

CASHING IN ON “GIRL POWER”:
THE COMMODIFICATION OF POSTFEMINIST
IDEALS IN ADVERTISING

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by
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CASHING IN ON “GIRL POWER”

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, fem-vertising, Girl Power rhetoric, feminist consumerism and commodity feminism have proliferated in advertising. This study analyzes key literature regarding how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and cause marketing incorporate postfeminist and neoliberal theory into marketing campaigns to encourage women to consume brands as a sign of their independence and power. This research, conducted as qualitative focus group analyses, examines how groups of racially diverse college-aged women define feminism and the modern empowered woman, how they connect and react to advertisements using women’s empowerment as a selling point, and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements. Through this research, it became clear that race matters when discussing these advertisements. Definitions of feminism depended on participants’ race, and racial diversity in the advertisements was a powerful motivator, especially for women of color. The advertisements using feminist rhetoric were deemed empowering, but not feminist, and participants were ultimately skeptical of corporations promoting feminist politics. However, they struggled to imagine a better alternative, and accepted that it was their responsibility to purchase from companies that represented their values. Overall, participants reinforced the use of a neoliberal lens to understand postfeminist advertising.

Keywords: commodity feminism, postfeminism, neoliberalism, cause marketing, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), intersectionality.

Chapter One: Introduction

“I heard that girls couldn’t rap. I rapped.”

— *Queen Latifah in CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” commercial*

In the last decade, a new trend in the representation of women in advertising emerged when major brands began using women’s empowerment rhetoric to sell products. CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” commercial featured female celebrities like Queen Latifah, Ellen DeGeneres and Katy Perry to demonstrate that young girls can achieve whatever they set their minds to – whether they want to be a rapper, comedian or pop star. Similarly, Always created a campaign to make the phrase “like a girl” mean amazing things, and Pantene started a conversation about whether women apologize too much in its “Not Sorry” advertisement. These are just three examples of brands using feminist ideals and women’s empowerment rhetoric to associate their brand with empowerment and change for women. Brands are celebrating females as smart and capable, and this advertising trend has changed the way that brands market and speak to women.

The investigation of gender stereotypes in advertising has more than five decades of research behind it. The women’s movement of the 1960s brought about new opportunities for women and ushered them towards more educational and career opportunities – and financial independence. This thesis contains a literature review that gives a brief history of feminism. It uses Rosalind Gill’s definition of postfeminism to highlight the focus on individualism, choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007). The image of the empowered women is often associated with the words “choice,” “freedom,” and “agency,” which have clear ties to neoliberal theory (Chen, 2013, p. 440). Neoliberalism

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is understood as constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating (Brown, 2003; Gill, 2007). Therefore, Gill argues that women serve as the perfect subject of neoliberalism (2007) and recent advertisements advance the image of a new, empowered woman embracing commodity culture (Chen, 2013). Most research on postfeminism’s and neoliberalism’s ties to advertising, however, ignores the importance of race. Intersectionality will be explored in this literature review, and how advertising depicts women of color.

In recent years, advertising has critically changed how it represents and speaks to women. Fem-vertising is what advertisers call the growing marketing trend that uses feminist values and female empowerment to encourage brand activism (Castillo, 2014). These advertising campaigns rely on consumers voluntarily participating in championing the social cause with the brand by engaging with the content. In Dove’s well-known *Real Beauty* campaign, the company used “feminist consumerism” to encourage women to perform feminist and self-care practices by engaging with the brand (Johnston and Taylor, 2008, p. 943). “Girl Power” has also emerged from feminist discourse and presents an assertive and dynamic young woman that is not bound by the constraints of femininity (Gonick, 2006, p. 2). Over the past decade, CSR and cause marketing has coincided with women and young girls emerging as the public faces of brands (Calkin, 2015). The result has been a proliferation of business initiatives for women’s empowerment, gender equality and massive growth in CSR and cause marketing related to feminist issues.

Depiction of women in the media has long been a relevant topic of research that is well-established in marketing and communication literature. Although fem-vertising and

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advertisements that use components of feminism have been a hot topic in editorials and industry publications, little scholarly research has been done on this advertising trend and race often does not factor into the discussion or analysis of the trend. There are few studies that consider how women of different racial constructions connect with and react to brands that show them (and other ethnically diverse females) as strong and empowered.

As the consuming world becomes more diverse, it is increasingly important to expand scholarly research to include the perspectives of people of different races, ethnicities and religions. This study uses focus group methodology to explore the relationship between neoliberalism and postfeminism in advertising. It examines how a group of college-aged women of different racial constructions react to advertisements using women’s empowerment rhetoric to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How do female participants of different racial identities define and perceive feminism?
- **RQ2:** How do female participants of different racial identities perceive campaigns that reflect postfeminist themes?
- **RQ3:** How do participants feel about the portrayal of race in advertising campaigns that use empowerment rhetoric?

To answer these questions, this study utilizes qualitative methodology. It is informed by Judith Taylor, Josée Johnston and Krista Whitehead’s (2016) use of focus group analysis to better understand how young, feminist-identified women understood Dove’s *Real Beauty* campaign and whether it was compatible with the participants’ version of feminism (Taylor et al, 2016). By examining the opinions and reactions of female

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participants with different racial constructions through focus group methodology, this research gives the advertising industry and the academic world important information on how diverse groups of women regard these campaigns and how the industry can become more inclusive with this marketing strategy.

Through this research three main themes emerged: (1) race matters in both feminism and advertising; (2) empowerment is distinct from feminism; and (3) a complicated relationship between feminism and corporatism is partially reconciled through ethical consumption. Across all the focus groups, definitions of feminism depended on participants' race, and racial diversity in advertisements had a powerful influence, especially on women of color. This research also determined that participants found the advertisements using feminist rhetoric to be empowering, but not feminist. They still believed that the empowerment and pro-girl rhetoric, however, could promote cultural change. Participants rejected the conflation of 'feminism' with corporate interests and were ultimately skeptical of corporations promoting feminist politics, but accepted that it was their responsibility to purchase from companies that represented or advanced their values. Participants were cognizant that the companies primary goal was to sell products and critically assessed the advertisements limited ability to effect real change. Interestingly, participants were more critical about the lack of intersectionality in feminism and racial representations in advertising, but did not respond the same way to the corporatization of feminism. While they did not want to conflate feminism with corporate interests, they were still willing to participate within a neoliberal postfeminist framework. In the end, focus group participants deemed these types of advertisements better than nothing in promoting feminist ideals.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

While several definitions of postfeminism have been widely discussed and debated amongst scholars, there exists no one definition for the term. This study relies on Rosalind Gill’s (2007) definition, as it has clear ties to neoliberalism and the media culture. This literature review begins by charting the development of feminism in advertising since the early 1900s through the oft-used wave metaphor. The literature review gives a brief overview of intersectionality and its ties to advertising, and then explores the connection between neoliberalism, advertising and postfeminism. Finally, it connects cause marketing and feminist consumerism, highlighting where they overlap.

Conceptualizing Postfeminism in Media Culture

Many feminist scholars criticize the use of “waves” in charting the development of feminism because it entrenches the perception of a singular feminism and pits generations of feminists against each other (Laughlin et al, 2010). Despite its critics, the waves model is helpful in analyzing the history of feminism in the United States because its chronology contextualizes the progression of feminism (Laughlin et al, 2010).

Early feminism, referred to as the First Wave, formally originated at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and used marketing tools and techniques to publicize the feminist cause (Maclaran, 2012). For example, feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton endorsed Fairy Soap in a U.S. advertising campaign and Amelia Bloomer started a fashion trend called bloomers that was less restrictive than the corset (Maclaran, 2012). Although these First Wave feminists seemed to embrace parts of consumerism, there was tension

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between feminism and consumer culture since many brands portrayed the ideal woman as one that was domesticated or sexualized.

Second Wave feminism started developing in the 1960s and these feminists rejected the socio-economic order because they believed that consumer culture was an unfair, patriarchal system (Maclaran, 2012). Betty Friedman wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, which critiqued marketing activities that pushed women towards child rearing and defined them exclusively as wives and mothers (1963). Advertisers slowly realized they were alienating women who had tremendous amounts of buying power and began to incorporate themes of liberation and empowerment associated with the suffragettes into advertising campaigns (Maclaran, 2012).

In the early 1990s, Third Wave feminism began evolving. Third Wave feminism can be broadly viewed as a reaction to the perceived failures of Second Wave feminism. It attempted to include the concerns of women of color, women from developing nations and women who are lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (Beasley, 1999). Many of these groups were denied a voice in earlier decades because white women primarily led the feminist movement.

The Third Wave overlaps with postfeminism, which is characterized as a “reconciliation of feminism and consumption” (Maclaran, 2012, p. 466). This phrase is important because it ties buying power to feminism, embraces capitalistic tendencies and links female empowerment to purchasing power. Television shows like *Sex and the City* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* suggest that when women purchase shoes or wear designer dresses it is a form of pleasing and empowering themselves rather than others (Maclaran, 2012). Rosalind Gill (2007) refers to the current time period as a “postfeminist media

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culture” because postfeminism plays such a huge role in modern marketing (p. 148). She believes that postfeminism cannot be defined by one static notion of feminism, but instead is a sensibility that can be described by the:

...notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill, 2007, p. 149).

Gill’s definition is one of the clearest interpretations of postfeminism that exists, and it effectively shows the shift away from Second Wave feminism while highlighting the ties to commodity culture. Although postfeminist theory portrays women as empowered consumers, advertisers typically empty feminism of its political content to make the message adhere more easily to the brand and market as a whole (Goldman, 1992).

Postfeminist theory is relevant to advertising because of the shift in feminist marketing strategies. As discussed earlier, older advertisements oppressed women and forced them into archaic roles. Now, advertisers have developed new representations and strategies towards women that factor in this postfeminist shift to avoid critics and appeal to female audiences. These advertisements resemble the CoverGirl, Always and Pantene campaigns mentioned above that use feminism and Girl Power rhetoric to associate the brands with empowerment and change for women.

Intersectionality and the Portrayal of Women of Color

One critical theme of feminism is analyzing what it means to be a woman during different time periods and circumstances. Third Wave feminism specifically attempted to include the concerns of women of color. Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term

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“intersectionality” in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” her critique of the contemporary feminist movement (1989). According to Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004), the concept of intersectionality signifies:

...the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands (p. 76).

This definition demonstrates that simply including Black women and other female minorities into the already existing structure of feminism is insufficient. Instead, Crenshaw (1989) believes that “for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating ‘women’s experience’ or ‘the Black experience’ into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast” (p. 58). Defining sex and race as mutually exclusive categories renders the experience of gendered racism inconsequential. Crenshaw makes it clear that for change to happen within feminism, all women must band together in solidarity. She believes that contemporary feminists need to recognize the realities of women elsewhere on the globe, struggling with marginalization, and integrate their stories into the movement (1989).

Audre Lorde insisted on foregrounding race in feminist discussion and exposed how white guilt can hinder feminist progress (1984). The white, upper-class feminist perspective from the Second Wave era is not universal and may not resonate with women who suffered from slavery or face challenges in less industrialized countries. Postfeminist research is filled with primarily white examples of empowerment, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Sex and the City*. Another oft-cited example in postfeminist

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literature, the Spice Girls, did have one Black member (Melanie Brown), but her nickname was “Scary Spice” which has a racist connotation. Although postfeminism is part of the Third Wave, it still has not lost its white feminist perspective.

The origin of intersectionality research is grounded in feminism, but the framework is widely applicable to other areas such as politics, social work, psychology, and advertising, as its purpose is to encourage people to better understand and acknowledge the realities of people of differing races, cultures, sexualities and genders. As brands attempt to appeal to a wider range of consumers, advertisements have begun to engage diverse social identities that construct race, gender and sexuality in a way that renders those identities empty of meaning (Barnum & Zajicek, 2008). Brands are guilty of whitewashing advertisements to make them more applicable to the white majority, at the expense of people of color. Or, recent research by Lloyds Banking Group (2016) found that often minority populations are not included in advertisements at all. After reviewing 1,300 adverts in the United Kingdom from 40 different brands, they found that only 19 percent of people featured in the advertisements were from minority groups (Lloyds Banking Group, 2016). Growing diversity, increasing multinationalism and a need to better understand the diverse range of consumers has made advertising to different races, sexualities and religions an important topic of discussion.

On the most basic level, a study by Corliss Green has identified a significant relationship between the ethnic background of models featured in ads and the target audience’s evaluation of those ads (1999). Viewers’ feelings towards advertisements depend largely on their degree of identification with their ethnic group, the racial composition of the ad and where the ads are placed (Green, 1999). It was determined that

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audience members relate most strongly to advertising that portrays their cultural and ethnic heritage (Green, 1999). The findings do not suggest that positive evaluations are limited to ads featuring models of the same ethnic background, just that it is influential. This study is important because a majority of advertising is not ethnically diverse and tends to display white people more prominently than people of color.

There has been much research specific to Black women and their portrayal in the media. In addition to selling products, advertising also sells values and attitudes. Overwhelmingly, advertising exalts white standards of beauty such as “light skin, straight or wavy hair, and blue or green eyes” (Cortese, 2008, pg. 17). The white ideals that popular culture promotes only allows Black women who fit these ideals to be called beautiful, causing an entire group of African American women to be deemed unacceptable and unworthy of the media’s attention (Thompson, 2009). This “whitewashing,” a term used by the media (Li, 2008), has become a prevalent problem in advertising. Popular images of Black celebrities like Beyoncé, Queen Latifah and Rhianna have all been “whitened” by lightening their skin or straightening their hair in advertisements.

Black beauty has often been juxtaposed with white beauty, and a “socially stratified hierarchy” began to take place with coarse-haired Black women at the bottom (Thompson, 2009, p. 834). The internalization of white, Western standards of beauty can cause women with darker skin and coarser hair to feel ostracized, even within their own race. This internalization is exemplified by the Clark Doll test, conducted in the 1930s by psychologists Dr. Kenneth Clark and Dr. Mamie Clark. The Clark Doll test revealed that a majority of the Black children who took the test selected white dolls for positive

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attributes and the black dolls for negative attributes (Bernstein, 2011). This test, although critiqued for its flaws, reveals the internalization of what the larger society sees as good, acceptable and beautiful (Bernstein, 2011). This idea of having either a good or bad skin tone, based off of Westernized ideals, is problematic, especially when further exacerbated by the media.

In 2008, beauty brand L’Oreal came under fire when it was accused of “whitewashing” Beyoncé (Li, 2008). This ad campaign featured Beyoncé with long, straight strawberry-blonde hair and skin much lighter than her natural tone. According to Dionne Stephens and April Few (2007), hair texture and skin tone are two traits central to beauty and have “historically been used as a measure of social, political and economic worth for African Americans” (p. 257). The media defines female beauty by long, silky and flowing hair, something that is naturally unattainable for Black women, causing desirable femininity to be predominately associated with white women (Thompson, 2009). Therefore, the more Westernized that Black women look, the more beautiful they are considered in popular culture. A study by Cynthia Frisby (2004) showed that “the fact remains that exposure to idealized images of other women and, more specifically, African American women, had an impact on Black women who reported being less satisfied with their bodies” (p. 342). This research shows how women of different ethnic groups and cultures may be adversely affected by ads.

The notion of a Black and white binary, defined as “the conception that race in America consists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups, the Black and the White” (Perea, 1997, p. 1219), has dominated studies of race in the United States. While the relationship between Black and white populations is crucial to

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understanding how race is structured in the United States, it also marginalizes the forms of racism experienced by other groups of color (Thangaraj, 2012). This binary has resulted in a lack of research about the representation of Latina and Asian women in the media, especially when compared to the proliferation of research on Black women. While Black women have stereotypically been represented as exotic or as a type of mammy (Cortese, 2008), Latinas have been shown as passionate and emotional (Fregoso, 2003) and Asian women as sexually submissive (Le Espiritu, 1997).

Latinas are more underrepresented than Blacks in advertising, and were virtually nonexistent in advertisements in the United States prior to 1980 (Cortese, 2008). Most of these depictions, as with portrayals of other people of color, have been stereotypical. The most common was the “Latina sex object,” a spitfire seductress used in many movies and advertisements (Cortese, 2008, p. 33). To this day, Latinas are often forced into three roles in the media: sex objects, maids or illegal immigrants (Cortese, 2008). Prominent actresses like Sophia Vergara and Jennifer Lopez are often cast as over sexualized or speak with a heavy accent and “resort to rapid-fire Spanish when annoyed” (Cortese, 2008, p. 34). Some Latina celebrities, such as Rita Hayworth, attempted to distance themselves from their Latina roots to advance their career. After Hayworth dyed her hair auburn and lightened her skin, her career took off.

An article titled “The Evolution of Latinas in Ads (Oh Wait! Nothing Has Changed)” in *Latina Magazine* – the largest magazine edited by and for Latina women – highlights how tired Latina women are of seeing hypersexualized representations of themselves in the media (Reichard, 2016). The article demonstrates that stereotypes of Latina women continue to be perpetuated by brands and in the media and not much has

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changed over the years. The article highlights the negative feelings Latina women harbor towards brands and marketing tactics that strip them of their multi-dimensionality. Much like Frisby's (2004) research that suggested Black women are adversely effected by negative portrayal in advertisements, Latina women seem to face a similar problem when portrayed as overtly sexual or stereotyped as maids and illegal immigrants.

Similarly, Asian women have been forced into stereotypical roles as well. Taylor and Stern (1997) set the stage for investigating Asian female images in advertising. In their study, they conducted a content analysis of Asian representation and concluded that Asian women were less represented and were perceived as less important than any other minority women in the United States (Taylor & Stern, 1997). Paek and Shah's study (2003) found that representation of Asian women was dominated by images that appeared typically silent, subservient and exotic, consistent with traditional stereotypes in the entertainment media. Regardless of some depictions of Asian women in professional roles, the image of petite and exotic beauty remains an overwhelming visual theme (Paek & Shah, 2003).

Asian women also experience pressure to look more Westernized. Plastic surgery is not just a way to enhance a person's appearance, but to minimize physical signs that marks a person as different from the dominant ethnic group (Davis, 2003). This kind of plastic surgery serves as a way to pass or look more “normal.” Julie Chen, a television anchor, revealed that she got eye-widening surgery to further her career (Romano, 2013). And it worked – her career took off. Chen revealed this personal example of ethnic cosmetic surgery to the public to demonstrate how Asian women are pressured to look white, especially in Hollywood-type settings.

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There are many examples of these stereotypes in the media. A Chinese detergent advertisement in 2016 spurred outrage online when it featured an Asian woman shoving a detergent pod into the mouth of a black worker and pushing him into a washing machine (Bromwich, 2016). After a cycle, the man emerges as a pale Asian man instead (Bromwich, 2016). Just this year, skin care brand Nivea pulled an advertisement with the phrase “White is purity” (Tsang, 2017) and Pepsi pulled its campaign with Kendall Jenner that trivialized the Black Lives Matter movement (Victor, 2017). These advertisements might seem extreme, but they are just three recent examples of media that assumes white skin is more attractive.

Many of campaigns that feature feminist ideals predominately feature white women or women of color that are “whitewashed.” However, brands are attempting to rectify this problem by changing the portrayal of women of color in advertisements. The Nike ad “Unlimited Greatness” is a recent tribute to Serena Williams as the greatest athlete of all time. Williams is not whitewashed and the ad delivers simple words and phrases one by one: Compton, sister, outsider, pro, #304, winner, top 10, Paris, London, New York, Melbourne, #1, injured, struggling, #160, done, comeback, focused, #1, legend, greatest female athlete ever, greatest athlete ever, Just do it (Nike, 2016). As the words “greatest female athlete ever” flash across the screen, the word “female” disappears and all that remains is “greatest athlete ever” (Nike, 2016). This ad is not just a tribute to Williams’ Black heritage, but it also empowers her as a woman – the best of both worlds.

Intersectionality research is critical because it acknowledges and complicates individuals’ lived experiences. White women often have the privilege of being seen as

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complex human beings, but women of color do not. Intersectionality does not just apply to women though; it applies to anyone with overlapping statuses. This kind of research has important implications for advertising and will help reach and include people who straddle multiple cultures and identities in advertising.

Neoliberalism and Postfeminist Ideals in Advertising

Another theory often explored by postfeminist scholars is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has been defined as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). This definition demonstrates how capitalist markets and the opportunity to choose contribute to individual well-being. Neoliberalism is clearly linked to the capitalist consumer culture and the construction of the new self-responsible consumer (Brown, 2003).

Feminist research has suggested that women, particularly young women, have been constructed as the ideal subjects of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has been defined by its capacity to consume and it is mainly young women who are encouraged to manage their bodies and sexuality through commodity culture (Gill & Scharff, 2011). In her research, Marnina Gonick demonstrates how feminism became not just popular, but sellable. Through bands like the Spice Girls and television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Gonick provides examples of the woman as the perfect postfeminist, neoliberal subject (2006). Rosalind Gill also argues that women, to a much greater extent than men, are required to work on the self and regulate their conduct (and then present their actions as freely chosen), strengthening the argument that neoliberalism could be considered

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gendered (2007).

In their research, Gill and Christina Scharff put forth many of the connections between postfeminism and neoliberalism. They believe that individualism shapes postfeminism and neoliberalism, which has replaced the idea of the individual being subject to outside constraints, pressures or influences (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Second, because of the parallels between postfeminism and neoliberalism, they argue that postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism, but a sensibility created from neoliberal ideas (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Finally, Gill and Scharff argue that women are the ideal subjects of neoliberalism as they exercise their buying power while still presenting their actions as freely chosen (2011). Therefore, the days of women only being considered feminist by traditional means are over. It is acceptable for women to buy makeup or shave their legs because they are doing it for themselves, not others. The significance of this differentiation lies in the fact that the woman made an individual choice rather than be told what to do. Interestingly, it seems that the neoliberal argument has become more effective than traditional feminist arguments as women emphasize their freedom to choose. The discourses of choice, freedom and empowerment highlight the bond between postfeminism and neoliberalism.

None of these platforms – postfeminism, advertising and neoliberalism – are mutually exclusive. Postfeminism is found in advertising, which is an example of neoliberal economics. Because neoliberalism argues that a free market will allow greater efficiency and economic growth, advertising is an important method for private firms to achieve success in a free market. Advertising, postfeminist and neoliberal theories

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conveniently overlap and create the foundation for why corporations have begun using feminist ideology in advertisements to convince women to buy products.

Since 1990, a predominately white “pro-girl” rhetoric has emerged from postfeminist discourse and represents an assertive, dynamic woman that is not bound by the constraints of femininity (Gonick, 2006, p. 7). The rhetoric of empowerment started to become commonplace in U.S. popular culture, especially as women were winning Olympic medals, becoming better educated and earning more money. A general definition of female empowerment is to “enhance [women’s] ability to control [their] own lives, or to ‘develop a sense of collective influence over the social conditions of one’s life’” (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 2). This definition has led to “girl power” and “girls rule” rhetoric in mainstream media and has clear ties to the neoliberal and feminist notions of choice and agency, or the ability for a person to act for herself (Gonick, 2006, p. 7).

This form of empowerment rhetoric in advertising led to the Riot Grrrl movement, which advocated a type of feminism that was very different from the popularized idea of Girl Power (Gonick, 2006). Riot Grrrl started as a grassroots movement in Olympia, Washington and Washington, D.C. and inspired young women to create and embrace subversive culture – punk rock music, homemade publications and Internet sites for example – to circulate overtly political statements (Gonick, 2006). The radical messages put forth inspired women to take action against patriarchal capitalist institutions and mobilized young women to become active producers, not just passive consumers, of culture.

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Despite the empowering message, this pro-girl rhetoric can alienate women of color because it reduces the role race plays in shaping their experiences. By concentrating on a small segment of women’s inequalities, this kind of feminism does not necessarily empower women of color the same way it does white women. However, there were a small amount of women of color associated with the Riot Grrrl movement. Ramdasha Bikceem is an example of a Black Riot Grrrl that created many zines that dealt with the intersection of race and gender during the 1990s (Bess, 2015). Her essays illustrate what it felt like to be a “Black grrrl” and how she was often only seen as a skin tone (Bess, 2015, p. 1). Despite the contributions of Black Riot Grrrls, a 1992 Newsweek article defined the movement as overwhelmingly “young, white, urban and middle class” (Newsweek Staff, 1992).

Although this social movement scorned commodification, it ended up popularizing the idea of Girl Power in mainstream media, leading to a new generation of feminist advertising. According to Gonick, “Girl Power” celebrates “the fierce and aggressive potential of girls as well as reconstitution of girl culture as a positive force embracing self-expression through fashion, attitude, and a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach to cultural production” (2006, p. 7). Influenced by the Riot Grrrls movement, Girl Power went mainstream and encouraged women to compete with men and follow their dreams. Women and young girls are increasingly depicted as strong, successful and independent in the media, but the real influence of Girl Power lies in the emphasis of how much positive change has occurred for women (Koffman and Gill, 2016). Bands and television shows featuring beautiful, powerful women – such as the Spice Girls, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* – took over conventional culture, making

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feminism not just popular, but sellable (Gonick, 2006). Although Girl Power has been exploited as a marketing concept, it provides an excellent example of the woman as a perfect postfeminist, neoliberal subject.

Empowerment is being understood more broadly as advertising professionals embrace postfeminist thinking with new depictions of women in campaigns (Gill, 2008). Interestingly, advertisers have begun portraying women to represent a feminist consciousness and link feminism to a brand without being overtly political (Gill 2008). Now, something as trivial as buying shoes or deodorant can be recognized as a gesture of female empowerment and pleasing oneself. According to Ellen Riordan, “The logic follows that if we start to value girls more and celebrate their culture, girls in turn will feel positive about themselves and will achieve higher esteem,” (2001). However, Riordan acknowledges the process of commodifying this type of empowerment tends to dilute and neutralize the political potential of feminist messages and may be damaging to women’s goals for social change (2001). Commodification of Girl Power and women empowerment tends to water down the feminist ideals they are based on.

Pauline Maclaran (2012) also examined the relationship between feminism and marketing, and her analysis raised the question of whether advertisements that incorporate feminism are empowerment or exploitation. That question resonates strongly in contemporary culture since everything from soap to cars can be positioned as empowering to women. Little research has been conducted, however, on how women feel about a brand’s potentially insincere association with empowerment. Pantene associates its shampoo with powerful, take-charge women with shiny hair, while CoverGirl’s makeup is associated with female celebrities and athletes that are the best in their chosen

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field. Jia Tolentino (2016), deputy editor at Jezebel, claims that empowerment has become “something to buy” (p. 1). Women’s empowerment is highly marketable, but “neither practice nor praxis, nor really theory, but a glossy, dizzying product instead...and no matter what, the intent of this new empowerment is always to sell” (Tolentino, 2016, p.1). Can this really be called feminism?

Becky Swanson, VP-executive creative director at Leo Burnett, does not think anyone wants to hear about feminism anymore. “It’s one of the most misunderstood and controversial words out there,” she said. “[But] if you talk about it as ‘girl power,’ that’s purely positive. At its heart it’s not that different from feminism, but it is a fresh new way to think about it” (Zmuda & Diaz, 2014). But, as more brands jump on the bandwagon, this advertising technique has begun to feel formulaic.

What makes this different from other periods of time is that incorporating feminist ideals has become a wildly popular marketing strategy, and women are now being represented as active and empowered (Gill, 2007). Unlike historical representations of women in the media, where they are portrayed as passive or dependent, there is a new trend in advertising of portraying women as success-oriented, physically active, sophisticated and unstoppable (Alkan, 2016). Feminist terms associated with female success are often being incorporated into the media and advertising to promote a brand’s commercial value in relation to the empowered woman. This shift has emerged as marketers are pressured to stand for something beyond just selling products, especially as men and women take to social media to critique brands for what they represent (Zmuda & Diaz, 2014).

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A growing marketing trend referred to as fem-vertising utilizes feminist values and female empowerment to encourage brand activism (SheKnows Media, 2014). The campaigns rely on consumers voluntarily participating in championing the social cause together with the brand by engaging with the content. The term was officially coined during a 2014 AdWeek panel moderated by Samantha Skey, chief revenue and marketing officer of SheKnows Media. The AdWeek panel discussed the trend of fem-vertising and how it has changed the way the industry speaks to female consumers. It noted the shift in the portrayal of women and the use of positive messages and imagery that show women as multidimensional, with a heavy focus on the millennial generation that is embracing Third Wave feminism.

A SheKnows Media fem-vertising survey (2014) polled 628 women to find out why women choose one brand over another. The results revealed that women respond to advertising that builds up females and they tend to remember pro-female campaigns. The survey found the following key statistics:

- 52 percent of women admitted to buying a product because they liked how the marketer and its ads presented women.
- 51 percent of women liked pro-female ads because they felt they broke gender barriers.
- Only a quarter of the 628 women polled said they would keep using a product if they did not like how women were portrayed in its ads.
- 4 out of 5 women thought it was important for younger generations to see a positive portrayal of women and an overwhelming majority felt that how women are seen in campaigns has a direct effect on girls self esteem.

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- 94 percent said that using women as sex symbols was harmful to the gender.

Some researchers believe there are serious implications for the popularization of the term empowerment in relation to Girl Power, and that not all pro-girl rhetoric offers an opportunity for girls to enact collective change (Riordan, 2001). Other researchers believe advertisers can use empowerment rhetoric to unite women and appeal to a global sisterhood (Lazar, 2006). Michelle Lazar (2006) defines the term “power femininity” as an empowered feminine identity in contemporary advertisements addressed to young modern women (p. 505). Although her study specifically discusses women in Singapore, power femininity incorporates feminist signifiers of empowerment and promotes the postfeminist assumption that modern women can have it all (Lazar, 2006). As brands continue to distill feminism of its values to produce advertisements that have no real political content, it can make empowerment advertising seem unauthentic if used ineffectively by brands.

A Trend of Feminist Consumerism in CSR and Cause Marketing

As corporations began to shift their advertising campaigns toward Girl Power and empowerment rhetoric, many researchers have conducted studies on Dove’s use of feminist ideals, since the brand has received countless awards for its campaigns. In Dove’s well-known “Campaign for Real Beauty,” the company coined its strategic approach “feminist consumerism,” which encourages women to practice self-care and feminist conventions by “engaging with corporate marketing campaigns and purchasing beauty products” (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 955). “Feminist consumerism” acts as a blanket phrase to cover many marketing strategies that incorporate feminism, and it is a way for brands to support a cause, without being too controversial. Feminist

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consumerism overlaps with neoliberalism theory because women who buy these products are embracing commodity culture. The brand is positioned as the fundamental subject of the empowered woman, and consumption of a brand’s products is seen as a sign of feminine power (Alkan, 2016).

Another category of feminist consumerism is “commodity feminism” which is an attempt to redefine feminism through commodities (Goldman, 1992, p. 336). Robert Goldman coined the term as a way to capture how advertisers harness feminism, empty it of its political content and sell it back to women (1992). The women featured in these types of advertisements are empowered, independent, and communicated many of the visions feminist fight for (Goldman, 1992). Advertising uses commodity feminism to turn a shampoo bottle or a pair of jeans into a symbol of a woman’s power and femininity. It allows advertisers to harness the power of feminism and empty it of its political content, essentially rehabilitating the theory for the world of advertising (Goldman, 1992). This notion of commodity feminism has been embraced by many feminist scholars and has popularized the notion of feminism, while simultaneously diluting its meaning.

Aside from studies looking at Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty,” there has been little research on how other brands and corporations utilize feminist consumerism or commodity feminism in advertising campaigns and how women react to this type of advertising. This lack of analysis has left gaps in the research because the examination of Dove’s tactics may not apply to other brands and is not necessarily representative of the field as a whole. There has also been a lack of research on how women of color react to these campaigns, which is problematic since many of these campaigns feature whitewashed models or a lack of racial diversity.

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The terms “feminist consumerism” and “commodity feminism” describe the use of feminism as a marketing tactic, but they can also serve as an example of CSR. In the past decade, growth in CSR has prompted much quantitative research that measures the outcome and effectiveness of CSR in advertising. CSR has been defined as “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 117). Importantly, CSR does not include things such as employing a diverse group of employees or paying women equally because those activities are already required by law. Instead, CSR embraces marketing tactics or advertising campaigns that align the brand with a social cause or philanthropy. The proliferation of CSR has coincided with women and young girls emerging as the public faces of campaigns on an international landscape, leading to an increase in business initiatives for women’s empowerment and gender equality (Calkin, 2015).

For CSR to be effective, advertising plays an important role in raising the awareness of potential customers to the cause brands are trying to promote (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Abigail McWilliams and Donald Siegel found that consumers who value CSR are willing to pay a higher price for a product with that additional social characteristic than for an identical product without the characteristic (2001). “Cause marketing” has emerged as a form of CSR that links product benefits with emotional appeals that encourage consumption (Smith & Alcorn, 1991, p. 19). This marketing tactic is extremely successful because it is a creative, cost-effective strategy that creates a strong connection with consumers (Smith & Alcorn, 1991). Cause marketing is less philanthropic than CSR and depends on aligning a brand with a social cause that consumers might support, such as feminism or women’s empowerment.

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Brands like Dove that apply the logic of feminist consumerism are also aligning the brand with a social cause such as feminism and gender equality. While previous studies have not identified feminism as a social cause that cause marketing utilizes, the definition of feminism implies advocacy of women’s rights. This clearly associates feminism, or more specifically postfeminist ideology, as a social cause for brands to associate with as a marketing tactic to create goodwill among consumers.

Empathy is a key source of prosocial behavior, so consumers with stronger feelings of empathy will be more likely to buy from brands utilizing cause marketing or CSR (Moosmayer & Fulijahn, 2010). Women tend to have stronger empathetic feelings, which make them more likely to respond positively to cause marketing campaigns than men (Moosmayer & Fulijahn, 2010). This phenomenon helps explain why brands like Nike and CoverGirl use cause marketing tactics when marketing products to females and why women can be considered the perfect neoliberal subject.

A successful example of CSR and cause marketing utilizing empowerment rhetoric is the Nike Foundation’s “Girl Effect” campaign. The movement began in 2004 by Nike’s corporate responsibility department and focused on ending intergenerational poverty by using young girls as the face of the brand (Calkin, 2015). The advertisements used in this campaign showed that when a young girl breaks the cycle of poverty she will have the opportunity to reach her full potential. This charitable project is an element of Nike’s CSR platform and serves as an example of a corporation using Girl Power to create positive associations with a brand.

Sydney Calkin argued that the proliferation of CSR coincided with women and young girls emerging as the public faces of global campaigns, leading to an increase in

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business initiatives for women’s empowerment and gender equality (2015). Her research demonstrates how the representation of empowered young women in the Nike Foundation’s “Girl Effect” campaign reflects postfeminist spectatorship and is a key example of a corporation using Girl Power to create positive associations with a brand (Calkin, 2015). The campaign was less about brand awareness than a desire to use Nike’s marketing expertise to drive action for the issue of young girls and global poverty. However, Nike did receive positive press and critical acclaim as a result of this campaign. Ofra Koffman and Gill also analyzed the “Girl Effect” campaign through a postfeminist lens showing the shift towards neoliberal thinking, the growing roles corporations play in philanthropy and the marketability of feminism (2016).

Further research on CSR and cause marketing is important because these marketing tactics represent the direction that advertising is currently headed. As corporations begin to align themselves more often with social and philanthropic causes, it is important to explore the repercussions. Although it may seem beneficial for corporations to align with a social cause or donate money to philanthropies, there are negative repercussions too. Does it matter if a corporation’s motives are purely financial and not authentic? Will aligning with controversial causes or philanthropies alienate brands from certain segments of the population? Can social and philanthropic causes be better served through activism or more genuine means of support? Have consumers embraced their reliance on commodity culture and prefer to purchase products they want regardless of the philanthropic cause or the corporation? How does race affect this discussion?

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Taylor, Johnston and Whitehead published one of the only studies that uses focus groups to explore how women respond to campaigns that use feminist politics to encourage consumption. It explored the question of whether companies benefit by promoting feminism. The researchers asked feminist-identified women how they responded to Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty and if corporations should engage in the cause of feminism (Taylor et al, 2016). The Dove campaign has been successful in the United States, with plenty of public attention and increased sales. However, the focus group found the watered-down version of feminism used by Dove to be incompatible with their feminist politics and harshly critiqued Dove for not being radical enough (Taylor et al, 2016). In the end, despite finding Dove’s advertising insulting, most of the focus group participants saw the campaign as being “better than nothing” and supported corporations partaking in some type of ethical consumption or pro-feminist campaign (Taylor et al, 2016, p. 136).

This study is unique in utilizing focus groups to addresses how women feel about advertising that uses empowerment rhetoric. Although Taylor, Johnston and Whitehead used different age groups of participants, they did not specify the demographics and racial construction of the focus group. They also used female participants who already identified as feminist, which does not represent the average woman. Most people do not understand the psychology and history behind true feminism, so the Dove focus group is not representative of the masses. Future studies should explore this potential flaw. This study of the Dove campaign also did not link feminism to CSR or cause marketing, something this literature review attempts to rectify. By not analyzing the corporation’s role and intentions in using feminism as a marketing tactic, Taylor, Johnston and

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Whitehead ignored how this type of advertising is disseminated and consumed amongst the average population. Also, although the study attempted to racially diversify the focus groups, it did not analyze how race effected the definitions of feminism or perceptions of the advertisements. Regardless, this study is important because it attempted to answer how consumers felt about cause marketing and feminist consumerism and created a foundation for future research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study is informed by Judith Taylor, Josée Johnston and Krista Whitehead’s (2016) use of focus group analysis to better understand how young, feminist-identified women understood Dove’s *Real Beauty* campaign and whether it was compatible with the participants’ version of feminism. The women varied in the critiques of the Dove campaign, but delighted in deliberating and discussing how they defined feminism and if corporations were vehicles for feminist change (Taylor et al, 2016).

Like Taylor, Johnston and Whitehead’s research, this study utilized qualitative methodology, as this approach is appropriate to answer questions concerned with a naturalistic model of research (Silverman, 2013). Focus groups capitalize on group interactions and conversations between research participants to generate data (Kitzinger, 1995). This technique takes advantage of the idea that group interaction will encourage participants to explore individual and shared perspectives (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups are especially appropriate for this topic because the research questions are open-ended and the researcher wants to explore participants’ opinions about cause marketing campaigns (Kitzinger, 1995). Although group dynamics can silence individual voices that disagree with the majority opinion, they can also facilitate the discussion of taboo topics (Kitzinger, 1995). Focus group methods are also popular with those who want the participants to become an active part of the analysis (Kitzinger, 1995). Since this study deals with how women react to cause marketing campaigns, focus group methodology allowed research participants to examine their own feelings, as well as those of fellow participants.

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Five focus groups were conducted to examine how diverse groups of college-aged female participants react to three cause marketing campaigns using women’s empowerment rhetoric. More specifically, the use of focus group analysis aims to explore the relationship between neoliberalism and feminism to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How do female participants of different racial identities define and perceive feminism?
- **RQ2:** How do female participants of different racial identities perceive campaigns that reflect postfeminist themes?
- **RQ3:** How do participants feel about the portrayal of race in advertising campaigns that use empowerment rhetoric?

The researcher showed focus group participants the three 2014 cause marketing television campaigns analyzed earlier – Proctor and Gamble’s “Like a Girl,” CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” and Pantene’s “Not Sorry” – and discussed their opinions and reactions to answer the research questions.

The Campaigns

In the past few years, many brands have found that discussing sexism and female empowerment on public platforms is a powerful way for brands to build buzz. The most effective of these campaigns originate from brands with primarily female consumers – for example, beauty brands, feminine hygiene products, female clothes and shoes. It started with Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty” in 2007, which helped Dove increase sales to over \$4 billion (Neff, 2014) and other women-centric brands have followed suit. This

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type of advertising has turned empowerment into “something for women to buy” (Tolentino, 2016).

Three successful advertising campaigns – Proctor and Gamble’s “Like a Girl,” CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” and Pantene’s “Not Sorry” – were used in the focus groups to spark discussion about how racially diverse college-aged women define feminism and the modern empowered woman, how they connect and react to advertisements using women’s empowerment as a selling point, and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements.

In June 2014, feminine hygiene brand Always released its award winning #LikeAGirl campaign. It took the insult, “like a girl” and turned it into an uplifting message. Research conducted for the brand showed that over half the women claimed a decline in confidence at puberty, so the campaign aimed to empower girls during an awkward and unconfident time (Leo Burnett et al, 2015). The commercial featured people of all ages and the stark differences of how they interpreted the phrase “like a girl” to highlight how many girls lose their self-esteem during puberty. The “Like a Girl” campaign included four white girls, two white boys, two Black girls and two racially ambiguous girls. The campaign was released in June 2014, but went viral when it was shown during halftime at the 2015 Super Bowl.

Covergirl’s “Girls Can” campaign debuted in February 2014. The campaign features female celebrities from the brand’s diverse roster, including Ellen DeGeneres, Katy Perry, P!nk, Janelle Monae, Queen Latifah, teen rapper Becky G and Sofia Vergara, so Caucasian, Black and Latina women are represented. The women begin with a chorus of “Girls Can’t,” which gives way to “Girls Can.” Each artist relays how she was

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discouraged from chasing her dreams. “At Covergirl, we’ve always celebrated strong, inspiring women who don’t let anyone or anything stand in their way,” said Esi Eggleston Bracey, VP and General Manager, Covergirl Cosmetics. “Our family of feisty, fabulous Covergirls embody this spirit, as each of them have broken boundaries in their own lives and careers” (Proctor & Gamble, 2014).

Finally, hair care brand Pantene started a conversation about whether women apologize too much. The “Not Sorry” advertisement debuted June 2014 and shows women apologizing in the office, at home and even in bed (Grey, 2015). The advertisement used three Black women and four white women. It ignited a debate around one of the most surprising ways that women undermine their own strength: saying “sorry.” It recreated each scenario with the women not apologizing, and ultimately more confident. The brand’s research department found that 82 percent of American women say “sorry” to be polite, even when they have done nothing wrong (Grey, 2015). The United Nations recognized Pantene with the “Breaking Gender Stereotypes” Award for this advertisement. “Universally, every woman that sees the video is like, ‘Oh, my gosh. I do this all the time and I don’t even know it,’” said Pantene spokeswoman Cheri McMaster (ABC News, 2014).

Sample

Since the focus groups needed to be racially diverse to gather information on how women of different racial identities perceive these campaigns, the researcher employed purposeful sampling, which involved identifying diverse participants who will have a unique perspective on the discussion of women’s empowerment strategies in advertising (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling allows researchers to select “information-rich cases”

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to study in depth so researchers can more effectively reach a specific group of people (Patton, 1990). In this case, only women were recruited, as they were the target audience for the advertisements.

Participants were recruited from a large undergraduate class and a mixed undergraduate and graduate class at the Missouri School of Journalism with the goal of creating racially diverse focus groups. Both classes dealt with the topics of feminism and the media, so students had an understanding of what feminism was before participating. For one class, students were provided with extra credit and pizza in return for participating (an alternate assignment was provided for those who could not attend the focus group or did not fit the criteria). For the other class, students were just incentivized with pizza.

A screener collected general information of all students who expressed interest in participating in the focus groups. The screener gave the researcher access to basic demographic information such as age, gender and race, as well as the participants' availability. Students were assigned to participate in one of five focus groups held the last week of April with the goal of creating racially diverse focus groups to gather information that reflects participants' unique perspectives and lived experiences.

Following recommended practices and accepted principles, the researcher organized five focus groups with five to eight participants in each group (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Fallon & Brown, 2002). There were 35 participants total and they were all female, eighteen or older, and may or may not have used the brands shown in the advertisements. Three of the focus groups included white, Black, Asian and Latina women, one focus group included white, Black and Asian women and one focus group

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only included white and Asian women.

Procedure

The role of a moderator is essential to the success of the process, so researcher Mary Jane Rogers, a Master’s candidate at the Missouri School of Journalism, moderated the focus groups and took notes while observing the discussion (Fallon & Brown, 2002). The focus groups were hosted in a conveniently located, comfortable room in the Missouri School of Journalism. The tables were arranged in a circle, so the participants were able to see each other, watch the three advertisements on a television and talk comfortably (Kitzinger, 1995). The discussions were recorded with video and audio and lasted an hour to an hour and a half, as recommended (Rabiee, 2004).

At the meeting of each focus group, the researcher thanked participants for coming, asked participants to read over the consent forms, reviewed the purpose and goals of the study, encouraged open participation and changed the advertisement shown on the television screen at the appropriate time (Tong, 2016). The moderator showed focus group participants the three different cause marketing commercials – Proctor and Gamble’s “Like a Girl,” CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” and Pantene’s “Not Sorry” – which are roughly one to two minutes each. After viewing all three advertisements, the participants discussed their initial opinions and reactions to answer the research questions. The campaigns were shown in the aforementioned order and were chosen because they challenge female stereotypes, show women taking on masculine qualities and position the brand as a champion of feminist ideals. Proctor and Gamble’s “Like a Girl” and Pantene’s “Not Sorry” did not have an especially racially diverse cast, but “CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” featured Caucasian, Black and Latina women.

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The discussion started by asking the participants what their initial reactions were after watching the advertisements. The discussion questions can be broken into four categories: defining empowerment and feminism; determining the association between the advertisements and feminism; analyzing diversity in the advertisements; and exploring whether products are a reflection of self. The researcher attempted to remain quiet and let the conversation flow naturally between the participants, periodically asking questions and guiding the discussion when it got off track.

After the focus groups were conducted, the researcher transcribed the video and audio recordings and analyzed the data. The participants were assigned pseudonyms from a list of the top 100 baby names to protect their identities. The researcher coded the transcripts and analyzed the transcripts for similar observational, analytical and conceptual themes. Particular attention was paid to sustained conversation about specific questions, idea development, arguments, and agreements or disagreements (Taylor et al, 2016). The researcher continued to create new categories and concepts from the information until it was saturated and no new codes developed. With consideration for the research questions guiding the study, recurring themes and ideas were immediately written down and set aside for more comprehensive analysis after all of the transcriptions had been analyzed. The use of five focus groups helped reach saturation efficiently (Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

Chapter Four: Analysis

The three research questions were addressed through focus group discussion. The discourse generated by the questions, and others related to them, helped participants gain a deeper understanding of feminism, the intersection of their identities that informed their responses to the campaign, and the relationship between corporations and feminist politics. Through conversation and debate, three main themes emerged: (1) race matters in feminism and advertising; (2) empowerment is distinct from feminism; and (3) a complicated relationship between feminism and corporatism is partially reconciled through ethical consumption. This process revealed the complexities of feminism and participants identified what they perceived to be contradictions and insufficiencies in the campaigns and in their own approaches to feminism.

After watching the three advertisements – Proctor and Gamble’s “Like a Girl,” CoverGirl’s “Girls Can” and Pantene’s “Not Sorry” – the discussion began with participants recounting their immediate observations and feelings. Initially, most of the participants were straightforwardly positive. Riley (FG2) said she “gets the chills” from the Always commercial, while other participants reflected on how often they apologize or feel inferior to men. Most participants were initially happy to see less stereotypical images of women, but further discussion about the campaigns and the politics associated with them led to concerns about the repercussions of advertisements associated with social causes and a critical analysis of the relationship between feminist politics and advertising.

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Across all focus groups, definitions of feminism depended on participants' race, and racial diversity in advertisements was powerful for women to witness, especially women of color. Non-white participants said they often felt excluded, both in the feminist movement and in the advertisements, but found both intersectionality efforts in feminism and diversity in advertisements inspiring. This research also determined that participants found the advertisements using feminist rhetoric empowering, but not feminist. However, they still thought the empowerment and pro-girl rhetoric could promote cultural change in a positive way. Participants rejected the conflation of 'feminism' with corporate interests and were ultimately skeptical of corporations promoting feminist politics, but struggled to imagine a superior alternative, and accepted that it was their responsibility to purchase from companies that represented their values. Participants were cognizant that the companies primary goal was to sell products, and critically assessed the advertisements' limited ability to effect real change. Interestingly, participants were more critical about the lack of intersectionality in feminism and racial representations in advertising, but did not respond the same way to the corporatization of feminism. While they did not conflate feminism with corporate interests, they were still willing to participate within a neoliberal postfeminist framework, and enjoyed seeing less stereotypical images of women in the media. In the end, focus group participants deemed these types of advertisements better than nothing in promoting feminist ideals and effecting positive cultural change.

Race Matters in Feminism and Advertising

All of the participants came from undergraduate or graduate level journalism classes that had previously discussed feminism and were well-versed in the definition of

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feminism and what should be considered feminist politics. A vast majority of the women identified as feminist. Most participants initially shared a textbook definition of feminism as some sort of “equality.” Once asked if there were different types of feminism, they began delving deeper into what feminism means to different groups of people. While the participants were knowledgeable about the complexities of feminism, they struggled with agreeing on a single definition. Harper (FG3) put it best when she said:

Feminism is very hard to put in one definition for me because there are different types of feminism in a sense. Feminism all-around is for the social, political and economical equality of like the sexes. Right, that’s the very broadest definition in my opinion. But that can be broken down into so many things because there are still different types of women. There are LGBTQ identifying women. There are Asian women. There are white women. There are Black women. There are so many different facets and so many issues that one definition can only encompass so much, if that makes sense. My issues as a Black woman are going to be different than your issues as a white woman or your issues as an Asian woman.

Many highlighted the importance of how someone was raised and their socioeconomic background. Olivia (FG2) said, “I don’t think you can have one kind of feminism because everyone brings something different or different opinions to the table.” No group arrived at a consensus, but how participants viewed feminism depended on their race.

Race did not just affect participants’ definitions of feminism, it also informed their discussions about advertising. Participants’ race had a large impact on how they felt about the brand featured in the advertisements. Chloe (FG3) admitted she did not expect that seeing someone with her skin color or who looked like her would affect how she felt about the advertisement, but the reality was, it did. In other words, diversity mattered. That finding corroborated the research done by Lloyds Banking Group (2016) that found “sixty-five percent of respondents said they would feel more favorable about a brand which reflected diversity in advertising” (p. 4). As a whole, the advertisements shown

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were not deemed representative and it hurt how women of color perceived the brands.

Two sub-themes emerged from the discussions about diversity and race: (1) definitions of feminism depend on race and (2) racial diversity in advertisements is powerful.

The definition of feminism depends on race. Many of the participants were eager to discuss their personal definition of feminism, especially the Asian, Latina and Black women, who tended to go the most in-depth. The participants of color highlighted how race and culture affected their definitions, and often brought up intersectionality and the history of the feminist movement. Non-white participants shared personal stories that highlighted how they felt marginalized within the feminist movement on account of their race. While most of the 35 women said they identified as feminists, some were hesitant to identify as feminist because of how the movement has historically treated women of color. Lucy (FG5) said, “I want to say I do call myself a feminist, but I will say that advocacy in general is a very hard subject to be able to pin down because intersectionality isn’t necessarily addressed in many issues.” Audrey (FG5) had a similar reaction:

I don’t think I would necessarily label myself as a feminist. Just not until everybody else gets on the train to where we are not just feminists, but we are for everybody. I just don’t want to cut myself off...you know, I’m just a feminist. No. I’m more than that. I’m standing with everybody because at the end of the day, it’s not just men and women that deserve equal rights, it’s the people that identify as transgender, intersexed, just everybody. So, I’m for everybody. Why not? Like, what’s the issue?

Many non-white participants felt that their race was deemed inconsequential within the politics of feminism. They mentioned classes that barely discussed the Black, Asian or Latina contributions to feminism and felt in general, that their unique experiences as women were not recognized by society. This could explain why these

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women were eager to share their feelings of marginalization within feminism in the “safe space” of the focus groups. Non-white participants seemed more comfortable conversing about difficult subject matter such as feminism and race and were eager to share their experiences. “Womanism” was also brought up in two focus groups as a more inclusive alternative to feminism. Many women of color struggled with aligning themselves with a movement that historically excluded Black women and focused on the rights of white women, but they still embraced many aspects of feminism. Many participants of color felt ostracized, ignored and left out of feminist politics because of the color of their skin:

Mia (FG2): [Feminism] does depend, I think, on the color of your skin because you get things like, ‘Oh, it’s just a mad Black woman’ or ‘It’s just a spicy Latina.’ No, it’s the same thing that everyone is complaining about. It’s just because of the color of my skin that you think that it’s a norm for me to complain.

Natalie (FG5): Being told that as a woman of color, I probably shouldn’t associate with feminism because feminism has done a great extraordinary job of excluding voices of color and people of marginalized identities. And so for some people who I talk to, being a feminist shouldn’t correlate with being a woman of color or a person of color. But to me, to not consider myself a feminist, that discredits women of color who helped form that movement.

There was also some resentment about the lack of intersectionality in feminism.

The women of color in the focus groups wanted to see feminist politics that were more inclusive, not just towards them, but members of any marginalized community. Multiple participants said that exclusive feminism was “not good feminism.” For example, Zoe (FG2) questioned:

“Where are the feminists when we’re going through these types of things? Like you don’t see that. You don’t see anybody who’s marching for other things. Like where were you for this? If you’re for all women, be for all women...I just feel that we get left out a lot and that’s where that concept of white feminism comes from.”

Other participants echoed this call for a more representative version of feminism:

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Julia (FG5): If you're going to call yourself a feminist, you also need to be like an ally of the LGBT community. You need to advocate for Black Lives Matter. You have to represent every intersection of different identities. You can't just be a feminist. Like, if that's your feminism, then it's not good feminism.

In contrast, every white woman in the focus groups identified as feminist. It was much more straightforward for these women because they had never felt ostracized or excluded from the movement. While they believed in the importance of intersectionality, they tended to accept certain female experiences as universal. They discussed equal rights, equal pay and biology, but race did not factor into most white women's definitions. It demonstrated how some women still struggle with incorporating intersectionality into feminism, despite seemingly good intentions. Many white women in the focus groups, however, were eager to understand the experiences that women of color had with feminism. Sophia (FG2) commented, “Hearing you guys talk about [feminism] ... it opens my eyes to new things.”

The participants seemed to subscribe to Crenshaw's (1989) definition of intersectionality – recognizing the complexities of a woman's experience as separate from the mutually exclusive categories of sex and race. They highlighted the importance of integrating the stories of women of color into the feminist movement, and believed that feminism must be intersectional. Discussions revealed that feminism is a term deeply rooted in historical and racial perspectives and women of color still feel marginalized within the feminist movement. They struggled with their support for feminism and their resentment about “where are the feminists when [women of color are] going through these types of things?” (Zoe, FG2). In some ways, participants echoed criticisms of the Riot Grrrl movement and earlier ideas of Girl Power, as that kind of feminism did not empower women of color the same way it did white women (Bess, 2015). Feminism may

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have come a long way since Crenshaw published her paper on intersectionality in 1989, but most non-white participants felt feminism is not truly intersectional and did not feel included in the movement. This topic unearthed intense discontent amongst non-white participants and revealed the divergence of these women from the white, feminist-identifying participants.

Racial diversity in advertisements is powerful. Race also had a large impact on how participants felt about the brand featured in the advertisements. Many women of color immediately commented on the lack of diversity, especially reacting with suspicion towards the CoverGirl commercial, which Sophia (FG2) referred to as “just a bunch of famous women.” Jane (FG3), an Asian-American woman, similarly said, “Personally, I’d like to see more people who look like me. Like the CoverGirl ad – Black and white pretty much.” However, Jane (FG3) appeared resigned to not having equal representation. She later said that she wouldn’t even know how she would feel about more diversity in campaigns because “I have never really seen an ad with a very prominent Asian woman in it” and other non-white participants voiced their agreement. Across the board, participants like Lily (FG3) thought the brands “could have done better” but did not see this tactic changing anytime soon. Clearly, seeing people that looked like them in the advertisements was important.

Zoe (FG2): I think that as a Black woman, you want to feel as included as possible. Because I can remember being young and walking through the room and you’re trying to see if there’s anybody who looks like you. And it’s really sad when there’s nobody who looks like you.

Caroline (FG5): Like the first girl in the [“Like a Girl”] ad was this tall, blond, perfect girl. Curled hair, hair was done, heels on. That was the first girl that they showed. Hey, we’re going to show you a white girl first. That’s more important. We’re going to show you the white girl, the typical American girl, and that shouldn’t be a typical American girl. There is no typical American girl.

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The Latina and Asian women in this focus group felt especially unrepresented. This was reflective of the Black and white binary discussed in the literature review, and many Asian and Latina women felt marginalized by the proliferation of Black women in advertisements, but lack of women that looked like them. Lucy (FG5) said she did not see a single Asian American. Jane (FG3) called the type of diversity featured in the advertisements “palatable” and said, “I think in the ‘Like a Girl’ ad they had one little Asian girl, but that didn’t represent me at all at any stage of my life. I never had hair that long. If I was ever in an outfit like that I would be crying.” Audrey (FG5) said that while she loves Sophia Vergara, advertisers always try and make her seem “extra diverse” to appeal to Latina viewers and feels that companies “exploit” that connection. Lily (FG3) called out these campaigns for missing “several other groups of people” outside of white and Black women. Others agreed:

Lucy (FG5): There were a few Dove beauty commercials that I was actually surprised when I saw an Asian woman in there, and I was like ‘Oh, wow! There is someone who is remotely like me!’ It just feels like you are part of the society that you receive news and influence from. You are not an outlier...that’s what I feel like when I see Asian Americans and people like me on television.

Natalie (FG5): Even though, you know brands are completely profit driven, it’s nice to see yourself represented and even made to feel like you’re a valuable target market. When people aren’t advertising to women of color or certain marginalized identities, then you’re like, what is it about that identity that you don’t find marketable? So even if the purpose of your brand is to take all of my money, at least do so representing me in the best way possible.

Many women said that they were used to seeing a “token” Black, Asian or Latina woman in these types of advertisements, and could see through unauthentic attempts by brands to add diversity to their image.

Chelsea (FG1): It’s like every time I see the Garnier Fructis ads and there’s always one Black girl in there. I’m pretty sure she doesn’t use that shampoo. So I

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don't relate to that. I can just tell they're covering all the bases, but it's usually the one girl in that has long brown or blonde hair and she's whipping it around. But the woman of color with different texture hair is usually not the focal point of that.

At times, the descriptions of exclusion and lack of diversity in society and the media were heartbreaking. Participants noticed the absence of images that would have challenged Western notions of beauty, like un-straightened black hair or extremely dark skin, and recognized the negative effect it had on their confidence. Many non-white participants noted that the commercials' version of diversity did not challenge beauty norms based on white ideals, nor did it address the racism in these beauty expectations. Women of color seemed resigned to this sort of treatment in the media, just like they were in feminist politics.

In contrast, when asked about diversity, many of the white participants discussed body size before commenting on racial diversity. Multiple participants said the body types across all three advertisements were either thin or athletic. Audrey (FG5) said, “You didn't see much variation outside of a white female, a white slender female.” Chloe (FG5), similarly said, “I felt like these advertisements were pretty much like here is your body type and that's it.”

Most of the white participants did not speak up about the lack of racial diversity and for many it appeared to not initially register.

Sophia (FG2): As a white person, it's a subconscious thing. I've never had to think about things like you guys do or like anyone who is not a white person because it's so – it's all white. So I see a commercial and it doesn't really – nothing registers because it's just like, I'm white.

Julia (FG5) also admitted, “I, as an average height, average weight, white...I don't even think about ‘Am I being represented’ because I always am.”

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Many white women seemed to fear speaking about racial diversity. Whether they were nervous about their perceptions of advertisements being “wrong” or truly did not notice the lack of diversity, their silence was palpable. Their obvious discomfort could be linked to why women of color were so eager to share their experiences and personal stories. Across all five of the focus groups, women of color did not feel included in the feminist movement nor represented in the media. Perhaps this was an opportunity for women of color to share their experiences with their white counterparts and receive validation from other women of color. Regardless, it shows why intersectionality research is critical and why it is necessary to continue applying it to the media and the feminist movement.

Although participants struggled in deciding if advertisements could represent feminist politics or be empowering, they were much quicker to agree that seeing diversity in advertisements was positive and empowering. Chloe (FG3) said, “I think seeing people that are often not there is sometimes more empowering than a message is.” Despite feeling underrepresented compared to the white women in these advertisements, the women of color ultimately appreciated the effort.

Riley (FG2): I thought it was cool that they at least tried in this first commercial to get a wide range of people. As a person of color, that would make me more interested than if I just saw an entire group of white people.

Jane (FG3): Personally, I’d like to see more people who look like me. Like the Cover Girl ad – Black and white pretty much. It was nice to see more like LGBTQ diversity, which is even more rare than racial diversity, especially Asian diversity. I think that it was really empowering in total, but I think that it just really shows that there are so many more steps that we have to take.

This sentiment corroborated research by Green (1999) that found people relate most strongly to advertising that portrays their cultural and ethnic heritage. However, brands

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are guilty of whitewashing advertisements to make them more applicable to the white majority, often at the expense of people of color. Participants noticed this trend in the media and claimed it made them less likely to purchase from the brand.

The women of color believed that diversity was not just empowering, but necessary. Black participants in particular said that if there were not Black women in the advertisements, they would assume, for example, that the makeup would not match their skin tone or that the shampoo could not be used on their hair type. Riley (FG2) admitted, “There has to be somebody of color in order for me to use it or else it’s not going to work on my hair.” Chelsea (FG1) emphasized that such representation was especially important for personal beauty items:

“I think with make-up in particular it’s really important because it’s all about matching your shade. So I think that’s going to be different than a pad advertisement where it doesn’t matter what race you are to use a pad.”

Seeing a confident, empowered woman on television was inspiring to a majority of the participants, but this discussion illustrated that they believed seeing a confident, empowered woman of color would be doubly inspiring, and might make non-white young girls feel included, instead of excluded. Participants also distinguished between a cosmetic approach to diversity and a feminist approach to diversity. A cosmetic approach would have included women across the color spectrum or with a variety of hair types, so women of different races would feel confident that the brand would work on their skin or hair. The CoverGirl advertisement included two Black and one Latina women, which demonstrated to some darker-skinned participants that the makeup would work for them. On the other hand, a feminist approach would have challenged Western beauty norms or given alternatives to typical portrayals of femininity, but none of the advertisements

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endeavored to do that. Participants would have appreciated either attempt at diversity, which shows the overall lack of inclusivity in most advertisements.

Participants were tired of seeing “token” Black, Asian and Hispanic women in advertisements. This sentiment corroborated other research on how the media defines female beauty by long, silky and flowing hair – naturally unattainable for Black women – causing desirable femininity to be predominately associated with white women (Thompson, 2009). Black beauty is often juxtaposed with white beauty and Black women continue to end up at the bottom of the hierarchy when it comes to beauty standards (Thompson, 2009). The desire to see more diverse representations of women in advertising and feminism demonstrates that intersectionality has not been successfully accomplished. Interactions between participants demonstrated that incorporating intersectionality is an ongoing narrative of progress and struggle.

Empowerment is Different Than Feminism

Participants were critical about the lack of intersectionality in feminism and racial representations in advertising, but did not respond in such a straightforward way to the corporatization of feminism. Many of the participants initially had positive reactions to the advertisements. They called them “fresh” or “inspiring” and were happy to see less stereotypical representations of women in the media. Evelyn (FG3) said, “I felt like it reaffirmed my feminism. I think just seeing a brand outwardly approach something the way I approach my life...I thought that was neat to see.” Very few participants were immediately cynical about the message these brands were disseminating. However, as they deconstructed what feminism and empowerment meant to them personally, participants began to struggle with their feelings towards the advertisements. Further

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discussion about the campaigns and the politics associated with them led to concerns about the repercussions of advertisements associated with feminism and a critical analysis of the relationship between feminist politics and advertising.

Since most believed feminism was about intersectionality, policy and advocating for change, they did not believe these advertisements aligned with those objectives. None of the commercials used the word “feminism” either, which was problematic for many of the participants. Also, since these brands all sold female products, it was not considered groundbreaking that the campaigns were in support of women. Abby (FG1) said, “They’re women’s products, so I think if they’re not attempting to say that they do support women and they support equal treatment of men and women and all of these things, then I think as a whole they’re failing as a company.”

Almost all of the participants acknowledged that feminism still has a negative connotation in the United States. Anna (FG4) said society thinks of feminists as “these angry women trying to get more rights than men.” While participants believed celebrities such as Emma Watson, Beyoncé and Lena Durham are paving the way for the term to become more mainstream and widely understood, they felt there were many misconceptions. Brooklyn (FG4) said she believed many people still consider feminists “men haters and baby killers.” Other participants agreed that most people stereotype feminists as radicals:

Ava (FG2): I feel like society pushes the idea of like the hairy leg, bra-burning feminist. And one time this guy said to me, ‘You’re not a feminist, like you shave your legs.’ That was an actual thing a guy said to me once.

Chelsea (FG1): I think a lot of people assume it’s about rivalry between the sexes and it’s not. I think that’s the biggest misconception. I understand why you might not want to come out and identify as a feminist for fear of that, but I feel like if

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people continue to do that, they're never going to see and be exposed to and learn about the fact that they're not all radical.

Because of these misconceptions, many participants were hesitant to say that the advertisements should have used the word “feminist” or “feminism.” Celebrities may have popularized the idea of feminism, but the word still has a radical, negative connotation. While some participants argued that it would appeal to feminist consumers, most thought the United States was not there yet.

Riley (FG2): I feel like if [the campaigns] used the word feminist, it's very off-putting to a lot of people...So subtly dropping hints and subtly educating people on what feminism is without saying feminism, womanism, it's easier for people to swallow.

Elena (FG4): I feel like because feminism does have such a bad connotation if they were to use it in a commercial, people would have a bad connotation with whatever the product was or the advertisement in itself, so I feel like with the first ad, they kind of like sneak the message in there. But if they were to just directly say, ‘This is a feminist ad’ or put it in there somewhere, it would kind of draw people away from it.

After participants discussed their definitions of feminism and empowerment, the researcher asked them to apply those definitions to the advertisements they watched. Since the participants had already been thinking critically about the terms, heated discussion ensued. After exchanging points of views, most participants eventually arrived at the conclusion that the campaigns were empowering perhaps, but not feminist. For example, Chloe (FG3) said:

“I think that policy and advocacy make differences not necessarily commercials...I think that intersectionality and understanding that people want and need different things because of their cultural and historical place...understanding that is an important aspect of feminism that I don't necessarily think is reflected in the advertisements that we watched.”

While participants did not think the campaigns aligned with their definitions of feminism, their definitions of empowerment were closer to the campaigns' messages.

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Audrey (FG5) defined empowerment as “knowing that you can accomplish whatever you want to accomplish, do whatever you want to do.” Zoe (FG2) similarly said it was “Uplifting each other and not bashing each other. Not looking at the negative or not looking at what you can’t do but what you can do.” In terms of the media, Chelsea (FG1) thought empowerment was “anything that acknowledges things that real women go through and doesn’t shame them for that.”

Zoe (FG2) thought the advertisements were empowering because:

“I feel like they had women in all different roles and everyday scenarios. Like to me, I guess it was relatable. I could see certain scenarios and I was like, oh, I’ve done that before, you know, just little things like that. And I did feel like that was genuine enough.”

Overall, most participants thought that the advertisements fit the definition of empowerment much better than feminism. A few participants, however, did not even consider the campaigns empowering. Chloe (FG3) likened an empowering campaign to “jumbo shrimp – it doesn’t exist.” She questioned how a commercial could be empowering when the end goal was to sell something. Charlotte (FG3) agreed with her, saying, “I’m not sure that an advertisement specifically can be something that’s empowering.” Others concurred with this sentiment:

Natalie (FG5): So for the first video, like I remember when I watched it the first time that it came out, it was like, ‘Oh, this is so inspiring, this is great.’ And then when you start watching it again, you just realize how it plays into certain norms and structures...I mean, it’s a nice ad, but I think when you start to deconstruct it, it’s not as nice and it’s not as empowering, and it just loses its zest.

The superficial enjoyment of the advertisements led to a more critical analysis of what can be called “real” feminism. Similar to Maclaran’s (2012) research, participants examined the relationship between feminism and marketing, and questioned whether advertisements that incorporate feminist ideals should be considered empowerment or

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exploitation. As the discussion concentrated on whether the advertisements promoted feminism, a consensus emerged that the advertisements were successful at empowering women, but not promoting feminism. But, the groups generally saw this as a positive step towards changing attitudes towards women, albeit a small step. In the end, most believed the ads were positive, with participants saying, “at least they tried!”

While participants did not believe that the campaigns would cause any political change, they did think the advertisements raised awareness and portrayed positive images of women, which was important to participants. Charlotte (FG3) thought an advertisement had the ability to “call attention to an issue and...put that in perspective for other people to consider, people that might not normally.” The SheKnows Media Femvertising survey (2014) showed that 4 out of 5 women thought it was important for younger generations to see a positive portrayal of women and an overwhelming majority felt that how women are seen in campaigns has a direct effect on girls’ self esteem. Participants similarly believed that these advertisements could positively young girls to become more confident, which was heavily discussed in one of the focus groups.

Sophia (FG2): I think it’s a start for instilling in younger girls that you can still be a girl and do all of these great things in life. Like just because you’re a girl, you shouldn’t think you’re any less than anything else on this earth. But I think it’s a good start.

Mia (FG2): Yeah, I think it’s a start. And I feel like it almost adheres to the younger community, like to the younger girls. Because I feel like, and this is just me personally speaking, but I feel like when I hear stuff like that, yeah, it’s empowering. But I’ve almost lived this whole life where we’ve had gender roles, where it’s like I could tell myself that I’m going to live that life, but I always know in the back of my mind I’m going to have a lesser pay than a man... We need to start with this newer [generation] so we can bring them in and really change things.

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Participants tended to agree that the pro-girl rhetoric promoted empowerment and was effective in pulling on their heartstrings. All three advertisements incorporated Girl Power rhetoric that celebrated the potential of girls and encouraged women to follow their dreams and compete with men (Gonick, 2016). Although the “girl power” and “girls rule” rhetoric in the advertisements has clear ties to feminist notions of choice and agency (Gonick, 2006, p. 7), participants felt it was necessary to distinguish the difference between girl power and feminism.

Chelsea (FG1): I don't think, up until this conversation, I haven't really associated the two – girl power and feminism. I think as long as they refrain from using those words in terms of a political sense, I don't think it's going to really help feminism at all because we're not calling out the big elephant in the room. So it might help in terms of female empowerment, but that's still different from feminism.

Heather (FG1): I feel like feminism is kind of a strong word because it is associated with many aspects of society like gender, racial problems. So the brands focus on more girl power, maybe empowerment in young girls and adults.

Participants determined that although girl power is a nice sentiment, it does not go far enough to be called feminism and ultimately distracts the public from what feminism actually is. They agreed that the advertisements highlighted feminist elements without being feminist. But, they also enjoyed the images of women and young girls being depicted as strong, successful and independent, and most seemed to buy into the popular idea of girl power in mainstream media – they just did not believe that it should be considered feminism.

The participants deemed this type of girl power socially acceptable, even going as far to say it would make a cultural difference. They essentially agreed with Ellen Riordan's (2001) logic that if society values girls more and celebrates their culture, in turn, girls will achieve higher self-esteem. Participants acknowledged that the

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commodification of empowerment was not the same as feminism, but they did not necessarily find it damaging to women’s goals for social change, as Riordan argued (2001).

Although participants did not consider the advertisements truly feminist, they still believed advertisements like these might have the potential to affect the United States’ culture. Participants debated that since a pro-girl rhetoric is easier to swallow than the word “feminism,” perhaps it could enact positive change.

Ava (FG2): The moment that really stands out to me in like the Always commercial with the little boy, I think he’s wearing the yellow shirt. And the woman says, ‘Oh, do you think you just insulted your sister?’ And he’s like, ‘Well, I insulted girls, not my sister.’ I feel sometimes people see a difference between the women they know and the idea of feminism in general – just treating women as equal.

Audrey (FG5): I honestly never thought about me saying, you know, sorry, excuse me. Because I do it, just out of force of habit, and so literally, until I saw that, I was just like, wow! I do that. So, it really does sort of make you think, why am I saying, sorry?

Although participants would not call the campaigns feminist, they were fundamentally pragmatic and appreciated the positive portrayals of women and recognized capitalism was not going to disappear. These reactions were similar to focus group members in Taylor, Johnston, and Whitehead’s study, who came to the conclusion that the Dove campaign was “better than nothing.” Evelyn (FG3) summed up her group’s analysis that “they did the best that they could for the era that we’re living in... I appreciated the fact they were trying to integrate feminism into modern society.” Most other participants likewise took a pragmatic approach:

Lucy (FG5): Even though I do feel like they have a lot of room for improvement, I do see them coming from a good place. Like they don’t quite understand it all, but I don’t think they put these out with the intention to be like – this is all that feminism is, this is the limit. They’re trying. I want to give them credit for that, at

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least they tried, and there are – there are still leaps and bounds that they can make, but just because they didn’t take those, we shouldn’t discredit what they have done.

Participants considered this kind of media a step in the right direction. They preferred these representations of women to those that were sexually explicit or stereotypical. Furthermore, many spoke positively about sharing these videos online, to teach others about feminist values or boost the confidence of young girls. To them, these advertisements incorporated feminist signifiers of empowerment and promoted the postfeminist assumption that modern women can have it all.

Overall, the advertisements gave participants hope that other people would watch them and similarly deconstruct how they speak to women and girls. They were optimistic that fathers and brothers would see these advertisements and recognize that how they treat women matters, or that women will become more confident in their abilities. This was very different than Riordan’s (2001) conclusion that commodifying this type of empowerment and watering down feminist messages dilutes and neutralizes the political potential of feminist messages. Instead of questioning whether this may be damaging to feminist’s goals for political change, participants were optimistic that these kinds of advertisements could promote some sort of positive cultural change. These women were not necessarily the active consumers associated with the original Girl Power movement (Riordan, 2001), but passive consumers that accepted capitalist institutions as the norm.

In sum, participants enjoyed how Pantene associated its shampoo with powerful, take-charge women with shiny hair and how CoverGirl used female celebrities and athletes that are the best in their chosen field. Like Tolentino (2016), they recognized that “the intent of this new empowerment is always to sell” (p.1), but still found this portrayal

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powerful. This demonstrates their willingness, or resignation, to participate within a neoliberal postfeminist framework, even if they did differentiate between feminism and empowerment first. They were not naïve enough to call the campaigns feminist, but did not necessarily find this trend negative or exploiting since they recognized it for what it was – advertising. Ultimately, they did not want to see a return to stereotypical advertisements or a lack of campaigns that promoted women’s empowerment. Participants’ initial positive reactions, dislike of seeing watered-down feminism, and ultimate conclusion that the advertisements were better than nothing, demonstrates how participants, in a true postfeminist tendency, have reconciled feminism and consumption.

The Complicated Relationship Between Feminism and Corporatism Supports

Ethical Consumption

While participants did not conflate feminism with corporate interests, they were still willing to participate within a neoliberal postfeminist framework. Rosalind Gill (2007) refers to the current time period as a “postfeminist media culture” because postfeminism plays such a huge role in modern marketing (p. 148). Participants debated whether the commercials use of feminist rhetoric was manipulative and could damage the feminist movement. Although no real consensus was reached, they did embrace the positive aspects of the campaigns. For example, Zoe (FG2) said, “I’m not going to go and like, oh, let me go buy some Pantene. But in the event I need it, I would be more willing to.” They engaged critically, judging the advertisements value based on their previous knowledge of the brand, product and advertising. Overall, they were innately skeptical of corporations promoting feminism. Participants also believed that they were more likely to notice when a company is doing something wrong, compared to when it is doing

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something right. But participants considered their purchases to be a reflection of themselves and their beliefs, although price did factor into that equation.

When defining feminism, over two-thirds of the participants used some form of “economic, political and social equality” in their definition, an example of neoliberal feminism (Gill, 2007). Although participants identified as merely feminist, they subscribed to some form of postfeminist politics that reconciled feminism and consumption and tied buying power to female empowerment (Maclaran, 2012). There was a focus on individualism and choice in these definitions as well, which revealed how entrenched these women were in aspects of neoliberalism. While they never referred to the words “neoliberalism,” they clearly subscribed to parts of the theory in everyday life. Neoliberalism has been defined by its capacity to consume and is understood as constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating (Brown, 2003).

Gill argued that women, to a much greater extent than men, are required to work on the self and regulate their conduct and then present their actions as freely chosen, strengthening the argument that neoliberalism could be considered gendered (2007). Feminist consumerism overlaps with neoliberalism theory because women who buy these products are embracing commodity culture. Alkan (2016) argued the brand is positioned as the fundamental subject of the empowered woman, and consumption of a brand’s products is seen as a sign of feminine power. Unlike historical representations of women in the media, women are portrayed as success-oriented, physically active, sophisticated and unstoppable.

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These advertisements incorporate feminist signifiers of empowerment and promote the postfeminist assumption that modern women can have it all. Lazar (2006) argued that when brands distill feminism of its values to produce advertisements that have no real political content, it makes empowerment advertising seem unauthentic. However, participants still found them empowering because the notion of a confident, powerful woman was inspiring. Although they recognized that the purpose of these advertisements was to sell a product, participants seemed to reflect the notion of gendered neoliberalism with their willingness to manage their bodies and sexuality through commodity culture and purchasing from brands that supported women.

Many of the definitions of empowerment used by participants also echoed ideas of choice and freedom. The discourses of choice, freedom and empowerment are often used to highlight the bond between postfeminism and neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Participants initially enjoyed the advertisements because they reflected superficial parts of their feminist beliefs, but agreed that the advertisements would not effect real change. This suggests that postfeminist politics, which are closely linked to neoliberalism, may not align with the participants' definitions of “real” feminism.

Upon discussion, the focus groups revealed that participants were critical of the media they consumed, recognizing its commercial purpose and not buying it as “genuine.” As journalism students, participants had a thorough understanding of the limitations of the media industry and judged the commercials accordingly.

Natalie (FG5): You begin to realize that it's a brand and this is about consumerism and who will buy into this idea of feminism. You know, riding the wave of feminism and what it can bring you as far as like profit is concerned.

Overall, their reactions were ambivalent. They balanced the potential of this

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media packaged with feminist ideals with skepticism towards the commercial purpose of this strategy and advertising in general. Participants believed that advertisers could have gone further if they truly desired to advance feminist politics.

Audrey (FG5): Honestly, it's less genuine when it's – of course it's scripted – [the models in the CoverGirl commercial] are not going to come out here and say something that could possibly get them in trouble with their fans. They're going to have writers and these writers are going to make it sound good and fluffy.

Women's empowerment is highly marketable but Maclaran (2012) examined whether advertisements that incorporate feminism are empowerment or exploitation. Participants recognized that everything from soap to cars can be positioned as empowering to women, and participants recognized the purpose of the advertisements was to sell.

Therefore, they were more likely to call the campaigns an “attempt at feminism” as opposed to “feminist.” Natalie (FG5) said, “They're definitely trying to hit on some like important things, but they're doing it in a context that's very safe...they're doing the bare minimum. They're fulfilling the quota. And so to me, it's an attempt at feminism, but I don't think it is feminist.” This skepticism reflected their belief that the advertising campaigns could not cause political change, a core tenant of feminism.

Participants were also unable to come up with a realistic alternative in a capitalistic society, but they wanted to be a responsible consumer. They supported some notion of ethical consumption – making social change through targeted purchasing – and recognized that the burden of researching a company's ethics and policies fell on the consumer. Participants discussed the ethical dilemma of supporting corporations like Wal-Mart, Pepsi-Co and Chick-fil-A. They were skeptical enough to recognize a commercial as a media tactic, but admitted that they did not always do their research on every brand they buy.

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Harper (FG3): I want to be that person. I want to be self-conscious of the things that I’m buying and the things that I’m supporting based on social issues and things that are going on around the world. So that is something that I will be in the future that I will be taking a step to be more aware of, but yeah, like as of today, I was not aware of a lot of things so that’s something that I know I have to educate myself on in the future.

Two main sub-themes emerged from the discussions about feminism and neoliberalism: (1) Negative perceptions of brands were more important than positive perceptions and (2) participants considered purchases a reflection of self.

Negative perceptions are more important than positive perceptions. Like the SheKnows Media fem-vertising survey (2014), participants agreed that brands should be held responsible (and rewarded) for using their advertising to promote positive messages about women. However, participants were more likely to pay attention to negative representations of women than positive representations.

Mia (FG2): I think the negative outweighs the positive because everything is good in these commercials. Like sure, I’ll go and use Pantene. But I think negative things tend to stick in your mind more. Like for me, I think the only product I ever denied that I can remember was Oberweis because he was racist against Mexicans and I’m half Mexican. So like my family, we don’t eat his ice cream or have his dairy products.

While participants struggled to name a brand they purchased because of its feminist politics, they named many that they were currently boycotting. The controversial Pepsi Co. commercial with Kendall Jenner that was accused of trivializing Black Lives Matter was mentioned. Chick-fil-A’s bankrolling of anti-LGBTQ causes was brought up. Policies associated with Nordstrom, Uber, Wal-Mart, Target and other corporations were discussed as well.

Audrey (F5): Like with brands like New Balance who support Donald Trump, when I see that, I just sort of know you’re not for everybody, because that’s not a candidate who is for everybody. So, when I see that, it’s just like, no, I’m not going to support that.

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While every focus group named multiple corporations that had negatively portrayed women at one time, it was difficult for them to associate any brand outside of Dove with feminist politics. Lucy (FG5) described the phenomenon of the negative outweighing the positive best:

That kind of got me thinking. Advertising, sometimes it can seem like housekeeping, in like if you don't do it well, people notice. But when you do it well, it's like the norm, and maybe that's something that we should change, but it's just like the negative effects are much more impactful than the positive messages. Like the moving messages stick with you, but it won't necessarily compel you to buy a product as much as a negative advertisement will compel you to not buy a product.

The concept of advertising as “housekeeping” corroborates participants’ beliefs that advertising with empowerment rhetoric or feminist ideals is incapable of promoting political or influential change in the United States. An advertisement might tug on participants’ heartstrings or evoke positive feelings but will not exert any influence over policy. A controversial advertisement like the Kendall Jenner Pepsi commercial, however, has the potential to catch people’s attention and affect buying decisions in a way a positive advertisement does not.

Purchases are a reflection of self. The most important aspect of fem-vertising is the authenticity of the corporation and the brand, since it ultimately reflects on the consumer (SheKnows Media, 2014). Participants similarly expected corporations to act openly and transparently when it comes to company practices, values and actions. But the advertisement was not the only thing that was important; the ethics of the company were too.

Zoe (FG2): I think the products you buy, are a reflection on who you are, especially if the brand has been outward about their views about something. Like I know going back to makeup, Jeffree Star, I know he recently he had an Asian

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woman for like one of his campaigns and he darkened her skin completely to where like she looked like a Black woman. And it was like, ‘Why don’t you just get a Black woman to do it?’ And so that for a lot of people was very off-putting. So, to me, it’s like, why are you using this company that doesn’t even want to like support you. They don’t even want to hire you, so why would you give them any more money?

Ultimately, participants believed that these advertisements diluted the meaning of feminism because using a specific brand does not necessarily make a person a feminist. However, participants still considered brands a reflection of self. Jane (FG3) is a proud user of Kotex tampons because they create feminist YouTube videos that use LGBTQ characters. She said, “it makes me proud to use Kotex.” Another participant used Dove as an example of a brand that promoted body-friendly advertisements with a diverse array of women – a brand she was proud to use.

Price was an important consideration too and, as college students, ultimately mattered more.

Audrey (FG5): I’m supporting them, and they’re supporting me at the same time, so it’s definitely something that I sort of look for when I’m shopping, but again, if it is cheaper, I am going to buy it because I am broke.

Many participants expressed regret that they had to shop at stores like Wal-Mart or use services like Uber, both of which have had negative attention concerning gender discrimination. Ultimately, however, they were not financially independent enough to “vote with their dollars.” They did recognize that what they buy is a reflection of their politics, and at least attempted to be ethically conscious with their purchases. The participants generally aimed to do better in the future when they are employed and have the means to do so.

In sum, participants were willing to embrace the concept of feminism consumerism, which encourages women to practice self-care and feminist conventions by

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engaging with advertisements and purchasing beauty products (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 955). They recognized that feminist politics were diluted through advertising, but also believed that the products they purchased were a reflection of self. They wanted to buy from companies that reflected their values and politics, regardless if the association was superficial. This demonstrates why CSR and cause marketing campaigns are so successful – consumers see the products they use and the brands they wear as an extension of themselves.

While most participants ultimately agreed that feminism should ideally be outside of corporatism, no clear consensus was reached. In some ways, many participants seemed to feel that the watered-down feminism still contained feminist ideals, which explains the “at least they tried” reaction many participants had to the campaigns. Participants had a complicated relationship with corporations that supported social causes and CSR, but the discussion demonstrated that if corporations and brands decided to ditch the “fake” feminism for a more “radical” support of feminist policies – through intersectionality, advocating for change, and using the word “feminism” – they would have found a lot of supporters amongst the focus group participants. Participants believed that feminism should not be conflated with corporatism, but also thought that if corporations were going to align with watered-down feminism anyways, they might as well make an effort to make it more effectual.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

There is a complicated relationship between corporate strategies and the consumption of feminist ideology in popular culture. Focus group participants analyzed many complex subjects and through dialogue, participants honed their critiques of three “feminist” campaigns and developed a better understanding of feminist politics. Participants openly explored the numerous contradictory feelings the campaigns inspired in them. For example, many initially had positive feelings until they more thoroughly deconstructed the advertisements. Participants had the same basic idea of feminism, but struggled finding a consensus once they delved deeper into what it means to them. Women of color appreciated the attempt at diversity in the advertisements, but would have found additional diversity more empowering.

Through focus group discussion, the relationship between neoliberalism and postfeminism was explored as the three central research questions were addressed. Discussion revealed that definitions of feminism depended on participants’ race, and racial diversity in advertisements was powerful, especially for non-white participants. Women of color said that they felt excluded, both in feminism and advertising, but found intersectionality in feminism and diversity in advertisements inspiring. Ultimately, participants deemed the advertisements using feminist rhetoric empowering, as opposed to feminist, but they still viewed the empowerment and pro-girl rhetoric as positive and thought that it could promote cultural change. The discussions illustrated that participants were skeptical of corporations promoting feminist politics, but they were simultaneously unable to imagine a better alternative and accepted that it was their responsibility to

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purchase from companies that represented their values. They recognized that some cultural change could be promoted through advertising, and separating feminism and corporatism was not always beneficial. In the end, focus group participants deemed these types of advertisements better than nothing in effecting positive cultural change, especially by disseminating less stereotypical images of women and celebrating the idea that women can do anything they set their mind to. Participants reinforced the use of a neoliberal lens to understand postfeminist advertising.

It is significant to note that across all focus groups, the initial reaction to the campaigns shown was overwhelmingly positive until participants began deconstructing the advertisements. This suggests that most women enjoy advertisements with empowerment rhetoric and feminist ideals, but mere advertisements will not inform real change for the feminist movement. This conclusion reinforces the notion that the relationship between feminist politics and corporations is superficial at best, and that the concept of enacting social and political change through businesses may not be as effective as the participants would hope. However, participants ultimately remained optimistic about a capitalistic society and most believed in some sort of ethical consumption. If they were going to purchase certain items regardless, participants wanted to put their money towards a company that aligned with their politics, superficially or not.

As the discussion concentrated on whether the advertisements promoted feminism, a consensus emerged that the advertisements were successful at empowering women, but not promoting feminism. Although participants differentiated between feminism and empowerment, their ultimate resignation to the conflation of feminism and corporatism signified their willingness to participate within a neoliberal postfeminist

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framework. Participants considered the advertisements a step in the right direction and preferred these representations of women to those that were sexually explicit or stereotypical. In a postfeminist tendency, they had reconciled feminism and consumption, even if it was because they struggled to find another option.

This research demonstrates that young women who are educated about feminism exhibit notable critical capacities and political consciousness, even in a culture marked by postfeminist individualism (McRobbie, 2009). While this sample was not representative of the general population, the focus group participants displayed an impressive ability to think critically about how feminist objectives were being used by corporations. They were skeptical of the objectives of these advertisements, aware that the purpose of them was to sell products, but ultimately decided they were better than nothing, especially for young girls to view and interact with.

Another important conclusion of this study was that the participants’ race – Asian, Latina, Black and white – strongly influences how they interact with feminist politics and the media. This research demonstrated that intersectionality has still not been accomplished and is an ongoing narrative of progress and struggle. Women of color often felt they were stereotypically portrayed by the media or not included at all. They similarly felt excluded from the feminist movement. There was a constant theme of exclusion in many of the topics discussed, which should be further explored in future research. Diversity in the media and seeing feminist ideals in mainstream media is empowering, and participants wanted to see more minority populations represented. In essence, they wanted to see themselves reflected in the advertisements.

Practically, this research demonstrates that while advertisers are attempting to

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empower women through these campaigns, the lack of diversity made it less meaningful and genuine to women of color. When advertisers promote their products through a postfeminist rhetoric, it is often whitewashed or presented from a primarily white perspective. This can be remedied in future advertising with thoughtful and genuine inclusion of more diverse types of women or by including more diverse people in the teams and companies that create the advertisements. It is important to reiterate that participants were more critical of racial representations in advertisements than of the conflation of feminism with corporate interests. This research supported the notion that viewers' feelings towards advertisements depends on the racial composition of the ad and whether it portrays their culture and ethnic heritage (Green, 1999).

Although this study attempted to rectify how research by Taylor, Johnston and Whitehead exclusively used participants who identified as feminist, most of the participants that volunteered were well-educated about feminist politics and a majority ended up identifying as feminist. Since most people do not understand the psychology and history behind feminism, this focus group does not necessarily represent the perspective of the average woman, as the researcher hoped. This “limitation” ended up being a strength, however, because focus group discussion was able to reach a certain intellectual level since participants understood the history and nuances of feminism. As a result, the data was deeper and richer than it would have been otherwise.

Another limitation of the study was that as college students, participants tended to have middle class sensibilities. Participants aspired to be affluent consumers and were deeply entrenched in capitalism, which may have affected their perceptions of the advertisements. Also, while the study attempted to organize the most racially diverse

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focus groups possible, only three of the five focus groups had white, Black, Latina and Asian women represented.

Participants did not want to conflate feminism with corporate interests, but they were still willing to participate within a neoliberal postfeminist framework. This study partially explored how race affected participants’ perceptions of feminism and the use of empowerment rhetoric in advertising, which has important academic and practical considerations. By racially diversifying the focus groups, this study adds a unique perspective to discussions of feminism and the perceptions of advertisements that contain feminist ideals and empowerment rhetoric. While there is a proliferation of scholarly research on race, it mainly focuses on Black women and their perspective. This study attempted to rectify that shortcoming by adding the voices of Asian and Latina women.

This study also demonstrated a need for scholarship to better conceptualize empowerment to better understand the repercussions of commodifying female empowerment. The term empowerment is being understood more broadly as advertising professionals embrace postfeminist thinking with powerful depictions of women in campaigns (Gill, 2008). Feminist literature does not typically conflate feminism with empowerment, but many advertisements that incorporate feminist ideals seem to use the terms interchangeably, which is why participants found it necessary to differentiate between the two.

As major brands continue using women’s empowerment rhetoric to sell products, there are many directions for future studies. This study can be expanded if the focus groups are diversified to include women of different ages, cultures, religions and nationalities to determine how different groups view the same empowerment campaigns.

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Researchers can also juxtapose how men view advertisements using empowerment rhetoric as compared to women. There are many quantitative studies that can be conducted as well to firmly link if women with feminist ideologies are more likely to buy from brands that support women’s issues or empowerment. As brands continue to use CSR and cause marketing to promote their products, additional research like this study is necessary to explore the relationship between corporations and feminist politics.

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Appendix A: Recruitment and Informational Script

The principle investigator initially reached out to potential study participants by briefly speaking in their classes and having the professor post the information on Blackboard or Canvas. The following script was used to inform individuals about the research study.

In-Class Speaking Script:

Hello, my name is Mary Jane Rogers and I am conducting research on the intersection of race and gender and how it applies to the perception of advertising campaigns that use feminist ideology and women’s empowerment rhetoric. I am a master’s candidate at the Missouri School of Journalism and this research will be used in my thesis. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

I’m interested in using focus groups to better understand how groups of women with different racial constructions define the modern empowered women, how they connect and react to advertisements using women’s empowerment as a selling point, and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements.

Students who are female, 18 or older and are a racial minority such as African-American, Hispanic, Asian or American Indian are eligible, although Caucasian women are welcome as well. The focus groups will be organized to be as racially diverse as possible.

Your instructor has agreed that participation in a focus group will mean 5 extra credit points for J2000 will be added to your final points total. There will also be pizza and refreshments provided. The focus groups will be hopefully be held from 6:30-8:00pm during the week of April 24th, 2017.

If you meet these qualifications you are asked to participate in this research study. Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and the following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about participation.

If you decide to participate, you have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time; there is no penalty for withdrawing and no explanation is necessary.

There are no physical risks associated with this research. The focus groups will take place at the Missouri School of Journalism. The discussion will be videotaped and audiotaped for academic purposes only. Your name will not be attached to your comments and you will be assigned a pseudonym.

If you are interested in participating in this research study please contact me, Mary Jane Rogers at maryjanerogers@me.com. Once you have confirmed your interest in participating, I will provide information about the specific day and time for the focus group. I will also forward you a copy of the informed consent form for your review.

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Thank you for letting come speak in your class!

Blackboard and Canvas Recruitment Post:

Hello,

My name is Mary Jane Rogers and I am conducting research on the intersection of race and gender and how it applies to the perception of advertising campaigns that use feminist ideology and women’s empowerment rhetoric. I am a master’s candidate at the Missouri School of Journalism and this research will be used in my thesis. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

I’m interested in using focus groups to better understand how groups of women with different racial constructions define the modern empowered women, how they connect and react to advertisements using women’s empowerment as a selling point, and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements.

Who’s eligible?

- Students who are (a) female, (b) 18 or older (c) and are a racial minority such as African-American, Hispanic, Asian or American Indian, although Caucasian women are welcome as well. The focus groups will be organized to be as racially diverse as possible.

What’s involved?

- Participation in one focus group, to be held from 6:30-8:00pm during the week of April 24th, 2017
- 5 extra credit points for J2000 will be added to your final points total
- Pizza and refreshments

If you meet these qualifications you are asked to participate in this research study. Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and the following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about participation.

If you decide to participate, you have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time; there is no penalty for withdrawing and no explanation is necessary.

There are no physical risks associated with this research. The focus groups will take place at the Missouri School of Journalism. The discussion will be videotaped and audiotaped for academic purposes only. Your name will not be attached to your comments and you will be assigned a pseudonym.

If you are interested in participating in this research study please contact me, Mary Jane Rogers at maryjanerogers@me.com. Once you have confirmed your interest in participating, I will provide information about the specific day and time for the focus group. I will also forward you a copy of the informed consent form for your review.

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Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Mary Jane Rogers

Appendix B: Demographic Survey

Recruitment Email for Demographic Survey:

The principle investigator reached out to interested potential study participants via email. The following script was used to inform individuals that they were being asked to participate in a research study.

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this focus group. Please complete the following demographic survey and mark your availability for the focus group. This survey will determine your eligibility for the study.

The purpose of this research project is to study how groups of women with different racial constructions connect and react to advertisements using women’s empowerment as a selling point and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements.

This research will be conducted by Mary Jane Rogers, a master’s candidate for the Missouri School of Journalism, and will be used in her thesis.

The following survey will be ask you to share basic demographic information and your availability time for the focus group. Nobody will have access to the survey results outside of the researcher and the results will be only be used to create focus groups with diverse racial constructions. As mentioned above, this survey will determine your eligibility for the focus group.

The actual focus group session will last about one hour. The focus group will be recorded on a digital audiotape and videotape and will take place in the Missouri School of Journalism.

Your identity will remain confidential in the research process. The researcher will not ask you to share your last name during the focus group proceedings. Only the researcher will have access to the audio and video recordings, transcripts and survey results. No identifying information will be present in the final report.

You will encounter risk no greater than that faced in ordinary every day life. There are no physical, psychological or social risks associated with the research procedure.

The benefits to you and other that may be reasonably expected from this research include the opportunity to discuss your thoughts and opinions about advertisements. By participating, you may contribute to knowledge in the field.

If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact the primary investigator Mary Jane Rogers at 314-288-8154, or her advisor Dr. Cristina

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Mislán at 573-884-1633. For additional information regarding human subject participation in research, please feel free to contact the MU Campus IRB Office at 573-882-9585.

Please understand that your participation in this project is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. You may exit this survey at any point. Also, you do not have to answer any questions that may be asked.

If you have read and understand the following information, here is the link to the survey:

https://missouri.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eDsQgaxo3aYWhwh

Thank you,

Mary Jane Rogers
Master's Candidate | Missouri School of Journalism
Mar9t9@mail.missouri.edu
314-288-8154

Demographic Survey:

This survey was hosted on Missouri Qualtrics and included in the email sent to all interested participants.

Thank you for your interest in this research study. Please fill out the following demographic information and your availability for the focus group.

What gender do you identify with?

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-conforming
4. Trans
5. Other

What is your age?

1. Under 18 years old
2. 18-24 years old
3. 25 or older

Please specify your ethnicity.

1. White
2. Hispanic or Latino
3. Black or African American
4. Native American or American Indian
5. Asian/Pacific Islander

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6. Other

Please select all of the times that you are available. This will help determine which days the focus groups will be held.

1. Monday, April 24 from 6:00-7:30pm
2. Tuesday, April 25 from 6:00-7:30pm
3. Wednesday, April 26 from 6:00-7:30pm
4. Thursday, April 27 from 6:00-7:30pm
5. Friday, April 28 from 6:00-7:30pm

Please enter your name and student email address.

1. Blank text box

Appendix C: Focus Group Participant Consent Form

IRB Informed Consent Form:

The purpose of this research project is to study how groups of women with different racial constructions connect and react to advertisements using women’s empowerment as a selling point and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements. This research will be conducted by a master’s candidate for the Missouri School of Journalism and will be used in her thesis.

You and other college-aged women will be asked to share your observations about three advertisements. The focus group session will last about one hour. The focus group will be recorded on a digital audiotape and videotape and will take place in the Missouri School of Journalism.

Your identity will remain confidential in the research. The researcher will not ask you to share your last name during the focus group proceedings. Only the researcher will have access to the audio and video recordings or transcripts. No identifying information will be present in the final report.

You will encounter risk no greater than that faced in ordinary every day life. There are no physical, psychological or social risks associated with the research procedure.

The benefits to you and other that may be reasonably expected from this research include the opportunity to discuss your thoughts and opinions about advertisements. By participating, you may contribute to knowledge in the field.

If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact the primary investigator Mary Jane Rogers at 314-288-8154, or her advisor Dr. Cristina Mislán at 573-884-1633. For additional information regarding human subject participation in research, please feel free to contact the MU Campus IRB Office at 573-882-9585.

Please understand that your participation in this project is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. Also, you do not have to answer any questions that may be asked.

Appendix D: Focus Group Procedure

Focus Group Procedure Script:

To be on the table: Pizza and bottled-water

To be on the television/projector screen: The first of three advertisements to be shown

To be distributed: Consent form (with a copy for them to keep)

BEGIN SCRIPT

First, I want to explain what a focus group is, why we are having this focus group and what we hope to learn. A focus group is discussion that centers on one particular topic. The purpose is to gather a variety of detailed information about the topic.

In this case, you were all selected because as young women, you are the target audience of these advertisements. Also, you each have a unique perspective and lived experiences because of your race. I'm interested in using this focus group to better understand how women with different racial constructions connect and react to advertisements using women's empowerment as a selling point and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements.

Your comments today will be videotaped and audiotaped. I want to assure you that what you say is for our academic research purposes only. Your name will NOT be attached to your comments. First, we need to take care of some housekeeping details. I handed you a consent form when you came in. If you have read the form, there is a copy of the form for you to keep. Does anyone have any questions about the information on the consent form?

As I mentioned in the form, with your permission our discussion tonight is being videotaped and audiotaped. This helps me so that I can talk to you and listen without having to frantically write down what you are saying. Your names will not be used in my thesis, and I can assure you that no one outside of my committee will ever see this tape.

Now, there is an important thing I want you to know about focus groups. There are only right answers. There is no certain answer I am looking for in any of the things we will discuss tonight. You all have had different experiences and have different opinions, and all opinions are truly important. We are looking for different opinions, so please do not be swayed by others in the group if you might feel differently about something we are discussing. On the other hand, if you agree with others, you do not need to feel as if we need a dissenter either!

As we begin our discussion, please speak up so that we can all hear what you have to say and so we get it on tape. Feel free to address others at the table and you do not need to address all of your comments to me. Just to make sure things run smoothly, if you have a cell phone or a pager that emits noise, please turn the volume off. Also, avoid side

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conversations while others are talking. This will keep others from getting distracted during our meeting. I may interrupt the discussion from time to time. Please forgive me if I do this. I'm not trying to be rude; it's just that we have a lot that we need to cover and I want to get you out of here on time. Lastly, I really encourage everyone to participate equally; I'm very interested to hear what each one of you has to say. If you tend to be a very talkative person, you might want to think about talking a little less, and if you tend to be a quiet person, you might want to think about talking a little more.

Please help yourself to the refreshments at any point. Are there any questions before we begin?

SHOW ADVERTISEMENTS

Proctor and Gamble: “Like a Girl”

CoverGirl: “Girls Can”

Pantene: “Not Sorry”

BEGIN QUESTIONS

- What are your initial reactions after watching these advertisements?
 - ALT: Did you enjoy these advertisements? Why or why not?
 - ALT: Do you think these advertisements are authentic representations of women?
- Do you feel these advertisements use less stereotypical images of women?
 - If no, how were these portrayals stereotypical?
 - If yes, how so?
- How do you define empowerment?
 - ALT: Some define empowerment as making someone stronger or more confident or giving a person the authority/power to do something, would you agree with this definition? Why or why not? What would you add to this definition?
- Did you find these advertisements empowering?
 - If yes, how so?
 - If no, why not?
 - What specific parts of the ads were empowering for women? What parts were not?
- How do you define feminism?
 - ALT: A basic definition is striving for equality between men and women, would you agree with this definition? Why or why not?
- Do you identify as a feminist? Why or why not?
 - ALT: What does it mean to identify as feminist?
- Are there different kinds of feminism? If yes, what are they?
 - Does race come into play with feminism?
- Do you think these advertisements were feminist or represent feminist ideals?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, what would a truly feminist campaign look like?
 - What specific parts of these ads represented feminist ideals? What parts did not?

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- Could the advertisements have done more to incorporate feminism? How so?
- Did you see yourself reflected in these advertisements?
 - Did you identify with the women in these advertisements? Why or why not?
- Did these advertisements represent diversity well or feature a diverse array of women?
 - If yes, is that empowering?
 - If no, how does that make you feel?
 - Do ads with more diversity help you identify with the advertisements?
- Do you think that buying these products help express your own identity?
 - How so? What parts of your identity do these products help express?
 - Why not? Would buying these products prevent you from expressing parts of your identity?
- Does feminism play a role in your decision to buy these products?
 - Do you have to be a feminist to purchase the products or have positive feelings about them?
 - Do you think that buying products from these brands is supporting feminism?
 - If you do identify as a feminist, would you buy these products to support feminism?
 - If you don't identify as feminist, would you avoid buying these products?
- Of all the topics we discussed, what topic do you think was the most important?
 - Ex. Empowerment, feminism, identity, diversity, purchasing these products...
- Have we missed anything important? Is there anything else that you would like to add?

CONCLUSION

Thank you for coming and participating! There was a lot of great discussion today. Just to remind you all, the results of this focus group will be used in my thesis, but your name will not be attached to your comments. My topic is on the rising trend of brands using feminist ideology and women's empowerment rhetoric to sell products. I'll use this discussion from this focus group to better understand how groups of women with different racial constructions define the modern empowered women and feminism, how they connect and react to advertisements using women's empowerment as a selling point, and how they feel about the portrayal of race in these advertisements.

Appendix E: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

190 Galena Hall; Dc074.00
Columbia, MO 65212
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

April 20, 2017

Principal Investigator: Mary Jane Allison Rogers
Department: Dean of Journalism

Your Exempt Amendment Form to project entitled Cashing in on "Girl Power" was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2008317
IRB Review Number	226040
Initial Application Approval Date	April 14, 2017
Approval Date of this Review	April 20, 2017
IRB Expiration Date	April 14, 2018
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 business days.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the Annual Exempt Form
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize all approved research documents located within the attached files section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure:

http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

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If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 573-882-3181 or irb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board