

## ***Beyoncé - LEMONADE***

A sociological analysis of Beyoncé's visual album, discussing gender and race.

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Beyoncé Knowles has always been a star within the limelight. An artist whose angelic voice is recognizable amongst the masses. As an artist, she successfully uses her platform to convey messages regarding issues such as racial injustice and gender inequality. Being a well-known feminist, her newest body of work entitled “Lemonade” is not only a banger for a 180 on gender roles to represent feminists and women, but also a collection of songs that display the intersectionality of a black female who challenges all that society might think about in terms of gender and race. “Lemonade” follows the story of infidelity between herself and her husband Jay-Z, along with the struggle of reaching the point of reconciliation with him. However, “Lemonade” is more unique than any album reflecting a cheating significant other. Beyoncé verbalizes and expresses her thoughts of the infidelity by raising questions about her identity as a black female.

The visual album/film itself involves 11 primary chapters, each of which is a signifying point in Beyoncé’s process/journey of dealing and coping with the infidelity. Chapter one, *Intuition*, introduces the opening song on the album, “Pray You Catch Me”. Rather than focusing on the lyrical meaning, the real manifestation of reverse gender roles is when Beyoncé says within the narrative, “I tried to make a home out of you.” This could be a play on gendered roles, and how typically women are the one’s who stay at home to “create” the home (they create the home by cleaning, cooking, preparing the house for the husband to come home after a long day of work), while men are the ones who go out into the work force and provide for the family. The traditional family involves the woman to be the ‘caretaker’ of the house, while the men were the primary ‘breadwinners’ of the family (Kelshall). Women, especially around the 1950’s,

were “oriented around the home” (Kelshall). However, with Beyoncé clearly expressing that she was believing that she could “make a home” out of her husband, she implies that she is either *the* breadwinner of the family, or one of the breadwinners of the family. She’s making it clear that even though she is a woman, she is not to face the gendered script of being a “caretaker, responsible for fulfilling domestic duties” (Mills, 60), challenging the idea that women belong at home. Her unquestionable claim that she is not the average traditional housewife reflects the new wave of feminism that is pushing for an embracing amount of reversal gender roles, where women are found to be in the workforce while men are found to be at-home caretakers. Data from the census bureau compares the percent of women who are the breadwinners between 1976 and 2010, indicating a 17% increase (6% to 23%) (Cauchon). Similar to Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s situation, where they are both breadwinners (and one of the wealthiest couples in the entertainment industry), couples where both individuals work found that “wives outran their husbands 28% of the time, up from 16% 25 years ago (Cauchon). Factors for this role reversal can be due to several things. For starters, education's played a huge role in the rise of working women, where currently the university enrollment ratio is around 93 men per 100 women, compared to the ratio in 1970 that showed a ration of 160 men per 100 women (Chamie). Another factor that USA today expresses is the comfortability for parents to go towards what they feel they handle best, meaning that if the father is able to be a nurturer, and the mother doesn’t naturally have the ability to do that, then the role reversal would only make sense (which implies, in my opinion, that the gender roles are a joke that is socially constructed to begin with) (Cauchon). Of course, one factor is definitely the new wave of millennials and “generation Z” individuals that are not only em-

bracing anything and everything out of the traditional 90's norm, but also challenging what anyone older than the millennial generation think and thought the knew was considered "right" (Tsjeng). Taking ideas from Nina Nijsten's "Some Things We Need For a Feminist Revolution," a list of 10 key things are give to create successful social change; collective activism, non-hierarchical organizing, networks, meetings, spaces, means, education, media, protests and alternatives, and fun and rest (548). With Beyoncé being one of the most successful and influential female individuals in the entertainment industry, she takes chapter 1's narrative to represent part of the gender-role change that is both being embraced and happening in todays society.

After realizing that there might be some sort of infidelity involved within her and Jay-Z's relationship, *Denial*, chapter 2, approaches, in which she begins to question her own identity as a woman who is not able to completely satisfy her husbands needs. Two versions of herself are possessed within the flesh, drowning under water in a bedroom. A woke form of herself stares at the "sleep" form of herself and narrates within the film, "I tried to change, closed my mouth more, tried to be soft, prettier... fasted for sixty days." Both the sleep and the woke version of herself being submerged underwater signify how she is too deep within her emotions, unable to get herself out of them. However, the symbolic manifestation of the intersectionality between gender and race appear for the first time in the film when she continues to describe all that she is doing as a female to change and satisfy her cheating husband, up until the point where she dictates "I bathed in bleach." This may not entirely be clear as to why she said that, until the end of the track "Sorry" where she says "you better call Becky with the good hair" (which rumors point out that Rachel Roy, an American, is the "Becky with the good hair"), which

implies that she attempted to 'whiten' herself in hopes that her change in skin color would appeal to Jay-Z's supposed desire for lighter-skinned women. This can relate back to Doctors Kenneth and Mamie Clark's "doll test" done in the 1940's where black children believed that a white doll was more beautiful and 'better' than the black doll (NAACP Legal Defense Fund). In reference to 'whitening' her own skin with bleach, Beyoncé not only feels vulnerable as a female, but as a black person. Being compared to what is supposedly someone who is lighter skinned than her gives her self esteem issues that, because Jay-Z cheated on her with someone like that, made her think about wanting to lighten her skin. This is a similar issue that other women deal with as well. "Yes, part of it is a self-esteem issue and I have addressed that and I am happy now" (Fihlani). The BBC reported from the World Health Organization that Nigerians are the highest users of skin-whitening products, indicating that 77% of these users are women (Fihlani). This issue of race, gender, and fulfilling beauty primarily affects women, since the beauty industry is not only targeted towards women, but also one of the largest grossing markets in the business industry. Beyoncé's openness towards demonstrating her vulnerability towards being a black woman displays the impact of intersectionality that she can not escape, no matter what she does.

After trying all that she could to change herself, she realizes that she is not the problem. "Hold Up", her second track off her album, shows a confident, feminine, and happy Beyoncé roaming the streets. Soon enough, she obtains a bat. "I don't wanna lose my pride but imma fuck me up a bitch... What's worse? Looking jealous or crazy?" As she makes such bold claims to 'fuck a bitch up' and pose questions about how she might be perceived by her actions, she walks around the streets swinging her baseball

bat and destroying windows and cars. This is a representation of not only the misconceptualized ideology that women are emotionally unstable, but also the concept of the “angry black woman” which is a reoccurring ‘character’ that Beyoncé embraces here and there throughout the film. Melissa Harris-Perry, author of *Sister Citizen*, discusses how society makes the black female a presumed character of being loud, argumentative, angry, and verbally abusive (Maxwell). Additionally, emphasizing the angry black girl narrative undermines the ability for black women to be able to express and embrace emotions (Sinclair). The display of the intersectionality between gender and race is displayed in this track, further emphasizing that there is almost no escape for someone who is not the typically advantaged white male, let alone a white person. I believe that being a feminist herself, Beyoncé is contradicting the portrayal of the angry black woman narrative by accompanying the window and car smashing with the looks of an elegant woman that is singing a beautifully angelic, soft, and non-egressive track that expresses her disapproval for Jay-Z’s infidelity. She might be partaking in angry actions by representing them as a metaphoric way for how she feels on the inside, but on the outside, she uses lyrics and her music to display her confidence with how ultimately she loves him more than anyone else will.

Beyoncé then displays a reversal in gender roles by reducing Jay-Z’s powerful and successful image (especially as a powerful and successful male). In a primarily dominant and masculine stance, she begins to pose the hypothetical situation, “let’s imagine for a moment that you never made a name for yourself or mastered wealth, they had you labeled as a king. Never made it out the cage still out there moving in them streets, never had the baddest women in the game up in your sheets... Would

they be down to ride? No.” She subtly and respectfully lets him know that not only is she the ‘baddest’ (meaning the hottest, sexiest, and overall ‘best’) woman in the entertainment industry, but also without his wealth, power, and status, he wouldn’t be desirable. An article from Forbes magazine states that “women are sex objects, and men are success objects. Women, fairly or unfairly, are judged on their looks, and men, fairly or unfairly, are judged on their money, power, and status” (Savage). The claim that women are sex objects can be backed up with the overall existence of objectification, dehumanization, and sexualization of women almost anywhere and everywhere in our society. Huffington post compares the idea that women are attracted to wealthy men the same way a peahen is attracted to a peacock with the most lavishing looks of colors and feathers (when flashed with it) (Bindley). With this, Beyoncé devalues the idea that Jay-Z is actually a desirable man, and that women are really lurking onto him not only because of his status and wealth, but because of the person he’s with; Beyoncé/herself. Once again, Beyoncé breaks gendered expectations that relate to confidence. A study discussed within Forbes demonstrates that gender disparity exists internationally, and that results of the study indicated that not only men have higher self esteem than women, but the disparity gap between genders is larger within more developed countries (Warrell). This is interesting to point out, since Beyoncé is not only from a developed country, but is one of the most successful women in the entertainment industry. With that research, she *should* have some sort of self-esteem issue. Yet by pointing out that Jay-Z is with “the baddest women in the game up in your sheets,” she demonstrates her self confidence and embraces her identity. The ‘music video’ portion of this particular track ends with Beyoncé riding a monster truck, crushing cars, with fire in the

background shots, all of which are masculine symbols. This is a reverse gender role that Beyoncé demonstrates in *Lemonade*, where she disregards what is considered masculine and feminine. Although masculinity and femininity is socially constructed, it's typical for fire, monster trucks, and those types of dangerous and active things to be categorized as masculine.

Once Beyoncé has clarified that she truly is a loyal female that is capable of satisfying her man, she approaches chapter 3; *Anger*. Discussing how she wants to rid the physical presence and soul of 'the other woman' she brings up what seems to be a flashback to her childhood. "My fathers arms around my mothers neck. I don't know when love became so illusive." Angry about her fathers instances of physical abuse towards her mother, she compares this to the anger that has fueled her in cause of her husbands infidelity. The track "Don't Hurt Yourself" begins, in which the characteristically exaggerated and/or emphasized image of the "angry black woman" is further emphasized. This time, instead of masking and contradicting the image of the angry black woman, she completely embraces it. Her walk, her posture, her masculine passion when chanting the opening lyrics "who the fuck do you think I am? You ain't married to no average bitch, boy! You better watch my front ass twist, boy, as i bounce to the next dick, boy!..." not only emphasize on the "angry black woman", but also destroys the gendered image of a male being sexually promiscuous and a overall hustler. Unlike the average 'man-whore,' who indiscriminately sleeps around with women and jumps from one girl to another (Irvine), a sexual double standard exists between men and women that Beyoncé challenges through her passionately aggressive lyrics and overall stance and look within the film. "Women are derogated and stigmatized for sexual contacts, un-



like men” (Irvine), yet that is in no way stopping Beyoncé to “bounce to the next dick,” especially if Jay-Z were to cheat once again.

The most signifying scene, which emphasizes the intersectionality between gender and race, occurs when an excerpt from Malcom X is played, in which he states “the most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.” This is stated after Beyoncé proclaims her hope for motivating Jay-Z to become a better man and to never cheat again. As a female, they are the least dominant gender in the gender binary. And as a black person, they are not fully understood in terms of their racial, emotional struggles. It’s due to the lack of understanding between this intersectionality that makes the black woman ignored and poorly understood, especially considering that 61% of black women reported that they were unhappy with how “blacks are treated in society” (The Double Lives of Black Women). Society continues to distort the lens of the black woman by sending them messages that they are incapable of being equal to or above not only their stereotypical counterparts, but also the more dominant white individual (The Double Lives of Black Women). All the research I have found regarding the struggles of being a black woman leads me to the understanding that their struggle goes deeper than racial and gendered misconceptions. It’s that they are a slave to misconceptions and distortions of their own identity, which is an attempt on the part of the capitalist system to destroy any part of humanity that is not, for the most part, white or male (Beal).

With Malcom X’s claim said, the film/music video continues, displaying a black and white video of Beyoncé completely emotionless, stating “I am the dragon breathing

fire. Beautiful mane, I am a lion. Beautiful man I know you're lying. I'm not broken, I'm not crying." Here, Beyoncé compares herself to two powerful and fearful creatures. One of which is something associated with anger and destruction, and the other in which is seen as a graceful hunter. Additionally, the use of two homophones (mane/man and lion/lying) indicate that she is a resilient and independent woman who is stronger than her husband's betrayal. Beyoncé's ability to face racism and sexism, as well as repress Malcolm X's claim of how the black woman is the card at the bottom of the deck, is a sign of black female resilience (Harris). The ability for her to avoid becoming part of the generalized female stereotype of being emotional and crying (hence, when she says "I'm not broken, I'm not crying") indicates that she is a capable and independent black woman (Bird, 38). The rest of the song goes on saying "when you hurt me, you hurt yourself. Don't hurt yourself. When you diss me, you diss yourself. Don't diss yourself..." and so on, up until the point where she says "When you love me, you love yourself. Love god herself." As she says this, the screen goes to black with large white bold text saying "GOD IS GOD AND I AM NOT." This is Beyoncé's indication that she is just as human and black as the rest of Black America (Josephes). The album itself is a representation of the struggles not only between black people in a relationship, but for black women. Additionally, the statement that "GOD IS GOD AND I AM NOT" can easily become a reference to how after slavery, black people found a sanctuary within the black church, since every other social institution in America was discriminating the black individual. She is just as normal as any other individual and in no way is more or less superior than any other human.

*Apathy*, chapter 4, introduces one of the most successful song off the album entitled "Sorry." Singing "I ain't sorry" repeatedly, she sits in a throne, which is typically for male figures. Additionally, she is getting up for no body, no man. The throne, in general, is a symbol for someone in power. Typically, the media never displays images of a woman sitting at a throne. Beyoncé's decision to have shots of her sitting on a throne as she proclaims that she isn't sorry is an indicator of her strength and resilience against the dominant male authority, destroying the idea of oppression amongst women. The throne itself is a symbol of power and immortality, that displays the highest form of morality and civility. Psychiatrists in the past, as well as some of modern day society, regard black immorality as "entirely normal" due to the presumed notion that the "normal negress was unintelligent... and her immorality could be shrugged off with the assurance that there was nothing abnormal about her delinquencies" (Lunbeck, 535). Yet for this very reason, Beyoncé sits in the throne to display her power and morality as a human being, not just for herself or her relationship with Jay-Z, but for black America (or quite possibly black female America). She also states "suck on my balls" which not only makes fun of the male figure/power, but also show's that she is in charge. It's Beyoncé's attempt to create the image of the already-dominant male subversive to her. With the hyper sexualized black female being suppressed from society, given that their hyper sexuality is seen as animalistic and deviant, Beyoncé challenges those views by not only displaying black female hypersexuality, but also displaying the sexual double standard between men and women, in that hypersexuality amongst men is excusable, while hypersexuality amongst women is not (Lunbeck, 535).

There is a huge double standard-gap between men and women that is the reason why feminism and the sexual revolution existed in the first place. She goes on to talk about how Jay-Z is now coming back to her for forgiveness. “Now you wanna say you're sorry, now you wanna call me crying. Now you gotta see me wilding, now I'm the one that's lying, and i don't feel bad about it.” Jay-Z has broken down his dominant figure, crying, apologizing for cheating on Beyoncé, but she doesn't care at all about what he has to say. Society's preconceived idea that men are unable to cry is a reason for feeding into hypermasculinity. Over time, the male pose/guise evolved into something that became more and more enhanced, magnified, and enforced by mediums within society (such as media). Beyoncé's exposure to Jay-Z's crying not only challenges the gendered norm of masculinity and avoiding to embrace emotions, but also gives Beyoncé the upper hand as a female for failing to comply to female gendered norms of femininity which indicates that women cry more than men (Mullin). Engrained in society and culture that masculinity means holding back tears, Jay-Z's display of crying not only goes against masculinity, but also embraces the new wave of masculinity that encourages men to become more emotionally expressive (Whitney). It's unclear whether Beyoncé is aiming to either take a jab towards male masculinity or embrace a new wave of masculinity. However, she makes a signifying point towards challenging what we think we (as a society) already know about gender.

She goes on to sing, hoping that “big homie better grow up” and learn from his mistakes. Referencing back to what was mentioned earlier in the dialogue before Hold Up, with a hairstyle of a traditional African culture of hair of the Congo Mangbetu women (the Nefertiti crown of braids) (Yursik), she goes on to sing about the ‘other woman,’

saying “you better call becky with the good hair.” She displays intersectionality that not only is she a female that can not fulfill her man’s needs, but it is of her African roots that is a contributory factor to a difference between “Becky” and Beyoncé. Referencing back to the narrative before “Hold Up,” she demonstrates her vulnerability as a black female living in a predominately ‘normal’ white America. The “good hair” is a common societal belief that white women have better hair than black women. Legally speaking, women of African descent, with biologically African ‘hair,’ have less rules and regulations to follow when it comes to certain things such as being in the work place (Caldwell). Examples found within society and the law (regarding the workplace), white women not only have an easier time with managing and embracing their hair, but also are discriminated upon less (Caldwell). With oppression towards black beauty, black women feel obligated within society to “whiten” themselves by mimicking the straight hair of privileged people in order to feel beautiful and accepted within society (Black Hair Care). The intersectionality between race and gender impacted Beyoncé’s cognitive process in coping and understanding her experience with her husbands infidelity.

Chapter 5 approaches as *Emptiness*, accompanied by water and fire, which symbolize passion and emotion. The words “LOSS” show up on the screen, and the track “6 Inch” begins to play. This song is the anthem for female empowerment, demonstrating that women can be just as powerful and just as much as a ‘boss’ than any male out there to be on their ‘work grind.’ The overall emphasis of “6 Inch,” both as a title track and as a repetitive lyric within the song, is to emphasize that she is a female no matter what, and at the end of the day she is killing the game, walking in the club “like nobody’s business,” with 6 inch heels. With scenes of her being escorted and driven

around the city, the motivational lyrics of strength and effort to rise in power begin to be chanted. “Stars in her eyes, she fights for the power, keeping time. She grinds day and night. She grinds from Monday to Friday, works from Friday to Sunday. She gon’ slang, she’s too smart to crave material things. She pushing herself day and night, she grinds from Monday to Friday, works from Friday to Sunday.” This whole repeated verse is an indication of the working woman, and how the working woman will stop at nothing to fail to achieve what she wishes to accomplish. Rather than complying to typical female standards of material spending, she reminds herself to save her money up and continue working hard to reach success. “6 Inch” is Beyoncé’s anthem towards gender discrimination within the work force. With discrimination against women within the work force being so widespread that “it seems normal, natural and right” (Black Hair Care), it’s as if society is trying to make sure that the working class female does not overachieve the “man.” Similarly to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s excerpt sampled in Beyoncé’s “Flawless” three years ago, women are encouraged to have high ambitions and aspirations, but not too high to “threaten the man” (Black Hair Care). It’s already known that women make 79 cents for every dollar that men make (Pay Equity & Discrimination). Beyoncé, however, makes sure she is on her grind, working non-stop and focusing on the outcome of all this, rather than entertaining lavished spending habits.

She opens up the next chapter, *Accountability*, with the following; “ you go to the bathroom to apply the lipstick, somewhere no one can find you. You must wear it like she wears disappointment on the face. Your mother is a woman and women like her can not be contained... Did he bend your reflection? Did he make you forget your own name? Did he convince you he was a God? Did you get on your knees daily? do his

eyes lose like doors? Are you a slave to the back of his hand? Am I talking about your husband or your father?" This introduction leads to "Daddy Songs," an ode to how her father prepared her to tackle on men like himself. Throughout *Lemonade*, there are themes and references given about Beyoncé's father and how he resembles her husband. The reminiscing allure of her father's strength carried on from her childhood into her adulthood, which was then seen, in Beyoncé's eyes, within Jay-Z. This may have been emotionally captivating and appealing for her at the time, but she realizes that, like her father, he will struggle with fidelity. The resemblance of her fathers actions with her husbands actions remind her to remember how to handle situations with men like himself (himself being her father). "He taught me to be strong. He told me when he's gone, here's what you do. When trouble comes to town and men like me come around, oh my daddy said shoot... baby girl he's playing you." Her husbands actions of fidelity reminded her to be prepared, strong, and invulnerable to emotional pain for when a man like himself comes around. Psychotherapist Elayne Savage conducted research that indicated that women seek a husband that is similar to their fathers due to the comfortability in familiarity (Perron). This aspect of comfortability in familiarity also reflects the notion Savage suggests in which history is doomed to repeat itself. That is, women find men that resemble their fathers, and they are doomed to repeat the same emotional process that they had gone through, whether it means emotional struggles or emotional upbringings (Perron). These findings can be represented within the song itself, as Beyoncé's father is making sure that Beyoncé is not only emotionally ready to encounter a man like himself, but also aware of what a man like himself is capable of doing (and might end up doing).

Although insignificant with gender and intersectionality between gender and race, it's important to discuss chapter 7, *Reformation*, for an analysis purposes of "Lemonade" itself, as a body of work. The song "Love Drought" is shown, and a cinematically impactful 360 degree rotation is shown of Beyoncé's face, with face paint. At this point, she is interested in reforming her relationship with her husband, and the face paint is the culturally-African signifier that her face paint, entitled the sacred art of the Beyoncé, indicates that she now has a soul filled with love and emotion. (Klein)

Beyoncé takes on "Sandcastles" (chapter 8) by incorporating reverse gender roles once again, claiming that Jay-Z had cried when Beyoncé began to space herself from him ("we built sandcastles that washed away, I made you cry when I walked away"). This relates earlier to when Beyoncé calls Jay-Z out on crying, however, there is more sincerity with displaying his emotional feelings. Again, his display of sadness by crying challenges the idea that men are not allowed to cry. A man crying should not diminish his level of masculinity because crying is completely natural. Masculinity itself is socially constructed, with parenting skills emphasizing their sons to "control their emotions" in order to ignore or downplay their emotional needs and wants (Holloway). Not only are boys/men encouraged and raised to suppress their emotions, but also they're taught that their suppression of emotions depends on the sanctity of their masculinity (Holloway). This further implies that the relationship between masculinity and maleness can easily be broken, which is why society places such a high emphasis on enforcing masculinity (Holloway). It's good though that Beyoncé challenges the socially constructed myth that boys don't cry and that expression of emotion hinders masculinity and maleness. Continuing on with the song, her vocals in the song are raw and wounded,



but newly hopeful for the future with her husband. A signifying point in the film that indicated Beyoncé's acceptance of Jay's forgiveness (hence, the title of chapter 8 itself, *Forgiveness*) was a still shot of a bowl that had been broken, but was glued together to become whole again. This, amongst other symbols of regrowth of love, is the indicator that they want to move forward.

"Forward" is probably the most brief and controversial visual segment of the Lemonade film. With the chapter 9 title of *Resurrection*, a woman says "how do we lead the children of our future? Love." A huge signifier and contributor to the Black Lives Matter Movement, Beyoncé had Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin; Lesley McSpadden, Mike Brown's mother; and Gwen Carr, Eric Garner's mother, have scenes in the visual film where they hold the photos of their lost loved ones (Blake). Although this is primarily an issue that affects the general black public, it is the African American men that are primarily affected by the effects of overdone and unjustified police force. Research shows that black men are 9 times more likely to be a victim of police brutality in comparison to other Americans (Swaine et al.). To compare statistical results of police brutality amongst black men and women, I counted the data of 102 reported deaths of black people, to then figure out that only 5 of 102 unarmed black people that were killed were women (the research reported at *least* 102 unarmed black people, and the data reflected the deaths of unarmed black people by the hands of police brutality in the year of 2015) (Police Killed)

The transitional scene is another indicator of Beyoncé's challenging views towards gender roles. A musical-less shot of a Mardi Gras Indian dressed from head to toe with feathers and intricate designs, is seen walking around a dining room table with

a tambourine. The symbolic and not-quite-obvious part of this scene is that the Mardi Gras Indian is a female. With further research, I found out that the traditional role for the Mardi Gras Indian is played from a man, which is often passed down from father to son (Donnella). The only role reserved for women within Mardi Gras Indian tribe ceremonies is “queen,” and although it’s clarified that some tribes allow for gender flexibility, the face of the Mardi Gras Indian is primarily and commonly male (Donnella). For Beyoncé to have a female play the part is her attempt to challenge gender roles and question the identity of gender-affiliated roles itself.

Freedom, the pro Black Lives Matter movement, anti-racial oppression and discrimination anthem not only embodies the spirit of courage within Beyoncé, but also within all of black America itself. And with the reference to Malcom X’s excerpt during Don’t Hurt Yourself, stating that “the most disrespected person in America is the black woman,” Beyoncé makes a statement for gendered equality in addition with the racial equality (creating an intersectionality between the two) by having an audience of exclusively black women as she sings the song. Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw discusses how the black female can not simply experience just racism or sexism, but a combination of the two (hence intersectionality) because of being both female and black, in comparison to being male and white, which would be the ultimate form of privilege (Smith). During the civil rights movement, there were struggles for the legal system to recognize that black women struggle with a combination of both racism and sexism, which Crenshaw believes is due to white Americas fear of exposing the truth behind the severity of racism within the women’s suffrage movement (Smith), a category too big for America to handle at once. Similarly to Crenshaw, Beyoncé expresses the intersectional

struggle of being a black female within her song as “multiple oppressions [that] are not each suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience” (Smith).

She continues singing, “freedom freedom I can’t move, freedom cut me loose... I break chains all by myself,” indicating that she is not only pleading for freedom to save herself from the plague of emotional suffering due to her husbands infidelity, but also strong enough to save herself from whatever she is going through. This relates with the following line, where she says “I’m telling these tears “go and fall away, fall away.” May the last one burn in two flames... Imma keep running cause a winner don't quit on themselves.” Although it’s a thin line, the line is still there. The difference between the ‘angry black woman’ character and the ‘strong black woman’ can easily become a blurred collage between the two. However, in this verse, Beyoncé shows no signs of anger and is merely embracing her power, courage, and dedication towards becoming a stronger woman, not just after experiencing her husbands infidelity, but by living and moving on as a black woman. An interview with attorney Erin Millender expresses how she feels about being compared to the ‘strong black woman’ trope, claiming “It fills me with a kind of pride that in seeking an ideal of femininity, these [people] would turn so much to a black women to model dignity, resilience, and boldness” (Harris). Beyoncé’s purpose for expressing herself as a powerful black figure might also be for influencing other black women, and the rest of America as well. With Michelle Obama being the first black first lady in the white house, recent research studies have shown that individuals affiliate her with ideas of power, strength, and courage (Harris). With Beyoncé being able to avoid crying, a common characteristic towards determining what makes a feminine woman, and break free from her own mental restriction of moving forward, she dis-

plays herself as an ideal woman, human, to find enough strength within themselves to overcome anything.

At this point in the visual film, Beyoncé has moved on from sadness and grieving from what she thought was a completely failed relationship with Jay-Z. But with determination and persistence to be strong and move forward, she and Jay-Z learned to grow together from this experience. The final chapter, *Redemption*, introduces the song “All Night.” To focus on the issue of gender, Beyoncé did not have much of a impactful interpretation to challenge any gendered ideals within the song. However, one thing that completely took me by surprise that involves queer theory was the brief shots of couples holding each other and kissing each other, indicating their love for one another. Yet one couple shown within the scenes was a homosexual couple. Within the song, she sings “true love never has to hide,” and with the scene of the homosexual couple holding and kissing each other, Beyoncé makes the statement for sexual equality. She’s implying that love, whether it’s heteronormative or not, should *never* hide. Sexuality, especially in the public, has been taking drastic positive measures towards being embraced both institutionally and in America. Rather than hiding and self-managing one’s sexuality, sexuality should avoid being institutionalized. New research indicates that more than a third of generation Z identifies as somewhat bisexual (Tsjeng). The clear research indicating the acceptance of non-heteronormative ideals, as well as destroying the idea that heterosexuality is the only sexual norm, is represented within Beyoncé’s video. She accepts queer individuals, meaning anyone who is out of the ‘norm,’ and believes that love is love no matter what. With a variety of couples from different races, different looks, and

different sexualities, Beyoncé makes the impact of reflecting queer theory and attempting to normalize it through the visual film.

As a visual album, Beyoncé takes us on the journey of 11 chapters that involved the infidelity of her husband. The emotional process of sadness, insecurity, anger, confusing, and soon enough forgiveness, ends with the chapter-less song that by far is the most controversial song on the album. "Formation" takes on gender roles and racial inequality, both visually and musically. Referencing back, once again, to Malcom X's excerpt in "Don't Hurt Yourself," she utilizes racial and gendered intersectionality to make a statement about the overall inequality for not just black people, but black women, by sitting on a police car that is submerged in water. The water and the flooding reflects the issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina. The beginning of the song begins with the narration of Messy Mya, a sassy and queer rapper and comedian, saying "what happened at the New Orleans? Bitch I'm back by popular demand." (<http://fusion.net/story/266893/Beyoncé-formation-superbowl-messy-mya-new-orleans/>). The significance of this scene/audio involves three significant layers of meaning, with each laying going deeper and deeper into the intersectionality between race and gender. The first layer involves the surprise release of the single, which was not only a typical "Beyoncé-surprising-the-world-with-new-music" (especially after not releasing a new album since 2013), but also a statement that declared her interest in creating a racial and gendered movement by releasing the single a day after Trayvon Martin's birthday and a day before Sandra Bland's birthday (both of which are black victims of police brutality). The second layer involves gendered and racial inequality, which, given that the song itself is a black power anthem, reflects the ideas that after the lack of support for those who were affected

by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, a deepening plague of racial inequality and injustice for black men and women grew due to police brutality. This was the signifying point of the Black Lives Matter movement. The lack of support for the black people during Katrina indicated the inequality and lack of care. The third layer behind all of this is specifically geared towards queer theory, gender roles, and racial discrimination. Beyoncé sampled Messy Mya's audio for the intro of her song, a song about racial and gendered oppression, to signify Messy Mya's story. He was sassy, black, and very expressive of his opinions. With bright purple hair, he discusses the problems with the government and the lack of care for black people, especially after Katrina (Prakash). The significance of his story is that as a queer black male, he was fatally shot and killed while leaving the baby shower of the mother of his unborn child (Prakash). What's sad enough, which digs deeper into the issue of police brutality, is that the case for his murder is still a mystery (Prakash). The lack of investigation for Messy Mya, a queer black male, is a representation for the oppression, discrimination, and lack of support for both black people and queer people. Beyoncé's use of his YouTube video in the opening of her song is to signify racial, gender, and queer oppression and discrimination.

She continues the song with many verses that are racially empowering, such as "I like my baby hair with baby hairs and afros. I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils." The Mardi Gras Indian makes another cameo in this song, this time wearing different colors (however still played by a woman). Throughout the song, one chorus is repeated where she proclaims "okay ladies now let's get in formation." A very strong indicator of Beyoncé's challenge to reverse and break gender norms and roles, masculinity and femininity, is during the aggressive verse "When he fucks me good I take his ass

to red lobster, cause I slay. If he hit it right I might take him on a flight on my choppa, cause I slay. drop him off at the mall, let him buy some jays let him shop up, cause I slay.” In this part, she is asserting her sexual dominance within their relationship. Rather than having the traditional male take the female out for food, she is taking him out. She would be willing to drop him off at the mall from her helicopter to buy a new pair of shoes, if he performs well in bed. These lyrics indicate that she is in charge. The traditional gender roles are completely disregarded, and she is the dominant one in the powerful position within the relationship. Typically, our society believes that the male is the dominant figure in all of the gender categories, and especially in relationships, it would only make sense for the male to be the dominant one while the woman is the submissive one (Betchen). For a woman to be perceived as dominant, while a man is perceived to be passive, it threatens socially constructed understandings of gender, masculinity, and femininity (Betchen). Such social change creates social anxiety, especially since the traditional values and roles for men and women are for men to be dominant and women to be submissive (Betchen). She goes on to say that she “might get your song played on the radio station... I just might be a black bill gates in the making,” implying that not only is she sexually dominant within her relationship with Jay-Z, but also she is an extremely dominant figure within the business and entertainment industry. So dominant that she just might become as wealthy as one of the richest men in the world. This is Beyoncé’s way of challenging male authority and power, by letting Jay-Z know that she has enough power to get his song played on the radio station even though she is a woman, a gender ranked lower in terms of privilege in America. The interesting part about her claiming that she “just might be a black bill gates in the making”

is that it's followed by her saying that "you just might be a black bill gates in the making," emphasizing that even though Jay-Z is a man, she, a woman, is able to get just as much money as him.

This is "Lemonade." This is Beyoncé. This is a poetic and artistic way she has exposed the truth behind the inability to escape gendered and racial issues, both as separate entities and as one. This is the exposure of social, racial, and gendered oppression and discrimination. Why "Lemonade" you might ask? Because at the end of the day, Beyoncé is able to make something sweet out of all that is wrong in the world.



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