

# RADICAL LOVE IN A POST-FEMINIST AGE: Reading the Pedagogy of Dove's "Campaign For Real Beauty"

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## *Abstract*

Watching television or surfing the internet, one cannot avoid seeing an ad campaign that claims to empower women. The 1990s had their share of sporadic empowerment ads, most notably Nike's, "If You Let Me Play" campaign, which hoped to benefit from an increasing number of females participating in sports (Luca, 2000). Today, one of the most prominent is Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty," launched in 2004 ("Campaign for real beauty mission", 2008). This is of particular interest because Dove's campaign contributes to and is a product of beauty and self-esteem discourses centered around women's bodies. These discourses are prevalent in other advertisements by companies such as The Body Shop and Bath & Body Works, and reality television shows, such as TLC's "What Not to Wear" and "Queer Eye." Scholars have looked at the relationship between media and constructions of femininity, beauty, female subjectivity (Ringrose & Walkerdin, 2008; Weber, 2009; Lucas, 2000). Melissa Milkie (2002), for example, has examined how "femininity-defining cultural institutions operate to create and sustain gender stratification." Jennifer Millard (2009), moreover, has offered an analysis of the Dove campaign itself. She uses social semiotics to interpret how a group of sixteen "real" women in rural Canada make meaning from the ads. My analysis takes a different approach. I wish to examine how female subjectivity is being constructed in these ads. What type of female subject does Dove imagine and seek to produce? Even the viewer with basic media literacy would be immediately suspicious of the campaign's altruism. This paper, however, aims to

understand how Dove seems able to construct a female subject that is supposedly “liberated” and “real,” yet at the same time also neatly produces female consumer subjects. This campaign explicitly suggests that it is providing an opportunity for females to create a different feminine consciousness by offering them a chance to challenge beauty norms. Dove implicitly claims to provide women a counter-narrative that challenges U.S. beauty standards, standards that emphasize thinness, blemish-free skin, and a narrowly defined femininity. Their ads maintain they tell a different story about what girls and women look like. They assert that they employ “real” women as their models, instead of “professionals.” Thus, by offering supposed “alternative” images, educational forums, and educational materials, the Dove ads and website claim to teach girls and women; they allege to offer a pedagogical space and to be a pedagogue. Dove claims to love women and girls and to teach them how to love themselves. Dove’s own explicit claims to teach media literacy and challenge oppressive social norms through love invite a Freirian critique. Therefore, Freirian insight serves as a tool to critically examine Dove’s pedagogical methods and expose the ways they construct neo-liberal, post-feminist subjects that lack radical agency. Finally, this paper offers a reflection on some of the difficulties of a Freirian pedagogy in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. consumer capitalism.

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As an instructor of pre-service teachers, I have had a recurring experience when talking with students about feminism and media portrayals of female bodies. Each semester it comes as a surprise to my students, most of whom are stereotypically post-feminist (white and middle class), that feminism is not just for lesbians, man-haters, and old rebel-rousers of the past. While it may seem obvious to the readers of this journal that these stereotypes are not at all representative of the body of feminists who make up the field, to my students—18–20 year old education majors from the South—this is news. There is typically minor kicking and screaming, followed by eventual submission; bell hooks’s (2000) introduction to *Feminism is for everyone* has helped on more than one occasion to calm the raging souls of the young females in my classes. These students scramble to maintain that, on the one hand, they most certainly are not duped by media and recognize the number of negative images with which they are presented, while on the other hand, they wish to be “good” (well-behaved) girls; dissent, contrariness, and confidence in difference are not such features.

My students’ anti-feminism, or “soft” feminism, which is no doubt influenced by an education that has failed to denaturalize consumer culture, typically rears its head again when we begin discussing popular visual culture. I infuse this

section of the semester with insights from, but not limited to, feminist theory, critical media studies, and fat studies. I do not have trouble convincing students that the media is not always a source of empowerment; however, in their attempt to think of counter-discourses, students once again look to corporate media. Despite the students' willingness to entertain the thought that media can operate not simply for entertainment and is not circulated by benevolent or innocent forces, I have found that students on more than one occasion cite Dove's "Campaign For Real Beauty" as a positive counter-narrative to mainstream messages. In a way that only pre-service teachers can, my students look to me with excited eyes awaiting validation that they got the answer right as they cite Dove as the example of how advertising can be done well and, jeez, if just more companies would do this we could all be happy.

It is not my intention to paint these students as foolish or naïve. These students are in fact quite smart in many respects; however, this topic always results in a stutter-step. Students seem to come to this topic with a narrative that has already been provided to them. The answer to advertising, consumerism, and capitalism is simply to do these things responsibly. It is as oxymoronic as the Whole Foods CEO's assertion of "conscious capitalism," where a "moral case" is given for capitalism (Lowery, 2013; Mackey, 2011). My teaching has been at a large, public institution and these students are the products of an education system that cultivates a neoliberal subjectivity where students are primed to receive these messages.

Moreover, at a neighboring institution, Dove's iconic campaign picture of six women standing in their white underwear and bras is featured prominently on their Women's, Gender, and Sexuality studies department bulletin board. Not ironically. The presence of the Dove campaign in a university shows how seductive, consumable, and insidious the campaign's reach is. That is, Dove's work is being advertised for them (let us not forget that Dove's main role is as a profit-making business) by the very places that should be producing counter-narratives in the first place. Dove's campaign is adopted as a "woman" centered project and a location of activism that university Women's Studies departments see as legitimating their existence.

So while this journey into the bowels of the Dove campaign may seem dated or obvious to some, I think this is a key pedagogical moment. This encounter points to the ways that Dove's campaign is considered a counter-discourse to the traditional ways that women are represented in advertising and addressed as consumers. Not only is this Dove's purported mission, this is the message that many, like my students, take away.

Despite the possibility that Dove's images produce a broader spectrum of possible subject-ideals, they still contribute to regimes of regulation. Indeed, it could be claimed (as Dove itself does, for example) that these campaigns break

down barriers and improve self-image for women. At the same time, how do we account for the fact that these images of “real” women are just as much a part of capitalist structures aimed at moneymaking as those of the professional models? Let us not forget the hypocrisy of the campaign. Dove’s parent company, Unilever, also markets AXE products, whose commercials rely on traditionally sexualized images of women (Golin, 2007). Additionally, Hindustan Unilever in India has been criticized for showing television advertisements for their skin-lightening cream “Fair and Lovely” (Dhillon, 2007).

This paper is an attempt to work though how and why Dove is able effectively to mount a counter-narrative that is more a counter-narrative to the radical love of a Freirian pedagogue and of feminist thought than any body standards. I want to think about Dove’s role as a pedagogue that employs “soft” love in the face of Freire’s radical love. But, this analysis is not merely a statement about what Dove is doing wrong, rather it evidences a new corporate strategy, one that is presenting itself as a counter-discourse, and one that students and “woman”-centered activism is latching onto.

## Background

Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty” was launched in 2004 and contributes to and is a product of beauty and self-esteem discourses centered on women’s bodies. (“Campaign for real beauty mission”, 2008). The use of women’s bodies in this way is nothing new. One of the hallmark advertisements of the 1990’s was Nike’s “If You Let Me Play” campaign. The Nike Corporation sought to gain financially by portraying its brand as “on the side” of a generation of women benefiting from access to sports as a result of historical and cultural events such as Title IX (Lucas, 2000). The Body Shop’s ongoing “Learning is of Value to Everyone (LOVE) Initiative” similarly capitalizes on a largely female-based, beauty product market (“How do we make our customers,” 2013).

Dove’s campaign, like these others, functions by exploiting the connection between capitalism and the production of female subjectivity. In the 1960’s, Betty Friedan’s (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* confronted the dangerous role the media played in undercutting feminist thought. Friedan argued that the advertising campaigns (rooted in the interests of business) of the post-war 1940’s and 1950’s served to turn once-feminists into pacified consumers (pp. 206-207). She stated, “the energy behind the feminist movement was too dynamic merely to have trickled dry; it must have been turned off, diverted, by something more powerful” (p. 206). We can see this “diversion” again in the current post-feminist backlash against the developments of the 1970’s and 1980’s (Driscoll, 1999; Jones, 2003; McRobbie, 2004; Gill et al., 2006; Schoene, 2006). The backlash is well illustrated in the juxtaposition of two popular female television characters: Maude Findlay from the 1970’s show, *Maude* and Quinn Fabray from the contemporary

show, *Glee*. Both characters are faced with an unplanned pregnancy. Maude, a self-professed feminist during the pre-Roe vs. Wade era, opts for an abortion. By contrast, the teenage Quinn embodies a post-feminist female subjectivity; she is a professed Christian, a cheerleader who when faced with an unplanned pregnancy chooses to have the baby and give it up for adoption. These campaigns and media practices, then, are evidence of new tactics that rely on post-feminist subjects who see themselves as outside of corporate manipulation and thus do not need to adopt a radical politics.

## Dove the pedagogue: Transformative experiences/transformational products

Scholars have long looked at the relationship between media and constructions of femininity, beauty, and female subjectivity (Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Brumberg, 1997; Kilbourne, 1997, 1999; Lucas, 2000; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Weber, 2009). But what can be revealed when we view the Dove campaign as a would-be pedagogue? While Dove never overtly claims this position, Dove does claim to love women and girls. Dove claims to teach women and girls how to love themselves. And Dove explicitly claims to teach media literacy and to challenge oppressive social norms (“The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty,” 2013). Dove is, as a consequence, acting as a pedagogue.

So, what kind of pedagogy is Dove? If we look to Freire for guidance, the role of a critical pedagogy is to help create possibilities for transformational experiences in the lives of oneself and others (Freire, 1970, pp. 47-48, 50, 79-80, 83). Dove’s campaign, for its part, also centers on transformational experiences. Dove imagines transformations as originating in bodily practices. By undergoing transformations on the “outside,” the Dove product user experiences transformations on the “inside.” Dove is a producer of the kind of transformations Brenda Weber (2009) examines in her study of popular make-over shows. Weber argues that transformation, as represented by make-over television, has become focused on turning “before-bodies” into normative “after-bodies” (p. 38). In the Dove campaign, turning “before-bodies” into “after-bodies” is a transformational experience best mediated through products.

Dove’s cleansing cream oil is an example of such a transformational product. Their advertisement, “The Last Bottle of Cream Oil” (2010), describes the transformational experience one may have through the use of Dove’s product. The subject presented in the ad is a light-skinned, black woman named Whitney. As Whitney sits on the couch, dressed casually in jeans and a gray, muted t-shirt, she is told that she is holding the last bottle of the body wash product she so loves. Whitney is then shown Dove’s new and improved version of the product with added “nutrium moisture.” As she washes herself with the new product, Whitney transforms into her “after-body,” a properly feminized subject dressed

in a flowing, purple, sleeveless shirt. Not only does this transformation parallel the “make-over” process that Weber (2009) describes, in that any sense of gender ambiguity is removed (p. 128), but it also shows how Whitney’s transformation is dependent on her product. Her beloved cream oil must have crapped out and led her to wear the frumpy “before-body” outfit that we see at the opening of the commercial. Dove’s new and improved version is the only way for Whitney to access again the female subject ideal.

Similarly, Dove’s “Intensive Repairs with Fiber Active,” is lauded for the ways it “helps reconstruct hair from the inside and leave it more beautiful on the outside” (“Dove intensive repairs,” 2010). This encapsulates a fundamental principle of Dove’s philosophical mission and underpins their pedagogy. The ad assumes that concentrating on transforming an individual’s issues with self-esteem—the “inside”—transforms self-esteem issues for women and girls universally. By positing an “inside” and “outside,” Dove is suggesting that by focusing on the individual, social change will necessarily and naturally follow. “Inside” and “outside” are constructed as distinct locations where change always flows from the individual to the social (from the “inside” to the “outside”). One changes the “inside” to change the “outside,” without backflow and without dialogue.

Here is a place where we can see a dramatic contrast between Freirian and feminist pedagogy and Dove’s pedagogical assumptions. Freire’s pedagogy was based on dialectal relationships between individuals and the community. An individual’s experience of oppression is important, but must be related to structural oppression. And structural oppression around a person will necessarily affect her lived experience. Thus, in Freirian pedagogy the boundaries between “inside” and “outside” are not so distinct. Similarly, the fundamental second-wave feminist insight that “the personal is political” highlights the fact that the boundaries between “inside” and “outside” are blurry (Hanisch, 1975).

The subject Dove seeks to produce through these transformative experiences is evident in Dove’s deodorant and anti-perspirant line. Dove’s “Ultimate Visibly Smooth Wild Rose Anti-Perspirant Deodorant,” (2010), hypes that “within weeks, you’ll start to notice that your underarm hair feels soft, fine, and easy to remove. Over time, your underarm hair will look and feel less noticeable.” This advertisement seeks to create a particular type of female subject—most obviously a subject who does not want underarm hair. The commercial for this anti-perspirant starts with a woman dressing in preparation for her solo violin concert that evening. As she gets ready to put on her black, sleeveless, dress, the text appears: “she has to shave her underarms, of course.” On the one hand, Dove is presenting an image of a woman who is skilled—a modern, liberated woman who is successful and talented. On the other hand, Dove undercuts this woman. The female subject in this commercial is a violinist who, in order to be a performing soloist certainly practices hours a day, yet the whole of her ability to give a great

performance is equated with “looking right.” Dove’s logic asks women to locate their agency in managing underarm hair rather than in their talents. One is left asking whether the unruly underarm hair is a sign of a particular kind of unruly woman (e.g., a feminist), one that Dove would specifically want to tame through their transformative project (“The Performance,” n.d.).

Dove’s prescription for transformative experiences is focused on one’s skin. If a woman has blotchy skin, Dove is not demanding that she get plastic surgery or hide away in a cave; however, Dove does expect women to undergo transformative experiences through the use of their products. That is, regulating one’s skin, purifying it, and altering it are all acts of (self) love. Rather than questioning prevailing beauty discourses, Dove offers girls and women ways in which to fit their particular shapes, sizes, talents, and interests into this existing discourse.

Moreover, these transformative experiences are not for all women—they are distinctly classed and raced. Despite Dove’s claim to be supporting diversity, they are largely reflecting the interests of white, middle-class, heteronormative girls and women (“Dove self-esteem ambassador,” 2013; “Dove Campaign for real beauty,” 2013). The girls represented in Dove’s ads and the girls who participate in the online interactive zones voice concerns over how their hair or skin make them feel. No one portrayed on the website talks of hunger or violence. Dove’s subject, thus, must be a girl who feels entitled and empowered enough that she can change the world, one who already feels like she has control over her own life. As Valerie Walkerdine (2003) argues, “the neo-liberal autonomous subject is made in the image of the middle class” (p. 239). Moreover, Dove’s transformations fit within what Weber calls, “projects of citizenship” (p. 38). The campaign moves with the flow of neo-liberal demands that want individuals to buy into the myth of a “free-market meritocracy” (p. 38). The emphasis is placed on individual women to be self-sufficient and perform appropriate self-care. Women are asked to participate in the “exchange of currencies (money, beauty, power, strength) for commodities (products, love, acceptance, adulation)” (Weber, 2009, p. 51).

Especially insidious is that these transformative products are essentially a “cleaning” product. They are designed to wash away the dirt and grime on one’s skin. They are products aimed to soften harsh, calloused feet. They are used to lighten the “too-dark” (and thus, “dirty”) skin. They are used to fade away birthmarks, pimples, and scars. And in this process, they wash away any chance for radical love. Radical love is necessarily dirty and messy, according to Freire. Radical love and radical feminist pedagogy means standing in solidarity, which might mean being arrested or sleeping outside, not simply using an anti-perspirant. The type of love Freire was talking about was not easy, neat, tidy, and clean.

## Dove's pedagogy: Consciousness and literacy

Dove's campaign explicitly suggests that it is providing an opportunity for females to create a different feminine consciousness by offering them a chance to challenge beauty norms. Dove implicitly claims to provide women a counter-narrative that challenges U.S. beauty standards, standards that emphasize thinness, blemish-free skin, and a narrowly defined femininity. Their ads maintain that they tell a different story about what girls and women look like. Dove asserts that they employ "real" women as their models, instead of "professionals." Thus, by offering supposed "alternative" images, educational forums, and educational materials, the Dove ads and the website claim to offer women and girls places to raise consciousness.

Dove claims that it loves women and cultivates a new female consciousness based in self-love. Their campaign partners with other organizations (such as girls, inc., Girl Scouts of America, and the Boys and Girls Club) that claim to improve female self-esteem and give females a positive self-image. Dove provides these groups, as well as schools and youth organizations, with curriculum materials that address self-esteem. They claim that these materials, as well as their blogs and clinics, offer pedagogical spaces for women and girls ("Self Esteem Toolkit & Resources," 2013). Dove also offers clinics in which girls talk about self-image. Dove, thus, acts as a savior of girls, sending the message that the corporation is offering a radical divergence from mainstream media. In fact, they are limiting girls in many of the same ways as "traditional" media, but veiling this in empowerment language aimed at the production of neo-liberal, post-feminist subjects (i.e. white, middle-class, able-bodied, heteronormative).

Furthermore, the self-love/self-esteem that Dove claims to encourage is not authentic consciousness, in a Freirian sense. This is evident when the consciousness that Dove elicits is set in contrast to the consciousness of Freirian pedagogy. Consciousness, as Freire employs it, lies in the recognition that the problem of the oppression of the impoverished is caused by the dominant elite. On the road to critical consciousness, one becomes aware of the historical, economic, political, and cultural factors that have shaped the world. Literacy is one of the key tools in developing consciousness. Literacy, Freirian pedagogues assert, can serve to maintain the status quo or it can be used as an emancipatory practice (Torres, 2009, p. 171). Critical literacy must come from the people themselves, otherwise it is simply domestication and ideological management (McLaren, 1992; Delpit, 1995; Macedo, 2003; Smith & McLaren, 2010). Literacy is much more than the ability to participate in language; it involves the ability to question and challenge ideologies, narratives, and institutions. Critical reading involves going beyond simple intake of information and involves critique, active involvement, and interrogation of a text.

Several of Dove's online tools and pedagogical resources specifically address dialogue and media literacy. The mother-daughter decoder, for example, aims to help mothers and daughters communicate—to make each legible to the other. This simplistic device is cute, but it trivializes the complex nature of authentic dialogue necessary for critical consciousness. Dialogue, for Dove, happens on the “inside;” it happens within the private space of one's normative nuclear family. The decoder allows a mother to select from a list of pre-written statements, one representative of something she might say to her daughter; for example, “you look beautiful.” The decoder then assists the mother by telling her what she actually means: “you are beautiful inside and out.” Then, the decoder names what the daughter feels: “You have to say that. You're my mom. You can't see my flaws.” While this tool attempts to make communication between mothers and daughters more effective, the decoder reduces the significance of the ethical demands and responsibility of the relationship between the mother and daughter and suggests instead that decoding is universal and simple and is best “fixed” though mediation by a corporate “ally.” Additionally, the daughter is robbed of her right to name her own feelings (“Talk it Out,” 2007). Freire warns that true solidarity requires that “no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words...it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others” (Freire, 1970, pp. 88-89). Dove's translator (i.e. the omniscient narrator) eliminates any possible fractures in the discourse on beauty, fractures that might instigate change.

Additionally, Dove's pedagogical tools for media literacy include teaching guides for schools and parents/mentors/youth leaders. Their activity sheets offer questions like the following:

6 out of 10 teenage girls think they'd 'be happier if they were thinner'. While only 19% of teenage girls are 'overweight', 67% think they 'need to lose weight'(UK Teen Body Image Survey, Jan 2004, Bliss magazine). Give reasons why so many girls might think this way. (“Self-Esteem guide,” 2013, p. 15)

Dove teaches a media literacy that is based in seeing categories such as “overweight” as “real” rather than socially constructed and leaves unquestioned prevailing discourses about weight. This type of media literacy is in no way “emancipatory,” as it fails to offer any critique of normative ideologies. That is, Dove specifically uses resources that fit neatly within a medicalized, normative structure of thinking about bodies.

Dove's resources offer no political contextualization of these beauty norms and lack any sense of the historical dimensions of women's oppression. Dove readily blames media for using skinny models with airbrushed skin that present a “normal” beyond any real “average.” They also present anecdotal accounts of women with “different” body types through the ages (“Fashionable Body,” 2008).

But, they do not offer a historical contextualization of the ways that patriarchal processes have participated in the production of female subjects who locate their value in external, bodily beauty. Dove neatly side-steps any statement that might point out who really gains from individualizing female self-esteem and what damage this does to any sort of collective action.

## Making a movement of one: Solidarity and collectivity

Dove's description of their campaign makes it clear that they want their viewer to see the Dove brand as part of a broader collective effort for social change. The website goes so far as to call their campaign the Dove "movement" ("Our vision," 2013; "The Dove campaign for real beauty," 2013). This claim has several implications. First, this movement is a consumer capitalist movement. The problem, then, is that this movement is founded on a definition of beauty that will not threaten, but in fact contributes to and maintains Dove's profit margins or their ability to create and market new beauty products. The success of Dove's campaign exploits the passive, fractured nature of capitalist society that leads many to an uncertainty as to how to act collectively. Dove's media campaign works well in tandem with other movements which, as Gonick (2006) argues, "participate in the production of the neo-liberal girl subject...both participate in processes of individualization that...direct attention from structural explanations for inequality toward explanations of personal circumstances and personality traits" (p. 2). In other words, Dove's campaign does nothing to bring women and girls together in any way that might challenge systemic problems and institutions and help them find ways to work together across differences. Dove reproduces the types of female subjects that radical love would want to interrogate.

If Dove imagines female subjects as white, middle-class, and heteronormative, then Dove's pedagogy imagines that there are certain ways in which these subjects can act. Their primary sense of agency comes through consumption. One can "consum[e] oneself into being" (i.e., a successful looking middle class, feminine [white] woman) (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 247). This subject fits smoothly in a system in which individuals are not supposed to expect much in the way of governmental support. Locating responsibility for self-care on the individual level helps excuse systemic shortcomings, such as a lack of universal healthcare and welfare support. Dove's girls are rendered straightforward, universal, and uncomplicated by issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. Even more, Dove "naturalizes" women and girls as subjects who interact with each other in their own spaces, to the exclusion of men and the women it erases (the subjects that do not "count" as women). Moreover, Dove's pedagogy lacks a critique of, and even hides, the regulatory structures of power at play that contribute to "women's" oppression.

Dove declares that, “we’re building a movement in which women everywhere have the tools to take action and inspire each other and the girls in their lives” (“Dove Movement for Self-Esteem,” 2010). On the one hand this may seem like a form of social action. Women and girls are being encouraged to go out and talk to other girls and women in their life. On the other hand, however, this method is missing radically important elements of Freirian pedagogy. A Freirian critique would point out that a movement constructed and driven by a corporate “individual” has very limited possibility for any real social change. Dove cannot claim that it too is a “woman,” but neither can it claim to be in solidarity. Solidarity would necessitate abandoning its corporate interests. Dove asserts that they are building a movement. Dove positions itself as the “teacher.” In sharp contrast to Freire’s “teacher,” who should be a vested part of the community, Dove is a corporate individual. It is as if the students of a school have decided to have a meeting to mount a coup on the faculty and a faculty member has come into the group as the leader telling them how to do it.

Dove offers a limited number of highly monitored and scripted spaces on the website where women and girls can share their thoughts. These spaces all are controlled by and narrowly conceived of through the lens of Dove’s mission. For example, in the “Never Ending Hair-Connection” (2010) women can engage in conversations on how “hair has played a role in my career and in my memories.” Another space offers a place to comment (in 125 words or less) on the question “what do you wish you’d known at thirteen?” (“What do you wish you had known at 13,” 2010). Responses that pass Dove’s editorial muster include, “you are beautiful just the way you are” and “if you think you are beautiful others will too,” and makes evident the type of solidarity that Dove thinks counts; it’s a solidarity that fits Dove’s individualistic, neo-liberal message.

In another section of the website editors weigh in on topics. Here Dove unites its readers with “real” people who really care. The editors become untied from their corporate obligations and become people “just like you and me.” One need only click on the “family” issues option to learn not so much about how to negotiate family dynamic as much as what constitutes a “family” in the first place according to Dove (“Editor’s Topics,” 2010). As one may expect, they offer overtly heteronormative imaginings of the traditional nuclear family. For example, à la June Cleaver, the editors ask the questions: “what moments have shown the man in your life is comfortable in his own skin” and “do you have any mother/daughter traditions?” In this way they shape the types of conversations that can be had and the people who are invited in.

Freire argued that solidarity:

is a radical posture....the oppressor is in solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category... when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures

and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plentitude of this act of love... (Freire, 1970, p. 50)

To look at Dove's tactics through this lens reveals a lack of radical love on the part of Dove. Dove shows not solidarity, but instead a reiteration of individualistic strategies. Dove's "counter-narrative," when all is said and done, is merely a re-writing of the status quo. Moreover, if Dove does indeed have a counter-narrative to offer at all, it is a counter-narrative to feminist liberation and radical love. In its focus on individuality, Dove undoes the solidarity that was sought through much of feminist history and Freirian pedagogy.

## Conclusions: Taming love

Dove claims to love women and girls and to teach them how to love themselves. Dove's own mission claims to teach media literacy and challenge oppressive social norms through this type of love ("Campaign for real beauty, 2013; "A girl's guide," 2013; "Self-esteem discussion guide for mothers," 2012, p. 19). Moreover, Dove is invested in producing and reproducing female consumer subjects who believe that Dove loves them. The love Dove professes, however, suggests that a woman of any shape or size can be loved if and only if she complies. In other words, the rebellious subject, like rebellious hair or an unshaven armpit, necessitates taming to deserve this love. Dove's video advertisement for one of their damaged hair care line products offers a final telling example. As the video begins the adjectives "dry" and "frizzy" appear alongside one of Dove's "real" women. This product, the ad asserts, "nourishes rebellious hair." ("Dove Hair Care," 2010). Although Dove is "widening" views of beauty, this ad makes clear the limits of Dove's campaign. Women can use Dove products to produce themselves within these "redefined," yet at the same time, familiar bounds. Dove posits that they offer girls tools of empowerment. Dove "wide[ens] stereotypical views of beauty" ("Campaign for Real Beauty," 2008) while at the same time reinscribes the same discursive moves that historically created rigid self-imaginings in the first place.

Dove mimics a Freirian pedagogy of radical love, but instead provides a type of "soft" love. Dove's "soft" love is marked by positive sentiment, but is void of full engagement. Their "soft" love spouts affective caring, but lacks of commitment and responsibility. Freire stated, "the man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into communion with the people whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived" (Freire, 1970, p. 61). Seeing Dove's "soft" love for what it is—namely, a corporate advertising plan that also happens to make some people feel good—is to reassert the significance and radical nature of Freire's thought. Dove's advertisements, especially their success, highlight the dangers that a lack of engaged critical media literacy can have. Dove's gestures are not benevolent, they are not even

innocent, they are categorically insidious. Closely analyzing the Dove campaign and its failures should remind us that Freire was not advocating working within the system, but rather demanding solidarity and commitment to achieve any real change.

Zygmunt Bauman explores a type of radical love that is one that Freire may have suggested for today's U.S. society. Bauman (1995) describes the challenges of working together within the fragmented and episodic nature of encounters in postmodernism and considers how to approach ethics under these conditions. He asserts three different forms of togetherness: being-aside, being-with, and being-for (p. 49). Both being-aside and being-with lack any sort of continued commitment to the Other, and in this way resemble Dove's position. "The being-for... means an emotional engagement with the Other *before* it is committed...to a specific course of action regarding the Other" (p. 62). That is, one must meet and learn about the Other, not prescribe a cookie-cutter methodology for how to love. This being-for is a radical love that comes with an ethical and moral demand (pp. 59-60). The responsibility lies in the not knowing what to do, but acting anyway.

And, sometimes the best pedagogy comes in the moments when one tosses the script and acts according to the demand for love. When Freire did his work in Brazil it was not the case that someone handed him a blueprint for what needed to be done. He saw oppression happening around him and knew he needed to act. He was not certain that what he did would be "right," but he acted anyway. This acting without certainty, but rather in response to the demand for love, shows one's humanity and contributes to social change.

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