

Queen B: A Modern Feminist Critique of Beyoncé

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Introduction

Writer Suzanne Bragger once said: “If a woman can only succeed by emulating men, I think it is a great loss and not a success. The aim is not only for a woman to succeed, but to keep her womanhood and let her womanhood influence society” (*Daily Good*). Through the short span of time I’ve been able to experience life, there have been many influential women who live up to this statement. Powerhouse Oprah Winfrey, who is the first woman in history to own and produce her own show, win countless Emmy awards, starred in Oscar nominated films, and has formed her own successful production company, which has produced countless movies, magazines, and books. In 1993, President Clinton signed the “Oprah Bill” into law, which established a national database of convicted child abusers that is available to law enforcement agencies and concerned parties across the world (Oprah Winfrey Biography). Oprah was named one of the "100 Most Influential People of the 20th Century" by *Time* magazine, and in 1998 received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. In 2013, President Barack Obama awarded Oprah Winfrey the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Oprah Winfrey is considered the highest-paid performer on television, the richest self-made woman in America, and the richest African-American of the 20th century (*Academy of Achievement*).

Other successful women who use their womanhood to influence society are AIDS researchers Hannah Gay, Katherine Luzuriaga, and Deborah Persaud are collectively responsible for functionally curing a newborn of AIDS. By giving the infant, who contracted HIV from its mother, anti-HIV drugs within hours of birth, Gay, a pediatrician at the University of Mississippi; Luzuriaga, an immunologist from the University of

Massachusetts; and Persaud, a virologist at Johns Hopkins Children's Center, managed to battle back the virus so the child, now 2 1/2 years old, no longer needs medications and shows no signs of HIV. Following the success with the newborn, another study reported that 14 more patients have been able to control HIV. These three ladies opened the gate to a historic opportunity to control the spread of HIV (*Time 100*). Screenwriter and producer Shonda Rhimes, is the first African-American woman to create and executive-produce a Top 10 network series—the medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*. She is also the creator of its spin-off, *Private Practice*, and the political thriller *Scandal*. Before these series, Rhimes penned such film screenplays as *Crossroads*, *Princess Diaries 2*, and HBO's *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*. (*Biography*). Her shows, *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal* include African- Americans with starring roles, interracial and gay & lesbian relationships, and very educated women in power; All which have won her several GLAAD Media and NAACP awards for taking on important issues of gender and race (*Biography*). Dilma Rousseff, the first woman president of Brazil and the second most powerful woman in the world. Jill Abramson, the first woman executive editor of The New York Times. CEO at IBM, Virginia Rometty (*Forbes*). The list, of course, can go on seemingly forever. Today, women are a huge part of many facets of our society, including politics, medicine, business, media, philanthropy, technology, real estate, and so much more. The hardship, success, and education of women have made such an impact in society and have empowered women of all ages to strive for going as high as they can go.

So why feminism? Why choose Beyoncé as a subject to write my senior project about? Well, allow me to explain. As graduation suddenly approached, I slowly began to

realize that I would be done with school. My days with a desk too small for an average person, college ruled paper, and number two pencils were weeks from over. With 18 years of school, I have gained knowledge from teachers, counselors, coaches, friends, and books. I have grown immensely while striving towards my education and now it is all coming to a close. Everyone continues to ask me, “what do you want to do after you graduate?” Well, I personally want to get into public relations. I want to help create positive publicity for an up and coming star in the entertainment industry, by establishing and maintaining their image using my education and life experience. This is where my idea for my senior project derives from. As a communications studies major at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, I have been exposed to all sorts of theories, media, studies, and performances. One thing I wish I had experienced more in school, especially college, was honest discussion in the classroom. Yes, in most of my classes we touched upon subjects here and there, but I always felt and wished we could go deeper and further into some more relevant topics. I understand that professors have guidelines and syllabi that they must follow, but this is the time where we should talk about issues of gender, race, relationships, sexuality, and media. Modern ideas and concerns that relate to the world we live in today.

So being an opinionated communication studies student, I wanted my senior project to be, in a sense, a huge discussion. I wanted to exemplify everything I had learned in school but also include pieces of myself, my opinion, and the culture I am still wondrously learning from. People in the media are far too scrutinized for my taste. As a culture, we are way too impressed with whom a person is dating, what type of clothing someone wears, or how many followers they happen to have on social media sites. While

all that is fine and dandy, what about the entertainers who care about changing the world and how we think as a society? For this analysis, I want to focus on the impact and empowerment of mega-star Beyoncé Knowles. Beyoncé is a powerhouse full of multiple talents and titles such as a, singer, dancer, actress, entrepreneur, businesswoman, mother, wife, sister, and daughter. She is a woman that truly deserves a round of applause for her efforts. Although, in my eyes and in the eyes of her million fans, she is an inspiring black woman, but there are competing views on what she represents as a role model and public figure for women across the globe. Ironically, majority of those opposing views and opinions come from feminist women.

Queen B

Part girl next-door, part mistress of the universe, Beyoncé now exudes a hip-thrusting sensuality that can be a little...intimidating. She's hot, no doubt, but her eminence, her independence, and her ambition make some label her cool to the touch. Her allure lies in the crux of that tension—on the meridian between wanting her unabashedly curvaceous body and knowing that she's probably right when she says, to borrow from her song "Bootylicious," that you really aren't ready for all that jelly (Wallace-Miss Millennium).

Beyoncé Giselle Knowles was born in Houston, Texas on September 4th, 1981. At an early age, she began belting out powerful tunes with the help of her father/manager Matthew Knowles and mother/stylist Tina Knowles. In the early 1990's, Beyoncé auditioned for and landed a place in an all-girl singing group called *Girl's Tyme*, with

whom she traveled the talent show circuit with in Houston. In 1996, Beyoncé's father left his six-figure sales job to manage the group full-time. After a change-up in the members of the group and name, Matthew Knowles helped Destiny's Child land a deal with Columbia Records. Destiny's Child became one of the most popular R&B groups of the time, with hit singles such as "No, No, No," "Say My Name," and "Bills, Bills, Bills." In 2000, the foursome became a trio as fellow singers Kelly Roland and Michelle Williams became the permanent members of Destiny's Child. The group continued its success with the historically empowering girl power anthems of "Independent Women Part I" in 2001, which spent 11 weeks at No.1 on the *Billboard* charts, and "Survivor", which sold more than 4 million copies worldwide (People). In 2002, Beyoncé becomes the first black woman to win ASCAP's Pop Songwriter of the year.

According to Biography.com, while enjoying her group's success, Beyoncé began exploring other projects. She made her acting debut in 2001 with a starring role in MTV's *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*. She then co-starred with Mike Myers in the spy parody *Gold Member* the following year. Beyoncé took center stage as a solo artist, releasing her first album, *Dangerously in Love*, in 2003. The recording became a huge success for her, both commercially and critically. It sold millions of copies and won five Grammy Awards, tying the record for most wins ever for a female artist. Destiny's Child released their last studio album, *Destiny Fulfilled*, in 2004, and officially broke up the following year. In 2006, Beyoncé released her second solo album, *B'Day*, starred in the Broadway adapted film *Dreamgirls*, received a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame, and launched her clothing line House of Dereon. In 2007, she became the first non-model, non-athlete, and second African American woman to be featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated's

swimsuit issue. At the 35th Annual Music Awards that same year, she made history again as the first woman to win the International Artist Award. In 2008, she married longtime boyfriend and hip hop mogul Jay-Z, released her third album, *I am... Sasha Fierce*, and starred as R&B legend Etta James in the film *Cadillac Records*. In 2010, Beyoncé made history yet again taking home six of the ten Grammy's she was nominated for, the most ever one by a female in one night. In 2011, she released her fourth solo album, *4*, which included the powerful anthem that sparked much controversy, "Run the World (Girls)." In 2013, Beyoncé performed at the Super Bowl Halftime Show in New Orleans. In that 12 minute set, Beyoncé wowed audiences across the world, reunited with Destiny's Child, and proved that she was seemingly unstoppable. She was heavily praised to have "continued in the vein of Madonna last year, steering the Super Bowl away from dad rock to embrace girl power" (Rooney).

As of now, Beyoncé Knowles has won 17 Grammys, 24 Billboard Music Awards, 3 NAACP Image Awards, 14 MTV Video Music Awards, and 9 American Music Awards. Overall, she has been nominated for over 700 awards and won 448 of them (People). She's released multiple number one albums and singles on U.S. and international charts, dabbled in fashion and award winning fragrances, and has been a spokeswoman for many products and causes. "Queen B" has made the Forbes Top 10 list of entertainment's highest-earning women and the world's most powerful women (currently #17), and remains one of the most-searched people on the Internet. To millions of fans, myself included, Beyoncé is seen as an iconic woman of the 21st century, who takes pride in being an independent and successful woman. She has proved herself over and over again, taking bigger steps and making even bigger accomplishments every year.

To others she is portrayed as a questionable role model for girls and women today. Earlier this year, Michelle Obama expressed that she considered Beyoncé a good role model for her own daughters to look up to. Well Writer and founder of the Modern Girls Guide to Spirituality, Rakhi Kumar, wrote a letter to the First Lady in response to her statement about Beyoncé. In her letter, she expresses how endorsing an artist like Beyoncé shows the “most misogynistic aspects of the music industry” (Kumar 1). Calling Beyoncé “dreadfully familiar and sad” and comparing how she presents herself to the topic of drug trafficking. She goes on to say that girls everywhere need to be sent a “more refined, intelligent message with the acknowledgment that they are naturally brilliant and capable of everything without ever having to undress to achieve success” (Kumar 1). It is clear that Beyoncé is an interesting and somewhat controversial figure. Her image entails problems with gender, race, sexuality, feminism, patriarchy, media, and more. I understand that all these limitations and topics are relevant, but for this analysis I will focus on the feministic critiques of sexuality, patriarchy and the media pertaining to Beyoncé Knowles.

Method

In order to fully execute a feminist critique of Beyoncé as a woman of empowerment, it is first necessary to briefly examine the history behind feminism. First, I will explain the three waves of feminism. According to Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen’s *Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls*, the first wave of feminism started in the 1800’s with the Seneca Falls Convention in New York: “More than 300 men and women assembled for the nation’s first women’s rights convention. The Seneca Falls Declaration was outlined by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, claiming the

natural equity of women and outlining the political strategy of equal access and opportunity; giving rise to the suffrage movement” (Krolokke 3). During this wave, social and child labor laws were created, a campaign for legalized birth control started, and the Equal Rights Amendment was drafted. Although many black women activists and abolitionists supported this wave, it “consisted largely of White, middle-class, well-educated women” (Krolokke 4). Second-wave feminism refers:

Mostly to the radical feminism of the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s...Socialist feminists Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollontai, and Emma Goldman, fought both politically and in their own private lives for women’s right to abortion, divorce, and non-legislative partnership—and against sexism both in bourgeois society and within the socialist movements (Krolokke7).

Here is where protest events like that of the Miss America Pageants became significant, “to show how women in pageant competitions were paraded like cattle, highlighting the underlying assumption that the way women look is more important than what they do, what they think, or even whether they think at all” (Krolokke 8). Here is where women’s liberation groups start to organize, women step into male dominated political arenas, there is passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, and Title IV funding for boys and girls are equally federally funded in educational settings, and so much more. “Key to this branch of feminism was a strong belief that women could collectively empower one other” (Krolokke 9). And this is what’s happening today as feminist figures continue to empower other women by becoming models of success to emulate.

Although second wave feminism is still very much alive and kicking, a third wave followed soon after. This wave, from the late 1980's to present day, is where women of color get involved and race becomes a huge issue to the feminist movement. It becomes a fight for all women everywhere, even beyond U.S. borders. There is also a shift on the ideals of proper or correct feminism, due to the huge change in the media, with the Internet, music, movies, magazines, etc.:

Born with the privileges that first- and second-wave feminists fought for, third wave feminists generally see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents...The Third Wave are buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism. Young feminists now reclaim the term "girl" in a bid to attract another generation, while engaging in a new, more self-assertive—even aggressive—but also more playful and less pompous kind of feminism. (Krolokke15).

Here is where sexuality is more than explored and feminist standards of the first two waves are questioned and challenged:

Quite to the contrary, younger feminists honor the work of earlier feminists while criticizing earlier feminisms, and they strive to bridge contradictions that they experience in their own lives. They embrace ambiguity rather than certainty, engage in multiple positions, and practice a strategy of inclusion and exploration. Meanwhile, they propose a different politics, one that challenges notions of universal womanhood and articulates ways in which groups of women confront complex

intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, and age related concerns (Krolokke 16).

The focus of womanhood as a whole changes to the focus of the “self”. In her article, *Isn't it Ironic?: The intersection of Third-Wave Feminism and Generation X*, writer Helene Shugart discusses feminism in our generation's contemporary culture and how it intersects with third-wave feminism: “A third-wave philosophy is individually liberating in that it absolves women of responsibility to the collective. Rather than shouldering the burden of all women, third wavers are responsible to and for themselves, not representative of and thus beholden to generations of women past, present, and future” (Shugart 133). The responsibility of women as a collective is a thing of feminist past and is a major difference for third-wave feminists. Beyoncé is a perfect example of not shouldering the burden of all women. Although she is in the spotlight and her every move is watched, the decisions she makes are her own. The choice to listen to, look up to, or emulate her is one of your own.

This is what we need to realize as women and as a culture, period. As human beings we are given the choice of *free will*, which is defined as the power of acting without the constraint of necessity of fate and the ability to act at one's own discretion (*Oxford Dictionary*). So it shouldn't matter what kind of clothes Beyoncé chooses to where wear when she is performing, or how sexual she chooses to dance or speak. It is her right to do so. In her documentary, *Life is But a Dream*, Beyoncé touches on this subject pertaining to the intersection of her work in the music industry and her personal life:

It's a tough time in the music industry...people don't even listen to a body of work anymore. When I first started out there was no Internet, people taking pictures of you, and putting your personal life, or exploiting your personal life as entertainment. I think people are so brainwashed. All you think of is the pictures and images that you see all day every day. You don't see the human form...Nina Simone put out music, you loved her voice and that was her instrument. You don't get brainwashed by the focus on by her day-to-day life, who's she's dating, what her child is wearing. All the things that really are not your business and it shouldn't influence the way you listen to the voice and the art, but it does (*Life is But a Dream*).

The pure honesty that Beyoncé exudes is truly heartening and represents third-wave feminism to its core. In this wave, women collectively and independently empower each other, accept their sexuality, and show it with exceptional pride.

Although third-wave feminism may be premised upon an oversimplified, limited, and monolithic caricature of second-wave feminism, it has its virtues. For one thing, it's inspiring --vibrant and outspoken, third wavers appear gleefully brazen, brimming with optimism and intoxicated by their own potential, which raises the question of whether their virtual rejection of second wave feminist tenets is really that egregious...if nothing else, [it gives] me the sense that feminism is thriving someplace other than in scholarly journals and classrooms (Shugart 133).

Beyoncé Knowles' fierce female empowerment mindset is constructed through all aspects of her performance: her physical appearance, her voice, her dance moves, her

music videos and lyrics. Beyoncé is a modern day feminist and I will show proof of this through the use of her music and actions.

Analysis

Imagine a Sahara surrounded by mountains where burned anonymous objects cover the ground, an army of women running frantically around each other, as a platoon of men dressed in what seems to be SWAT gear invade their space. Beyoncé emerges through the dry desert, clad in all white, straddling a black stallion, as women seductively rise out of cages and up from an arrangement of blocks of wood that resemble a cross. Cut to Beyoncé, her army, and a massive lion standing their ground, dressed in what can be portrayed as war decor, as red flags flow to the left and right in the wind. “Girls” is repeatedly sung as Egyptian sound effects shimmer along before the beat drops as Beyoncé looks up and starts to walk towards the group of men belting:

Girls!

We run this motha/Yeah

Who run the world? /Girls!

Who run this motha? /Girls! (2-5)

Beyoncé chants these lines with the attitude and power of a million women, as she performs a perfectly synchronized African-styled dance with undeniable ease. In her newly debuted autobiographical documentary, *Life is But a Dream*, Beyoncé explains the significance of her 2011 anthem through her performance at the Billboard awards:

The urge to get my message out was so overwhelming. I didn't even pay attention to the risk I was taking. Nobody knew I was pregnant during that performance and I'm cool with that. I'm not interested in a free ride, but it

absolutely proved to me that women have to work much harder to make it in this world. It really pisses me off that women don't get the same opportunities as men do, or money for that matter because let's face it money gives men the power to run the show. It gives men the power to define our values and to define what's sexy and what's feminine. And that's bullshit. At the end of the day it's about how we think. We have to reshape our own perception of how we view ourselves. We have to step up as women and take the lead and reach as high as humanly possible. That's what I'm gonna do. That's my philosophy and that's what "Girls" is all about (*Life is But a Dream*).

Beyoncé almost took the words out of my head with this compelling statement. Instead of letting people, or more specifically men, dictate what women do and how they present themselves, women need to take power into our own hands. Beyoncé's "Run the World (Girls)," challenges traditional views of masculinity and gender roles by portraying women as superior to men. Beyoncé depicts the controversial topic of power relations between the two sexes in an empowering anthem meant to persuade women to embrace and flaunt the qualities that make them great. The video for "Run the World (Girls)" goes into this by portraying the two groups in a way that challenges gender role expectations and cultural beliefs, and creates a strong divide between masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, bringing up the question of which of the two seems to hold more power within our society, the video portrays women as having more power, and, in a sense, as ruling the world. The females in the music video are very sexualized, wearing high heels and lingerie as they dance provocatively underneath the male gaze. However, the "dance"

is one that unifies all the women in the video and allows them to freely express and prove that they are not to be messed with.

The women in the music video, including Beyoncé herself, use their bodies within the dance to express their power as females and flaunt their sexuality without shame. Their movements are both sharp and coordinated, leaving the men on the opposing side powerless to their persuasion. Her strong lyrics come to a peak when she sings,

My persuasion can build a nation

Endless power, with our love we can devour

You'll do anything for me (25-27)

These precise lines depict most clearly her feminist aims within the lyrics and video, describing her belief that women can use persuasion to create action, and transform their love into a powerful force for influencing the actions of men. At the end of the video, Beyoncé and her band of female followers salute the uniformed men in what can be viewed in one way as submission to their masculine authority. This scene perhaps reveals that although women have the desire to supersede the social inequalities they face against men, at the end of the day, they are still limited by the society's traditional expectations of the female role. It is acceptance at best, but it is not agreement. Beyoncé both supports patriarchy and goes against it.

Beyoncé is not saying that women have finally "made it" and that patriarchy is finished. She agrees that patriarchy is here and accepts it. She's arguing that the world runs on girls: without our labor, without our care work, without our accomplishments in industries/economies, the world as we know it would fall apart. Patriarchy runs on the foundation of women. But we still manage to critique it, resist and subvert it, and leave

the world a little better than we found it. The world can't run without girls, no matter how much patriarchy would like to eliminate us and overlook our central role in keeping the world running. Patriarchy exists, but no matter how much patriarchy devalues femininity and women, it can't get rid of them, because it is built on the backs of the girls and women they would love to get rid of. Women are making sure the world keeps running. Here is where modern feminism, or third wave feminism, comes into play.

But this leads to the question of why women, especially feminists, don't agree with Beyoncé as a strong role model or being anything near a feminist. Is it because she wears revealing outfits, dances seductively, or expresses the deep love she has for a man? Race and gender writer Tamara Winfrey Harris examines what the perceptions of Beyoncé's feminism say about women in her article, *All Hail the Queen*:

Beyoncé's success would seem to offer many reasons for feminists to cheer. The performer has enjoyed record-breaking career success and has taken control of a multimillion-dollar empire in a male-run industry, while being frank about gender inequities and the sacrifices required of women. She employs an all-woman band of ace musicians—the Sugar Mamas—that she formed to give girls more musical role models. And she speaks passionately about the power of female relationships.

She goes on to discuss how feminist ideology is deeply seeded in the idea that women are the owners of their bodies. “It is the feminism of SlutWalk, the anti-rape movement that proclaims a skimpy skirt does not equal a desire for male attention or sexual availability. Why, then, are cultural critics convinced that when Beyoncé pops a leather-clad pelvis on stage, it is solely for the benefit of men?” (Harris). Stating examples of women in the

media who are favored by feminists like the famous “crotch-grabbing, nudity, BDSM, Marilyn Monroe fetishizing” Madonna (Harris). She has been viewed as a woman who keeps pushing the boundaries of acceptable femininity, but does not face the same scrutiny being made against Beyoncé. Harris goes on to note how cultural critics have also been dissecting the feminism of Beyoncé through her relationship with her husband, Jay-Z, and through her recent tour being named the “Mrs. Carter Show,” after her husband’s last name.

If a woman loses feminist bona fides by becoming Mrs. So-and-So, someone best tell the 86 percent of American women who take their husbands' names at marriage. If there is any woman not in danger of being subsumed by a man's identity—no matter her last name—it is Beyoncé. In fact, the singer's married name is not "Mrs. Carter." She and her husband combined their names to create the hyphenate "Knowles-Carter" (Harris).

Jay-Z, aka Shawn Carter, who has made a living perpetuating hyper-masculinity and patriarchal masculinity, took the last name of the woman he married. “That in itself, to me, says something about gender in their relationship and the respect that exists there” (Harris 2). Not only does Jay-Z taking Beyoncé’s last name fight gender roles and standards given by society, it greatly adds to the growth of feminism and the baby step take-down of patriarchy. Although the scrutiny of Beyoncé is very harsh, it is the commentary on Beyoncé’s pregnancy that should make women everywhere feel disappointed with the route we are heading. When Beyoncé revealed she was pregnant, the media buzzed about it every minute of the day, but it wasn’t until an interview in Australia made it a turn for the worse. As Beyoncé sat down for the interview, her dress

seemed to fold and in pictures it looked as if she was wearing a belly pillow of some sort. Commentary such as Beyoncé faking her pregnancy in front of the world and talk of her using a surrogate began to swirl from one picture. Remarks like “why won't this woman display her naked body on television to prove to the world that she carried a baby in her uterus?” make me feel disgusted. A woman should never have to face that type of criticism, no matter who you are. Harris sums it up flawlessly, stating:

The conversation surrounding Beyoncé feels like assessing a prize thoroughbred rather than observing a human woman and it is dismaying when so-called feminist discourse contributes to that. Feminism is about challenging structural inequalities in society, but the criticism of Beyoncé as a feminist figure smacks of hating the player and ignoring the game, to twist an old phrase (Harris 2).

Instead of supporting a woman who's bringing a bundle of joy to the world and entering motherhood, we see the need to criticize her and think she is so obsessed with her image that she would lie about being pregnant and have another woman carry her child. I would go as far to say that it is inhumane to even talk about a woman this way and to try and force her to “display her naked body on television to prove to the world that she carried a baby in her uterus” (Harris 1). A woman should never be questioned about something so precious, especially by another woman. So perhaps one of things feminists can do is to stop portraying their own gender in such a negative light, and start giving women credit where credit is due; the credit for bringing children into the world, continuing to be good mothers, partners, sisters, daughters, and friends; the credit for

achievements in industries like media and entertainment that are traditionally feminized or industries like science and technology that are extremely masculine.

Women like Beyoncé Knowles, who fight patriarchy every day and who wholeheartedly promote the success and growth of women everywhere. "You know, for some reason, everyone accepts the fact that women don't make as much money as men do. I don't understand that. Why do we have to take a backseat?" she says in her film, which begins with her 2011 decision to sever her business relationship with her father. "I truly believe that women should be financially independent from their men. And let's face it; money gives men the power to run the show. It gives men the power to define value. They define what's sexy. And men define what's feminine. It's ridiculous" (*GQ*).

This problem comes from the history of feminism itself. I understand that it is necessary to know the history of what women fought for in the feminist past, but that history should not stop anyone from being a feminist today. Writer Christina Sweeney Baird, in her article *What Does it Modern Day Feminism Mean?*, explains the difficulties and critiques that past feminists are putting on the feminists of today. "The standard of self-proclaimed 'proper' feminists is too high, rendering feminism too exclusive. It's ironic that a social movement based on everyone being treated equally and being included in society treats people unequally and is shockingly exclusive" (Sweeney-Baird 1). There are too many roadblocks and stalemate tenets being put on modern-day feminists, that it seems as if feminism has become exclusive. It is as though you have to dress like this, study that, admire her and not someone else, or talk like your grandmother to be included in the "great feminist club". You don't need to know the Bible by heart or pray on your knees every day to be considered a Christian. Feminism is the belief that all

women should be treated equally and how you choose to fight for that cause should be your own. In her article, Christina-Sweeney Baird explains what modern feminism means to her:

You don't need to be well versed in the dialectic of second and third wave feminism and have a comprehensive response to Germaine Greer in order to be a feminist. It's wonderful if that knowledge is in your arsenal to debate at your leisure, but anyone can be included in the spectrum of feminism. One of the greatest differences between 2007 and 2013 is that Katie Price has been knocked off the 'feminist role model pedestal' by the combined power of Lady Gaga, Lena Dunham and Tina Fey. Yet they are burdened with an artificial obligation to represent every possible feminist perspective at all times (Sweeney-Baird 2).

Sexuality is a major part of our society. It is something we see every day in our media, in school, and even when we look at our own bodies in the mirror. It is a natural part of our lives, and the sooner we embrace that, rather than criticizing every woman who shows her curves, and come together as a class of women, we might actually have the potential to “run the world” as Beyoncé says.

There are critics that believe Beyoncé is a bad role model for using her body in a way that it functions as merely an object of male gaze. Success as a woman, unfortunately, comes with much criticism and unexplainable expectations. But I believe that through her music and efforts, she has made a positive stride towards both womanhood and feminism. Beyoncé has broken a multitude of barriers that have

challenged women in the past, present, and future. She has released her call to action and it is the decision of women everywhere to either heed her call or turn away from it.

Author Phyllis Reynolds Naylor said it best:

If you are embarrassed about your sex, it must mean that you feel there is something demeaning or disgusting about being female. You are all wondrously made, girls. Remember that: wondrously made, and you should carry your sex proudly, a badge of honor (*Good Reads*).

Conclusion

The feminist and empowering values that Beyoncé Knowles uses in her music and career, I argue, represent her passion and hunger to see women succeed. She has followed in the footsteps of a class of women that stood up for their rights and in turn she is a woman of my generation that I will proudly follow. Feminist media *Bitch* magazine's Kelsey Wallace defends and praises Beyoncé in her article, *Run the World Girl: In Defense of Beyoncé*:

She's no feminist scholar, but she is a woman who uses her considerable platform to talk about women's issues, at least the ones that concern her and that she thinks might concern her audience (these include: standing up for yourself, making your own money, walking away from someone who treats you poorly, going out on the town with your girlfriends, achieving your goals, and so on). While I don't think that Beyoncé should be our next choice to head up the Office of Global Women's Issues, I for one do appreciate that she foregrounds the experiences of women in her music (Wallace).

It seems as though people don't see the problems in stating that Beyoncé Knowles is a bad role model. Saying that she is a bad role model implies that showing skin and wearing tight outfits is out of the question. If this is so, women like Madonna, Katy Perry, and Serena Williams should be criticized. Works of art that contain nudity should be banned. Actresses, athletes, dancers, and artists everywhere might as well forget about being role models. Kelsey Wallace's article on the body double standards explains the unrealistic pressure we put on people:

We want our celebrities to be everything to us at once. We want someone like Beyoncé to be both powerful and vulnerable, secretive and revealing; in our bedrooms and on a pedestal...We put these unrealistic expectations on women especially, because even non-famous women are expected to be all things to all people. But those of us who are paying attention realize how unfair that is, and how complicated these images really are. Until we can look at the bigger picture that is our sexist celebrity culture—one that tells women their value comes from their bodies and then criticizes them for those bodies—and hold ourselves and our media to a higher standard (*Body Standard Double*).

Although feminism became established with the first two waves, third wave feminism is more current with our culture, and in my opinion it occupies a class of its own. The definition of women's empowerment is changing, along with the agenda for achieving equality. Women today aren't afraid to show off their figures, along with their education and success. I personally love my body and it's a part of me just as my mind is. Writer

Arielle Loren explains this change in her article, *Is Beyoncé the Face of Contemporary Feminism?*:

“Most women are tired of the hardcore oppression and patriarchy rhetoric... they’re ready to embrace their bodies and sexuality in a public way. Simply put, 20-something-year-old women are ready to showcase the multidimensionality of womanhood: we can be intelligent, independent, powerful, family-oriented, and sexy without having an identity crisis (Loren).

Beyoncé’s personal goals of independence and empowerment are aspirations that have inspired women everywhere. This is her feminist call to action. We as women and feminists need to understand that even the best of us sometimes fall to the standards and values of gender and race. As human beings, we make our decisions based on a multitude of desires and demands. For a woman like Beyoncé Knowles to be judged for her decisions without recognizing the impacts gender and race make, is heartless and misleading to say the least. So pertaining to the criticism of Beyoncé’s personal life, career, and self-proclaimed feminism:

A tiny top and a traditional marriage should not be enough to strip a woman otherwise committed to gender equality of the feminist mantle. If we all had pundits assessing our actions against a feminist litmus test, I reckon not even Gloria Steinem and bell hooks would pass muster. Women must be allowed their humanity and complexity. Even self-proclaimed feminists. Even Queen Bey’s (Harris 3).

Seeing that this woman's every move is watched under the microscope of the world, Beyoncé has constructed a major platform to encourage women to embrace their sexuality, fight patriarchy, and make a difference in this world. During my time at Cal Poly I have written dozens of papers about all sorts of topics. But as a result of this project, I have never felt so much of my own self and my major balled into one project. I am a 22 year old African-American/Puerto Rican woman who put herself through college against all kinds of odds and road blocks. When I was a freshman in high school, my counselor told me in front of my parents that I was not going to get anywhere near a university like Cal Poly. I participated in collegiate sports all while having three jobs, going to school, and trying to support my family back home in Los Angeles, Ca. After submitting this project, all of the nights I spent studying, working, and fighting for a way out of the hopeless path that was chosen for my so long ago, I will be an official graduate of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. I will be the first to graduate with a college degree in my family. I have made my baby steps in fighting patriarchy and trying to make a difference in this world.

As a result of this project, I have realized that there are so many implications in being a famous woman. You rise to stardom trying to get the world to see you for what you really are, but you don't expect the backlash and criticism to be so blunt and harsh. What matters is that not only should women stand by each other, but we also need to physically, emotionally, and mentally help each other. It all starts with us as women. Men need to be taught by their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and friends on how to treat a woman. On what is right and wrong, no matter the content that the media presents us with. We need to support each other as a culture and generation. Women, men, black,

brown, yellow, straight, or gay need to stand together and fight for equal rights. The barriers we put between each other, as human beings are what hinders us as a culture. So to start my feminist call to action:

Our power is ever pragmatic. I am woman and when I think I must speak.

Men have been given the chance to rule the world. But, ladies, our revolution has begun. Let's build a nation. Women everywhere... Run the world! (Life Is But a Dream).

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