A strategy for accomplishing audience identification with texts is the co-option of discourse; importantly, such appropriation highlights social issues as a means of generating sales (Danesi 2002). Alignment with co-opted subcultural signs allows consumers to think of themselves as insurgents; yet, since their rebellion occurs through consumerism, they do not "pay the social price of true non-conformity and dissent" (Danesi 2002, p. 197).

Sociologist Robert Goldman terms this tactic “commodity feminism,” wherein advertisers attempt “to reincorporate the cultural power of feminism” (Goldman 1992, p. 130) and, in so doing, depoliticize the feminist message.

Commodity feminism takes on new meaning in a consumer culture characterized by branding, a marketing strategy that trademarks corporate identity and is a “social, economic and existential reality” (Arvidsson 2006, p. 14). Branding utilizes techniques of persuasion to make the brand become a seamless part of individuals’ everyday lives. Media scholar Adam Arvidsson argues that a brand’s value arises from its strategies that “manage and program human communication and appropriate the ethical surplus—the common—that it produces as a sort of value” (Arvidsson 2006, p. 13). Thus, when people purchase a brand based on the corporate identity that has been attached to it, socialization occurs through a common association with the brand. Their socialization, then, is mediated through the brand’s role in their lives, and their attachment to the brand secures its place in culture and social networks.

Branding enlists audiences to support a corporate brand identity that is managed by the corporation to produce its desired outcome. In turn, audiences’ agency is limited by corporate desires because “Brands are a kind of de-territorialized factory where the productive mass intellectuality and the new forms of surveillance” (Arvidsson 2006, p. 94) converge in consumer culture. Importantly for this study, cause branding is a specific type of branding that blends corporate and individual identities through brand communication and audience participation. Cause branding “falls at the intersection of corporate strategy and citizenship and is fast becoming a ‘must do’ practices [sic] for the 21st century” (Cone 2000), therefore positioning corporations to implement their identities to attract and retain consumers through a depth of involvement that draws on their emotions, actions, and identities to drive brand commitment.

It is important to consider the practice of self-branding when thinking about girls and women who consume cause branding messages. While media studies scholars have examined the meanings of textual signs, a study of current consumer culture entails an exploration of the ways in which individuals are encouraged to become a self-branded “commodity sign” (Hearn 2008, p. 201) using “the narrative and visual codes” (Hearn 2008, p. 198) promoted by institutional power (corporations, advertisers, and so on). Self-branding suggests that the audience-as-sign is a cultural product that sits at the nexus of consumed media messages, social interactions, and identity development shaped by postfeminist media culture. This analysis considers how CFRB’s meanings of popular feminism and social change convey the message that audiences should self-brand as postfeminist “real” beauties.

The Current Study: Liberation and Oppression in “Real Beauty”

This section presents a feminist semiotic analysis of CFRB’s print, television, and new media texts. These branding texts will be presented in chronological order of their entry into popular culture. The myth of “real beauty” will be teased out through a textual interrogation of the theme of liberation and oppression.

CFRB Print Texts

CFRB’s texts integrate feminist politics from the three waves⁵ through the pictorial signs of “real” women and the use of feminist discourse to foster audience identification

based on physical attributes, age, and generational feminist politics. The pictorial signs of women signify their age, which corresponds with a feminist wave, and all the women are photographed against a white background. These images inaugurate the campaign's mission with representations of five women of distinctly varied ages, signifying a unification of women from the three waves. The first word of CFRB—"Campaign"—acknowledges a political intention. Linguistic signs in the CFRB texts connote the politics of the feminist waves: specifically, the first wave's focus on suffrage; the second wave's focus on collective—"we"—political action by women; and the third wave's focus on individual difference—in gender, ethnicity, race, etc.—or micro-politics. The print launch comprised six images: portraits of five women (three close-ups of faces and two body shots at a distance) and one composite picture of them.⁶ The five women pose with questions that address the dominant ideology of beauty; each question offers two options as a response. The CFRB manifesto accompanies the composite image, stating:

For too long, beauty has been defined by narrow, unattainable stereotypes. It's time to change all that. Because Dove believes real beauty comes in many shapes, sizes, colors and ages. It's why we started the campaign for real beauty. And why we hope you'll take part. Together, let's think, talk, debate and learn how to make beauty real again. Cast your vote at campaignforrealbeauty.com. (Dove Manifesto 2004)

The three close-up photos represent women from each wave. Their images are accompanied by ballot boxes next to descriptive labels, posed as questions: "wrinkled? wonderful?" (First Wave), "gray? gorgeous?" (Second Wave) and "flawed? flawless?" (Third Wave) The dark-skinned ninety-ish woman wearing a colorful headscarf smiles, with the text beside her asking, "Will society ever accept old can be beautiful?" This query signifies the difficulties involved in changing societal views regarding the role of women (First Wave; Figure 1). The smiling fifty-ish Caucasian woman wears a black turtleneck and, looking over her shoulder at the audience, the text beside her raises the only question of those in this set that invites discussion, rather than a yes/no response: "Why aren't women glad to be gray?" This question signifies the consciousness-raising ideology of dialogue relevant to her era (Second Wave). The text beside the twenty-ish, red-haired Caucasian woman, wearing a white tank top, poses a question that seemingly derives from her freckled appearance, "Does beauty mean looking like everyone else?" This inquiry signifies the ideology of difference in her wave (Third Wave; Figure 2).

Additionally, two women belonging to the Third Wave are photographed from head to thighs and are presented next to the ballot box signifier. One image ("half empty? half full?"; Figure 3) depicts a slim, smiling, short-haired, small-breasted black woman in a white tank top and jeans with her hands in her back pockets; the text beside her breast questions, "Does sexiness depend on how full your cups are?" This phrasing suggests optimism or pessimism, an intertextual reference to the rhetorical expression, "Is the glass half empty or half full?" The other image ("oversized? outstanding?"; Figure 4)⁷ depicts a full-figured, smiling, large-breasted Caucasian woman in a strapless black cocktail dress with hands crossed behind her head; the text, positioned at her hips, asks, "Does true beauty only squeeze into a size 6?" Both of their confidently smiling visages connote an optimistic, "real beauty" answer to the ballot box question posed next to them. The full-figured woman has a confident posture, with arrows created by her arms and elbows that direct the audience to the bare skin above her breasts and on her arms. The thin woman draws attention to her lean body by positioning her hands at her back, which highlights her small circumference;



Figure 1

“wrinkled? wonderful?” Copyright 2004 Ogilvy & Mather.

her mid-section, clothed in a white tank top, blends in with the background, again highlighting her slim physique. Likewise, the freckled woman (Figure 2) reveals her thin upper body through a barely-there tank top, its placement offering another meaning of “flawed? flawless” as referencing her breast size. The representations of these Third-Wave women problematize the cultural issues of breast size and body weight that signify female sexuality. Women, regardless of race or class, have attempted to resolve self-esteem problems arising from a perceived deficit in these sites on the body through potentially self-harming diets and/or plastic surgery. The casting of these women, however, based on their physical attributes, inherently objectifies these images, as their bodies are employed by Dove to promote ideological and economic consumption by audiences.

The composite representation of all five women is accompanied by the CFRB manifesto. Their images appear in a strip above the linguistic signifiers, beginning on the left with the First-Wave woman. Her image stands apart from the group, as she is separated



Figure 2
"flawed? flawless?" Copyright 2004 Ogilvy & Mather.

by more space and appears to be of a slightly larger size. In addition, her representation is the only one that differs from the individual ballot box image, as here she is cropped mid-breast and thus some of her clothing is visible; also, in this composite image her head is not cropped. Her bright headscarf, white strapless top with a black horizontal line (the only clothing that blends black and white), front facing body positioning, and location as the first woman in the strip of images, all draw attention to her image as the most dominant, connoting her wave's leadership role in the feminist movement. In relation to her pictorial sign, the CFRB mission statement connotes that Dove, like the First-Wave feminists, is an agent of social change. However, the corporate message is visually constructed as more important than the women: the paragraph of copy occupies more space on the page than all the women together, the text occupies more vertical space than the strip of photos, and the copy concludes with a blue color whose length and vibrancy are more visually compelling than the women. Further, this blue copy relays information about Dove and CFRB: the campaign website, the Dove icon, and a request to "Cast your vote." The copy emphasizes Dove as the organizer, catalyst, and vehicle for change: "it's time to change all that...it's why we started the campaign for real beauty." CFRB's texts connote a



Figure 3
 “half empty? half full?” Copyright 2004 Ogilvy & Mather.

hegemonic relationship between the “real” women (who represent the liberation of women) and the corporation (as the site for the elimination of women’s oppression). In this sense, the texts are a means to position Dove to usurp the power of women and the feminist movement in this mission of “real beauty.” CFRB’s strategy raises questions about the politics of women’s participation in the Campaign, as will be discussed.

The message of “real beauty” in these texts functions as a social myth wherein the denotative signs of liberation oppose the connotative signs of oppression in the depictions of “real” women. The central meaning of “real beauty” in these texts is connected to a voting device; the linguistic sign “cast your vote” connotes the feminist value of suffrage, however, CFRB is not an election. By tallying the votes on publicly displayed interactive billboards and on the CFRB website, the women become objects for approval or disapproval by the “real” judgment of global audiences, with potentially disempowering consequences for the “real” women. Moreover, CFRB’s oppressive construction of these signifiers—wherein the voter is able to select only one option—does not allow for debate,



Figure 4
“oversized? outstanding?” Copyright 2004 Ogilvy & Mather.

and also limits the audience’s freedom of expression. Such devices facilitate Dove’s authority to oppress “real women” and the audiences who identify with and even judge them.

Self-Esteem Fund: Television and Viral Video

Dove took CFRB’s messaging “a step further and [focused on] talk about self-esteem” (Branding Evolution 2007) by launching two texts in 2006 to brand the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, which was established by and is primarily financed by Unilever/Dove. These texts encourage ideological identification for girls and adult female audiences (mentors/-mothers). Girl audiences may identify with the “real” girls in CFRB’s television advertisement and viral video through sharing their physical attributes, ages, and, significantly, their emotional states. These texts are designed to arouse emotions against the dominant ideology of beauty and garner support for “real beauty.” The mentors’/mothers’

identification is mobilized through acceptance of the Fund's leadership and mission: to save girls' psychological and physical health via an emphasis on "self-esteem" (a crucial component of the "real beauty" ideology). Women can also economically bond with Dove by making donations to the Fund.

"True Colors" debuted during the February 2006 Superbowl XL Game, at a cost of \$2.4 million dollars for forty-six seconds. The spot ran during this time to make contact with the largest audience possible, in keeping with Dove's goal (which was achieved) of reaching one million young girls by 2008. In "True Colors," Dove represents itself as a facilitator and problem-solver, declaring: "let's change their minds/we've created the Dove self-esteem fund/because every girl deserves to feel good about herself/and see how beautiful . . . she really is/ help us . . . get involved at" the CFRB website. In "Evolution" (launched eight months later), Dove establishes its credibility as a leader by exposing the construction of unattainable beauty at the initial site of production (the studio set) and in the technological space (the software program, Photoshop). At the end of the text, Dove asks girls, mothers, and mentors to "Take part in the Dove Real Beauty Workshop for Girls" through the CFRB website.

"True Colors" offers a range of emotions in the expressions of "real" girls of various sizes and ethnicities. The emotional song, "True Colors," is performed by The Girl Scouts Chorus. At first, the girls' faces reflect innocence or ambivalence, bolstered by linguistic signs connoting feelings of victimization—"hates her freckles," "thinks she's ugly," "wishes she were blonde," "afraid she's fat"—because they do not meet the dominant ideology of beauty. The lyrics simultaneously elevate the poignant portraits and offer an intimate relationship with the person ("I") in the music and the girls in the text: "Show me a smile then, don't be unhappy, can't remember when, I last saw you laughing, If this world makes you crazy and you've taken all you can bear, You call me up, because you know I'll be there." Halfway through the video, an emotional shift occurs following the encouraging syntagm, "Let's change their minds" against a white background. The lyrics also become positive: "And I'll see your true colors shining through." Accompanying this phrase is a group of smiling girls euphorically pumping their hands in the air, an intertextual reference to the feminist iconic image of "Rosie the Riveter," whose slogan was "We Can Do It!" Another phrase, "We've created the Dove Self-Esteem Fund," appears next, also against a white background. Smiling girls appear throughout the rest of the text, accompanying Dove's announcement of leadership via the Fund and the lyrics: "I see your true colors, And that's why I love you, So don't be afraid, To let them show, You're beautiful like a rainbow." The white background on which the pivotal text for the film's message appears signifies light, symbolizing Dove as the caring narrator ("I") and the ray of light illuminating the public perception of female beauty and girls' "real beauty."

"Evolution" launched on YouTube at no cost to Dove or Ogilvy & Mather other than its production expenses. Near its commencement, a screen displays the words "a Dove film." Although Dove's "film" is brief (seventy-four seconds) and not presented in a traditional cinematic space (like a movie theater), this label allows Dove to appropriate the aims of feminist documentary filmmaking, which serves as a medium for raising social awareness (Byerly & Ross 2006). Two types of feminist filmmaking emerged during the second wave: one offered alternative images to gender stereotypes in the service of self-expression, and the other deconstructed the film medium "to expose the ideological (patriarchal) apparatus beneath" (de Lauretis paraphrased by Byerly & Ross 2006, p. 84). CFRB employs both: "True Colors" (although not stated as a "film") offers an alternate

component of beauty (self-esteem) wherein self-perception of beauty does not rely on conformity to the social standard, while "Evolution" exposes the ideology of beauty through its deconstruction of a media text.

"Evolution" depicts a woman's makeover using the tools (physical, technological) that are employed by the beauty industry to transform a "real" woman into a supermodel. The subject appears to be in her twenties and sits on a stool, staring without affect into the camera. Bright lights suddenly turn on; the footage speeds up in a choppy, fast-forward simulation; and music plays in synchrony with the rapid projection of images. The woman is presented as a site of work for make-up artists and hair stylists. During the transformation, the camera zooms in on her face, removing any indicators of her tank top to imply a state of undress. The image is manipulated using Photoshop, and her final representation as the dominant beauty appears on a billboard that two girls walk past and briefly acknowledge, connoting acceptance of the manufactured image as a cultural norm.

The syntagm at the conclusion of the film, "no wonder our perception of beauty is distorted," implicitly acknowledges a social problem that relates to the dominant ideology. However, the ambiguous use of the word "our" suggests that Dove (and perhaps other corporations) as well as women, men, and countless other factors are culpable for the problematic of beauty. Finally, the logo that appears with the syntagm, "the Dove self-esteem fund" shows the upward flight of three blue doves in ascending size (from small to large). The color blue symbolizes "trust, loyalty, wisdom, confidence, intelligence, faith, truth, and heaven" (Color Wheel Pro 2010). The three doves perhaps symbolize the corporation/institutional power, the mother/mentor, and the daughter/girl, although which set of doves symbolizes which conceptual pair is ambiguous. Their upward direction connotes unity and positive direction for the future. However, this optimistic sign diverts from the messaging, which positions the corporation to usurp the feminist role of engendering social change for women and displaces the influential role of the women who share girls' everyday lives onto institutional power. Moreover, through the Fund, Dove asks mothers/mentors and girls to endorse the oppressive female role as an ideological and material consumer.

Dove Movement for Self-Esteem

The Dove Movement for Self-Esteem is primarily an online branding strategy through social media and the corporate website. Achieving online popularity (over ten million views) and more popular discourse for the brand than "True Colors" (and for minimal cost), The Movement may be an effort drawing on the success of "Evolution" as a low cost, high impact text. It is a site of interactivity, a critical process for understanding the agency and subjectivity of users.

The Movement continues CFRB's global conversation about beauty with the aim of "building a world where women everywhere have the tools to inspire each other and the girls in their lives" (About the Movement 2010). The Movement and CFRB share the same ideology but use slightly different terms to suggest their own uniqueness and, perhaps, reinvention. For instance, CFRB does not appear on the Movement's site, but a link is offered to Dove's homepage on which CFRB is listed (though not prominently). Further, CFRB and the Movement have partnerships with the same nonprofit organizations but call them by different names (for CFRB, "self-esteem partners"; for the Movement, "partner organizations"). Much like the political intention in "Campaign," the word "Movement"

denotes a group that engages women's participation (like the feminist movement). This terminology displaces the feminist role more overtly than the Fund texts. The Movement emphasizes users' participation as a prerequisite for liberation, which may be likened to collective activism (similar to the Second Wave).

The Movement brings together the "real beauty" ideology from CFRB's print texts with the Fund's positioning of Dove as the site for women's and girls' activism. The centerpiece of the Movement is acceptance of its mission, which is executed when women and girls acknowledge their participation by signing a "declaration" to "Join the Movement." A declaration denotatively affords power to the audience by offering the opportunity to make a choice and assert oneself. Yet the Movement's language communicates a hegemonic relationship between the corporate leader and its followers, asking users to join "our Movement," "our vision," and "our cause." The declaration itself amounts to providing their email address, first and last name, zip code, and age, as well as an answer to an "optional" question: "What advice would you give to your 13 year old self? We'll collect these messages and deliver them to girls to build self-esteem in the next generation" (Our Vision: Join Us 2010).

Minimization of the only question that may stimulate self-care suggests that the purpose of the declaration is for Unilever/Dove to gather demographic information. After all, corporations can "expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments" (Jenkins 2006, p. 18) by using new media "designed to be more responsive to consumer feedback" (Jenkins 2006, p. 133). That the Movement may be using the declaration to create a list of consumers under the guise of participation for social change is not surprising: CFRB was formulated on the findings from a global research study and Dove has conducted numerous global and national studies⁸ throughout the Campaign. The Movement can be seen as a form of market research, and the Movement's participants are its research subjects. The work of media studies theorist Mark Andrejevic is of particular importance here, as he contends that it is critical to question the politics of participation by users, who may be involved in "the labor of detailed information gathering and comprehensive monitoring . . . in the name of their own empowerment . . . and to view such participation as a form of power sharing" (2007, p. 15). Scholarship on Dove's user-generated marketing raises issues of users' labor on behalf of the brand (Duffy 2010) and users' discourse may support the patriarchal view that women's role is to pursue the dominant ideology (Lachover & Brandes 2009). In light of these voices, the Movement's declaration serves as a contractual agreement between audiences and the "real beauty" ideology, whose potential for the liberation of women and girls is questionable. The myth of "real beauty" may be shaping subjectivities by enlisting audiences' labor, as will be discussed next.

Producing a Postfeminist Campaign and Self-Branded Postfeminist Citizenship

CFRB and its brand extensions (the Fund and the Movement) created and advanced a myth of "real beauty." This ideology mandates female audiences to practice psychological self-improvement and physical subjectification as a means of liberation from the dominant ideology of beauty. This section explores the production (concentrating on the politics of women's participation in CFRB) and potential consumption (in connection with self-branded identity and postfeminist citizenship) of "real beauty" to consider its promise to facilitate audience liberation.

In addition to the aforementioned participation of women from Ogilvy & Mather, CFRB's partnership with the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership further highlights women's involvement in this branding strategy. Woodhull is a nonprofit women's organization named after feminist Victoria Woodhull. Its website describes its partnership by employing the key words of feminist activism—"social change": "The Woodhull Institute of Ethical Leadership has partnered with the Dove CFRB to share success building tools through online training sessions that promote ethical development and empower women to act as agents of positive social change" (Woodhull 2007). Of note, Woodhull's co-founder and most public figure is Naomi Wolf, who may be known to popular audiences for her bestselling critique of the beauty industry, *The Beauty Myth*. Three years later, Wolf advocated a postfeminist position in her subsequent (and lesser known) book. However, for audiences who remember Wolf from her argument in *The Beauty Myth* and are not versed in postfeminism, this partnership may pose conflicting meanings of feminist involvement with the beauty industry. As one journalist notes, "To go from writing *The Beauty Myth* to touring with Dove and singing its praises is a big jump" (M.K. Johnson 2008). At the same time, the author optimistically queries whether Wolf is actually "spreading her message about the hypocrisy of the beauty industry, all on Dove's dime? Savvy audience members would certainly catch the irony, and Dove can laugh all the way to the bank. Everybody wins" (M.K. Johnson 2008).

Several "self-esteem" partners (nonprofit girls' organizations that draw on feminist ideologies) similarly bolster CFRB/Dove's credibility to audiences. The participation of these female-focused groups extends the brand into community spaces in a grassroots way that may read as "feminist" for popular audiences. These groups thereby function as a kin network that aids in the development of a CFRB community. The strategy surrounding Dove with these partnerships may operate to reduce popular attention to Unilever's other brands; after all, Unilever manufactures Slimfast (a diet plan), Fair & Lovely Fairness Cream (a skin lightening product), and Axe deodorant (whose advertisements, targeted at men, portray objectified women). Unilever's ownership structure suggests it is a site of fractured ideological credibility that circulates knotty popular meanings of feminism and social change.

By asking girls and women to partner with the corporate ideology in a similar manner as the aforementioned organizations, The Movement potentially enlists global postfeminist citizenship through the support of yet *another* oppressive beauty ideology. By signing the declaration, girls and women work to become neoliberal subjects who accept responsibility to develop and perform Dove-approved "self-esteem" behaviors (requiring self-judgment and self-monitoring of one's emotional state) that are integral to the pursuit of "real beauty." Joining the Movement aligns its participants with neoliberal governmentality and, thus, postfeminist citizenship, as "Self-esteem is a technology of citizenship and self-government for evaluating and acting upon our selves so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to" (Cruikshank 1993, p. 330). Finally, audiences' compliance with the "real beauty" ideology allows Dove to distance itself from its cultural role as a producer of the dominant ideology by placing the responsibility for women's and girls' lack of self-esteem on themselves.

CFRB's cause branding strategy thereby engages female citizenship through consumerism. This fusion of participation in and consumption of "real beauty" suggests that female audiences will voluntarily shape their identity through the practice of self-branding. By branding themselves as "a real beauty," girls and women derive their identity from internalization of the meanings and representations produced by Dove to align themselves with the postfeminist citizen who obeys CFRB's rules in the name of

empowerment. Becoming "a real beauty" necessitates ideological and material labor on the self that originates from acceptance of the "real beauty" myth: support of CFRB's hegemonic views of female beauty, agreement with Dove as the site for social change and female activism about beauty (even if it displaces the roles of feminists, mothers, and mentors in individuals' lives and in cultural ideology), work to achieve Dove's meaning of self-esteem, and embrace of women's traditional role as consumers.

While CFRB denotatively associates "real beauty" with diversity and independence, its connotative signs stand in stark contrast to those values. In fact, self-branding oneself as "a real beauty" enlists conformity: labor to become part of an "inventor[y] of branded selves" (Hearn 2008, p. 211) from which Dove profits "by packaging, branding them, and selling them back to themselves" (Hearn 2008, p. 209). Moreover, regardless of their awareness as self-branders, women and girls—by virtue of this process—become "global value subjects. They are product, producer, and consumer, but they do not control the means of their own distribution" (Hearn 2008, p. 213). By signing the Movement's declaration, women declare themselves postfeminist citizens whose labor and "real" identity serve the aims of institutional power.

The rationale for women's and feminists' support of CFRB may lie in the postfeminist belief that contemporary women are consumers with agency. Or, feminists might welcome CFRB's representations as a positive change in a mediascape that is otherwise saturated with the dominant ideology of beauty. It is important to stress, however, that the feminist task is to realize social change that revolutionizes social structures, not to support corporate strategies that seek audiences' brand attachment. While CFRB and the Movement do not liberate female audiences from an oppressive ideology of beauty, women's (and men's) participation in CFRB may have liberated CFRB/Dove from "a 'cluttered' [media] environment in which there are more and more messages [that] must have [to find] a way to break through the attendant noise" (Jhally 2003, p. 253) by developing a postfeminist-supported branding strategy.

Ultimately, it seems that "who wins" in CFRB's effort is the corporation. At first, CFRB resulted in enormous financial success for Dove and industry acclaim for Ogilvy & Mather and Edelman Public Relations, which spearheaded CFRB's marketing. Sales figures indicate that Dove's revenues increased following its launch: 12.5 percent in 2005 and 10.1 percent in 2006 (Neff 2007). In 2006, CFRB swept the highest awards⁹ in the advertising industry and its sister industry, public relations. In 2007, however, sales growth dwindled to 1.2 percent (Neff 2007), and industry pundits questioned whether sales were connected to advertisements for Dove's Pro-Age product line (featuring unclothed women over age fifty) that perhaps "went a step too far in embracing aging in all its naked, wrinkled and sagging glory" (Neff 2007). The same year, controversy over the realness of CFRB's texts may have impacted sales when retoucher Pascal Dangin implied in an interview that he had altered the Pro-Age texts (Collins 2008). While Dove denied any textual modifications and Dangin retracted his statements, the public realization that there had (or could have) been retouching may have generalized to a lack of textual and brand authenticity. In 2008, although the "brand reportedly gained \$1.2 billion in value" (Molitor 2008) since CFRB's launch, Dove's unhappiness with its sales led to a re-assessment of CFRB. The Movement may be CFRB's tactic to restore its integrity with audiences to bolster sales. More so than previous CFRB strategies, the Movement incites ideological brand commitment through focusing on women's "depth of involvement, the engagement, the participation and the commitment of moving people to take action" (Molitor 2008). The Movement may also be a

way for Dove to publicly emphasize the brand bond with consumers, thereby minimizing the role of industry insiders.

"Real beauty" is an oppressive ideology that reinforces the value of female beauty and its pursuit by garnering women's agreement with its values of ideological and material consumption. At its core is a paradox: while apparently decrying it, "real beauty" embraces conformity to hegemonic beauty standards through both corporate instigation for brand attachment and women's striving to be part of what they may feel is a positive beauty ideology. "Real beauty," then, is "diluted by its contradictory imperative to promote self-acceptance and at the same time increase sales by promoting women's consumption of products that encourage conformity to feminine beauty ideology" (Johnson & Taylor 2008, p. 962). CFRB's "real" women, whose beauty deviates from the beauty norm in size and/or color, lend credibility to the campaign and invite female audiences to self-brand as a "real beauty"; yet, this identity aligns with being a consumer of a corporate brand strategy that positions itself in the feminist role as an advocate for social change that promises to empower women. The stakes are high for audiences who agree with CFRB's meanings of "real beauty," and may intensify when such popularized meanings of empowerment are drawn on and reinforced as cultural norms by future brands. In addition, CFRB does not work to create awareness about female beauty as a social issue that has institutional underpinnings (for example, concretely addressing the links between eating disorders, body image issues, and beauty industry discourse/images). Like cause marketing, this cause branding strategy "is merely a cleverly disguised ploy to mask some of the fundamental problems for which the very same marketing forces are directly or indirectly responsible" (Stole 2008, p. 34). Within this consumer context, commercial connotations are attached to popular messages and practices of philanthropy (Stole 2008).

There is much work to be done to arrive at a strong collective feminist voice of what empowering female beauty means for current and future audiences. As feminist media studies scholar Angela McRobbie suggests, this action may "entail the resuscitation and re-conceptualization of feminist anti-capitalism" (2008, p. 548). The "real beauty" myth serves as a cautionary example of how institutional messaging about the democratization of female beauty connotes a hegemonic relationship between the corporation and female audiences, reframes the dominant ideology of beauty, and endorses the spread of postfeminist citizenship. CFRB's partnership between female cultural producers and a corporation is problematic at best.

Conclusion

There is a complicated relationship between corporate strategies and the production and consumption of popular meanings of feminism, social change, and female citizenship in postfeminist media culture. This study has argued that CFRB's cause branding strategy perpetuates an oppressive ideology of "real beauty" requiring a behavior ("self-esteem") that underscores neoliberal self-improvement benefiting the corporation's power. CFRB's textual signs revealed a significant theme in feminist politics (liberation and oppression) in the communication of the "real beauty" ideology, whose consumption may involve women's and girls' self-branding as "a real beauty" and postfeminist citizenship. Further research might unpack female audiences' meanings about "real beauty" and self-branding practices, as well as CFRB's messaging of "real beauty" and its interpretations in non-English speaking countries.

NOTES

1. Countries represented at The G(irls) 20 Summit and the G20 Summit are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK, USA and the European Union.
2. Women who participated included Dr. Jennifer Scott and Heidi D’Agostino of research firm StrategyOne; Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Harvard psychologist; and Dr. Susie Orbach, author of *Fat is a Feminist Issue*.
3. See “Welcome to Dove” for a list of countries.
4. Industry insiders confirmed that there is no single database for global CFRB texts. A search of texts in the major markets where CFRB was created (the UK, the US, and Canada) found minor differences in the images and language that did not substantially alter the messaging. The US texts were selected since they are among the first set of texts, the United States is a major market, and they were accessible. This analysis thus focuses on the US texts.
5. The feminist movement is generally regarded as comprising three “waves” whose dates are as follows: the first wave occurred from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s; the second wave occurred from the 1960s to the 1980s; the third wave began in the 1990s and characterizes the present time.
6. The author was granted permission to reproduce the First-Wave and Third-Wave portraits and Third-Wave body shots, but not the Second-Wave portrait and composite portrait of the women (these images, accordingly, are not included in the article).
7. The UK version says, “fat? fit?” and the Canadian version asks, “fat? fab?” These sentiments are strikingly similar to the US version.
8. “Beyond Stereotypes” (2005) collected information from 3,300 girls and women from ten countries; “Beauty Comes of Age” (2006) surveyed 1,450 women from nine countries; and “Real Girls, Real Pressure” (2008) surveyed 1,029 American girls.
9. Awards include: Cannes Advertising’s Grand Effie Award, Cannes’ Film Grand Prix and Cyber Grand Prix, Global Campaign of the Year by Advertising Age, Consumer Launch Campaign of the Year by PR Week, and Best of Silver Anvil Award from the Public Relations Society of America.

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Dara Persis Murray is a doctoral candidate in Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University, where she also completed a Certificate in Women's and Gender Studies. E-mail: darapm@rci.rutgers.edu

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