The Embodiment of the New Woman: Advertisements' Mobilization of Women's Bodies Through Co-Optation of Feminist Ideologies

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This paper stands on an important feminist notion of "embodiment" which considers the body not just as part of a body-mind dualism but as an essential site for political and personal emancipation. It then proceeds to critique the concept of embodiment of the New Woman as a co-opted notion in twenty (20) beauty product advertisements aired on Philippine free TV from 2010 to 2014. Co-optation in representations is a process of borrowing only surface elements of a progressive philosophy/theory such as feminism while ignoring its other, more important, ideas. New Woman, on the other hand, is a social construction of the modern woman who is supposedly making wise and empowered choices in life. The analysis focuses on how feminism has been co-opted in what the author labels as a "depoliticization project" in these beauty product advertisements.

Keywords: *co-optation, new woman, advertisements, embodiment, feminism*

In this paper, I problematize how advertisements of beauty products have mobilized women's bodies not as fantasy but through a progressive idiom, feminism, in which they are couched. Specifically, I refer to the seemingly empowering portrayals of women as "New Women" in beauty product television advertisements. This cultural construction of "New Women" defines contemporary women, particularly those who are both successful in the workplace and at home. These "New Women" are supposed to be harvesting the gains of the women's movement, making them politically and economically empowered. I argue in this article that these representations are at their best only a co-optation of a progressive thought and not, in fact, a close appropriation of it. I surface instances in which so-called "New Women" are packaged as a feminist utopic icon of emancipation—co-opted notion of liberation that is individualistic, rather than what feminism deeply prescribes as liberation through structural reforms and collective efforts. This packaging is done through the hailing of women's bodies as fully emancipated players of a neoliberal economy.

In this study, therefore, I ask the question: How do Philippine TV advertisements on beauty products mobilize women's bodies through the co-optation of ideas of Feminism in the representation of feminine beauty?

Specifically, it aims to do the following:

1. To draw out and assess how 20 beauty advertisements aired on Philippine free TV from 2010 to 2014 have framed women's bodies as agents of empowerment;
2. To analyze how the image of "New Women" is portrayed via the advertisements' selling of the ideal feminine beauty; and
3. To critically analyze these conceptions and assumptions in advertisements vis-à-vis what have been discussed in some related literature by identifying patterns of depolitization in how advertisements co-opt Feminism.

For the theoretical framework, I utilize the grand theory employed by socialist feminism and post-modern feminism. Socialist feminism, on one hand, proposes that there should be a balance between personal "consciousness" reforms and institutional restructuring for women and men alike to be truly emancipated from all forms of oppressions according to gender, class, and race, among others. Primarily, it questions society's blind acquiescence to neo-liberal capitalism and the different forms of repressions that trickle-down into our cultural sites (Jaggar, 1983).

Post-modern feminism, on the other hand, celebrates the power in renaming, re-languaging, and revocabularizing discourses. It contributes to the shaking of power structures by changing reality through language and vice-versa (Jaggar, 1983). Moreover, as both communication theory and post-modern theory, Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory is used as part of the post-structural analysis of representations. Harding (2004) proposes that for an objective account of reality, one must use the standpoint of the marginalized. In the case of slavery, for instance, the perspective of the slave's, not the master's, should be considered. For this study, the concept of "co-optation" is a feminist account of representation, not the dominant/privileged group of advertisers'.

For its methodology, I employ a critical interpretive approach to research. It offers a qualitative analysis of television advertisements of beauty products in order to examine the latent language in the advertisements' co-optation of feminist ideologies. Specifically, I conducted a textual analysis of 20 TV advertisements of beauty products (see Appendix) which have appeared on Philippine Free TV from 2010 to 2014. I used criterion sampling and intensity sampling to select the 20 advertisements. Criterion sampling

method picks as many cases as possible that meet a certain set of criteria while intensity sampling limits the final number of cases (Patton, 1990). Through intensity sampling, I was able to identify the 20 advertisements which strongly manifest the characters of an empowered Filipina at first glance. I used five categories for beauty products: hair products, facial products, body products, make-up and perfume, and health products. I then picked four advertisements for each category.

Feminism as a Co-opted Notion in Advertisements

This study is rooted on the conflicted appraisal of the status of Filipino women. The Filipina has broken through many forms of discrimination. However, she remains imprisoned by many forms of oppression.

The contemporary Filipina is still subjected to different forms of bondage which can only be dismantled through different answers and approaches. Feminists humorously refer to this situation as a "problem that has no name" (Friedan, 1963, p. 20). The oppression of the Filipina, by virtue of their sex, comes from a combination of gender, class, state, and global economic subjugation. Moreover, the Filipina suffers from another kind of oppression, by virtue of her class, that comes from her nationality and her global citizenship (Arnado, 2011).

Feminism is best considered as a polytheistic socio-political movement that has evolved in accordance to specific cultural, social, and economic needs of women in different parts of the world, across eras, and within women's everyday struggles in the streets, in workplaces, and in their homes (Bowden & Mummery, 2009). It has many phases and types—liberal, radical, ecological, socialist, Marxist, among others—which are not always theoretically congruent with one another. Each approach provides a different take on what needs to be changed with society and how to address it. To critics, the various, if conflicting, perspectives on feminism can indicate the tenuous sense of liberation of Filipino women. However, in the context of the Philippines, this multiplicity of feminist discourses has been transformed into a brand of Third World feminism that is politically inclusive. It takes into account the weaving of different forms of oppression in women's lives, not just the most mainstream cry for "equality". Equality, for the most part, is just the starting point of what feminists want. Indeed, to mistake equality as the totality of the movement is already a form of co-optation.

As a feminist in the field of Communication and Media Studies, I am compelled to look into a cultural site that is rich with the issues that unsettle feminism but nonetheless enrich its theoretical and practical trait. Driven to

examine within my domain this continuing challenge to feminist thought, I start with representations, particularly the phenomenon of co-optation.

To co-opt or coopt literally means "to assimilate, take, or win over into a larger or established group" or "to neutralize, to appropriate as one's own, or preempt (i.e., the dissidents have co-opted the title of her novel for their slogan)" ("Coopt," 2015). Therefore, co-optation, as a concept in this paper, is taken to mean as the process through which a progressive idea (feminism) is accommodated as surface elements of mainstream text (in this case, advertisements), without engaging its complex and intricate positions on issues.

More than ever, we, as women, are dealing with an ambivalent regard of our bodies in a very intimate manner. We are forced to confront, consciously or otherwise, the conflict between a feminist ideology that rejects sexual objectification and the deeply ingrained cultural definition of femininity as a particular kind of commercialized feminine beauty. In spite of the gains of the women's movement, women remain conflicted as to how we see our bodies. My premise is that women continue to feel ambivalent because feminist representation is at best only co-opted. Thus women feel the sense of being free, but not completely.

In the Philippines, advertisements have evolved through time. The local advertising industry has claimed it has become increasingly sensitive to the needs of the modern Filipina. For example, industry representatives say that the sexual objectification of women has been toned down in local advertisements, with the exception of liquor advertisements. They also argue the Filipina consumer is seen as not just having decisive capacity but also purchasing power. Thus, advertising for women is directed to the supposedly empowered Filipina (Torres, 2010).

The New Woman

The pictorial image of an empowered Filipina represents this study's conceptualization of the "New Woman". The term New Woman first appeared in the 1840s to describe a construct or a diluted symbol of disorder and rebellion (Pykett, 1992). It is also historically been referred to the early 20th century character Nell Brinkley (Robbins, 2001). This social construct was actively produced and reproduced in novels and newspaper pages as both as a relief and a cautionary tale. Being well-educated, she treads the fine-line between science and religion. Moreover, by openly demonstrating her disinterest in marriage and domesticity (Pykett, 1992), she has been seen as a cause for moral panic. The New Woman as representation has evolved across decades and each new transformation has often disturbed the typical arrangements of gender roles and domesticity. She has become

very mannish in one period and too feminine in one. In the US, she has been futuristic and rustic. In Asia, she has metamorphosed from being traditional to being edgy in just one decade (Kitch, 2001; Robbins, 2001).

My preliminary survey of current advertisements across various media reveals that it is in beauty products that the modern, empowered Filipino New Woman is mostly articulated. Unlike in advertisements of products like detergent soap, for instance, where women are mostly seen inside reproductive spheres (kitchen, gardens, and interiors of homes), the Filipina in beauty products are seen as "career women" who work outside the home, enjoy freedom and mobility, and are fully integrated into the productive economy.

In fact, in 2013, advertisements for body care and cosmetic products comprised the majority which featured female characters (Prieler & Centeno, 2013). This shows, as I premise in this study, that the discourse on women as market and as representation can indeed be accessed through products on "beauty" and body care.

The New Woman and Her Body

Fundamental in this paper is the consideration of the feminist concept of embodiment. Feminism troubles the dualistic soul-body and mind-body hierarchies. Western patriarchal notions see the body as an "unfortunate necessary condition" (Bowden & Mummery, 2009, p. 46), that is something of an irrelevant distraction. Part of feminist responsibility is to challenge the way women's bodies have been categorized as inferior or incomplete. Another challenge is to give social form and meaning to the contradictions and ambivalence of bodily existence. Other feminists even say that "race and gender oppressions may both resolve around the same axis of disdain for the body" (Patricia Collins as cited in Bowden & Mummery, 2009, p. 50).

As mentioned earlier, this so-called New Woman has historically appeared in various and novel iterations. The Filipina, for instance, has been haphazardly extolled as having gone though darkness in lieu of hiding her deceitfully from the reality of her bondage. At present, the New Woman is cunningly cocooned in the spectacle of the body with subtexts of co-opted feminist ideologies.

The New Woman is in the spotlight as a poster-child for empowerment. Naomi Wolf (1991) explains:

> How to make sure that busy, stimulated working women would keep consuming at the levels they had done when they had all day to do so and little else of interest to occupy

> them? A new ideology was necessary that would compel the same insecure consumerism; that ideology must be, unlike that of the Feminine Mystique, a briefcase- sized neurosis that the working woman could take with her to the office. To paraphrase Friedan, why is it never said that the really crucial function that women serve as aspiring beauties is to buy more things for the body? . . . The beauty myth, in its modern form, arose to take the place of the Feminine Mystique, to save magazines and advertisers from the economic fallout of the women's revolution. (p. 66)

The New Women could look like she has found the perfect solution to the beauty dilemma which has bugged her for generations—does she put make-up or not? Along with the steady stream of promises, she is assured by the beauty industry that it is not just about putting on a lotion or lipstick anymore. This time, it is about entitlement and self-esteem. (Craig, 1998).

What follows is a discussion of the advertisements that were analyzed weaving textual data with related literature.

You Go Girl!: The New Woman Has Made It

Anne Curtis for L-Oreal Paris shampoo extols women to use her brand "because every Filipina is worth it!" (L-Oreal Group, 2012). Finally, we are worth it now at this point in history. We have to be grateful to L-Oreal Paris for this affirmation because, obviously, years ago when the brand was not yet around, we weren't worth it. Notice, too, the word "Paris" in the brand signifying a particular Parisian nostalgic imagery connoting beauty and romance. In this case though, like many other brands with names of popular cities attached to them (Maybelline New York, New York Color, Yon-Ka Paris, Caudalie Paris, Darphin Paris, and Anastasia of Beverly Hills) the association goes too many layers back—beyond the romance and nostalgia—and just down to the basic product claim that Paris (or New York) is far better than the rest of the world.

In the Avon lipstick commercial, three women look at an Avon brochure and declare excitedly, "Avon shopping na! (It's time for Avon Shopping!)" (Avon Philippines, 2013). Towards the last part of this Avon commercial, Anne Curtis looks at the women and tells them, "You go girls, keep shining!" In another advertisement, Toni Gonzaga, for Pond's, asks her girls, "What's your beautiful story?" (Unilever, 2014b). Meanwhile, Angel Locsin, also for Avon, walks towards the camera and says, "Hello, tomorrow!" (Avon Philippines, 2013). The prescribed sense of entitlement as to why women need to push it now, more than at any time in history, is at once premised

upon and heralded via the necessity to take care of the self, finally, and without guilt. Put the lipstick on and sway the hips because it is harvest time for women. Still, it is her personal appearance that carries this sense of fulfillment and the burden of living up to this bountiful harvest depends upon her capacity to look like a winner. Wouldn't it be a shame to our women predecessors if we were to look sloppy today? As the Garnier tagline goes, we need to "take care" (L'Oreal Group , 2010).

As premised by Tseelon (1995), a quintessential female's currency is consistently measured through her personal appearance. Informed by a cultural framework of capitalism, I argue that the female body is made to adjust between a static and an ever-changing commodity which is considered to be both natural and learned.

In these advertisements, the personal identity is that of a champion who has seen the worst and has come here with a renewed sense of liberty. Angel Aquino in the Olay Body Bar advertisement is a testament to this entitled self. Unlike before, she no longer is afraid to reveal some skin because Olay has freed her from imperfections, just as Sam Pinto in Fitrum exclaims, "This is my body….And I love it!" (RDL Products, 2010). Miriam Quiambao for Olay likes her dress to be shorter "unlike other women her age". She then tells her audience to "love the skin you're in" (Procter and Gamble, (2013a).

"It's time to get *Belo*-fied!" is Sarah Geronimo's way of telling women that this is it—this is *that* time (Skin Care, Inc., 2010). But then, of course, Sarah Geronimo, like Angeline Quinto (also in the Belo commercial) is just one of the few talented women who were able to rise above other men and women through a televised singing contest. Yes, Sarah Geronimo has made it. She has risen to stardom and has earned the right to look like a celebrity. Angeline Quinto, a rising star, is following her footsteps.

The body of one who "has made it" definitely has purchasing power and this purchasing power is channeled towards wanting this particular kind of body that is fair-skinned and young, not unlike a celebrity's.

This New Woman who is winning it all now has to buy her way into looking like she deserves what she has gained for her and by her because a woman is not empowered if she looks shabby. Thus, at the end of the day, a woman's already-entitled body still has to look empowered—that is, polished, parlored, improved, and "*Belo*-fied"—for it to become fully entitled.

These modes of representation help explain why we have an obsession with joining televised contests which people see as a short cut in getting out of poverty. We have seen it many times before: an ordinary "poor barrio lass" winning a contest on national TV and then becoming an endorser of a beauty product. All of a sudden, she becomes extraordinary with her whiter

skin and straighter hair. With her new celebrity looks, there is no turning back for her.

"Healthy" Inside-out: The New Woman is No Longer Just Skin-deep Beautiful

The perfect amount of shine, fresh stylish look, moisture-rich skin, radiant white youthful skin, a hair in-place, the fairest of them all—these are the most common lines used to describe the possibilities for women. However, aside from achieving these aspirational physical attributes, the woman's body also has to be more than just skin-deep beautiful. Deep down the skin, cells are renewed, Myra E products tell us (UNILAB, 2013). Clear and Sunsilk shampoos repair the hair not just at the tips but three layers down the scalp. Liveraide flushes out toxins from the inside so that the outside can glow (Herbs and Nature Corporation, 2011). Garnier has a scientific innovation that brings out the white in our skin at the deepest level of the epidermis (L'Oreal Group , 2010). Deep inside, the New Woman is at her best. She has finally gone beyond being objectified at the surface level. She can now claim that beyond the gaze, she is not hiding anything. According to Sam Pinto in Fitrum, "I am confident *at wala akong itatago* (I have nothing to hide)!" (RDL Products, 2010). Iza Calsado in Myra E says now she can make her beauty last because her "cells are continually renewed" (UNILAB, 2013).

The objectification of women, therefore, has gone inwards, too, to the interior cells of women's bodies. In a Foucauldian sense, the inside part of the body has joined the discourse of propriety. Foucault (1979/2008),in his lecture, "The Birth of Biopolitics," makes a link between neo-liberal market rationality and human capital (as opposed to Marx's "labor"). This human capital is a lifetime of investing in oneself so as to maintain/ensure one's participation in the human economy. Therefore, the commonsense transforms into a naturalized economic sense transforming the *homo sapiens* into *homo economicus*. This market rationality becomes embedded in the human's sense of self as a homo economicus, consistently considering one's self as a life project to be improved upon—brain, skill, skin, and all—for one to survive and thrive.

Furthermore, anti-aging products are no longer just for washing away wrinkles of the aging or the aged. This time, however, they are also for the young ones and those who have not yet aged as they help prevent dreaded old skin and the more dreaded old self.

This proves my point further. There are "healthy" women—women who do exercise, eat well and live very healthy lifestyles—who remain unhappy with their bodies. Women in important meetings or international conferences may sit to talk about solving global issues but later would

exchange comments on how defective their own bodies are. (Wolf, 1991). For most feminists, it is our fear that the longest and the hardest battle for women is the claim to loving our bodies across the full spectrum of healthiness, tautness (from the firm to the saggy), age (from the young to the old), and shape. Indeed, there is basis to what feminists often declare about the body being feminism's last frontier.

Still, health is an important matter with regard to bodies and the "health pitch" is highly conflicted in these ads. One is healthy if cells are continually rejuvenated but only if the woman has the prescribed body-size. A body is healthy only if it looks adolescent or in its twenties. "Forty" is proudly claimed by Miriam Quimbao and Angel Aquino in their Olay Body Bar commercials because they do not look forty. Ponds Natural White promises nature's best because that pinkish glow exemplifies "youthful glow for all ages" (Unilever, 2012).

Again health, like the body itself, is isolated from the rest of the world which is in decay and from the Philippines, where the health targets for the year 2025 set by the World Health Assembly are not being met. This is a major finding indicated in the first Global Nutrition Report which aims to track the world's progress in meeting the following nutrition targets: reducing child stunting and anemia in women of reproductive age, lowering low birth weight, preventing overweightness among children less than five years, increasing the exclusive breast-feeding of infants, and reducing child wasting ("Philippines unlikely to meet", 2014). The Social Weather Station (2015) reports that for the first quarter of 2015, there has been a decrease in the number of families experiencing involuntary hunger from 17.2% to 13.5%. However, the figure still represents three million families. There is still what Peracullo (2011) terms as "the madness of hunger" (p. 173). She recounts how the real state of hunger in the country became so starkly felt in its actuality when in Nov. 2, 2007, a 12-year old Mariannet Amper, from Ma-a, Davao City committed suicide allegedly due to hunger. Amper left behind a diary describing how her family could hardly eat three times a day.

Contrary to the fact that not all Filipinos have access to healthy food, there is an abundance of food in the Liveraide commercial. But, then again, food becomes the enemy here. In the ad, Iza Calsado's friends are intentionally bigger sized compared to her to remind the audience that Iza was once obese but is now embracing a very healthy and active lifestyle. Through this framing, Iza is a very credible endorser of how Liveraide keeps her fit. The tagline "*Liveraide para tunawin ang taba* (to melt away the fat)" (Herbs and Nature Corporation, 2011), makes the ad rare in its explicit and direct targeting of fat, with a clean liver only second to it. What

is not seen is that for most Filipino women, thinness or obesity is a form of malnutrition, often due to inadequate access to balanced meals, and not due to excess in food supply. Obesity is, in fact, surveyed to be a poor woman's problem due to over-eating of rice. Rice, being a staple food, can be a meal by itself for most Filipinos when *ulam* (viand) is not necessarily always available (Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). Drewnowski and Specter specifically report:

> First, the highest rates of obesity occur among population groups with the highest poverty rates and the least education. Second, there is an inverse relation between energy density (MJ/kg) and energy cost ($/MJ), such that energy-dense foods composed of refined grains, added sugars, or fats may represent the lowest-cost option to the consumer. Third, the high energy density and palatability of sweets and fats are associated with higher energy intakes, at least in clinical and laboratory studies. Fourth, poverty and food insecurity are associated with lower food expenditures, low fruit and vegetable consumption, and lower-quality diets. (p.1)

The measurement of health is haphazardly becoming just a skin litmus test. Nowhere in these ads is it emphasized that health is achieved through holistic lifestyle that is both a personal and societal responsibility. It is not about taking the right pill or putting the right lotion. A healthy hair may be frizzy in most days while a healthy set of organs may not come in a fair-skinned body with a 23-inch waistline. Body care products can also be silent as regards their carcinogenic potential because of paucities in the regulation of the cosmetic industry by the Food and Drug Administration (Gue, 2010). The advertisements assure the safety of our bodies because the products are "scientifically proven" using the latest and most complex technology found in the laboratory: Pantene's pro-V formula, Clear's zinc vitanol, Fitrum's L-carnetine and green tea extracts, Met's alpha arbutine and glutathione, Olay's Pro X, Palmolive's coco minerals, and Pond's ginseng extracts. All these "secrets" that are available in nature have been fortified in these products to serve our malleable and can't-wait-to-be-better, bodies.

The body is pictured as a masterpiece primed for nothing less than eternity and poised as an innocent ahistorical entity. However, the masterpiece could go wrong with just one wrong move and one's chance with eternity could easily be obliterated in just a moment's notice.

This runs contrary to how women's bodies have historically accommodated and rebelled against the pursuit of innocence and

reification. Women's feet in China have been bound and subsequently freed; African women's afro hair continue to be problematized and offer venue for continuous reconsideration in different discourses (to braid or not to braid, to perm or not perm); female genital mutilation continues to be a reality in some parts of the world; while women's erotica teases the innocent body and transgresses it too (Moore, 1998). Therefore, women's bodies have paradoxically been constituted between the aspirational and the subverted, definitely not just as ahistorical innocent entities.

Effortless Beautiful Body: The New Woman is No Longer Sweating It

Gretchen Barreto has well shown herself to be a wealthy person, one who comes from the exclusivist sector of society. However, she is practical, too, as we learn from her endorsements. She uses Olay Total Effects, which to her, is affordable compared to her "imported products". With Olay, the "seven signs of skin aging are minimized in just seven days" (Procter and Gamble, (2013b). She is a wise woman because she is not sweating it anymore. "I can even go without make-up," she says.

Bea Alonzo, for Clear shampoo, "goes down to the bottom of the problem" because a woman who doesn't sweat it knows this (Unilever, 2014). The Lewis and Pearl girl knows how to play it cool with the guys. She doesn't have to be ultra feminine anymore. In fact, she can be "one of the boys" because she is calm, cool and practical. She is not sweating it at all. Similarly, Ruffa Gutierrez, who is Cleopatra in the Met commercial, is giving up sweating it, too. However, Ruffa is unlike Cleopatra who still needed slaves to give her a bath of milk in order to get the right skin glow.

One's self is a project because a self-determined woman has goals for the world and, now, for herself. However, it is not worth it if she belabors this. With her multi-tasking roles, she needs to cut to the chase and be impeccably in-the-know about the fastest way to transform her body. So when Angel Aquino in Olay asks her audience, "Why haven't you switched to Olay yet?" (Procter and Gamble, (2013a), her women audience might just take it against themselves because one who is in control is supposed to know this already.

Kris Aquino in Pantene has "whipped it" and she is challenging the rest of womanity if they can as well. She sits alone in a car, isolated and in contemplation. She has come from so far away because of her own determination. To whip it is to do it; just like that, without sweat. In the end, these TV ads say women have to whip it or else. Indeed, Anne Curtis in L-Oreal Paris confides, "Girls, we have enough problems. *Kaya dapat hindi*

na natin prinoproblema ang hair (That's why hair shouldn't be a problem)" (L'Oreal Group, 2012).

In these messages, not all women have made it after all, but only the ones who have risen above the sweat. It is important to note that sweat has always been connected with soil and toil, with hard-work, with blue-collar jobs, and with tasks that are "of the body." One who uses her body is always paid less compared to the one who merely "thinks" or does mental work: the *labandera* (laundrywoman) vs. the bank manager, the bank teller vs. the CEO, or the welder vs. the fore-man.

Indeed, "*bakit kailangan pang magtiis* (why suffer)?" asks Christine Reyes in Belo Essentials, when there is a faster solution to everything, especially the whitening of skin (Skin Care, Inc., 2010). By making the successful body and radiant skin accessible to all, anybody can finally detach herself from the mundane ordinariness of sweat. Women, these ads are saying, are fighting for their individuality by going home and dressing up, savoring long showers and slow skin exfoliation sessions as they bathe in excessive femininity. The only time that she goes out is when there is an audience with a pack of cameras, all gazing at her; and why not, she is sweat-free, dolled-up and so over the mud.

All-around, All-purpose Body: The New Woman with a Malleable body

The ideal feminine body is channeled through consumerist culture's reliable merchandise, the Barbie doll. Urla and Swedlund (2000) argue that although "Barbie's identity maybe mutable—one day she might be an astronaut, another a cheerleader—her hyper-slender and big-chested body has remained fundamentally unchanged over the years" (p. 407). Likewise, Pineda (2002), in a very personal essay, gives an intimate picture of how a person appropriates for herself ideas of an ideal feminine, Barbie. Ultimately, Pineda recounts, she has consistently failed to measure up to Barbie's eternal perfection.

In these commercials, the New Woman is always the better version of herself, always at the end of a life-long make-over session. This perpetual reinvention of one's self, the pitying of the new self with the old one is heralded as a woman's reward for everything she has gone through. Finally, she is allowed to focus on herself and this allowance should be spent on making herself better for what else is there to do?

Belo-fied, Angeline Quinto turns from "dreamer to dream-girl" and a girl transforms from a "so-so" to "oh-so- awesome!" (Skin Care, Inc., 2010).

In Lewis and Pearl, a younger Coleen Garcia is that cool girl who "snorts when she laughs, one of the boys, and *sobrang takaw* (such a glutton)"

(Green Cross Corporation 2010). A cute boy says, "And I like her," yet Coleen remains oblivious because she is cool like that. She does not hear it, of course, because she has her headset on. She simply rocks like that. And though she rocks, she "still smells like an angel". Coleen is definitely like our typical all-around cool girl.

In the postmodern tradition, however, "coolness" as an ideal type can be subverted to mean the "uncool" as it rectifies any form of oppressive essentialism. Postmodernity continually challenges all forms of reification including the reification of coolness.

However, the non-reification of "essences" in postmodernity has been slapped with its total opposite—the all-equivalent, the quintessential. The ideal is not just challenged with the non-ideal, but rather, with all that it can be—the all-and-be-all of it, the all-around. MacDonald's (1995) critique on the myths of femininity in popular media asserts that "feeling good" for women involves a larger array of requirements and, I may add, not just the basic effortless trappings of coolness. This includes success in career, sexual life and appearance. In all three cases, nothing is to be achieved without hard work and commitment. The commercials I have analyzed just reemphasize that this life project of improvement in women's career and sexual lives all point to women's appearance as the most central of projects. The commitment and the hard-work are often hidden behind the easy-breezy dexterity of a malleable body.

In the Myra E advertisement, Iza Calsado exemplifies strength. In one scene, she jogs ahead of several men whose presence she knows and whose gaze objectify her body. In another scene, she lifts heavy blocks as she helps communities build homes. Indeed, Iza the humanitarian has strong arms, an attribute that is atypical in beauty product commercials. However, in the evening scene, she dons a black gown and swishes down that grand staircase to be gazed at again. These scenes indicate her malleability. She is like chameleon who is able to adapt to her environment's demands. She is all-around and transformable, embodying the ultimate New Woman.

Toni Gonzaga, for her part, is grateful to Pond's, that's why she is declaring happily, "*May igaganda pa pala ako* (I never thought I could still be more beautiful)" (Unilever, 2014). As she makes this claim, her past self is posted in black and white, in contrast to her present self with her white rosy complexion. Meanwhile, the Active White woman is "remarkable" as a man's voice-over validates her, "She enjoys a full-time career and independence (USA Formula, 2010). She knows her colors by heart, taking charge of her radiant white skin. Tell me, what man can resist her?" (USA Formula, 2010).

Indeed, what man can resist her when she can be everything to him now: powerful yet submissive, independent yet constantly servile to his whims?

Notice the racist obsession with whiteness or what Hall (2006) terms as the "bleaching syndrome." The syndrome is taken to explain how whiteness has historically been a secure, and therefore aspirational, currency for social status. Our colonizers—the Spaniards, the Japanese and the Americans—were all fair-skinned. Moreover, being fair-skinned could mean that a parent could be a foreigner. By extension, this parent could potentially endow some inheritance, or at least some social support, to the mestizo child.

The body is framed inside a narrative that resembles a short biography. The cursory life story emphasizes the passing of time, particularly the woman's growth into becoming the better version of herself. The story contextualizes the ordinariness of these celebrities and implies that their story can be applied to everyone, as well. We see them with their "natural look," or what is now commonly called as the "no-make-up" make-up (that make-up look that looks pure and clean without making the make-up obvious). The advertisements show this motif: Iza Calsado in the shower, Angel Aquino in the shower, Angelica Panganiban in the shower, and Sarah Geronimo in the shower. They then step out into the limelight, having been transformed suddenly into glossy and shining women.

In these ads, the bleaching syndrome is indeed pronounced. One way to understand it critically is to locate it within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Hall, 2006). Since the advertisements focus on the fulfillment of physical needs such as wealth and income as well as safety needs such housing and standards of living instead of belongingness, self-esteem and self-actualization, they prevent Filipino women from advancing beyond the base of Maslow's hierarchy. Hall (2006) explains:

> This requires a substantive knowledge and emphatic appreciation of Western culture at the expense of the Filipino self-esteem. Thus the Bleaching Syndrome suggests that Filipinas who are affected by it must alter themselves to approximate a mainstream fantasy. Such alteration is a quasi-functional strategy, which ultimately fails (p. 114).

Oplan Me-Myself-and-I: The Depolitization Project in these Advertisements

Individualized and Isolated Bodies

As what have been found out, these advertisements have only presented summarized and sanitized forms of empowerment. The New Woman has

both evolved and managed to roll with the times, breaking free from the traditional bonds she used to be tied with.

Primary in these representations is the notion of an individualized sense of agency. Except for Avon, Pond's, Palmolive, and Met, the main characters are always alone in all the frames except when they are joined by a man towards the end of the advertisements or as spectators. However, when there are other women in the story, they are shown either as mere aspirators or, in the case of Met, as servants to Ruffa's Cleopatra. She is in the company of women but only she can rise above mediocrity. The servant women are content that their queen is able to do so. In the Palmolive commercial, KC Concepcion's friends during a girls' night out are just blurred backdrops to her monologue in front of the camera. They just supply the youthful giggle that adds to the energetic *mise-en-scéne* of the story. KC is at center-stage but she is not seen as relating to the other girls. In the Avon lipstick commercial by Anne Curtis, Anne is the cover of the magazine that three women are looking at. They comment at Anne's picture, "She really shines, no?" (Avon Philippines, 2013). Meanwhile, Angel Aquino for Olay considers herself above the other women in her forties who are afraid to reveal skin. In comparison to these women, Angel isn't reticent about showing her radiant and youthful skin.

When women are with other women, they are often pitted against one another: Who among them has the blacker and straighter hair, the whiter skin, and the better self?

Women, therefore, see their bodies as being unruly. The hair is something to be tamed either by straightening or perming; the skin to be whitened or tanned; and the breasts to be augmented or reduced. After all, if a woman cannot govern her unruly body, she has no one but herself to blame.

Estrada-Claudio's (2002) "Love, Desire, and Sexuality" demonstrates how women's bodies are rationally governed by the state and how this supports the capitalist investments on sexuality. According to her, women's unfulfilled desired is due to century-old limited definitions of women's bodies as being either utilitarian or fantastical. She demonstrated that marital rape is an example of how women's desire is imagined within bounds of heterosexual penetrative sex. When women voice out that their sensual bodies seek something else but could not fully express it, their bodies are transgressed. This transgression is also extended to how this body is pressured to accommodate the economic demand for her to be desirable. She illustrates:

> The marketing of the female body has always been a major arena of capitalist enterprise.... The beauty and

> fashion industry generates a neurotic cycle of unreachable consumerist desire with their perpetual re-inventions of impossible standards of white, upper class, female beauty. Mothering and nurturing is now marked by the parameters of good home-making that expects women to aspire for the Model (western) house, full of model (western) furniture and the latest model (western) appliances…. These very same women do not care whether they earn very little in sweatshops because they accept their secondary role in the productive sector. (pp. 85-86)

Raymundo's (2005) article, "Articulations of Capital in a Globalized Culture," presents an analysis of the representation of a supposedly "globalized" Filipina. Her analysis of the various symbolic capitals in "Global Pinay," a segment in the then-popular noontime TV show, *Magandang Tanghali Bayan*, exposes the symbolic violence of globalization. Using Bourdieu's position in theorizing the popular, she presents the "expansionist agenda" of global capitalism in her critique of the cultural beyond culturalism. She therefore provides a critical gaze to a supposedly naturalized phenomenon of a transnational/hybrid Pinay by looking at the cultural text through the neo-liberal capitalist discourse that lies behind it. What Raymundo proposes runs in parallel with this paper's contention: the New Woman is not just an innocent cultural product but rather a part of an expansionist agenda of the neo-liberal economic logic. It is recreated often because it continues to sell.

Rajan (2004), meanwhile, extends the case against advertisers and affirms what have been found out in this present study. She arrives at a conclusion that by positioning the New Woman as having control over her finances, she becomes the perfect target of advertisers. She elucidates:

> In interpellating the users of these products as "new" women, ads not only provide an attractive and desired self-image for women in general, but also provide a non-active model of citizenship that is significantly, now gendered female. (p. 189)

The depolitization occurs in these twenty advertisements at the point when feminist social goals such as self-definition, equal treatment in labor markets and inside the household economy, control over one's body and personal freedom are framed as commodity form. The depoliticization also

forgets its origin as a critique of unequal social, economic, sexual, racial, and political relations.

These forms of interpellation in the 20 advertisements obliterate the political project of feminism and assign certain elements of the women's movement's agenda into a a simplified sign system that is devoid of the subjective nuances of the label "woman". It also separates women's liberation from the women's movement by making women's achievement as an individual undertaking and projecting the unquestioned normalcy of this process as outcome of capitalist socio-economic forces. This way, such interpellation valorizes the surfacing of the New Woman, like the valorizing of Rajan's Indian woman, "as a painless, non-conflictual, and even harmonious process that contrasts with the discomforts produced by political feminism" (Rajan, 2004, p. 189).

Women's Bodies in Post-Feminist Utopia/Backlash

A "backlash" has time and again occurred across the feminist discourse. There are the so-called "recovering feminists" who blame feminism's cry for equality as the reason for the career woman's loss of sense of meaning. These are the ones who say their sense of entitlement to a rewarding career, due to feminism's mantra of equal chance for success outside the home, has left them childless at 40 when they would want children at this point in their lives. One thing has been made clear, that the progress of the women's movements has always been turned against women, putting the blame on feminism for the miseries of the world. Faludi (1991) writes:

> The afflictions ascribed to feminism are all myths. From "the man shortage" to "the infertility epidemic" to "female burnout" to "toxic day care," these so-called female crises have had their origins not in the actual conditions of women's lives but rather in a closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture, and advertising—an endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of womanhood. (p. xv)

To stay competitive in the hunt for market share, advertisers have given way to female consumers' hostile view of how advertisers continuously dictate them to envy the body or look conveyed in model images. The advertising industry has paralleled, if not greatly contributed to, the emergence of post-feminism in the 1980s. Post-feminism "designates a new generation of women who take for granted the victories secured by their elders, presuming their right to equitable treatment both in the work place

and at home, *while shunning the label feminism* [emphasis mine]" (Goldman, 1992, p. 130). The 20 advertisements greatly contribute to the aesthetical depoliticizing nature of feminism. They adapt a brand of feminism that is revised, polished, trimmed, and incorporated into the demands of the commodity form. Goldman puts it this way:

> The process of turning feminism into sign values fetishizes feminism into iconography of things. When advertisers appropriate feminism, they cook it to distill out a residue—an object: a look, a style.... Sign- objects are thus made to stand for, and made equivalent to, feminist goals of independence and professional success. Personality can be represented, relationships achieved and resources acquired through personal consumer choices. (p. 132)

The New Woman is not apologetic about this anymore. Her purchasing power deems her commanding of what choices to make, because she is supposed to have many options at this point in history. She is both able to take care of everyone and most importantly, herself. Her body is an autonomous entity capable of will-power and discipline. Her sexuality is something she exercises by choice rather than her ascribed gender role. Torres (2010) thus declares:

> Women will always be women. No matter how "evolved" women are, there is still that natural need for women to look beautiful. But whereas before women did this for men in their lives, nowadays women dress up or pretty themselves for their own personal satisfaction. (p. 32)

Rajan (2004) points out that if feminists recognize that femaleness is a construction of the body that risks women's desire and sexualities as dispensable commodity, then a feminist critic of the dominant discourse underscores coercive structure of women's representation. MacDonald (1995) investigated just how advertising invented what she termed as "post-feminist utopia" (p. 90). Resting on the idea that feminist battles have now been completely won and that its ideologies have now become slogans by virtue of their being out-dated, women of today can have whatever they want as long as they have sufficient will and determination, the most important characteristics of the New Woman. Advertising reinvents the feminists' overburdened woman who multitasks between career and home-making plus the pleasures of seduction from the health-club and the

bedroom, into the executive superwoman who seems to be always on the move, always achieving, always busy, but who is in complete control. Images of her jet-setting, caring for children, and reveling in an exciting social life, predominate the birthing of this New Woman (McDonald, 1995).

If looking after others has already become a manageable obligation which is no longer a dreary experience, the New Woman now has to maximize her full potential given what she has gained so far. This embodied consumerism, carrying feminist rhetoric, has without a doubt made many women believe that feminism is essentially a middle-class undertaking. Co-optation is "responding to the competing ideology, innovating it, and adopting its surface terminology without taking the broad ideology that underpins it" (MacDonald, 1995, p. 91). To quote MacDonald:

> For the new superwoman to combine career and home, cultivate independence, while maintaining family relationships, remain sexually alluring but also convincingly businesslike, a panoply of material aids and services were required. From microwave ovens to massage oils, from linen suits to silk lingerie, from aerobics to assertiveness-training classes, her iconography depended on spending money. (p. 91)

Radner (1995) further analyzes the concept of New Woman by asking:

> How does this trajectory delineate an arena in which feminine identity is both empowered, accorded a position of relative autonomy, of relative domination, and circumscribed within a social structure that in the final analysis maintains masculinity as the top in a relationship in which femininity continues to define the bottom? (p. 5)

In ending, I demand that there should be more to these representations than just the surface elements or the sanitized and summarized form of a progressive world-view such as feminism. For one, representations should be deepened to include a wider and more inclusive shape, color, age, and size of women. More importantly, though, the message of empowerment taken as under the guise of celebrating women's emancipation should not forget many other alternative routes to liberation. These routes are far from a focus on personal agency but rather on structural reforms and societal transformations. Audiences are challenged to continually subvert the text of representations and, for women, to hail our own realities as the argument

against prescribed notions of the ideal body. After all, our lived realities are often the first evidence contesting the idealist claims. Our living, breathing, out-of-shape bodies come in different shapes and statures. Our ways towards emancipation are never just through an appearance make-over but through hard-work and, most importantly, through power-with discourse and collective efforts with other women and men too. These efforts are often sweaty, sustained, and difficult—far from the glamorous and utilitarian notions of the body and their potential freedom we see on advertisements.

Consistent with my socialist feminist perspective, I propose that there be continuous personal and structural analyses of women and our bodies and how these are imagined in representations. To reemphasize, I propose that with these analyses comes a re-imagination of the myths of liberation to include both individual conscientizations and collective coalitional politics that bring long-term dents on structure. Here, I give as examples, some collective efforts in media that attempt at this re-imagination.

The Representation Project (http://therepresentationproject.org) is an advocacy aimed at empowering individuals to challenge sexist media. It is currently raising funds for a mobile app called #NotBuyingIt. The organization has teamed up with Emer.ge.com, an online resource that focuses on body image. The organizations' shared mission is to fight sexist and damaging media and celebrate the positive. This #NotBuyingIt app is envisioned to allow users to photograph, map, and share ads that objectify women. A significant number of people have already begun to challenge brands, including big names such as Hallmark and Amazon ("People Worldwide are Using Hashtag," 2014). UNESCO has also released its scholarly agenda for the global alliance for media and gender in 2014, emphasizing the importance of structural reforms. Representatives from the Philippines are active participants in its drafting.

Furthermore, there is the Media Education Foundation which has been very influential in widening the network and easing accessibility to materials by media reform activists. Beyond education, the foundation offers an extensive resource on the internal workings of media industries, including exposés on their revenues. It has researches on media literacy, pornography, and advertisement reform indices all over the world just to name a few. It offers a wide array of links of organization worldwide doing media criticism, surveillance, and conversion. It has more than a hundred organization affiliates across the globe actively exchanging strategies from lobbying to consumer boycotting.

In the Philippines, we still have a lot to work on. Other countries offer models on how the neoliberal market can be cautioned and curtailed via the state and collective action. In Sweden, for instance, advertisements have

been banned from children's primetime programs since 1991, thanks to women organizations' consistent pressure on the state and the advertising industry ("Sweden Pushes Its Ban on Children's Ads", 2001). In Venezuela, venezuelaysis.com has been launched which is tasked to have immediate, consistent and long-term feedback system on the media. It has made writing to the editors/producers/directors very accessible allowing anonymity and legal back-up. The organization has also arranged for face-to-face meetings between advertisers and consumers.

These collective actions are testaments to the need for a continuous vigilance with how the seductions of the neo-liberal economy have made feminism their handmaiden by using it as just another powerful message in support of sales. Part of this activism is to break the link between the valorizing of unwaged work, like care-work, and the uncritical heralding of the family. Care-work is central in the embodiment concept of feminism. Consequently, the socialist feminist strategy is ultimately a radical, albeit slow, severing of the bond between bureaucratic capitalism and free-market fundamentalism to give way to participatory democracy that is true to a basic feminist language of power, the "power with" ideal.

Ultimately, this critique of co-optation is a reemphasis on the examination of the intersectionality of oppression among women in general and consumers in particular. The multi-layered nature of oppression—gender, economic, racial, etc.—is apparent in how the depolitization project in advertisement is remade at each moment when a woman counts on herself and herself alone, when she deems it her priority by coercive choice to bank on her body as her ultimate social capital because, otherwise, what does she have? Therefore, instead of expanding the discourse to include the examination of the economic-sense, a woman resorts to the whitening cream because perhaps the cream can give her that chance at economic freedom however thinly substantiated it maybe. Also, because that cream is a reminder that she has it well this time, compared to other women who have it the worst. Those who cannot afford the cream will not have time to examine the workings behind all these commercial jingles because the family awaits and the stomach rumbles. She needs to be reminded of this because it sustains her, what with the pressure behind the proclamation that she is an equally important contributor to the economy. As she goes out into the "economy", the advertisement slogans cheer her on and mute the invitation of other women and men at subversion.

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Appendix

The 20 pre-selected beauty product TV advertisements are the following (the words in italics are the brand names, two for each type as enumerated above):

1. Health products:
    a. *Fitrum* (with Sam Pinto)
    b. *Myra 400E* multivitamins (with IzaCalsado– the new me)
    c. *Liveraide* (with IzaCalsado)
    d. *Myra Vita* white
2. Hair products:
    a. *Clear shampoo* (with Bea Alonzo – Going to the bottom of the problem)
    b. *Palmolive* shampoo (with KC Concepcion – girls' night out)
    c. *LOreal Paris* shampoo (with Ane Curtis)
    d. *Pantene* shampoo (with Kris Aquino)
3. Facial Products:
    a. *Pond's Pinkish Naturals* moisturizer/facial cream (with Angelica Panganiban – Plants and vines)
    b. *Pond's Rosy Glow* (with Toni Gonzaga)
    c. *Olay* anti aging cream (with Gretchen Barreto)
    d. *Garnier* light complete cream
4. Body products:
    a. *Olay Beauty Bar* (with Miriam Quiambao)
    b. *Active White Glutathione*
    c. *Belo Essential* beauty bar (with Christine Reyes)
    d. *Met* whitening (with Ruffa Gutierrez)
5. Make-up and perfume:
    a. *Lewis & Pear*l cologne
    b. *Avon* perfume (with Angel Locsin)
    c. *Avon* lipstick (with Anne Curtis)
    d. *Lewis and Pearl* body mist

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