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The Prophets and Profits of Neoliberal Feminism in America

Molly Stambaugh
mstambaugh@pugetsound.edu

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The University of Puget Sound

The Prophets and Profits of
Neoliberal Feminism in America

Molly Stambaugh

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Faculty Advisor: Michael Benveniste

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Introduction

In recent years, the cooptation of feminist ideology by corporate and media agencies in America has markedly increased in frequency. This cooptation appeals to ideas of female empowerment and gendered liberation for the advancement of tenuously related and often conflicting causes. In *One Dimensional Woman*, Nina Power explores examples of these “politically opportunistic” appeals to feminist ideology, from the Bush presidency’s borrowed rhetoric of female liberation in calls for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, to conservative anti-abortion organizations’ appropriation of the term itself through naming practices (“Feminists for Life”) (7-8). Power determines that we currently face a “fundamental crisis” in the meaning of the term feminism, and the overall “political imagination of contemporary feminism is at a standstill. The perky, upbeat message of self-fulfillment and consumer emancipation masks a deep inability to come to terms with serious transformations in the nature of work and culture” (69).

Since the rise of third-wave feminism in the 1990’s, scholars have widely discussed the impossibility of reducing liberal feminism to a single set of ideological beliefs and political goals. Many believe that first and second-wave feminist movements demonstrated the limitations of liberal feminism in their failure to advance the interests of marginalized and minority women. Perhaps informed by these realizations, the popular imagination has largely set aside the political practice and rationality of liberal feminism (beyond a few key issues, like abortion rights) and entered a postfeminist age, characterized by the generally uncontested supposition that women’s structural equality has been realized. Films and television shows since the 1990’s have continuously recycled the postfeminist myth in successful career girl narratives like *Sex in the City*, in

which affluent, young, and usually white women find happiness through careers, romantic relationships, and consumer activity. Angela McRobbie argues that, in our postfeminist era, “Popular Feminism” has emerged, and through it “consumer culture finds a license to speak” on behalf of women, subordinating the female subject and discouraging the politics of earlier feminist struggles (533). Scholars employ a number of terms to describe this variety of feminism, like “commodity feminism” (Goldman) and “consumer feminism” (McRobbie), but they can all be placed within the rationality of neoliberal feminism.

Catherine Rottenberg contends that neoliberal rationality has “become the dominant mode of governance” in the United States:

This mode of governance is neither limited to the economic sphere nor to state policies, but rather ‘produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social...[it] is a dominant political rationality that moves to and from the management of the state to the inner workings of the subject, normatively constructing and interpellating individuals as entrepreneurial actors (420).

In the neoliberal mode of thought, “collective forms of action or well-being are eroded, and a new regime of morality comes into being...one that links moral probity even more intimately to self-reliance and efficiency,” undoing notions of collective social identity and justice (Rottenberg 421). Jodi Dean argues that neoliberalism presents the market as “the site of democratic aspiration,” and commercial choices—to buy or not to buy—as the “paradigmatic form of choosing” not only in consumer decisions, but also in political and social activity (22). From these two definitions of neoliberalism, I hope to establish

that neoliberal feminism has also become the dominant mode of engagement with women's rights in our moment, and that it selectively borrows ideology and rhetoric from liberal feminism while rearticulating them under its own rationality. The neoliberal feminist platform interrupts collective action by decentralizing political attention from the group to the individual and encouraging self-actualization and self-sufficiency as the means for economic and political advancement. I will examine three prominent mediums through which neoliberal feminist ideology is disseminated: Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty*, Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*, and the *Tumblr* campaigns "Who Needs Feminism" and "Women Against Feminism," both of which are shared widely across social media. In examining these neoliberal feminist movements, I will argue that the ideology is circulated not only by corporations like Dove and corporate self-help gurus like Sheryl Sandberg, but also by women and grassroots feminist groups to unprecedented extent.

Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty

The most lucrative, prominent, and well-established instance of corporate cooptation of liberal feminism is Dove's *Campaign For Real Beauty (CFRB)*. In 2003, Dove conducted a "global research study" to assess the body image issues faced by women. The study, which used a sample group of thirty-two hundred women, 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" (Murray 84). From these findings, marketers proceeded to overhaul Dove's branding strategy, engaging heavily with the discourse of the Body Positive Movement, and *CFRB* was launched in 2004 through a variety of media,

including television and print advertisements, online videos, and community and online outreach programs.

Dove's website states that *CFRB*'s mission is to broaden "the definition of beauty by challenging stereotypical conventions" and show women they "have the power to redefine what is beautiful" in themselves (*Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*). Dove's ads feature "real" women of varying ages, body types, and ethnicities, ostensibly without heavy makeup or photo retouching, although the practice of these claims has been widely disputed among critics. In the United States, the Dove-Self Esteem fund, a brand extension launched alongside *CFRB*, has teamed up with nonprofit groups like the Girl Scouts of America to distribute "self-esteem toolkits" and "parent kits" through online and in-person workshops (Murray 85).

Since *CFRB*'s launch, Dove has continued to run print and television ads, but its most impactful outlet has undoubtedly been social media. *CFRB*'s first viral video, "Evolution," documents the transformation of a model as she is professionally made up, photographed, and then dramatically edited with Photoshop. "Evolution" received widespread acclaim in the advertising industry, reinvigorating corporate interest in cause branding strategies related to women's self-image. Dove's "Real Beauty Sketches" ad has received over 66 million views on YouTube in the U.S. alone since its release in 2013, making it one of the most-viewed online ads of all time. User feedback, in the form of likes and dislikes, is 97.5% positive. At the start of the three-minute video (which Dove captions a "film"), a number of "real" women are asked to sit behind a curtain and describe themselves to a forensic sketch artist. In a succession of rapid cuts through interviews, each woman is highlighted describing features she considers unattractive—

one woman states that she has a “fat, rounder face,” others note their “big forehead” or “big chin”, and are all visibly uncomfortable with the process. The artist then proceeds to draw a second sketch based upon the women’s descriptions of one another after a brief prior meeting. When the women are shown the resulting sketches, the second sketch is unanimously considered more attractive and “happier” looking than the first (Fig. 1 and 2). All of the women tearfully admit that they are “more beautiful” than they previously thought. The video concludes with a young man and woman embracing, the tagline “you are more beautiful than you think,” and a gradual fade to the Dove logo.

Dove’s “real beauty” ads have been lauded by the advertising industry, dispersed widely on social media, and inspired an excess of copycat campaigns, a prominent example being Always’ viral “#Like a Girl” ad. While Dove has received a substantial amount of criticism for *CFRB*, this criticism is largely directed towards instances of corporate hypocrisy and not, as I intend to establish, participation in the systemic diffusion of neoliberal feminism. Critics point out that Dove’s parent corporation, Unilever, also owns AXE, whose body spray ads famously recycle the narrative of an average-looking man being mauled by highly sexualized, model-perfect women. Likewise, Unilever owns Fair and Lovely, a hygiene brand that sells skin-lightening lotions in Asia and the Middle East (“the first *fairness* crème in the world”). Like Dove, Fair and Lovely appeals to women’s empowerment through advertising and outreach programs; Fair & Lovely Hindustan’s statement of purpose is to “empower a woman to change her destiny” and “give underprivileged women the power to overcome all barriers & change their lives” (*Hindustan Unilever Ltd.*). These critics note that even Dove is

guilty of marketing products like firming, tanning, and anti-aging lotions, which seem to contradict the “real beauty” positive message of *CFRB*.

Most other criticisms of *CFRB* address its relentless prioritization of female beauty over more profound attributes like competence or intelligence, as if beauty confidence were the only means for empowerment. In an article for *Bitch Magazine*, Lindsay King-Miller writes, “Dove wants us to talk about why women don’t feel beautiful...[but] I want to talk about why that’s the only question they think is worth asking” (King-Miller). In addition, *CFRB*’s message is paradoxically dependent upon women’s perception that unrealistic body image standards continue to oppress them, because without negative media messages, Dove’s would be redundant and unnecessary. Thus, each ad serves not only to invite women to see their “real beauty,” but also to remind them that “ideal beauty” remains extant and inaccessible. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that Dove never advocates organized social action (petitions or boycotts) against the specific media outlets that perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards. Dara Persis-Murray employs semiotics to interpret “real beauty” itself as a structure of signification unifying women beneath Dove’s brand ideology:

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 compromise a social myth, such as ‘real beauty’ (Murray 85).

The degree to which criticism of Dove focuses on corporate hypocrisy and an oversimplification of women’s issues, while allowing the myth of “real beauty” to remain unchallenged even as it distorts existing meaning systems. Additionally, Dove encourages women to engage with the myth of “real beauty” through pseudo-political activities; women can “take the pledge” for “real beauty” on their brand website, and “cast votes” in response to beauty-affirmative ads (Fig 3). This mirroring of democratic practice is an essential quality of neoliberal feminist platforms, and the stated purpose of any such platform is inevitably to start or continue a “conversation,” a transparent but highly effective method for increasing online traffic. In successful liberal feminist movements of the past, structural change was the terminal goal of political activity, and not conversation for its own sake.

Throughout Dove’s *CFRB* messaging, *self-realization* is offered as the sole means by which individuals can find their “real beauty” and become empowered, and it is in this process that neoliberal feminist consciousness emerges. Dove implores women to reject the unrealistic beauty standards that lead them to insecurity, and to psychologically and emotionally reorganize their own perceptions of self. The project of improving the body becomes a project of improving the mind, and the successful realization of Dove’s message requires the attainment of an intangible quantity, confidence, with a similarly intangible outcome in mind—happiness. This is specifically articulated in *Real Beauty Sketches*, when a participant claims the experience has proven beauty self-confidence to be paramount because “it impacts the choices in friends that we make, the jobs we apply

for, how we treat our children. It impacts everything. It couldn't be more critical to your happiness" (doveunitedstates). In the transition from external self-improvement to internal self-improvement, Rosalind Gill and Ana Sofia Alias argue that "beauty becomes 'a state of mind,' not in a feminist sense that involves a rejection of and liberation from patriarchal appearance standards, but in a way that represents an *intensification* of pressure and its extensification from body work to psychic labor" (Gill 185). They conclude that this "move into the arena of subjectivity" needs to be examined as "new historical articulation of power-knowledge in Western societies, which highlights the interplay between neoliberal and postfeminist governmentality, emotional capitalism and the labor of self-confidence" (185). The objective of Dove's ads, individual happiness for consumers, is a reinstatement of neoliberal feminist ideology. The communal goal of economic or social equality fundamental to liberal feminism is discursively transformed into the highly subjective, individuated, and apolitical goal of happiness and fulfillment characteristic of neoliberal feminism. This newly "'empowered consumer'...lies at the intersection of consumerism and neoliberal governmentality" separated from the "meanings of female citizenship" that characterized liberal feminist "civic engagement" in historical movements of the past (McRobbie 2008, p. 533).

Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In Campaign

Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's instant bestseller, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, was launched in combination with her nonprofit organization, Lean In, on March 11th, 2013. A week later, on March 18th, Sandberg graced the cover of *Time* under the looming headline "Don't Hate Her Because She's Successful: Facebook's

Sheryl Sandberg and Her Mission to Reboot Feminism.” The media hype surrounding the book’s release was tremendous, hardly surprising given Sandberg’s public profile; she is currently ranked eighth on *Forbes* list of the world’s most powerful women and is worth over a billion dollars. To date, *Lean In* has sold over two million copies worldwide (Palmer). According to their website, the nonprofit campaign has facilitated the formation of over 22,700 women’s support “circles” worldwide and has attracted hundreds of corporate “platform partners,” including sixty Fortune 500 companies (Leanin.org). Sandberg claims the book is a “sort of...feminist manifesto” that “makes the case for leaning in, for being ambitious in any pursuit” (*Lean In* 9-10). *Time* calls the organization a “nonprofit foundation with corporate partnerships, online seminars and guidelines for establishing support groups,” an effort that proves Sandberg is “embarking on the most ambitious mission to reboot feminism and reframe discussions of gender since the launch of Ms. Magazine in 1971” (Luscombe).

Sandberg’s central claim in *Lean In* is that women hold themselves back in the workplace by not “leaning in” to opportunities for advancement and promoting their abilities by “sitting at the table.” She argues that women must reevaluate the ways they incorporate motherhood into their professional lives, but provides little advice on how to do this beyond choosing a partner who is an active co-parent. While she concedes that gender bias is omnipresent in hiring and promotion practices, and briefly implores men to acknowledge these biases, the majority of her book offers self-help advice and tactics to work around discrimination without directly confronting it. Instead of fighting for structural reforms (for example, a civil system that more fairly and effectively resolves gender discrimination suits) women should change what is under their own control—

namely, themselves. *Lean In* and its affiliate nonprofit site are rife with contradictory strategies for pay raise and promotion negotiations that resemble updated, professionally themed etiquette lessons. Ultimately, Sandberg believes *Lean In* will provide support to individual women so they can then attain corporate and political leadership positions. From these influential positions the individuals will ostensibly improve the lives of other female employees.

Many academic and grassroots feminists have criticized Sandberg's brand of feminism, arguing that she only represents the interests of a select group of highly privileged women (white, highly-educated professionals). They deem *Lean In* "trickle-down" (Jaffe) or "1%" feminism (Burnham), and emphasize that the vast majority of women—and men—do not have high-power careers they can "lean in" to, and instead "expect to be driven hard, paid little, burdened by debt and, eventually, cast aside." Without proposing changes to the "fundamentally exploitative work environments" afflicting women, particularly those who work in minimum-wage retail, service, and domestic positions, Sandberg falls into the trap of earlier mainstream feminists, who tended "to speak in the name of all women" while "universalizing that which is profoundly particular" (Burnham). Susan Faludi notes that *Lean In* blatantly ignores the truth that "progress has stalled for many ordinary women—or gone into reverse. The poverty rate for women...is at its highest point since 1993, and the 'extreme poverty rate' among women is at the highest point ever recorded." Indeed, even though Sandberg exhaustively lists statistical evidence of gender inequality across multiple demographic groups, she seems to view it within a decidedly postfeminist landscape. In this landscape,

women have attained structural equality, and organized feminist political activity is a thing of the past.

Sandberg gives a brief one-paragraph nod to the accomplishments of first and second-wave feminism in her introduction; “Today in the United States and the developed world, women are better off than ever. We *stand on the shoulders* of the women who came before us, women who had to fight for the rights that we now *take for granted* (4). In these lines, Sandberg semantically isolates the contemporary woman from earlier feminists—she “stands on the shoulders” of her predecessors and takes their fight “for granted”—as if to imply that women have become passive, overly-comfortable, and fundamentally disconnected from their predecessors. She goes on to state that contemporary American women “feel even more grateful when we compare our lives to those of other women around the world...we are *centuries ahead* of the unacceptable treatment of women in these countries” (5). Here, Sandberg immediately frames her discussion of feminism “within a progressive trajectory and a well-worn binary that positions the liberated West in opposition to the subjugated rest...[and] seems to deflect the question of continued inequality at home by projecting true oppression elsewhere” (Rottenberg 422). This is a frequent occurrence in the text—even as Sandberg acknowledges and broadcasts gender inequality in the United States, she also convinces the female reader that things really aren’t that bad. She also uses this section of the introduction to draw a clear temporal and ideological distinction between the struggles for gender equality made by women in the “past” (the real historical past in America and the metaphorical past of countries that are “centuries” behind) and those that remain for women in the present. Her shrewd alienation of the contemporary woman from a

communal feminist past, an estrangement that simultaneously discourages the implementation of historically effective feminist practices like collective action, exemplifies the affect of postfeminist ideology. The contemporary American woman, who is simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged, recognizes the difference between herself and liberal feminists of the “past,” simultaneously assuming the isolated, self-critical position of the neoliberal feminist subject.

If ever there was a feminist platform with the full support of capitalist institutions, it is Sandberg’s:

That Lean In is making its demands of individual women, not the corporate workplace, is evident in the ease with which it has signed up more than two hundred corporate and organization ‘partners’ to support its campaign. The roster includes some of the biggest American corporations...Never before have so many corporations joined a revolution. Virtually nothing is required of them—not even a financial contribution (Faludi).

In order to have their logo and message featured on the Lean In website, all corporate partners need do is write a brief statement detailing their support of women “leaning in” at work (and why wouldn’t they endorse employees working harder?). Faludi goes on to note that many of Lean In’s platform partners have “recent or pending EEOC grievances and state and federal court actions” for some form of gender discrimination against female employees. This list includes Wal-Mart, which temporarily delayed one of the largest sex-discrimination suits in U.S. History (1.5 million women) in 2011 through a legal technicality. Indeed, Sandberg’s “revolutionary” ideas are only demonstrated

through individual and personal anecdotes, many examples of which appear in her chapter on “Success and Likeability:”

Less than six months after I started at Facebook, Mark [Zuckerberg]... told me...that my desire to be liked by everyone would hold me back. He said that when you want to change things, you can't please everyone. If you do please everyone, you aren't making enough progress. Mark was right (51).

However Sandberg views the transformative power of Lean In, the sheer volume of corporate sponsors it has garnered implies complete support from existing hegemonic structures.

In the final paragraph of *Lean In*'s introduction, Sandberg claims “We can reignite the revolution by internalizing the revolution. The shift to a more equal world will happen person by person. We move closer to the larger goal of true equality with each woman who leans in” (11). Sandberg's statement demonstrates the essence of neoliberal feminist ideology; the individual, and not any larger social structure, is the site of revolution, and through each internal revolution women as whole are ostensibly progressing. The concept of revolution “is transformed from mass mobilization into an interiorized and individual activity, thereby stripping it of any potential political valence in the Arendtian sense of ‘acting in concert.’” The liberal feminist “revolution” is invoked but immediately “transmogrified into ambition and metamorphosed into the nurturing of each individual woman's desire to reach the top of the power pyramid” (Rottenberg 426).

Neoliberal Feminist Activity on Social Media

To this point, I have sought to establish that Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* and Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In campaign both coopt the discourse of liberal feminism, rework it to fortify their own interests, and generate neoliberal feminist subjects. This "emergent neoliberal postfeminist citizen links meanings of empowerment and choice to ideological and material consumption," aligning her with the objectives of existing hegemonic powers (Murray 86). Of course, Lean In and *CFRB* are not themselves identical ideological platforms, and they go about realizing their objectives in different ways. Dove communicates to women by engaging liberal feminist rhetoric in a connotative manner to cultivate a compelling brand identity, while Sandberg explicitly foregrounds the concerns of liberal feminism, simultaneously positioning herself at the forefront of its supposed rebirth. However, I would argue that the result of their alternate methods is an ideologically unified population of neoliberal feminist subjects. This unification is radically different from that of earlier liberal feminist movements, in which unification was practiced through solidarity and communal action. Neoliberal feminist unification is the shared belief in isolated self-examination and self-articulation, practiced by individuals through their self-interested pursuit of success or happiness.

Feminism has become a ubiquitous talking point on social media. Click-bait articles shared from popular news sites like *Vice* and *Slate* constantly circulate write-ups on feminism, and their particular topics tend towards the sensational and superficial. BuzzFeed features countless feminism-themed quizzes, YouTube has pages of "feminist" makeup tutorial videos, and some iteration of #feminism is constantly trending on Twitter. The existence of a gender pay gap is widely acknowledged and discussed on

social media, although its causes are frequently disputed. And yet, amidst this saturated media coverage, only 18% of Americans in a 2015 Perryundem poll (conducted for VOX) identified as feminists, even though 85% agreed that they believe in equality for women (Kliff). Feminism has been severed from much of its political history, leaving behind a cultural “myth” subject to the rise and fall of any other trending item, disseminated on a social media platform that prioritizes these trends indiscriminately; Twitter hashtags condemning rape culture and victim blaming (#Rapecultureiswhen, #Survivorprivilege) are presented alongside viral cat videos and celebrity gossip. Of course, even before the rise of neoliberalism, this homogenization has been recognized as an effect of mass media culture, under which consumerism subsumes and subordinates all other potentially disruptive ideologies (famously discussed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). However, the interactive, pseudo-political qualities of social media have greatly exacerbated the problems of feminist political engagement under neoliberalism.

In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, Jodi Dean argues that there is a profound division between “politics circulating as content and official politics” in our culture, a division which violates the most “fundamental premise of liberal democracy...sovereignty of the people” (21). She argues that overwhelming quantity of information and debate circulating in contemporary media is partly to blame for this division:

Contestations today rarely employ common terms, points of reference, or demarcated frontiers. In our highly mediated communications environments we confront instead a multiplication of resistances and

assertions so extensive as to hinder the formation of strong counterhegemonies. The proliferation, distribution, acceleration, and intensification of communicative access and opportunity result in a deadlocked democracy incapable of serving as a form of political change. I refer to this democracy that talks without responding as communicative capitalism (22).

Any individual message projected into the flow of technological media is reconstituted as a “contribution,” one that is instantly and totally overwhelmed by volume of similar contributions (26). In subscribing to communicative capitalism’s “fantasy of abundance,” a belief in the emancipatory power and equal representation of mass media technology, individuals fail to realize they are politicizing into an abyss. While the individual may feel politically engaged and participatory in this process, the system actually strips them of political agency:

Expanded and intensified communicativity neither enhances opportunities for linking together political struggles nor enlivens radical democratic practices... Instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence... the deluge of screens and spectacles coincides with extreme corporatization, financialization, and privatization across the globe. Rhetorics of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism, an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich, devastating the planet and destroying the lives of billions of people (23).

Dean's theory of communicative capitalism is a useful lens in the evaluation of feminist activity on social media. While truly counterhegemonic feminist movements are unlikely to gain traction within such a system, the format is suitable for the dissemination of neoliberal feminist rhetoric.

An apotheotic instance of social media feminism can be seen in the campaign "Who Needs Feminism," which promptly sparked a copycat antifeminist campaign, "Women Against Feminism." A gender studies class at Duke University created "Who Needs Feminism?" in 2012 with a laudable goal—to start a "PR campaign for feminism" and "to challenge existing stereotypes surrounding feminists and assert the importance of feminism today" (Who Needs Feminism?). The campaign was launched on Tumblr in 2012 with a series of photos in which individuals hold a handwritten sign listing the reasons they need and support feminism (Fig 4). The group has since spread onto social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, where thousands of individuals have submitted photos following this original format. The group has not released any singular definition of feminism, nor has it outlined particular political goals, because the goal of the project "is to decrease negative associations with the word that would keep anyone from identifying with the movement" and to encourage individuals to "keep defining it" themselves (Who Needs Feminism?). In the process of identifying themselves with feminism via submissions, individuals discursively alter the signifier—feminism—in an ever expanding and contradictory web of signified meanings that is ultimately meaningless. The implication of the practice is that feminism's usefulness directly correlates with its ability to service the individual's particular concerns, while excusing them from the imposition of ideologies they might not agree with. Feminism is removed

from its political and ideological connotations in the process of self-branding and individuation, and all gestures towards unification are essentially meaningless, even though the campaign is wholly created and sustained by “grassroots” participation. The failure of such a platform calls to question the viability of any grassroots organization grounded in social media, where community is perceived but does not generally actualize in the outside world.

“Women Against Feminism” mimics the structural format of “Who Needs Feminism?” exactly; users submit a photo of themselves holding a sign listing the reasons they do not need feminism (Fig 5). They also began as a Tumblr campaign, but have branched out onto other social media sites, where they also post links to antifeminist YouTube videos and articles. On the group’s community Facebook profile, their mission statement is to feature “women’s voices against modern feminism and its toxic culture” (Women Against Feminism). Their criticism of feminism usually manifests as criticism of feminists themselves, seen as man-haters, perennial victims, and hypocritical liars. Most contributors draw upon postfeminist ideology and argue that feminism is only viable for oppressed women outside the U.S. The group is heavily influenced by various arguments of the Men’s Rights Movement, claiming that feminism alienates and persecutes men, although they differ from “Who Needs Feminism?” in that they only release photos of women. The two campaigns have comparable constituencies, with approximately 35,000 followers on Facebook and 3,500 on Twitter, but “Women Against Feminism” subscribers are far more consistently active on both sites.

Engaging with the overflow of highly individualized communication within these two groups is even more difficult when they are put in conversation with each other, and

with the attention they've garnered outside social media. But with all the attention, neither group makes strides towards true unification or the satisfaction of political goals. One is an example of grassroots neoliberal feminism, the other an example of grassroots neoliberal antifeminism. In either case, the only service they offer to women is an endless, fruitless debate over a term severed from practical application, for how can neoliberal feminism be put into practice? The only beneficiaries of this debate are the billionaires of communication and technology, a patriarchy plus one (Sheryl Sandberg), who profit equally from all forms of activity on social media. Ultimately, "Women Against Feminism," as with any other conservative platform, is far more likely to achieve its goals because neoliberal ideology serves to inhibit progressive movements and maintain hegemonic structures of power. Above all else, these two sites demonstrate that corporations and their prominent representatives are not the only source of neoliberal feminist rationality—and they are certainly not the only instances of such diffusion.

Conclusion

The consequence of neoliberal feminism's diffusion is a population of women who have fundamentally reimagined political agency and its practice. In the neoliberal system, "community" is a unification of individuals through shared rhetoric alone, "revolution" is transformed into endless "conversation," and "conversation" is so depoliticized and mundane that it cannot possibly yield action or reform. Historically, revolutionary change has only occurred through unified and sustained political activity, and neoliberal rationality undermines every stage of this process. Until we are able to reject the influence of neoliberalism, our society will continue to exist as a democracy in name only. We must fundamentally reimagine the means by which we engage with and

influence existing hegemonic power structures. The necessity of this reimagining extends far beyond the interests of feminism, or any other marginalized group, because these power structures are growing stronger and more oppressive for every American, every day. In combating neoliberal feminism, I suggest a return to the principles and political methods of liberal feminism, and, as Angela McRobbie argues, a “the resuscitation and re-conceptualization of feminist anti-capitalism” (McRobbie 548). Until we succeed in severing the existing ties between feminism and consumerism, reclaiming the power of collective action, and rejecting the influence of neoliberal rationality, women’s economic and political equality cannot be actualized.

Figures:



Figure 1: Dove "Real Beauty Sketches-Kela." Source: "The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty." *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. N.p. n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2015.

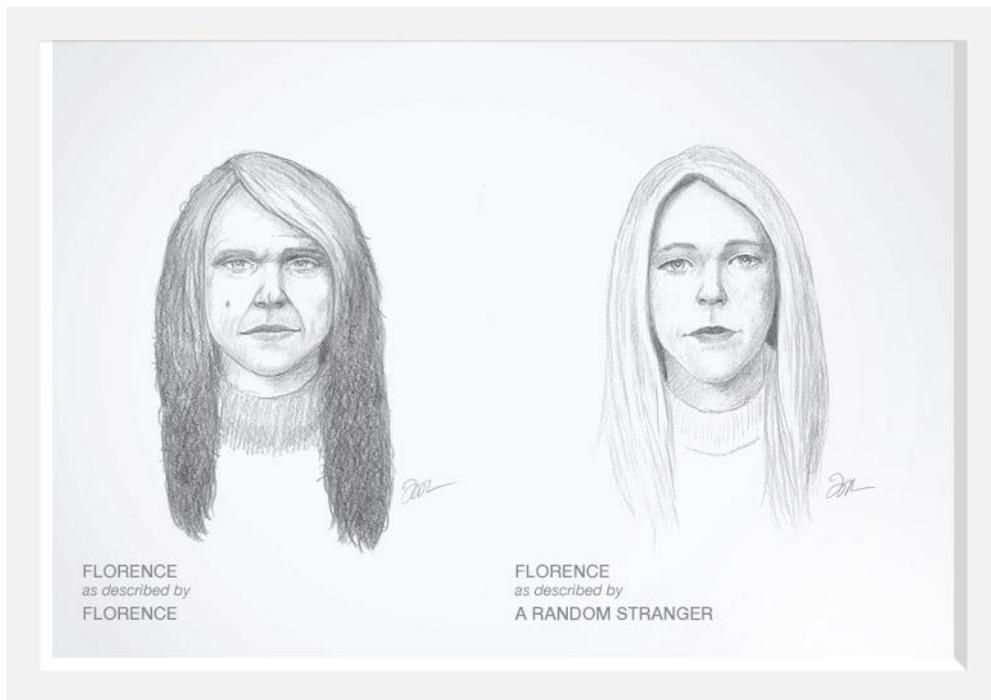


Figure 2- Dove "Real Beauty Sketches-Florence." Source: "The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty." *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. N.p. n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2015.



Figure 3- Dove *Campaign For Real Beauty* ad. Source: "The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty." *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. N.p. n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2015.



Figure 4- "Who Needs Feminism" Tumblr. Source: "Who Needs Feminism?" *Who Needs Feminism*. Tumblr. N.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2015.



Figure 5- "Women Against Feminism" on Tumblr. Source: "Women Against Feminism." *Women Against Feminism*. Tumblr. N.d. Web. 10 Sept 2015.

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