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Women Advertisement-Makers' Standpoint on the Production of Beauty Product Advertisements as Negotiated Co-optation of Feminism

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ABSTRACT

This paper rests on the premise that the experiences of Filipino women ad-makers in making advertisements (ads) of beauty products places them in a complex situation of "encoding" ad content. Using feminist standpoint theory and muted group theory, this article answers the question: what is the context of women advertisement-makers' negotiated participation in the co-optation of feminism in beauty product advertisements? As a contribution to theorizing feminist standpoints, this article is an interpretive account of a position that falls within a spectrum limited by an epistemological articulation of mutedness on one end and situated knowledge from active participation in the production of media advertisement *texts* on the other.

Using maximum variation sampling, twelve women advertisement makers were included in in-depth semi-structured interviews; another twelve were included in two focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative analysis reveals that the ad-makers' negotiated co-optation of feminist ideologies can be categorized into three types: co-optation as living in conflict, co-optation as living in affirmation, and co-optation as living in paradox. The findings affirm the paper's argument that, privileged as they are, these ad-makers are still a subjugated group within the ad industry. Their situated subjugation within the ad industry, however, is not the binary opposite of the dominant standpoint. While this standpoint sometimes echoes the ideology of the dominant language or the neoliberal capitalist language that is often heteronormative and masculine, it is often ambivalently positioned against the latter. This calls for a continued analysis of the players behind media texts not just through a normative economic rationality, but through a socio-cultural examination of embodied standpoints.

Keywords: standpoint, advertising industry, beauty products, situated knowledge, muted group

In this paper, I uncover how women advertisement-makers (ad-makers) take part in the co-optation of feminist ideologies when they create advertisements of beauty products. This is based on an initial observation that advertisements of beauty products give conflicting messages of women empowerment. On the one hand, these advertisements, in selling the idea that women have "made it," seem to celebrate their successes; on the other hand, they also make women feel conflicted about their bodies (Baldo-Cubelo 47). The arguments I present here are substantiated by Filipina women ad-makers' account of their lived professional realities. My contribution to the further theorizing of a feminist standpoint is an interpretive account of a position that falls within a spectrum that is limited by an epistemological articulation of mutedness on one end and situated knowledge of active participation in the production of media advertisement *texts* on the other. My account of the deliberate avoidance by women ad-makers to frame their experience as agentic privilege is a contribution to feminist accounts of co-optation. In particular, co-optation is presented here as the embodied account of how structure (the ad industry) and lived experience (women ad-makers' experiences of creating beauty product ads) determine one's *standpoint*—or what in feminism is described as ways of seeing and ways of doing or practicing (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis; Jansen; Haraway).

As both a critique of the advertising world and a nod to the magic of story-making in popular texts (Moore), this analysis of ad-makers is a form of what Matthew Soar calls necessary cultural sustenance, not necessarily due to the neoliberal underpinnings of the advertising industry (Bourdieu qtd. in Soar 418), but to the ad-industry's significant role as cultural intermediaries.

Co-optation of Feminism

To co-opt literally means "to assimilate, take or win over into a larger or established group" or "to neutralize, to appropriate as one's own or preempt (e.g., the dissidents have co-opted the title of her novel for their slogan)" ("Cooptation"). Co-optation, in this paper, is defined as the process through which a progressive idea (i.e., feminism) is accommodated as surface elements of mainstream texts (in this case, advertisements), without engaging with its complex and intricate positions on sociopolitical issues. While I personally adhere to socialist and poststructuralist feminism, I must lay out a common ground for feminists and non-feminists (including the healthy spectrum of beliefs in between) that attends to the nuances of feminism. This is where my interest in standpoint theory is anchored on. Feminist concerns over meaning are important since they not only include what a certain philosopher might offer in terms of the universal concern for equity but also show how feminism could further evolve. I enumerate below the feminist concepts to

which this study subscribes and refers when it talks about the "co-optation of feminism"; meanwhile, the term "surface elements of feminism" largely refers to individual empowerment as opposed to structural or systemic upheavals that emancipate people from all kinds of oppression.

Equity in feminist thought (Farganis 24) refers to women's inalienable right to be accountable for their actions, their ability to make rational and moral decisions, and their strong commitment to and demand for personal freedom. The concept transcends women's right to be treated equally vis-à-vis men; it champions giving more to and caring for those who have been historically disadvantaged. This giving and caring are expected not just from non-female persons, but from all groups considered privileged.

Another important feminist concept is embodiment, which presupposes that women's lived realities are experienced through their bodies and that hopefully, through their bodies they could work towards emancipation (Farganis 31). Embodiment debunks the mind-body duality that privileges the mind as it is the pulsating body that gives evidence to what has been, what is, and what can be. Abstractions are grounded on positionalities from "somewhere," not just anywhere. This is the premise of feminist theorizing on standpoint—that a marginalized position is evidenced most completely through the accounts of embodied reality.

Finally the feminist concept of difference or intersectionality emphasizes not only how women are different from men, but how they may be different among themselves. These differences lie in the intersections of gender, race, age, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and politics. This implies women's roles in constructing or deconstructing different ways of being a woman[1] in the world (Sawicki qtd. in Farganis 35).

Beauty Product Advertisements and Women's Status in the Advertising Industry

I am personally interested in advertisements because their pop culture content has obvious ways of prescribing notions of the ideal. Advertisements not only prescribe ideas but also place monetary value on these ideas (Packard). Despite audiences' options to skip, ignore, or altogether refuse advertisements in some media platforms today, ads maintain their significant presence (Nazarenko; Yakob).

Although gender representations in Philippine ads show the gradual disappearance of the objectification of women's bodies, gender stereotypes are still prevalent (Paragas et al.). Majority of the advertisements with female characters are ads about body care and cosmetics. This suggests that women as a market are still

accessed through beauty products, which is the basic premise of my study (Paragas et al.; Prieler and Centeno).

In 2020, despite the pandemic, women continued to be a formidable market for beauty and personal care products. According to Shankar Bhandalkar, the team leader for Consumer Research at Allied Market Research:

> The demand for beauty and personal care products in [the] Philippines is expected to increase. This is attributable to the surge in number of young consumers in the Philippines who are willing to try new products, demanding more product benefits, and are spending more on beauty and personal care products to improve their looks and personality. (G.Y. Lim)

In the skincare category alone, the number of local start-ups is proof of the economic optimism within the industry. As skin care science becomes more democratic and ingredients more accessible, local beauty brands gain popularity not just in the country but globally as well (Culliney; A. Lim; Kwek). However, the key players are still global brands operating in the Philippines: L'Oréal, Shiseido Company Limited, Coty Inc., Estée Lauder Companies Inc., Unilever, Beiersdorf AG, Olay, Kao Corporation, Johnson & Johnson services, Inc. and Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennessy (LVMH) ("Philippines Beauty"). It is safe to say that the beauty industry and, consequently, its advertisement expenditure will continue to grow. This is especially likely since beauty continues to be branded as "resilient beauty"; the industry is also described as going through a "wellness make-over" and the discourse dominating the beauty industry is now shaped by phrases like "healthy is beautiful" (G.Y. Lim; A. Lim, "Wellness Makeover").

In 2020, when ad spending was feared to drop excessively, it was valued at 558 million USD in the Philippines, with TV advertising accounting for about 64.5% of the total advertising market (Sanchez, "Market Size"). It is forecasted to be valued at 671 million USD in 2021, with revenue in the beauty and care market projected to reach 5.7 million USD in the Southeast Asian region. The beauty and personal care market in the Philippines had a 4.6% growth rate in revenue in 2020 despite an estimate of shrinking growth in the coming years ("Philippines: Revenue Growth Beauty"). Meanwhile, data from Facebook advertisements in the Philippines as of January 2020 revealed a 52.9% female audience. In total, Facebook ads in the Philippines reached 70 million people within the same period (Sanchez, "Market Size"). In short, more and more ads will be made. These may be shorter, tighter, and more targeted to segmented audiences, but the typical 30-to-60-seconder videos will still be around (Culliney; Lim, "The Way Forward"; Nazarenko; Sanchez, "Market Size"; Kwek). The ad-industry will prevail for at least two more decades, despite the

growing sentiment among media analysts that more and more people hate ads (Hsu).

At this point, let me clarify the ambiguous nature of what constitutes the advertising industry when I refer to the terms advertising or "advertisement making" in this study. I recognize that the industry is not a monolithic body of advertising "actors" or "advertisers." The Philippine AdBoard's definition of advertising will be used in this study:

> Advertising shall mean dissemination of information or messages for a business purpose, usually intended to promote commercial transactions or to enhance a business' general standing in the marketplace or the community . . . [It] shall, where context requires, also refer to the "advertisements" as defined herein. (*Advertising Code of Ethics Manual* 11)

Generally speaking, the advertising industry is composed of holding companies, advertising agencies, media agencies, and marketing service agencies ("Structure of the Advertising Industry").

I also situate the ad industry inside corporate Philippines, which, in February 2020, was reported by Grant Thornton International's 2020 Women in Business to be making great strides in senior corporate positions. In fact, the Philippines is the number one country among the 32 surveyed in this arena, with 43 percent of Filipino women executives holding senior positions. While the global average status has plateaued, the Philippines seems to have broken boundaries at an unprecedented rate (Lucas).

It is necessary to point out, however, that the global trends for women's position in the ad world has seen a decline, particularly in creative positions. Data from Europe and the United States show that as the ad industry world-wide recalibrated ad placement in the most audience-segmented manner (Hsu), the ad-industry saw women disappear from creative positions and get absorbed as administrative trouble-shooters (Ellis). A career move is often seen as an agentic and empowered decision, but the pronounced absence of women in creative units has yet to be fully examined. This has significant implication for the actual advertisement texts that women consume, regardless of their actual purchase of products. This is the reason why some women's groups like Ad.women.com, More Girls, Where Are The Boss Ladies, Nettwerk, The Doyennes, Chicks in Advertising, Project Noir, Invisible Creatives, HER Global Network, and She Says devise ways to make creative talent-pooling accessible to women within creative industries ("Events: The Future is Female"). Aside from their absence in the creative sub-fields in the ad-industry, women in the largest advertising and marketing groups like Omnicon, Wire and

Plastic Products (WPP), Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc., (IPG), and Havas Group continue to experience a pay gap ranging from 20.4% to 30.2% ("Female Talent on Spotlight").

Likewise, there remains a lack of inward reflection on the human actors in the advertising industry. Despite the extent of feminization of the industry since the 1990s, generated by a non-heteronormative labor force, a certain male-centric standardization remains entrenched in the ad-world (Martín-Llaguno). In the Philippines, because of how ads have become successful economic and cultural texts, little examination has been made on the industry and its constraining ideology of labor and commerce (Celades; Sinclair). Consequently, this taken-for-granted ideology of commercial normativity has relegated the analysis of women's ways of operating in the professional world to an auto response. This means that there is no adequate understanding of how women's standpoints in the industry construct a negotiated brand of co-optation that does not simplistically render them as complicit members of the industry but rather as a muted and subjugated group making the most out of their limited powers and resources.

Standpoint, Mutedness, and Situated Knowledge

Calling the ad-makers' approximation of their work in the production of beauty product advertisements as "co-optation of feminism" is my contribution to feminist theorizing on standpoint as an active spectrum between mutedness and situated knowledge. In this paper, I look at both mutedness and situated knowledge to account for the objective reality forwarded by standpoint theory. The ad-makers' mutedness is often articulated not inside the spaces of the ad industry but in homes, non-work settings, and, more importantly, in the interviews for this study.

Although I am aware that my argument is a critique of the ad-makers' shortcomings in the ad-world, I must clarify that this exposition of co-optation-as-practice is a feminist interpretivist endeavor. As I interpret the ad-makers' account of their experiences, I also render these accounts as features of situated knowledge in feminist standpoint theorizing. These are partial yet objective accounts of a subjugated group that point to contradictory and paradoxical lived realities. These accounts further an important epistemological interrogation of a rather reified, and sometimes fetishized, group—the empowered women behind the creation of media texts. Although the main tenets of standpoint theory that I adhere to are those articulated by Sandra Harding (*The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*; "Rethinking Standpoint"), I am likewise including Donna Haraway's, Nancy Harstock's, Patricia Hill Collins's and Julia T. Wood's contributions to this body of knowledge to enrich the epistemological conversation surrounding feminist standpoint theorizing. Harding's *Whose Science?* premise regarding women's standpoint is that in various

phenomena, where there are masters (or the dominant) and slaves (or the subjugated, the subordinate, and the marginalized), it is the account of the latter that constitutes the "objective account of reality." This basic premise is now extended to recognize the complicit nature of the account of the subjugated (Haraway).

I refer to the experience of women ad-makers[2] as "subjugated experience" in relation to the advertising industry (considered in this article as the "dominant center," "hegemonic space," or representing "hegemonic culture"), because women create and sell "wares" to an audience of which they are a part. Because these women may also have conflicting notions about "beauty" and what it means to be a woman, they might struggle with what they believe in and how they create advertisements. Thus, this study posits that women who create beauty product ads are individuals who are subjugated not by any particular group of men (or women) within the industry but by the collective nature of the ad-industry itself. By critically examining women's subjugated position, this study supplements an important feminist reflex which critically examines and never reifies these subjugated positions. As Haraway states, "The positionings of the subjugated are not exempt from critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation; that is, from both semiological and hermeneutic modes of critical inquiry. The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions" (583-84).

Aside from this, the goal of this article is to present an empirical account of mutedness, which is a contested reality in communication. I am particularly interested in the unique standpoint of women ad-makers within the context of a specific form of institutional mutedness that supports subjective mutedness on the level of a woman's individual experience.

Muted group theory begins with the premise that language is culture-bound, and because men have more power than women, the former have more influence over language, resulting in a male-biased language (Barkman et al.). Muted group theory also posits the following ideas about women's communication: 1) women have a more difficult time expressing themselves than men do; 2) women understand what men mean more easily than men understand what women mean; 3) women are less satisfied with communication than men are; and 4) women are not likely to create new words, but sometimes do so to create meanings special and unique to women (Kramarae).

These differences between men and women are not based on biology. Instead, as the muted group theory claims, men risk losing their dominant position if they listen to women, incorporate their experiences in language, and allow women to be equal partners in language use and creation. In other words, language is about power, which men have historically had. This theory has been supported by

evidence in many contexts (Mahrukh et al.; Orbe and Roberts; Kissack; Meares et al.), but requires further support in studies on the ad-industry.

Applying the muted group theory to women's relationship with mass media, Cheris Kramarae suggests that women problematize audience/consumer-media power relations by engaging in the analysis of such relations as a political act. She explains that it is important to recognize men's power in naming experience by identifying the language and specifically the words that have been invented not just by men but also by those in power (by virtue of race and class) in order to subjugate lesser identities. Furthermore, the language of oppression must be deconstructed by offering a different meaning to experience, and coining new terms to label experience.

I adapt the following ideas in formulating a theoretical framework for my investigation of the context of production of co-opted feminist messages in advertisements.

1. The masculine power to name experience can be any dominant group's privilege. In this study, the dominant group is the advertising industry in which women ad-makers are still subjugated in spite of their supposed empowerment.

2. The advertisers' language may be deconstructed by offering a different meaning to experience. I do this by calling the advertisers' communication strategy "co-optation of feminist ideology."

This study argues that media production through advertising is an intricate process of negotiation, processing, and reconstruction. In the examination of co-optation, this study looks at producers or encoders of advertisements not as individuals who decide to incorporate depoliticized feminist ideas into their messages, but as makers of advertisements who are situated in the complicated world of media production and distribution. In advertisement production, therefore, no one person can be held responsible for the final media product. As Liesbet Van Zoonen states,

> . . . it is so hard to make sense of the particular and different contributions to media output of employees with intriguing and obscure titles like continuity girl, vision mixer, floor manager, executive producer, on-line producer, production assistant, editor-in-chief, ... [It] does make clear that aside from formal hierarchies no individual communicator can be held responsible for the final product. (46)

To address the study's concerns, I adopt a feminist communication position that maintains that while individual freedom and autonomy are constitutive parts of a "mythology," as Van Zoonen calls it, surrounding media professions, decisions

that are purely individual seldom occur. A key step in framing the analysis of the gendered encoding of advertisements is to find out which decision criteria may be attributed to an individual and which of these are determined by the communicator's environment.

To reiterate, the analysis of media production in advertisements through women ad-makers' stories also offers an extended view of how media production works, and is therefore an important account of Filipino women ad-makers' situated knowledge of beauty product ad-making. On one level, the analysis takes into account how a woman's creative decisions are affected by beliefs regarding women's place in the world and her definition of what a beautiful woman is. On another level, the examination includes how she is situated as a woman professional in the world of advertisement making. In particular, her standpoint in relation to her environment is the main focus of this query. The organizational structure of media organizations, for instance, has been studied tremendously but are mostly concentrated on the production of news.

With these in mind, I, therefore, ask: what is the context of women advertisement-makers' negotiated participation in the co-optation of feminism through beauty product advertisements? The diagram below is an integration of the theories and concepts discussed above. In addition to the propositions of these theories, I contribute the term "un-muting" as my answer to the calls of Kramarae and Harding in order to foreground the standpoints of the subjugated and to expose the gaps in knowledge that are muted by mainstream discourse.

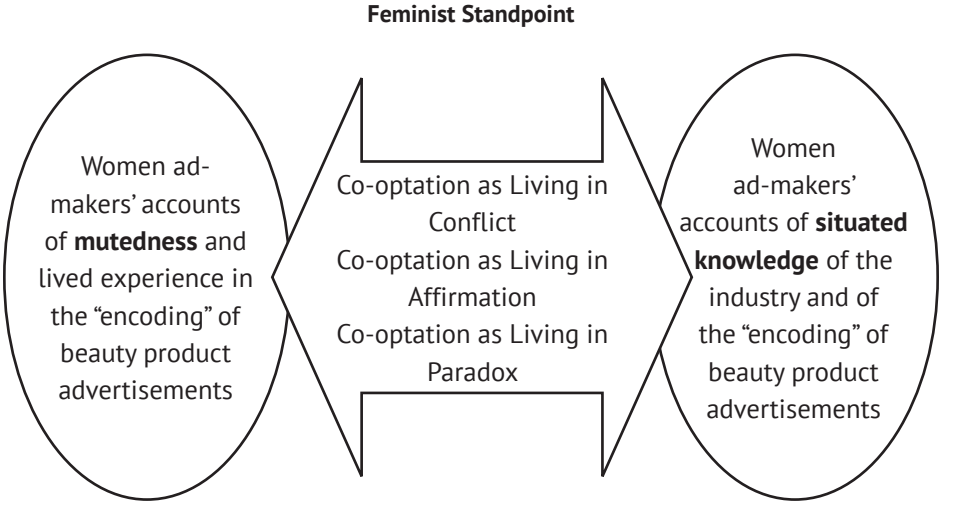

Figure 1. Integrated theoretical and conceptual framework of the study.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative exploratory and interpretive approach in its analysis. It specifically looked into the gendered encoding of media text in advertisement by exploring women advertisement-makers' standpoint and lived experience.

To understand the position of women ad-makers in relation to the creation of media text, I teased out out their interpretative and signifying practices or the meanings that they gave to their actions. From their stories, I sifted through the advertisement production process. Bearing in mind the notion of power (Rolin; Estrada-Claudio), I situated the stories in structural negotiations and processes where rules were both written and unwritten. I also noted the women's so-called privilege as part of the advertising industry, their position in the network of power relations in their media organization, and their role in the construction of gender on the subjective and discursive levels. Their reflections reveal how their environments' regard for women and women-in-ads affected the ways by which they encoded content and style into the ads they make.

Twelve[3] women ad-makers were included in in-depth semi-structured interviews for this study, while another twelve were included in two focus group discussions (FGDs). The informants represented twenty different advertising agencies/ companies in the Philippines, nineteen of which are labeled as advertising and marketing companies, while twelve were under large holding companies which are mostly multinational companies that have offices in the Philippines.

The following criteria for the maximum variance sampling were used in the selection of the interviewees and participants. The interviewee 1) makes or has made advertisements for TV or on-line media; 2) has been directly involved in the making of beauty product advertisements at least thrice in her career; and 3) is at least one of the following: art director/creative director in an advertising agency, copywriter in an advertising agency, a member of the creative team in an advertising agency, account manager in an advertising agency, advertising manager in a company (maybe under the marketing department, but has been involved in creating TV advertisements of the company's beauty product), or a product manager who directly handles the making of TV advertisements of a beauty product brand.

The transcripts of the interviews were personally verified (Harper and Cole) by the informants and while majority of them did not change anything in the transcripts, a number requested the removal of some information they divulged. The verified interview transcripts and the FGD's "clean notes" were first laid out in a loose thematic index with descriptive impressions for each initial categorization.

This first part of the analysis was done to have an inventory of or a "window" to the data set in organized form. This step also facilitated the descriptive part of the final written output. Then, I performed a first-level interpretation using an overlap of axial and cluster methods of coding (Saldaña). The third part of the analysis used memoing to infer how the informants' reflections, estimations, and accounts could have played a role in the co-optation of feminism (Corbin and Strauss). Filipino or Taglish (Tagalog-English) words, phrases, and sentences in quoted interview and FGD excerpts were also translated to English.

The informants for this study were not asked if they consider themselves feminists. Some of them mentioned "feminism," but only five explicitly identified as feminists. However, I disclosed to them that in 2015 I had published an article on beauty product ads where I called the empowering messages in the advertisement they make "co-optation of feminism." The decision not to ask the informants if they were feminists or not was to relieve them of the pressure to defend or explain their personal take on the term "feminist." As I will show in the discussion, analyzing accounts of ad-makers is part of a scholarly curiosity about the gendered processes of media and text production. Considering women ad-makers as subjugated individuals is a way of asserting that the hegemonic center also has marginalized positionalities (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis) despite the claims of literature on feminist standpoint that consider only the voices in the margins as necessary in theorizing. I argue that these women ad-makers' standpoints are an ongoing project and are not an inherited position that instantiates the privileged-marginalized dialectic; thus, their standpoints allow them to be important witnesses to the hegemonic structure. The accounts of these women ad-makers are sources voicing ". . . the view from a body, always complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured bod[ies], versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway 589).

The Context for Women Ad-makers' Negotiated Co-optation of Feminism as a Practice in the Ad Industry

This study reflects on how co-optation operates in the production of advertisements. Beauty product ads have been found to champion depoliticized and isolated women's bodies, the "lone self" in pursuit of happiness. This "lone self" is found to be the ultimate representation of the empowered woman who is supposedly reaping the gains of the women's movements (Baldo-Cubelo 55). Although empowerment is a feminist aspiration, the kind of empowerment reflected in these ads frames emancipation as individual acts of self-improvement and not as collective hard-work towards liberation (Baldo-Cubelo).

The following discussion focuses on how co-optation, mainly through borrowing of surface elements, manifests in different ways in the intricate interplay of individual

and group practices in the advertising industry. The ad-makers' opinions on how Philippine society sees women and their depiction in beauty product advertisements reveal the nuances in the ad-industry's process of borrowing surface elements of feminism. The analysis shows that co-optation is an informal, yet established, arrangement that the ad-world has acquiesced to. It is also a way of "responding to the competing ideology, innovating it, and adopting its surface terminology without taking the broad ideology that underpins it" (MacDonald 91). This is most prevalent in the informal conventions of the ad-world. Central to the discussion is the work of muting as the main element of co-optation. Muting is not an imposition but rather a consequence of customs in an industry that has as its ultimate goal to sell products.

It is important to note that the ad-makers interviewed did not mention or view any of the industry's practices as co-optation. I let the interviewees narrate their stories freely as I listened with utmost respect to their voices and felt their sense of agency, despite what seemed to be, in many instances, insurmountable frustrations in their work.

My analysis of the ad-makers' negotiated performance of their work surfaced particular contexts for co-optation. I categorized these contexts into: 1) co-optation as "living in conflict", 2) co-optation as "living in affirmation", and 3) co-optation as "living in paradox." These three categories capture how co-optation that "borrows surface elements" from feminism is reflected in the ad-makers' experience in dealing with conflicts, affirmations, and paradoxes. The ad-makers' standpoints, while subjugated within a hegemonic structure, is not fundamentally treated as the exact opposite of the dominant group's standpoint. Here, the examination of these women's privilege is extended to how the system works and how their participation in this system gives us an insight on how women in hegemonic spaces can also articulate what standpoint theorizing calls the "god trick" or the "god language" (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis; Haraway). By delaying the conclusion that these women ad-makers are privileged players with agency, I assert my belief in what feminists call the "chance at happiness… given the finite freedom" (Haraway 579). Similarly, Haraway pushes for feminist standpoint theorizing as a feasible means of correcting constructs of truth with an accounted view from somewhere*:* "The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history" (586).

I would also like to emphasize that co-optation is taken here not always as literal individual "acts" performed solely by ad-makers; it is a collective behavior of a group of encoders in the industry. Negotiation, therefore, in feminist standpoint theory is not taken from the universal context of negotiation between equals or

peers, but between the dominant group (the hegemonic culture of the ad-world) and the subjugated group (women ad-makers). This negotiation, as I will show, is a negotiation in inflections of orientations (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis; Collins; Harding).

1. *Co-optation as "Living in Conflict"*

All the ad-makers interviewed expressed that they love their work. Despite the long hours and the all-nighters, they said that this is the kind of job that best fits them. However, they also revealed stories of constant negotiation between conflicting knowledges about women and their reflections about themselves as ad-makers. Their reflections were very illuminating. They told me that they found layers of meaning in what they do and who they are.

The following sub-categories are the varying manifestations of co-optation as "living in conflict."

a. Co-optation as Recognition of the Stark Difference Between Real Women and the Women in Ads

One example of women's recognition of the difference between real women and women in advertisments is how the ad-makers considered women consumers as both clever and susceptible to being persuaded, while championing women who can no longer be fooled. There was a persistent discrepancy between the ad-makers' perception of the importance of women in their industry and how women are portrayed in advertisements. As Raquel[4] said,

> There is always that thought about the difference between me and the women in the commercials. I see it in three ways: they are living in a perfect world, we are not; or we are not expected to be perfect all the time…[while] they are objectified; then last, that woman in the ad and me in real life, we are both objectified.
>
> (There is always that thought about the difference between me and the women sa commercials. Three ways 'yan sa tingin ko: they are living in a perfect world, we are not; or we are not expected to be perfect all the time…[while] they are objectified; tapos last, that woman in the ad at ako dito sa real life, we are both objectified.)

There is also a contrast between what the ad-makers believed are equal work conditions for all and the lapses in institutional practices regarding equitable work. This suggests that the informants were also being co-opted as workers and equality in the industry was merely cosmetic. According to them, this is most evident in

instances when women in the ad industry give birth or are thinking about having families. Many of them expressed "unanticipated struggles of mamahood" ("mga hindi inaasahang struggles of mamahood"), or what Lanie calls "the collateral damage of being a working mom." Gina had similar feelings:

> It is not humane. Right now, I have friends who are trying to have babies in their late thirties. They could not successfully conceive. We joke about transferring to PR or Sales. At least there, people wear make-up, they stay in hotel lobbies. While us here, we are in our jogging pants and we have wet armpits all the time.
>
> (Hindi raw makatao. Right now, I have friends here who are trying to have babies, in their late thirties. Hindi sila mabuntis buntis. Joke nga namin,e, lipat na lang ako sa PR o sa Sales. At least sila doon laging naka make-up, nasa hotel lobbies. Kami dito sa creative, naka jogging pants at palaging basa ang kili-kili.)

Co-optation was also evident in the ad-makers' awareness of how their ads exclude poor women. Co-optation, thus, was also felt as a constant personal battle that they have to endure. They actually think about societal issues on a regular basis. Outside the workplace, they talk about these things with their colleagues. Mylene revealed how she processes these thoughts:

> . . . as an advertiser, I feel the irony of life daily. Women are struggling out there. The ones are uneducated have it worst. But I also believe that even if I am better off, my wishes for women who work like myself also deserve to be heard.
>
> (. . . as an advertiser, araw-araw kong dama ang irony ng life. Women are struggling out there. They have it worst especially yung hindi man lang nakapag-aral. Pero, I also believe na even if I am better off, my wishes for women na nagtatrabaho [like myself] also deserve to be heard.)

Still on the conflict between the perceived ideal status of women and the ad-makers' own reality, one ad-maker similarly wrestled with how her disposition goes against the practice in the industry and in her creative work. Gina spoke of how her romantic self clashes with the limitations of practicality demanded by her work. Meanwhile, Joy expressed that she is a creative person and wondered why the industry expects her to be a "math genius." She argued that the industry is not as edgy as it seems to be. "You think we are artists here, but actually we are not. We want to be artists, but we are actually ruled by numbers," she said. Lanie shared how she sometimes feels disconnected from real women—her friends, sisters, and even from herself. She said

that she justified this sense of disconnection by reminding herself that what she does is "for the economy." Others talked about beauty advertisements as an "art within an art form" and "art for art's sake, even if the art does not give a realistic painting of women." On the difference between "real women" and women depicted in ads, one informant commented:

> I know one or two real people who are simply perfect, physically speaking, that is—great skin, great body, perfect hair—the whole nine yards. But I also know that they did work hard for it, I mean [for] their skin and body. They have membership in gyms, and an array of cosmetic doctors and all that. They have nutritionists even! I am certain, it's not just the expensive cream.

This version of co-optation elevates, even validates, co-opted feminism in the advertisements as manifested in the interviewees' awareness of the blatant difference: "I'm not that woman and I don't know anyone who is flawless like that" ("hindi ako yan, wala akong kakilalang ganyan ka flawless"). It is interesting to note that many of them think that this awareness of the disparity between real women and the women in the ads is shared by all women. Some of them expressed how disturbed they are about this: "Yes, I think of it oftentimes, actually, and I don't want my daughter to believe it can be magic just like that [referring to a product]." Similarly, Chloe said: "Between the girl [in the ad] and me, or what I could ever be in this life, I am optimistic my skin might not be as wrinkly as my mother's when she was my age, but to fully repair my skin and bring back time, no, it's not gonna happen."

b. Co-optation as Resignation, Guilt, and Frustration

It is also evident that co-optation is a combination of resignation, guilt, and frustration felt and expressed by the ad-makers. As Gina said,

> For me, the most challenging are the ads on beauty. The ads for food, for instance, I have no guilt feelings towards them. But when you are trying to tell a story about how a woman should look like, I always think, this is me, this is about me. That's why it's frustrating. That's why I'm annoyed at ads with endorsers who are already beautiful to begin with . . . I'd like to be beautiful but I don't like exaggerated promises. But what is not exaggerated for us may still be exaggerated to others.

In fact, some of them even wished that some products would no longer be sold because of their exaggerated claims: "As long as I can avoid it, I don't want to do any whitening product ad" ("Hangga't makakaya, ayoko ko nang gumawa talaga

ng pampaputi"). This sentiment was echoed by Joy: "If I could only have it my way, I will banish all beauty products from the face of the earth, particularly, these are my best friends—shampoo, shampoo, shampoo, beauty soap, whitening products . . . and shampoo . . . ."

Mylene, Cynthia, Raquel, and another informants likewise mentioned that some ads should be banned because they make false claims about how they can miraculously transform women. Specifically, they disliked celebrity endorsers who claim to have been changed by the product when they have always had fair skin. According to Gina, "I hope there will be no more TVCs on beauty products, especially the whitening creams . . . with Gretchen, Kris Aquino in them, etcetera."

Joy said that "Revolution is a mountain too high," which is the reason she is frustrated. At the same time, she admitted her guilt because, according to her she is "part of all these lies in the industry." While others shared feelings of "shallowness" ("kababawan"), one informant expressed her dilemma: "I want to give up on principles even if I still owe it to my college degree to still have a sense of what is a right message, a right way of telling a story through advertisements." Some informants even mentioned moments of "sheer disgust with the pitch" because, as one of them said, it was the "total opposite from what I know for myself,"

c. Co-optation as "Sucking Up to the Peso"

The ad-makers also shared that, ultimately, the industry exists to make money. It exhausts all legal means to make products as sellable to as many people as possible. However, co-optation as the borrowing of surface elements of feminism to appeal to a large audience, as confirmed by the ad-makers, seems to be the moral counterpart of gaining profit for its own sake. They would rather co-opt empowering images to make profit rather than portray trashy images and still profit in doing so.

The ad-makers are knowledgeable about empowerment because they are also researchers. However, they themselves admitted that they do not create profound commercials because of the constraints in the process and, the need to make whatever will make the most profit. As Gina said, "I always abide by the mantra that you paint women with the highest regard given the limitations set out by the industry. Profit is what we are here for. You know I reflect on these things, always. It's really profit. That's our output. Profit for the clients equal profit for us in return."

This validates the contention of this study that the ad-world's feminism is tokenistic. The ad-makers even shared that they constantly look for "intelligent conversations among the learned." Some of them even attend symposia in universities because they are genuinely interested in the topic of feminism. Seven of them are graduate students who know academic lingo regarding emancipation, feminism, patriarchy,

oppression, and other similar concepts. However, they also admitted that making profit is the ultimate goal in the ad world, which can be the main source of their frustration, especially during "low-morale days." Zee summed up the no-rules game of the industry in the following words: "There are no rules, as advertising follows trends and popular beliefs. It's a sphere that is rooted on what's easy to sell and what's cheap to tell."

Others opened up about maximizing their time in the advertising industry as a way "to just make money," or as another informant put it, working in the industry is an opportunity to "save as long as the conscience is still not bothered." One informant, likewise explained that "I do this because I love traveling. So I work hard. . . ." Another described this time in her life as "the best part of being young, single, and employed." Shelby Ward, Michel Foucault, and Wendy Brown have problematized how almost all of human life is rationalized in terms of one's understanding of economic rationality. The informants' articulations show how women can situate themselves within this understanding and at the same time have a sharp awareness of how they "suck up to it [the industry]," a view one of the informants kept mentioning.

"Co-optation as living in conflict" underscores what feminists emphasize as the need to surface the embodied limitation and contradiction in confined economic and political spaces as constitutive of situated knowledge in women's standpoint. Meanwhile, the mutedness highlighted in this discussion is neither a form of not speaking nor not being heard, but rather a kind of mutedness embodied as a result of the competing forces of economic rationality and the need to make ethically sound personal choices.

2. *Co-optation as "Living in Affirmation"*

Other than pertaining to a state of "living in conflict," co-optation in the accounts of the women ad-makers also manifested as a sense of affirmation. This is attributed to the ad-makers' perception that "real women" in the Philippines are doing well, especially in comparison to women in other countries. Therefore, for them, the portrayal of empowerment in the ads justifies this reality. They were not, however, consistent with what they meant by "real women." As I will show in this section, "real women" for these ad-makers are comprised of middle class or upper-class Filipinas, based on their estimations of the privileges these women enjoy. The affirmation of their outlook is an instance of alignment between the notions of empowerment in the beauty ads and the existence of the empowered modern Filipina who decides for herself and controls her future. However, it is also important to note that the ad-makers mentioned the "poverty out there" lived by "real women." I see here the contradiction in how they define "real women" as the split in the standpoint (i.e., these ad-makers, because of their subjugation, are aware of contradicting points of view), identified by standpoint feminists (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis; Haraway 198).

Another kind of affirmation is hinged on the idea that women need to endure challenges in life or they will be left behind. The aspirational woman in the commercials, according to the ad-makers, is what they wish women ought to be in a real world full of hardships. "Let us affirm strength, power, bravado, because this is all we've got" ("kasi ito na lang ang ating puhunan"), as Joy put it. Some assert that because reality is harsh, representing Filipino women as resilient is necessary to boost their morale in what one informant called a "dog-eat-dog world."

Co-optation is also predicated on the premise that the ad-world is simply supplying images that women ask for. Since most Filipinas are still conservative, as some of the ad-makers observed, the ads then have to observe a degree of conservatism. Some describe the Filipina as "traditionally Asian," "conservative in expressing her power, but she already knows it," and "still afraid to break rules around authority but can be nasty when alone in a room" ("kung mag-isa lang s'ya sa kwarto"). The affirmation of qualified "conservatism" minimizes the distance between real world expectations and what the ad-world depicts in the advertisements as well as how it tries to evolve into what it believes to be a gender-fair industry.

Parts of the ad-makers' narratives interpreted in this section underscore the "god language" or the "god trick" in feminist standpoint discourse. Although critiqued, this hegemonic culture is best understood through the subjugated's account of working through the system (Haraway). To critique the dominant center is a necessary undertaking, but to render it as callously evil is to underestimate its inner workings (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis). This is an important reiteration of feminist standpoint's analysis of hegemonic systems. A subjugated person or group's capacity to "flow" with how the system works, agree with its principles, and validate its universalities attests to the dominant culture's power to be all encompassing and overpowering. Zayer and Coleman (qtd. in Paragas et al. 13) identify this particular group of ad creatives believers of the notion that "Men are from Mars and women are from Venus." This group tends to believe that stereotypes exist in representations because stereotypes are the unquestionable truths in the world.

a. Co-optation as Femvertising: The Advertising World's Redeeming Method

The incorporation of notions of women empowerment in today's ad world is considered by many ad-makers as the saving grace of the industry. If it were not for some values that uplift women in advertising, many ad-makers would have quit. Women ad-makers create "femvertising," or a kind of advertising that plays on gender stereotypes and spins them into "empowering" narratives. Lanie called this "pawér-pawér,"[5] which is further explained by Joy's views: "We call it 'femvertising' . . . You know, girl power, girl power. You think we're merely like this, but wait, there is

still more! We'll play with how you view us, as being weak, but we'll twist it at the end . . . always with humor."

Femvertising was also characterized by the informants as "hopeful messaging" or the "conscience of the ad-world" that champions "body positivity" and shows the "ad-world's soul." According to one informant, femvertising is the "one thing they [people] find hard" to criticize. It is a "revitalized CSR [corporate social responsibility] kind-of thing," in the words of another informant. Femvertising, was likewise described as "appealing to the educated mass." All of these are considered the "hope" of an industry that is otherwise merely profit-oriented; ad-makers felt that their industry can help shape a more empowering future for women. Raquel was optimistic about this: "Somehow the industry still has a redeeming quality. Aren't ads aspirational in nature? Who knows, because of the body positivity trend in many of these ads, we can help redirect the future."

Almost all of them opined that "femvertising" is reflective of women's success. Only seven informants mentioned the term "feminism," which one informant called a "school of thought," while another, a "philosophy." Lanie clarified that the term is not necessarily used in her agency. Instead, they have the word "feminish-ish" to refer to the creation of beauty product ads that sell women empowerment and "entitlement-ish." Another ad-maker said: "We'll never see women being encouraged to buy that make-up and actually not feel guilty about it had women activists not insisted on equality and all. So I truly believe that women should be celebrating and making themselves happy. Today is the best time for it."

Others mentioned the terms "modern bitch," "the boss," "the lady boss," and "rich boho chick who doesn't give a damn" to refer to this aspect of advertising. These descriptive terms reveal the ad-makers' belief that the Filipina has come to embody these images of the empowered woman.

b. Co-optation as a Calculated Act of Not Taking Risks

The apprehension among ad-agencies about creating revolutionary ad-content was also a reason for co-optation. The ad-makers said that they hesitated to experiment with risky content because only the big companies can afford to do this. One ad-maker mentioned that she was envious of Unilever's Dove campaign. She added though that such campaigns are risky, and losing a large amount of money means a client's withdrawal from the ad-agency. This, according to Gina, is something her ad agency cannot afford:

> We're just small-time. And like I've said, everybody watches everybody. We say, "God! They've beaten us on it! That was a great brave idea that

> we did not take because we're all chicken-shit cowards here!" But when the audience doesn't like it, we'll say, "Good for you 'cause you're so full of yourselves." But still, you are envious because they're brave and you are a coward.

Referring to shampoo commercials, Joy expressed her frustration over the lack of risks in ad content created by big companies:

> I have a lot of hang-ups with these shampoo products. They usually are from the big companies. The agencies are usually in contract for life with the manufacturer. But they're useless! They really have nothing except just a bit of empowerment, a bit of femvertising, but with their big budgets, it's all lies lies lies . . . they should take the risk because they can afford to do so.
>
> (Marami akong hang-ups sa shampoo na 'yan. Kasi siyempre big big companies 'yan, e. At naka kontrata na for life ang agency na gumagawa ng campaigns d'yan. Mga walang kwenta! Puro lang rampa nang rampa. . . may konting empowerment empowerment kuno, may konting femvertising pero with their big budget, wala, it's all lies lies lies . . . they should take the risk dapat kasi can afford naman sila, e.)

c. Co-optation as an Open Secret

The responses gathered also show that co-optation was an accepted way of doing things in the ad-world. By doing research on the latest issues and concerns in politics, both in and outside academe (e.g., on the streets) the ad-makers were able to come up with "tricks of the trade" that have been useful to them. Others call this "our aces," "our thing," "a magic trick that everyone knows as a magic trick," and "a loud open secret." Gina explained how they do this:

> We follow the old tricks of the game. Find her soft side, find what she is most insecure about then hit it gently with a hammer ("martilyo"). Then, pat her in the back . . . so that she thinks of how she can improve herself once again. Then sell her the product. Make a promise that it will help her with what she fears the most—aging, ugliness, and you know the rest ("alam mo na ang the rest").

After admitting this, she said that she had never been this frank and "tactless" before: "The funny thing is, I have not really articulated it this way. It sounds bad really. But that's how it is."

The ad-makers also divulged that although it is uncommon for them to talk about this among themselves, they know that everyone is aware of these "tricks." Here is Joy's take on the strategy:

> Us here in the ad-world, we don't admit it everyday that women in the ads are like dolls. They're beautiful, perfect, beyond perfect . . . But they're not real. They're just there to be looked at. You can't take them home to Mama. But, sssshhhh, let's keep it to ourselves, okay?
>
> (Us here sa ad-world, hindi naman everyday that we admit this to ourselves pero we know that women in advertisements are like dolls. They're beautiful, perfect, beyond perfect . . . But they're not real. They're just there to be looked at. You can't take them home to Mama. Pero, sssshhhh, atin-atin lang yan.)

Chloe recalled a time when she was asked to look at portfolios of "real-looking" women who can be models. She was shocked when she saw them in person because according to her, ". . . they were so damn beautiful. So I realized that there is an accepted trend, even standardized, to find 'real-looking' women, the ones with freckles or the ones with real frizzy hair, but even this portfolio making is so funny to me."

Feminist standpoint theory's greatest feat is its recognition that the subjugated standpoints are not necessarily innocent positions (Haraway). They are necessary in rendering visible the workings of the dominant center. The subjugated group's affirmation and validation of the hegemonic norm is not easy to process. However, the denial of societal inequities in these affirmations proves that the dominant discourse does in fact its trick. If the trick works on subjugated groups in the center (i.e., in this case the women ad-makers), then it will definitely work on the subjugated groups in the margins, the women who are not as privileged.

3. *Co-optation as "Living in Paradox"*

Beyond the affirmation-conflict binary is the "third space" of the paradox, which is where the ad-makers performed the process of reconciling two opposing ideologies. As in most paradoxes, the ad-makers did not attempt to solve the problem but managed the situation by finding a middle ground. Living in paradox has been the result of exercising human agency within the constraints of a continuing negotiation. This further reveals the multifaceted work of women who resist old notions of femininity and old ways of "doing ads" while at the same time accept the powerful traditional ideas and practices that govern the industry. Though these paradoxes were shaped by both pain and pleasure, success and failure, the

ad-makers said that these allowed them to be "more mindful" and "thoughtful" of their individual, albeit unconscious, influence and the industry's evolving nature. While a perfect industry is not yet a reality, the ad-makers cultivate a complex blending of resisting and adjusting to the quirks and dynamics of what Lanie called a "crazy" industry.

a. Co-optation as a Negotiative Transaction Through "The Brief," "The Bureaucracy," and the "The Conservative Clients"

All the ad-makers spoke of certain institutional constraints that force them to weigh different concerns. All saw themselves as people whose creativity is often compromised to some extent in favor of the following: the brief, the bureaucracy, and the clients. The advertising brief sets the limits of an ad-campaign or commercial that the ad-makers have to follow. All creative works have to cater to the clients' demands, which are also based on market research, projections, and the clients' goals. Cynthia explained the level of autonomy she has in her creative input: "Only if the ideas meet the brief. How wild or safe it is, is really up to how wild or safe a client can be, or even [how the] other members of the team in the agency, outside of creative [are]."

Meanwhile, the term "bureaucracy" was used by Raquel to refer to the process of limiting autonomy among the ad-makers. She explained:

> We have bureaucracy much like anywhere else. We have politics here also. So autonomy is just confined within a one-meter radius, meaning, if it's just you inside a room. Once the rest comes in, you are answerable to everyone, but most especially to your client.
>
> (We have bureaucracy much like anywhere else. We have politics here also. So yung autonomy is just confined within a one- meter radius, meaning, kung ikaw lang ang tao sa room. Once the rest comes in, you answer to everyone, but lalo na sa client nyo.)

Although the top decisions trickle down to the creative part of ad-making, Joy explained that some degree of individual ownership of ideas is still possible: "At least partial, there is [ownership] . . . but not the kind that's 'Oh my, I have a big idea. . . . This idea is original from scratch,'. . . . there's no such thing [as] scratch,' . . . there's no such thing."

Furthermore, part of the conservatism among clients is attributed to the limited consultations that they have with the ad-makers: "Sometimes, it's like there are just a few people involved in the talk between client and ad-agency. The rest of us, we just wait for the brief" ("Minsan kasi parang ilang tao lang ang nag-uusap between

client and ad-agency. The rest of us, nag-aantay na lang sa brief"). Clients were also described as the ones who are the "most careful" and "most calculating" in the treatment of their products. Some clients who venture into TV advertising may be bold, but, in most instances, they are very cautious. Here is another humorous and insightful summation from Joy:

> Autonomy is an illusion. It is the clients' call all the time. We are not making an Oscar-winning piece about life in the 1950s. We are just making a 60-seconder commercial which gives us like a million or 2 for a twenty-member team plus production staff compared to the 3 million payment for the endorser, or for some 6 to 8 million or more.

The client's trust is critical in the ad-makers' exercise of freedom in the execution of creative concepts. Unfortunately, for the ad-makers, such freedom is restricted by the client's own personnel or staff who may share their sentiments regarding their product. Mylene explained this as such:

> It's autonomous if the client trusts us. Eventually, the client listens to his own advertising unit, or desk, or consultant. . . . So, first we have to please this advertising person who's from the client, then we have to please the client . . . if the client has a lot of dos and don'ts, we have very limited personal input in the project.
>
> (Autonomous kung ang client trusts us. Eventually, the client listens to [his] own advertising unit. . . . So, first we have to please this advertising person na galing sa client, tapos we have to please the client, . . . kung maraming dos and don'ts ang client, limited talaga ang personal input mo sa project.)

Gina, in contrast, expressed her wish for clients to be more democratic in their treatment of the advertising world. She said:

> How I wish more clients are like that . . . let[ting] us do our job. Yes, the research says it's like this, but I still believe, we are artists. I mean the whole of the advertising industry is supposed to be made of artists, eh. But we can't be artists when our every move is dictated by market research.

b. Co-opting as Self-Preservation

Aside from the above-mentioned forms of co-optation, there is one that is particularly emphasized by three of the ad-makers. They refer to the "stubbornness of the industry" in responding to criticism. One ad-maker described it as a sort of

"pride that has made us entitled to do spin the wheel" and "self-preservation that is averse to intellectualisms." Here, co-optation is accomplished by turning a blind eye to the good intentions of other sectors. This muting is self-imposed not for its own sake but because the industry wants to protect itself. Gina illustrated this reality in her story about an advertising congress she attended a few years ago:

> They invited guests, authors, feminists. It was a blast (ang saya-saya)! There was one who really punched the industry in the face and [they were] like, "Let's ban her for life. What were you thinking, inviting her to the Ad Congress?" [But] for me, she made sense. It was not her turf, but she was badass! Love her to death! And I was telling my friends, "You know, we need to hear these things because, for all we know, this might be a dying industry and we just [refuse to] acknowledge it because of our fat bonuses." So my point is, the industry is educated . . . We are a thinking bunch . . . But we don't like criticism especially from the outside, especially about how women are in the commercials or how we measure women as a market.

c. Co-opting as Artful Ad-libbing

Compromise as ad-libbing is also a common term that the ad-makers used to refer to the formal and informal negotiations they make with themselves, with their co-workers, and with the other stakeholders in the industry. Others used the term "conceding," "give and take," and "bargaining" to refer to this form of co-optation. For me, the term "ad-libbing" captures the kind of compromising that the ad-makers do. This act of ad-libbing does not necessarily force them to let go of their convictions as it is is an artful form of "making do with what they have" within their sphere of influence. The term connotes humor and entails the profound skill of being witty under the pressure of uncertainty. Gina explained how this works:

> . . . even if there are exaggerations here and there, hopefully there will be no total disregard for respect for women women. Let us put some dignity into it, let us think about it. Not just what has been accustomed to. Oh dear, . . . it is not for the faint-hearted. It has been very difficult to start something, what you may call "revolutionary."
>
> (. . . Even if there are exaggerations here and there, huwag naman 'yung walang pakundangan, 'yung tipong wala na talagang respeto sa babae. Lagyan naman natin ng dignity, 'yung pinag-isipan. 'Yung hindi na lang kung ano ang nakasanayan. Hay naku, . . . it is not for the faint-hearted. It has been very difficult kasi nga ang hirap talaga to start something, what you may call "revolutionary.")

Here is another take from Mylene:

> We try as much as we can to go for the lesser evil . . . so we could still sleep at night. So we cut here and there, less zoom-in sa skin, more on the eyes . . . more on the narrative, less on the body.
>
> (We try as much as we can to go for the lesser evil . . . para naman makatulog kami sa gabi so we could still sleep at night. So we cut here and there, less zoom-in sa skin, more on the eyes . . . more on the narrative, less sa katawan niya.)

For Raquel, compromising as adlibbing means having values. It is always the better option than just "sucking it up": "I have been in many situations when the client really had the dirtiest ideas to a point of being illegal. For me, it's about meeting half-way because I still go to church" ("Ilang beses din naman ako in a situation na talaga kadiri ang gusto ng client. Talagang 'ilegal kumbaga'. Tapos ako, meet halfway tayo, coz nagsisimba pa din naman ako").

d. Co-optation as Reasoned Spiral of Silence

"Reasoned spiral of silence" is my take on an important communication concept, the "spiral of silence." It is my reading of the subtle act of "encoding" the co-opted media content. The ad-makers talked about avoiding causing "ruffles in the boardroom" or "rock[ing] the boat" or "start[ing] a fire." Raquel explained what these mean:

> This is all just "all in a day's work" most of the time. And [when] you we live the daily grind, you have to be very sensitive to how other people think and feel. In our culture, we don't want to start the fire. We don't want to offend others especially if we feel we are alone in our beliefs.
>
> (All in a day's work lang naman dito most of the time. And [when] we live the daily grind, you have to be very sensitive to how other people think and feel. At sa culture natin, we don't want to start the fire. Ayaw natin may na-o-offend lalo na 'pag feeling mo nag-iisa ka lang naman sa pananaw mo.)

My use of the term "reasoned" gives a multi-layered subtlety to the "spiral of silence" implied by Mylene as "she talked about how the focus on earning a living for the family takes precedence over everything." I see this paradox as a way of patiently living in the present while still being mindful of the silences that would have otherwise been voiced out had the circumstances not been complex. She revealed that, on a daily basis, ad-makers do not think of "society outside the industry" because they have deadlines to meet and they "just want to go home on time."

So even if an ad-maker has something to say to elevate the discourse on beauty, she just keeps silent to avoid confrontation because, according to Joy, "Your mind is just so tired and when your voice is nothing in the vast scheme of things, I'd rather say what the rest says. Come on, let's start the shoot because the rainy season will be here soon" ("Pagod na kasi ang utak mo at kung tiny voice ka lang naman sa kalawakan, I'd rather say what the rest says. Sige na, simulan na natin ang shooting kasi rainy season na bukas").

Nevertheless, this "reasoned spiral of silence" is a humble declaration that advertising is not as important as the other professions. This provides insight into the ambivalence that ad-makers courageously face. Gina recounted a conversation with her son: "I am irrelevant as my son often says about advertising—the source of evil in the world. But I'd like to think that I am the dark angel in here who has made a difference somehow. I followed the rules but broke them too, you know."

This is an important insight on how ad-makers have become comfortable in their roles as myth-makers. Gina talked about a friend whom she considers one of the "avant-gardes" in the industry, but has somehow renounced the need to over-analyze the advertising world. According to Gina, many of have eventually buried their criticisms because even the bravest among them have justified why there is no need to voice out their opinions. Here are her thoughts:

> We don't want to hear it because we have worked so hard to get here. And my friend would say, "What else do they want? (Ano pa ba ang gusto nila?) This is advertising, for chrissakes. We are not truth-tellers. We are spin doctors and that's why they love us." And she is one of those who think outside the box.
>
> She is one of the few who's kinda existentialist in her musings. "What is the meaning of what we do?" But after all the musings, the arguments over dinner, she is most proud of the great campaign last Christmas about this big soda product. See, what about the ones who just say "I am just here for the money. I am just here to launch this campaign. Just finish the shoot. . . ."
>
> (She is one of the few na may pagka-existentialist ang mga muni-muni. Tipong, "Why are we here in the first place? What is the meaning of what we do?" Pero after all the muni-muni, the arguments over dinner, she is most proud of the great campaign last Christmas about this big soda product. See, so paano pa kaya yung tipong, "I am just here for the money. I am just here to launch this campaign. Just finish the shoot. . . .")

I consider this account "reasoned" because the mere articulation of such experiences show the ad-makers' ruminations on the paradoxes they manage on a daily basis. This, for me, is no small feat.

I would like to emphasize that although I highlight the mutedness in the ad-makers' experiences, as shown in the disjunction between their personal views and the limited freedom in advertising, I also underscore the process of "un-muting" that they take part in as an equally important counter-discourse. Furthermore, these un-mutings show a certain procedural knowledge described by Mary Field Belenky et al. as the mastering of the "how tos" or "steps" in one's work that they may not necessarily like or agree with. In other words, the ad-makers have mastered the "form" of the work without necessarily completely agreeing with its "content." This mastery of an "art form" mattered to the ad-makers. As Raquel explained: "Although not everything that I did was reflective of my deepest philosophies, I am still proud that I was able to close the account and I was able to produce it [the advertisement]." For her, this procedural knowledge is the product of "heart-wrenching disappointments as well as immeasurable psychological and monetary rewards."

This section ascertains the situated subjugation of the women ad-makers within the ad industry. Sometimes the women just go with the flow and abide by the written and unwritten rules; but sometimes they do not agree with these and disagree among themselves. And oftentimes they have an ambivalent relationship with their specific ad agencies or with the other aspects of the industry. Subjugated subjectivities in the center can be difficult to identify, but Haraway gives us the parameters to distinguish them from the dominators: "Only those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent, born again" (586).

The paradoxical nature of the ad-makers' position likewise demonstrates inflections of orientation within a rather essentialized group of women at the center. (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis; Collins; Harding). By surfacing this situated ambivalence, I hope to have contributed to the demystification not only of the empowered woman but also of the reified community of empowered women (Walby qtd. in Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 318).

Conclusion and Recommendations

My analysis of the ad-makers' negotiated performance of their work surfaced particular contexts for co-optation that arise from the individual ad-maker's creative process and the institutional conventions that surround it. I hope I have shown how the co-optation of feminist ideologies in advertisements is not the binary opposite of the "enlightened feminist's" take on the world. It is not simply

a contentious aspect of feminist discourse that has found its way to the cultural spaces of capitalism. By not romanticizing the oppressed (Walby qtd. in Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 318), I have located the subjugated standpoint as it is embodied in women's lives in the highly contestable space of the ad industry. While the systemic transformation of women into being full partners in an uncensored space of creativity does not completely take place, it is nevertheless a space for epistemic and discursive transformations. In society, we are informed and moved not only by the oppressions in the margins but also by the marginalized found in the centers of power.

Beyond "profit," co-optation is a result of paradoxical circumstances more than intentional. It is not as if ad-makers say "Let's go co-opt feminism." Rather, it is a consequence of embedded practices that justify the co-opted notion of woman as a comfortable acceptance of what could be real for all women and what is only true to some. Co-optation also surfaced in the conflict between what the ad-makers perceived to be the real situation of the poor and marginalized and what they project in the ads. As shown in the accounts above, ad-makers affirm the positive and powerful images of women. In addition, the accounts showed that co-optation is an unwritten practice that everyone acquiesces to and a compromise that people make. Therefore, co-optation occurs because "borrowing surface elements" is the most convenient thing to do in an industry that admits to be on the frontline of what is "uso"[6]—in academe, pop culture, and religion. Co-optation also occured despite how the ad-makers resisted many of its premises because these women were not the only ones making important decisions.

Underscoring the tenets of standpoint and muted group theories, the discussion showed that the forms of subordination experienced by the ad-makers within their agencies and in the advertising industry did not just mute them in an overtly oppressive manner. They were muted in the process of co-opting feminist discourses in the ads they created partly because they are women in an industry that sells products to fellow women; thus, their output is much closer to home, so to speak. Furthermore, as women with subjective identities and whose work contributes to the discursive formation of womanhood, the multi-layered forms of mutedness and/or un-mutedness reveal a much more complicated yet "improvisational"—a term I borrow from Mary Catherine Bateson—form of un-mutedness. This improvisational form of un-muting was present in the ways that ad-makers worked within the constraints of the industry without letting go of their dream to improve the practice of advertising. The patterns of coercion, affirmation, and contradiction between the ad-makers' personal views and their advertisements showed how such a process of muting and improvisational un-muting through co-optation is cyclical, repetitive, and never linear.

As this research is an investigation of women advertisement makers' standpoint as opposed to the standpoint of the dominant group of which they are also a part, the results underscore that within the dominant group of advertising, certain standpoints are never fully heard. Unlike the other studies in the Philippines, my study surfaced the experience of women ad-makers who encode content into commercials that sell ideas and products to. As women ad-makers, they are themselves the potential buyers of the products that their clients want to sell. As one of them said, "I am myself a buyer so when I buy the product, I also buy the exaggerations that come with it." For me, "buying the exaggerations" is another form of muted-ness that is present on the level of consumption.

However, as the discussion has shown, the ad-makers' awareness and self-examination un-mutes the thick layers of subordination they negotiate with every day. This very act of articulation is a testament to a strong standpoint or "a strong voice of constructed knowledge" among women who are often in ambivalent positions. The ad-makers construct and reconstruct their professional lives vis-à-vis their personal lives in order to manage the gap between what they want for themselves and what they want for women in general, given the limitations of their work. Framing the analysis through women ad-makers' standpoint is a relevant feminist concern in communication studies. Since it is not easy to hypothesize whether the gendered hierarchies of media environments directly affect the production of media content, the feminist theoretical perspective of standpoint theory rests on transcending the popular truism that the presence of women in media organizations engender better portrayals of women. The feminist assertion though that women's access to media professions remains valid. This means that as we interrogate women's role in media, their presence in the profession needs to be continuously championed.

Finally, I strongly recommend starting more conversations among women in the advertising industry. Women executives in advertising associations in the Philippines such as the 4A's-Philippines (Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies), the Philippine Association of National Advertisers (PANA), and the Advertising Suppliers of the Philippines should mobilize intra-association conversations that highlight how the majority of women in the "middle-level" stratum of the industry are overshadowed by a minority of men at the top. The now-defunct Advertising Board of the Philippines (AdBoard), as an example, was composed mostly of male board members. These conversations also have to promote the role of women in the industry as catalysts for the elevation of discourse, not just in individual organizations but also in larger advertising contexts, which could lead to the revisions and institutionalization of a code of ethics for advertising. These revisions may begin with the AdBoard's Advertising Content Regulation Committee's (ACRC)

Code of Ethics Manual of 2006. Likewise, the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas's (KBP) *Broadcast Code of Ethics* of 2007 should have a more detailed discussion on advertising.

The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) is also encouraged to have policies against discrimination of women in ad-content and in the advertising processes. An intensified media literacy campaign initiated by academe should reach out beyond the confines of universities. Educating the public about the powerful images in advertisements will have long-term effects on the elevation of discourse. Since Media Literacy is a course in the new K-to-12 curricula, advertising-as-a-process and advertising-as-an-industry should be substantially tackled and critiqued in schools. The media literacy component of public education must also include the intensification of the critique of the advertising world, which challenges the political economy of advertising. It is thus critical to locate the world of advertising within a neo-liberal framework in order to dissect advertising's position within a scheme of economic arrangements.

NOTES

1. In fact, the political discourse on transgender people was elevated when feminism transcended the commonality of female embodied realities (e.g., the biological composition of these realities) and moved towards the intersection of privileges and marginalizations.

2. I use the term "ad-makers," not advertisement producers, because most informants preferred to label their work "ad-making" or "making ads," regardless of their specific roles within the ad-industry.

3. The original data set (interview transcripts of Gina, Joy, Mylene, Raquel, Cynthia, and Zee) and the original findings were part of my 2016 dissertation titled, "Ganda Babae: TV Advertisements' Co-optation of Feminism and Women's Standpoint on and Lived Experience of the Encoding and Appropriation of the Ideals of the Beauty" (Baldo-Cubelo, J.T.Y., 2016, Unpublished PhD in Communication dissertation, College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines Diliman).

   In 2018-2019, I continued interviewing women ad-makers who expressed interest in my study. In 2020, I began expanding the original theoretical premise of my 2016 dissertation on standpoint theory and muted group theory. Although there was no drastic departure from the 2016 unpublished manuscript, my discussion of standpoint theory and muted group theory, the additional data sets supported my theoretical expansion. The first part of the data set corresponding to a different research question has been analyzed and published as an article. See Baldo-Cubelo, J.T.Y. (2021). "Filipino women ad-makers' standpoint on their professional environment's regard of women and women in beauty product ads." *Plaridel Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 231-263. doi.org/10.52518/2021.18.1-03bldcbl.

4. Only eight women agreed to be identified through pseudonyms. The rest refused to be named at all but consented to sharing data from the interviews and FGDs. All transcripts of interviews and FGDs were shown to the informants for validation before the analysis was started. Some of them asked to remove information they had already divulged.

5. This is just an "accented" and an exaggerated way of saying "power-power."

6. Fad, trendy.

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