

## Real Soap, "Real" Beauty, "Real" Feminism?

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, November 17, 2004

<https://politicsrespun.org/2004/11/real-soap-real-beauty-real-feminism/>

Dove soap's [Campaign for Real Beauty](#) is very interesting to me. I've seen the billboards and I appreciate their attempt to legitimize beauty beyond what we're brainwashed with in Maxim, Playboy, Baywatch and the like.

But I'm not so sure about Dove. I'm not so sure that even if their soap products, etc. are stupendous that I respect *them* co-opting a legitimate debate for corporate ends. True, they may be spurring some to expand their sense of beauty, but underlying Maxim, Playboy, Baywatch *and* Dove is the consumerist necessity of defining for us what we want so we can buy it from one company, as opposed to the other.

So cynically--or perhaps realistically--Dove is merely engaging us in clever market segmentation: they are the soap for people who don't wish to recognize any legitimacy in stereotyped constructions of beauty. How post-modern of them.

Then there's the [Dove Self-Esteem Fund](#), that helps "girls all over the world to overcome everyday beauty pressures." Right. Again, Dove may be god's gift to women's dermatological health, but do we really want Dove being in charge of this dialogue? *They* sure want to be in charge of it. Great viral PR [we're encouraged to [invite friends](#) to the website]. In fact, instead of them actually having to advertise to you about how great they are in funding socially-conscious projects, we end up seeking that information from them. It'll stick to us better that way because we *want* to know about them. The cosmetics and health products industries are prime culprits in destroying women's self-esteem. How ironic--or socially healing?--of Dove to try to rectify this. Either way, they will probably sell more soap.

Happily for Dove, 2 of the 5 items listed as success stories for the Self-Esteem Fund are photo exhibitions they created themselves.

It may be terrible to rub this in, but Dove is even doing market research on us *as we navigate their site*. In providing information about their *motives* [thoroughly altruistic sounding, of course--remember, they're on our side!], they ration the information so that we need to click to further screens for elaboration. They end up with a good sense of just how much each of us is interested in various depths of information. This information about us can be combined with a log of all pages we visit on their site [including the time we spend between clicking through pages] to give them a pretty wonderful sense of how much we care to know. Heck, even *I* track my access logs to examine reading/clicking habits on my site [anonymously, though, because I collect nothing about yall but IP numbers]; I've got to believe Dove does it too. Worse still, if we actually log in and supply demographic data when we [create our profile](#) on the site [assuming a certain percentage of those signing up are not lying], they get an even broader sense of us, despite their [claim](#) that they only collect navigation data anonymously and in the aggregate. And what is our benefit from all this? Better soap? Better self-esteem through Dove products?

Even more cynically, perhaps, how many of the people taking part in the definition of beauty discussions

on that site are Dove lackeys spinning conversation in defined PR areas? If I were running this campaign, I wouldn't leave the discussion board completely at the mercy of regular normal people without having my branding agents subtly making it all worthwhile.

So then I dug through my hard drive to find the August 1992 update of the soc.feminism faq that defines various flavours of feminism to see which ones would support Dove's campaign and which ones would condemn it. The updated faq of [Different Flavours of Feminism](#) is more useful.

Applying each flavour to Dove's campaign will require great thought: more than I can accomplish without a few more days/weeks of mental meandering. [Maybe in the meantime I'll write something in here about the disaster of w.Caesar's election. Or not]

For now, until you follow the link to the full faq with descriptions of the flavours, here they are, listed:

Amazon Feminism

Anarcho-Feminism

Cultural Feminism

Erotic Feminism

Eco-Feminism

Feminazi

Feminism and Women of Color

Individualist, or Libertarian Feminism

Lesbianism

Liberal Feminism

Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Material Feminism

Moderate Feminism

'pop-feminism'

Radical Feminism

Separatists

Men's Movements:

Feminist Men's Movement

Men's Liberation Movement

Mythopoetic Men's Movement

The New Traditionalists

The Father's Movements

Finis