



**HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)**

**HUMANITIES RESEARCH PAPER 2019**

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Title: An Analysis of Objectification in Beyoncé's Music and Portrayal of Personal Identity (in Social and Visual Mediums)

Slant: Literature

Total Word Count (excluding appendixes, footnotes & references): 5979

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**Declaration**

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Date of Submission: 8/6/19

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Gender has always been a key component in the marketing of popular music, and even more so as the visual aspect of music becomes increasingly pertinent. In the past music marketing has been conducted through appearances on radio stations, television networks and the press, but in the modern era music marketing has expanded to encompass digital marketing through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, as artists attempt to promote and enhance their brand image, displaying a culture in which power is vested within visual and social mediums, and careers are “make or break” depending on how people perceive them on these mediums.

In the music industry, there is a common occurrence of the male gaze, which is described by feminist Laura Mulvey as degrading women by portraying them as objects “constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses”<sup>7</sup>.

There is also an oppositional gaze, which builds on to the male gaze by suggesting that performativity is related to the gaze, and that race affects how different women are affected by the gaze.

In my research paper, I will be using Beyoncé as my case study to analyse the relationship between Beyoncé and the oppositional gaze in the music industry and how her role as an intersectional cultural icon affects this relationship.

## **1.2 Rationale**

I have chosen to study gendered and racial representation in popular music as I feel that gender and ethnic studies are both important parts of any society. Gendered and racial discrimination occurs every day, and as these problems continue to exist, in my opinion it is still our duty to be educated about them. Gendered inequality is especially prevalent in the music industry, both in the figures and representation. According to Dr. Stacy L. Smith's study entitled *'Inclusion in the Recording Studio'*<sup>12</sup>, women make up only 21.7 percent of artists, 12.3 percent of songwriters and 2.1 percent of producers.<sup>11</sup> Going beyond the figures, there is also the frequent and exigent issue of objectification, exploitation and misrepresentation of these female artists. These all point towards the existence of a patriarchal, male dominated power structure within the music industry, raising further important questions on whether female artists in the industry are truly fairly represented. Furthermore, because we are constantly surrounded by images in a world increasingly reliant on visuals, the male and oppositional gaze also have increased relevance in today's society, with many artists implementing such concepts in their work. Thus, with this in mind, I have decided to take this on in order to explore more about the impact these issues pose on the music industry, and namely, Beyoncé.

I decided to use Beyoncé as the focus in my research due to her immense impact on popular culture. Leaving her footprint on everything from fashion choices to the feminist movement, her influence goes beyond just her high position on the Forbes list of World's Highest-Paid Musicians (2018)<sup>1</sup>. Beyoncé uses her status as a successful artist as a stepping stone to become an embodiment of female and black empowerment. She is a prime example of a popular intersectional icon, being both a woman and being a person of colour, and is unafraid to openly discuss these topics through her music. This makes Beyoncé an interesting subject for my research, to see how she attempts to present herself lyrically, visually and in the marketing of her music. Through this, I hope to reveal the similarities and differences between how she wants to be perceived and how she is perceived by the media by exploring if she successfully manipulates the oppositional gaze in her work, or whether she falls victim to the gaze.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

How does Beyoncé interact with the oppositional gaze through her music and/ or the use of social media?

How is this 'relationship' between Beyoncé and the oppositional gaze impacted by the intersectional element of race?

### **1.4 Thesis Statement**

Beyoncé manages to use the oppositional gaze to further spread her messages of gender and racial equality through her portrayal of personal identity, while also exploiting the gaze to boost her popularity and increase her sphere of influence. Despite sometimes inadvertently falling victim to the gaze by subconsciously appealing to notions of racial and gender superiority, overall, Beyoncé still manages to use her intersectionality as both an African-American to promote herself and her feminist cause successfully.

### **1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s)**

In my research paper, I will be making use of the male gaze and intersectionality theory. I will be looking at three of Beyoncé's most controversial posts on social media, as well as three of her songs which I deem most relevant to answer the research questions in terms of how clearly they display the relationship between Beyoncé and the gaze. My focus will be on the visual and lyrical mediums of her music as well as her visual marketing on social media.

### **1.6 Significance of Research/ Usefulness**

The exploration of visual mediums such as social media in order to gain further insight on the use of the male gaze in popular culture has been limited up till now, so the portion of my research paper on Beyoncé's social media posts is meant to gain new insights in this regard. Unlike other academic work, who mainly dabble with Beyoncé's music and its relation to the feminist movement and racial equality, I will be looking more towards the connection between Beyoncé and the

oppositional gaze, and also look at the marketing aspect of this relationship by examining the social media posts.

### **1.7 Limitation(s)**

For the Intersectionality theory, I will only be covering two factors mentioned under intersectionality, namely gender and ethnicity, leaving out other factors such as age and religion. I will be also be focusing on representational intersectionality while leaving out structural intersectionality and political intersectionality, which all contribute to the types oppression different people face. Another limitation is that I am a chinese male, not a black female, which means I am writing this research paper from my perspective; an outsider's point of view.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Survey**

### **2.1 bell hooks' Oppositional Gaze (2001)**

Another critique of the male gaze theory is the Oppositional Gaze proposed in bell hooks' research paper "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship"<sup>3</sup> (2001). bell hooks suggests that just looking through Laura Mulvey's scope of the male gaze will produce an incomplete picture of

female representation, and that one should be mindful that there are other factors such as ethnicity that should be considered.

In the paper, bell posits, “All attempts to repress our/black peoples’ right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: ‘Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.’” This encapsulates the main argument of the paper, which is that black females should take agency over their own representations in the media and have control over how society views them as a whole.

In the paper, bell hooks, like Mulvey, states that “there is power in looking”, but that the media and popular culture not only discriminate against women but against blacks as well. bell hooks argues that a “black female spectator” is “being forced to find the pleasure when her body is erased and she may herself be the white woman on the screen”. In this case, bell hooks is trying to suggest that there is a presence of white supremacy and racism within popular culture, and that since a majority of females in the entertainment industry are white, viewing from a black women’s point of view would then necessitate the development of the Oppositional Gaze in order to free oneself from the “racial limits” set by the industry. They are no longer outliers of the standard set by white women but be able to set their own standard.

The Oppositional Gaze is meant as a form of resistance against the mainstream representation of women, while still being aware about the racism incited by cinematic whiteness. This is reflected in the line “spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the

Other but also look back”. By taking agency, black women form their own gaze which better represents their true selves.

Ultimately, bell hooks’ Oppositional Gaze theory adds on to the Male Gaze theory by tying in with Crenshaw’s Intersectionality Theory, suggesting that black women are exploited and discriminated against at a larger extent than other women due to society’s perception of them as inferior stemming from the era of imperialism and slavery, thus stressing the need for black women to take agency and redefine themselves.

## **2.1 Laura Mulvey’s Male Gaze (1975)**

American feminist Laura Mulvey first describes the male gaze theory in her research paper “*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*” (1975)<sup>7</sup> as the phenomenon where the media objectifies women and subjects them to voyeurism. They are ”displayed in a glamorous manner”, and subjected to sexualisation and objectification for the “enjoyment of the male audience”. The theory suggests that even the female audience will have to view female artists from the perspective of a heterosexual male. In other words, both female artists and female audience simply exist in relation to their male counterparts, and are thus seen as the “passive” gender. In the book “*Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (2001)”<sup>15</sup>, explains that due to the “active” role afforded to men and the “passive” role afforded to women, males thus possess the power to “freely look” behind the “camera”, which represents “a tool for voyeurism and sadism, disempowering those before its gaze”. This means that males are seen as in control of the gaze, and have the ability to freely



express their desire over how they want women to be portrayed, reducing women to an erotic and sexual object for other males to look at and enjoy, further reinforcing the male gaze.

The male gaze sets up the context for viewing the overall landscape of the music industry. This link between the male gaze and the music industry suggests that the music industry is part of a larger patriarchal society where males are seen as the active decision makers.

## **2.2 Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory (1989)**

The term “intersectionality” was coined by feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her research paper entitled “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex.”<sup>17</sup> (1989) In this research paper, Crenshaw suggests that gender is not the only source of oppression, but that oppression can be “based on many other factors” such as colour, ethnicity, race, religion and sexual orientation. In her research paper, Crenshaw uses intersectionality to explore the oppression of women of colour within society.

Intersectionality is increasingly relevant to the music industry due to the rise of artists such as Beyoncé who push for the recognition and action against gender and racial inequality through their music and their portrayal of personal identity. There are three types of intersectionality identified by Crenshaw in her paper, namely, structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. The one I feel is most relevant to the music industry is representational intersectionality as it delves into how gender and race are “linked and enforce

oppressive stereotypes about women of colour in various forms of media” and show how “popular culture portrayals of non-white women can obscure their own authentic lived experiences”.<sup>14</sup>

Critics of Intersectionality include political theorist Rebecca Cooper, who in an article she wrote on her own website on intersectionality entitled “Intersectionality and Identity Politics” (2013)<sup>15</sup>, argues that the fact that “Intersectionality posits that an oppressed person is often the best person to judge their experience of oppression” creates “paradoxes when people who are similarly oppressed have different interpretations of similar events”<sup>17</sup>.

Cooper suggests that Crenshaw is overgeneralising intersectionality’s impact on people by making the assumption that all oppressed people have the best interpretation of their oppression, while also suggesting that Crenshaw’s theory fails to account for the possibility of multiple interpretations of a same type of oppression even by people of the same gender and ethnicity.

### **2.3 Beyoncé**

Most scholarly articles agree that Beyoncé’s influence on the music industry extends beyond her fame and popularity. Beyoncé is known to make use of her large popularity to provide her views and raise awareness on issues such as feminism, black empowerment and racism in general through her music. This gives Beyoncé the image of an intersectional feminist who fights for change through her songs by actively promoting for people to stand up for themselves, to be unafraid to show who they truly are and be proud of it.

Despite her efforts to counter the male gaze by promoting gender equality, the gaze still applies to Beyoncé. In bell hooks' work on Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, entitled "Moving Beyond Pain"<sup>18</sup>, she acknowledges Beyoncé's intent "to seduce, celebrate, and delight—to challenge the ongoing present day devaluation and dehumanization of the black female body", but also posits that "simply showcasing beautiful black bodies does not create a just culture of optimal well being where black females can become fully self-actualized and be truly respected" bell hooks suggests through this that while Beyoncé tries to use the oppositional gaze to shift the gaze of the "mainstream media", this "radical repositioning" of the image of black females fails to "overshadow or change conventional sexist constructions of black female identity". Due to this, bell hooks concludes that Beyoncé's interpretations on feminism and gender equality "cannot stand as truth", as Beyoncé may be creating a false and misleading image of feminism in order to further her popularity and boost sales.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Through the lens of the oppositional gaze and intersectionality, I analysed 3 of Beyoncé's songs and 2 of her posts, comprising of the lyrics and music videos for the songs, as well as the context, message and implications of the 2 Instagram posts. I chose the songs "Formation", "Who Run the World" and "Flawless" due to the relevance of the messages of the songs to the oppositional gaze. Besides analyzing the meaning and devices used in the lyrics and posts, I also look at the mise en scene used in the music videos, in order to extract messages and patterns tying to how Beyoncé interacts with the gaze and intersectionality.

## **Chapter Four: Discussion and Analysis**

### **4.1 Beyonce: Successful Utilization of the Oppositional Gaze in *Formation* (2014), *Who Run the World* (2011), *Flawless* (2013) and Social Media Posts**

Beyonce successfully utilizes the oppositional gaze by using herself as a role model to other women. She effectively showcases the ideal characteristics of one's self-image, which are bravery (to take agency and face the gaze), resilience (to be able to turn criticism that stem from the gaze as motivation) and self-acceptance.

This can be seen in *Formation*, where Beyonce gets a line of black women to stand together in formation to protest against a line of policemen by dancing. In the scene, the issue of mistreatment of blacks by the police is addressed by Beyonce.. For the mise en scene of the sequence, a blue CCTV filter is added to the footage. This suggests that Beyonce is aware of the oppressive nature of the authorities towards the black community, and that every movement of the black women is being monitored by the authorities through surveillance. Yet, she is sending out a strong message that black women should stand together as one community and take control over how they want themselves to be presented by facing the gaze without fear of any repercussions.

Another example of this can be seen through the lyrics of *Formation*, where there is a repetition of the words "I slay". The words "I slay" are part of the African-Americans Vernacular Language, and refers to overcoming challenges and emerging victorious. In this case, Beyonce emphasises the

need for black women to stop hiding from the police and stand up boldly against them in a fearless display of personal identity.

In the line “Slay trick, or you get eliminated,” Beyoncé is implying through the word “eliminated”, that the fight ahead for the black women in formation is one of survival, to escape from the clutches of mistreatment that the police have implemented for so long. Whereas, the words “slay trick” add on to the argument that Beyoncé is urging black women to openly display what have at their disposal and show the world what makes black women unique instead of trying to hide it from the public eye in fear.

In the song *Who Runs the World (Girls)*, hypophora is used in the Chorus, in the repetition of the lines, “Who run the world? Girls.” This suggests certainty in Beyoncé’s belief that women are indeed the dominant gender, with no other optioned being considered. This presents Beyoncé as decisive and confident, and it is meant to empower other women to hold the same amount of belief about their own abilities.

Later on in the song, the line “I think I need a barber, None of these niggas can fade me” makes use of a double entendre through the word “fade”. While on one hand “fade” denotes the hairstyle that one can get from a barber, it also connotes a sense of suppression into obscurity. What Beyoncé is trying to suggest through this line is that the male-dominated media often tries to portray Beyoncé in a degrading fashion to try to tarnish her reputation, yet, the control over her self-image is firmly in her own hands, and no amount of subjugation or discrimination will be able to prise this away from her. This presents Beyoncé as tenacious and fearless, with the utmost resistance and nonchalance against haters who try to criticize her race or her feminist beliefs. When we tie this in

with another line in the song, “My persuasion can build a nation, Endless power, with our love we can devour”, we can see the overall message that Beyonce is trying to send out. Through the use of the words “love” and “power”, Beyonce is suggesting that the two are related, as there is power through spreading love, suggesting that Beyonce uses the positivity invoked by her self-belief and self-image to counter the negativity of racial and gendered discrimination thrown at her.

In *Flawless*, Beyonce openly discusses her feminist beliefs, by referencing fellow black feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TedEd talk, detailing the issues associated with having a patriarchal society, such as teaching girls to “be successful, but not too successful”, so as not to “threaten the man”, expecting girls to “aspire to marriage”, and exist “for the attention of men”. These all tie in to the male gaze, where women exist in relation to men, subservient to men and their masculinity. By including these lines of the talk in her song, Beyonce recognises the male gaze’s existence.

However, she challenges the gaze in the chorus, where Beyonce uses repetition of the word “flawless”, to suggest that females are perfect as they are, no matter where they are or what time it is, and do not have to feel confined by the rigid guidelines set by society. Instead, using the positive energy gained through one’s self-acceptance, Beyonce encourages other women to fearlessly use their image to show to society that they are self-sufficient and do not require men as a constant pillar of support.



Image 4: Closing shot of *Flawless*, showcasing two competing teams in a talent show

*Flawless* also makes use of mise en scene effectively to showcase Beyonce using the oppositional gaze to prove societal views on black women wrong. The opening and closing scenes of the song describe a childhood experience of Beyonce's as her black female friends and her take part in a Talent Search Show, yet they attain a lower number of stars than a band of white men, losing the competition. In this scene, Beyonce is not criticizing the male band for winning, but instead subtly shading the judging process of the talent show. When we see this footage in the context of the music video in the current day, we know that the white male band that were deemed more talented and promising has since faded into obscurity, while there is no doubt that Beyonce and the band that would eventually become known as Destiny's Child, a group of black women, would go on to prove the judges of the competition wrong by attaining international acclaim and fame. This showcases the resilience of the young black girls, who did not let a judges' decision, which represents a white, prejudiced, repressive world view towards black females, deeming them inferior to a group of white men, affect their confidence or define their careers. Instead they overcame the obstacle of failure and continued to change reality by themselves, through their music and success, proving these views on them wrong. This implicitly reveals the reversal of the gaze in this situation, by using the

defeat as motivation to take agency (by continue pursuing greater height in their careers) and change society's perception of them in relation to other artists.

Beyonce also successfully utilises the oppositional gaze in her music by openly discussing about her African-American background, her black roots, to show she is proud of her black heritage, and effectively challenge racist people who discriminate against blacks, urging them to view black people in a more positive light and learn to respect black culture.

This can be seen in *Flawless*, where Beyonce starts out by declaring, "I'm out that H-town", with H-town referring to Houston, Texas, the southern community where Beyonce's roots lie. When we cross-refer this to lines from *Formation*,

"My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana

You mix that negro with that Creole make a Texas bama

I like my baby hair, with my baby hair and afros

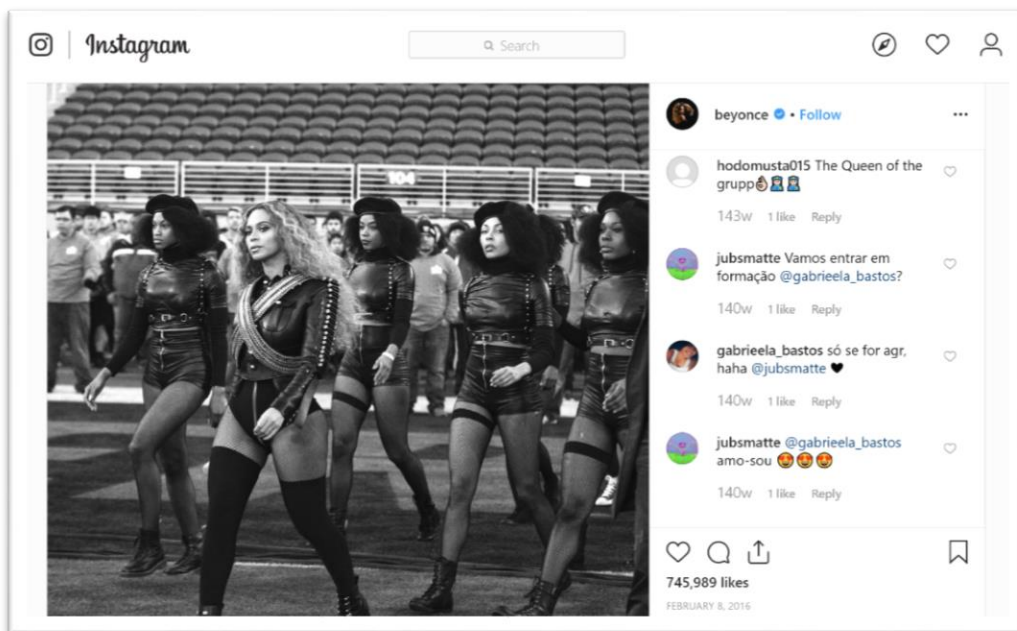
I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils

Earned all this money but they never take the country out me"

we see that there is a trend of Beyonce referencing her black roots, with "bama" being part of the African-American vernacular language, referring to the unsophisticated, uncivilized, black inhabitants of the Southern states. By doing so, Beyonce acknowledges the racism and discrimination aimed towards her race and skin colour. Instead of giving in to the gaze insulting her features, Beyonce embraces these features, challenging the derogatory connotations tagged to them,



instead treating them simply as what make her unique and special. The line, “Earned all this money, but they never take the country out me” is especially significant, as it suggests that Beyonce will not change herself to adapt to appease the gaze, but constantly reinforce her culture, her roots, her black identity in her music, regardless of what others think of it. This again shows a sense of resistance against conventional racial perceptions on African-Americans, as instead of giving in to these criticisms, Beyonce reverses the gaze to portray herself as confident and proud of her Black community in Houston.



In this Instagram post (2016)<sup>5</sup> by Beyonce, it depicts Beyonce, along with a group of black women, paying homage to the Black Panthers Party, a revolutionary party whose aim was to protest against black discrimination and racism, believing in self-defense against this oppression. The photo is black-and-white, removing the distractions of colour while also emphasising the context of the

post, which is the ideological battle between the white community perpetuating the gaze, and the black, female community, who are victims of the gaze.

In the photo, Beyonce and the battalion of women behind her are clad in full black attire, and they are marching with an aura of conviction in their cause, strutting with their heads held high. Through this striking image, the brazen message of racial equality is delivered to millions of people at the Super Bowl and the millions more who follow Beyonce, with Beyonce publicly honouring her black roots yet again by stepping up to continue the protests against discrimination started by the Black Panthers Party. The march is also as figurative as it is literal, with Beyonce also marching straight into the minds of the people perpetuating the gaze, and effectively using the oppositional gaze to show to them that she will not tolerate such discrimination against the black community.

#### **4.2 Beyonce: The Victim of The Gaze, But her Success Not Undermined**

While Beyonce successfully utilises the oppositional gaze in her music, there are also instances where Beyonce inadvertently falls victim to the gaze by subconsciously appealing to notions of racial and gender superiority. Despite this, the overall message Beyonce is trying to deliver is not undermined, therefore all in all Beyonce still succeeds in conveying her beliefs through her music and her posts.

An example of Beyonce falling victim to the gaze can be seen through the mise en scene used in *Formation*, which as seen in the scene below (right), makes a reference to an instance of black discrimination in history.



Image 1&2: Comparison of Slave Master's Wife in "12 Years a Slave"<sup>19</sup> and scene from *Formation*

In the scene, Beyonce and five other black women are clad in elaborate white Victorian gowns resembling that of a slave master's wife from the 1800s. They are posing in a manner that suggests a position of power and wealth, with one of the black women fanning herself. This is a form of role reversal, where Beyonce acknowledges the class gap between the black slaves and their masters, and that the discrimination against black women from that era meant they were not supposed to be wearing such luxurious clothing. She shows that today, it should not be considered unnatural for black women to be regarded in the same position of power as white women.

However, Beyonce falls into the trap of the gaze by failing to set a new standard for black women in the sense that they are imitating a white women's fashion choice, thus reinforcing the connotations attached to the clothes. This role reversal suggests that now the black women are now the slave owners, thus appearing to support the idea of one race being superior to another.

Despite this, the scene also clearly shows Beyonce attempting to set a new standard for black women in terms of their position of power within American society, freeing black women from the perception of them as poor and powerless while promoting racial equality in this aspect. Therefore, despite falling victim to the gaze in terms of the representation of the black women in relation to their white counterparts, the overall message of the scene, which is to counter notions that black women are weak and incapable in order to empower these women, is not lost, therefore the success of the messages conveyed is not undermined but instead holds strong.

Another line of *Formation* which shows Beyonce falling victim to the gaze is “I see it, I want it. I stunt, yellow bone it. I dream it, I work hard. I grind 'til I own it. I twirl on them haters, Albino alligators” In this line, the phrase that stands out is “yellow bone”. The phrase “yellow bone” refers to the lightest type of a light-skinned black female. Beyonce uses this phrase as a response to allegations made against her that she had bleached her skin in order to be more like a white women to stay relevant in the industry.

While Beyonce tries to put down these claims by sending a clear message that she is proud of her skin colour as it is and that others should do the same too, she is also inadvertently reaffirming the claims that her skin colour being lighter has helped to boost her career and help her attain more success. This ultimately perpetuates the gaze by suggesting that while one should embrace their skin colour as it is, having a lighter skin colour still helps black women like herself stand out from other black women and become more successful.

Despite this, the overall takeaway from the excerpt of the song is still evident. Beyonce uses an authoritative tone through the words “see it”, “want it”, “own it” implying a sense of self-sufficiency, emphasising her belief in her capability as a black female, and encouraging other women to have the same self-belief as she does. Due to the clarity message still remaining, the effectiveness of the message is not compromised to a large extent, thus it can still be considered a success.

In *Who Runs the World*, Beyonce attempts to face the gaze and falls into the trap of the gaze subconsciously once again.

In a scene of the song, a group of men are dressed up in SWAT attire are charging towards the women, while the women make use of their aggressive headbanging and dance moves to hold the men back. While this shows the strong resistance that the resilient women hold against the men, the aggressive reaction used by the women suggests that they are reinforcing toxic masculinity by validating the use of brute force against the oppression they face. This reaction is an unwarranted one, and using aggression and violence to wage a war against men is also ironic; while it seeks to display female empowerment, it actually defeats the fundamental purpose of gender equality, which is to promote peace and impartiality, not engage in conflict to become the alpha gender. Therefore, I believe that it is an unrealistic portrayal of what the pursuit for gender equality should look like, and perpetuates the gaze by suggesting that a system where there is an active gender (albeit women in this case due to role reversal) and a passive, subdued gender (men) is a healthy one.



Image 3: Formation of Women in the Opening Sequence of *Who Runs the World*

Despite this, the overall message of female empowerment is not lost in the song. In the opening sequence of the song, Beyoncé is already in formation with her fellow women and a lion, facing off against a line of men. In this case, Beyoncé makes use of visual imagery in order to establish a position of control. While all the women have a bold, intense stare at the camera (and the men), which represents the male gaze and the notion of hegemonic masculinity (male dominance), the only one looking away is the male lion, which represents the king of the jungle, a symbol of strength and dominance usually associated with males. The lion is positioned at the feet of Beyoncé and it appears tamed, and through this, Beyoncé challenges the notion of the males being the alpha and dominant gender, by suggesting that the real power is vested within female to overcome and subdue any notions of male dominance. Therefore, despite falling victim to the gaze as the aggressive reaction towards the men reinforces toxic masculinity seen in a male-dominated society, the overall message of the song, which is to empower women to free themselves from the confines of a male-dominated society and seek for a proper representation of females as a whole, is not lost. Therefore, Beyoncé's message is still successfully conveyed in this case.

These sentiments are echoed throughout various scenes in the song, from a scene where Beyonce rides a black horse and controls it, implying her sense of power and authority, to the vigorous and intimidating dance moves of the women which connotes relentlessness in the pursuit for recognition and gender equality.

In *Flawless*, Beyonce again appears to have fallen victim to the gaze by seemingly implying a reliance on males, but the message is still successful in showing the appreciation Beyonce has towards her roots, using her black family as the catalyst which helped her achieve such immense success in her career.

This can be seen through

“Momma taught me good home training  
My Daddy taught me how to love my haters  
My sister taught me I should speak my mind  
My man made me feel so God damm fine”

where while the last line, “My man made me feel so God damm fine”, does suggest a slight dependence on Jay-Z for reaffirmation, Beyonce is simply suggesting that she, like all other people, has her insecurities, and that despite her being a feminist, she does not entirely exclude men from her life to prove herself as self-sufficient, but treats them equally and fairly, and gives them credit when credit is due.

All in all, by using her family as sources of inspiration, we see that Beyonce is looking back to her cultural roots once again as the backbone of her identity. Her resilience, her strong opposition towards racial and gendered discrimination, her frank responses towards the gaze, these all stem from her upbringing, her distinction as an African-American woman.



Lastly, in this Instagram post (2014)<sup>23</sup> by Beyonce, she poses similarly to the war poster of Rosie the Riveter, who was a symbol used in the Second World War as motivation for women working in the factories, taking over the jobs left behind by men involved in the war.

In the poster, Beyonce has a fierce and smug expression on her face that suggests that she is proud of her strength. She is clad in a blue denim jacket, and flexes her muscles in the same way that Rosie the Riveter does which is a blatant display of power as a female African-American.



Beyonce channels the oppositional gaze in the post by blatantly staring directly at the viewer, which represents the notions that women are physically weak and are unable to achieve much on their own, defiantly insisting that women have what it takes to be independent and powerful. Beyonce is also empowering other black women such as herself who face discrimination to stand up for themselves, and take action to prove their strength to everyone, so as to disprove societal views on them.

When we take a step back and explore the context of the creation of the poster, we see that the poster was created by a man and was meant to be a poster simply to encourage women to take up the jobs as part of their duty to serve the country. These women were brought in as a last resort, given minimum wage and then sacked after the war was over. Despite this, due to the fact that not many people know the backstory of the poster, the poster retains its effectiveness in encouraging other women to adopt the oppositional gaze just like Beyonce.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

In conclusion, Beyonce makes use of herself as a role model to empower other women to have the bravery, resilience and self-acceptance required to resist the gaze and reverse it through the use of the oppositional gaze. Through her music and posts, Beyonce strategically uses both lyrics and visuals to further her cause of promoting gender and racial equality. Despite several instances where Beyonce falls victim to the gaze due to the scene or the lyrics seemingly being playing up to notions of gender and racial dominance instead of equality, the overall message Beyonce tries to convey

still holds true, thus all in all, Beyonce successfully makes use of the oppositional gaze as well as her intersectionality in order to spread the message of gender and racial equality.

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