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Beyoncé: A Powerful, Black Icon

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FY103: Gender Inequality and Intersectionality

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Abstract

Beyoncé, one of the most powerful Black, female artists is able to use her power to share her feminist perspectives with all of her fans. Originally in Destiny's Child, Beyoncé decided to go solo to create her own music and career. Today, Beyoncé empowers her audience with her music and extravagant performances. Although Beyoncé faces various personal challenges during her career, she is still able to attain her main goal of giving to her fans. Additionally, Beyoncé is able to pave the way for other artists who follow her by giving an example of how artists can interact with an audience. Therefore, Beyoncé is a Black icon to look up to because she guides her fans to be confident and be proud of their culture.

A Powerful Woman

Out of all the powerful and influential women in society, I chose Beyoncé to write about because I was familiar with Beyoncé's music and I was interested in the way that other people view her music. While doing research I realized that many fans are inspired by the way that Beyoncé confidently performs and empowers people with her lyrics. Since I am familiar with Beyoncé's lyrics I knew it would interest me learning about her life as a Black artist. Additionally, I wanted to research a powerful, Black woman because I think that it is important to research how the Black community is affected by Beyoncé. Many artists do not think about the effect they have on society, but Beyoncé knows that so many individuals look up to her. In the documentary, *Homecoming: A film by Beyoncé*, Beyoncé explains, "When I decided to do Coachella, instead of me pulling out my flower crown, it was more important that I brought our culture to Coachella" (Knowles-Carter & Burke, 2019, 0:31:48). While watching this documentary I confirmed my decision to research Beyoncé because I realized she is unlike other artists because her main focus is her fans.

Biography and Accomplishments

Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, a Black, influential singer and songwriter, is originally from Houston, Texas. Beyoncé, born on September 4th, 1981, is the daughter of Tina and Mathew Knowles. At a young age Beyoncé's parents, Tina and Mathew Knowles, put Beyoncé into singing and dancing competitions where she captivated the audience. Later in life, Beyoncé rose to fame when her band, Destiny's Child, gained popularity in 1997. Additionally, Beyoncé made her acting debut in 2001 in *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*. In 2003, Beyoncé released her first solo album, *Dangerously in Love*, which went on to win 5 Grammy awards. Eventually, Destiny's Child released their last album in 2004 and broke up later that year. In 2008, Beyoncé and Jay-Z

got married and Beyoncé's solo career continued. By 2013, Beyoncé collected 16 Grammy Awards and continued to reach number one spot on the billboard charts with the albums she released. In 2012, Beyoncé announced the birth of her daughter with Jay-Z and in an 2017 Instagram post, Beyoncé announced she was expecting twins.

As a woman who has been in the music industry for about 24 years, Beyoncé has many accomplishments. To start, Beyoncé was a part of one of the most successful girl groups, Destiny's Child. Beyoncé helped Destiny's Child reach number one on the charts with songs like "Say My Name" and "Bills, Bills, Bills." In 2010, Beyoncé was awarded more Grammys than any female artist, winning 6 awards. Beyoncé now has 28 Grammy awards and has been nominated 79 times. Additionally, Beyoncé has sold over 118 million records as a solo artist. Not only is Beyoncé extremely successful in the music industry, she has also starred in the movie *Dreamgirls*.

Challenges

One of the challenges that Beyoncé most recently encountered was her 2018 performance at Coachella. Beyoncé talks about her community of fans in her documentary, saying, "I wanted a black orchestra. I wanted the steppers. I needed the vocalists. I wanted different characters; I didn't want us all doing the same thing....the things that these young people can do... it's just gorgeous and it makes me proud." (Knowles-Carter & Burke, 2019, 0:18:14). Unlike other performers, Beyoncé makes it her job to show the audience how to be proud of their culture. This a huge responsibility for her considering she is working everyday to get back into shape after having twins. In *Homecoming: A film by Beyoncé*, Beyoncé states, "It's my first time back home, on stage after giving birth. I'm creating my own homecoming. And It's hard. There were days that I thought, you know, I'd never be the same. I'd never be the same physically"

(Knowles-Carter & Burke, 2019, 0:46:00). Getting back into shape after giving birth is a huge obstacle for Beyonce, but she continues to give a performance that the fans will remember. Furthermore, Beyonce shares this personal challenge that a woman goes through to show the audience the difference in the struggles of men and women performers. Overall, she is very thorough when it comes to running through the performance because she wants to give the audience an experience.

Encouragement

Although Beyoncé and Jay-Z have been through their own obstacles, one of the main people in Beyoncé's personal life that has encouraged her achievements is her husband, Jay-Z. Not only has he musically collaborated with Beyoncé in songs like “Crazy in Love” and “Drunk in Love,” Jay-Z supports Beyoncé's work. In *Homecoming: a film by Beyoncé*, Beyoncé tries on one of her old performance costumes even though she recently gave birth to twins. Beyoncé is excited she is able to fit into her old costume because she has been working hard to get her body back. Thus, when she is able to get her costume on she immediately shares her excitement with Jay-Z because he has seen all the work she has put in. Jay-Z smiles and says “All right!” when Beyoncé shows him the costume, showing that he encourages her to work towards her goals (Knowles-Carter & Burke, 2019, 0:51:49).

Likewise, Beyoncé's fans are unique in the way that they encourage her to keep performing. With the new age of technology, Beyoncé is able to connect with her fans more closely through social media. For example, in the article, ‘Formation’ of the female author in the hip hop visual album: Beyoncé and FKA twigs,” Barret (2016) includes, “Examining Beyoncé's release of a self- titled ‘visual album’ in 2013, Cupid and Files-Thompson detail how Beyoncé took unprecedented control over the release of her collected music videos, reinventing their form

and practically inventing a marketing strategy ” (p.44). This quote is referencing that Beyoncé is able to connect to her fans with her videos although there was no formal promotion for her album. The album *Beyoncé* is not only able to empower her fans, but it is a huge success because of the support that her fans gave. *Beyoncé* is “a collection of music and videos which has already broken an iTunes record by selling 823,773 copies in its first three days” (Dockterman, 2013). This emphasizes that Beyoncé's fans feel connected to her, therefore supporting her music career.

Consequently, Beyoncé uses the support to give her fans what they deserve. In Beyoncé's documentary the audience can observe that Beyoncé wants to include so many talents on stage for her fans to see how worthy they are. Beyoncé states, “I wanted every person that has ever been dismissed because of the way they look to feel like they were on that stage (Knowles-Carter & Burke, 2019, 0:18:51). Fortunately, Beyoncé's fans are able to benefit from the empowering music that Beyoncé produces. The song “Pretty Hurts,” explains the pressure of looking a certain way as a woman influences a whole audience of young women. Beyoncé sings lyrics about how women obsess over perfection, because they are not happy with the way they appear. By including these lyrics the audience is able to relate because many women struggle with unfair society standards.

Peer Influence

As a Black icon, Beyoncé is able to influence her peers and all the artists that will succeed after her. As mentioned, the method Beyoncé used to release the album *Beyoncé* created a new way to promote music. Beyoncé's music videos included with the album enhanced the music by adding a visual representation for the audience to follow a storyline. This method can be observed by her peers in the music industry and more artists will continue to create a deeper connection with their fans with their music.

Although Beyoncé is influential during this time, she is not the first Black artist who supports feminism. Beyoncé looks up to other artists herself and attributes some of her success to them. For instance, “When introducing Tina Turner at the 2008 Grammy Awards, Beyoncé performs a one-minute theatrical number that pays tribute to her black diva predecessors” (Kooijman, 2019, p. 17). By doing so, Beyoncé acknowledges that she is able to influence so many fans because she uses the techniques of previous Black divas. Additionally, the previous Black divas pass down the responsibility to Beyoncé because they are aware how powerful Beyoncé is. At the 2007 BET award show, Diana Ross gives Beyoncé the new diva role in her acceptance speech, showing that Beyoncé is the new Black icon (Kooijman, 2019, p.11)

Course Title

The title of this course, Gender Inequality and Intersectionality, relates to my selection of a powerful woman because Beyoncé makes it clear she wants to empower everyone and especially Black women. Beyoncé breaks the standard for men and women to be treated differently by treating everyone equally and bringing women up in her music. One of the main pieces of music that includes her opinion on gender inequality is “Flawless.” This song includes a peice of a TED talk from a Nigerian feminist where the main point is “for young girls to “lean in” and be more than someone’s wife” (Dockterman, 2013). This addition to Beyoncé’s song brings attention to the fact society must change that the norm is for women to be seen as a wife.

The course title also includes intersectionality, meaning that race and gender intertwine and create discrimination. As a Black woman, Beyoncé is able to show that being a woman who owns her culture is something to be proud of. Beyoncé does so by giving nods to her own culture. For example, in the music video for “Check on it,” “Beyoncé’ acknowledges that her cornrows in the “urban” scene pay homage to her musical past and the homegirls from the Black

working class section of Houston's third ward." (Durham, 2012, p. 40) The confidence that Beyonce shows during her performances with her sexuality and cultural background shows her fans that they should show off their culture.

In summary, Beyonce uses her confidence on stage and feminist perspectives to influence a whole generation of fans. With the power that Beyonce has over her fans she is able to be an artist to look up to especially for young, black females. Beyonce guides her fans to be confident with their body, embrace their sexuality, and show their culture.

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