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## Lady Gaga: Free Bitch

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**Lady Gaga: Free Bitch**

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FY103.17 - Gender Inequality & Intersectionality

Dr. Jeanne Buckley

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### **Abstract**

I would be surprised if there was anyone under 45 who had never heard of Lady Gaga. Lady Gaga rose to fame in the Early 2000s as an eager songwriter turned pop sensation. Gaga grew to push the boundaries of pop music with her out-of-this-world performances and shocking lyrics. Many pushed out by society have clung to her uniqueness and connected with her niche, yet mainstream music. Lady Gaga, once a girl with dreams, now a pop sensation, is not without scars. The star has faced criticism, loss, and pain that has carried over into her life and music. There is more than meets the eye to the icon, Lady Gaga.

*Keywords:* uniqueness, pop sensation, criticism, icon.

### **My Introduction to a Lady**

While most people look up to presidents, family members, or inspirational speakers, the biggest role model in my life is Lady Gaga. Ever since I was in elementary school, I would hear her powerful voice booming through my sister's stereo and watch her dance in faux Gaga outfits that she scoured up from my mom's closet. Scarves, hats, sunglasses, high heels 4 sizes too big, that was what inspiration and freedom looked like to me. Gaga never left me, even after my sister went through fazes of obsession with other artists. I grew an even deeper connection to her after seeing her live in 2018 for her Joanne tour. Her beautiful performance drew me to her presence even more.

Every electronic interaction I had with Gaga was empowering. The way she spoke, her inclusivity, and her absolute unapologetic image were always an inspiration to me. I decided to write this woman in power paper on Lady Gaga because I could think of no one more influential and powerful in my life. Gaga has always expressed herself clearly and always been an ally, which has inspired me to not only be a good ally but to accept my sexuality as well. My sister, mom, and I have always loved Lady Gaga and taken inspiration on how to also be unapologetically ourselves from her, shaping us into the powerful women we are today.

### **The Beginning of an Era**

Lady Gaga was born on March 28, 1986, as Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta to a proud Italian American family living in New York. From a young age, Gaga had a need to perform and found ways to do so, performing at clubs in her teen years in New York and writing songs for Britney Spears by the time she was 22 (Simões 2019). Gaga attended college at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts for a short time before leaving to pursue her career.

She gained recognition, got signed by Interscope Records, and released her debut album *The Fame* in 2008. Gaga quickly became known for her flamboyant fashion style and disco-pop music based on icons David Bowie and Freddie Mercury. Her iconic stage name – Lady Gaga – is based on rock band Queen’s song Radio Ga-Ga. Additionally, with her over-the-top outfits and biting lyrics, Gaga has a unique ability to produce a shock factor when it is hard to shock the modern audience due to technology and exposure to the world (Yebara 2018). Gaga offered something new to a dull world.

To date, Gaga has released 7 studio albums and according to author Israel Simões (2019) in *Between the Fame and Joanne*, “the Lady Gaga way of being has been preserved. The extravagant appearance, the affection in the interpretive modes, the joyful and dancing songs, everything seems, to some extent, to have been kept from the first to the last album.” While her music has changed through the years, her message of love and acceptance has stayed true. From her angsty pop albums to her stunning jazz album, and recently her emotionally charged *Joanne*, Gaga’s albums have all widened her audience and helped her climb to the top of the charts.

### **The Ups and Downs**

Throughout the years, Gaga has been very open about her biggest achievements and greatest struggles. During her rise to fame, Gaga was run ragged by her producers and managers who forced her to perform an intense tour schedule. She performed multiple high-energy shows on her tour with pain in her hip, first wrongly diagnosed, which was later found to be broken from overuse. Gaga was not able to fully recover at first because of the pressure from her staff, and to this day she performs and lives with chronic pain in her hip. *Lady Gaga: Five Foot Two* (2017), a documentary depicting Lady Gaga’s life, shows this struggle of chronic pain in her

day-to-day life. At one point she is debilitated with pain, and during an intense treatment session in her own home, she admits that she is so grateful for this care others may not be able to get.

Another struggle Gaga is not immune to is the critique from the public eye. Gaga is among the most controversial figures in pop music, and according to author Israel Simões, “[Gaga’s] public significance arises in part from the controversy she generates” (2019). During her rise to fame, her incredible outfits, stage persona, and intense lyrics put her in the harsh hands of the media more often than most rising stars. In *Reading Through the Skin*, an analysis of Lady Gaga’s media presence, Author Anne Graefer connects media expectations to Gaga’s Rolling Stones’ cover. “In the photo, Gaga’s immaculate white and naked skin is only covered by a black thong and machine guns that seem to replace her breast” (2016). In many ways Gaga was forced to conform with the sexual aspect of being a female in the music industry, which noted by Graefer depicts women, “as “heavenly bodies” that represent our cultural ideals of beauty, especially female celebrities are required to sport immaculate skin [Dyer]. Celebrities that fail to do so are often publicly shamed” (2016). However, Gaga marketed herself in such a way that she had control over her image, despite conforming to these social norms. For example, she made her image inhuman, monstrous, or alien to take charge of her forced sexuality and media expectations; her machine gun breasts on the cover of Rolling Stone for example. The media, however, took her rebellion at face value and constantly showered the news with critique over her appearance and style instead of looking into the meaning behind her marketing. According to author Stephen Roberts in *Beyond the Classic*, “[Gaga’s] elaborate performances and sartorial experimentation are deployed to create visual impressions that are practically tailor-made for the age of viral marketing” (2017). While most people wonder how Gaga is able to stay so relevant,

her marketing strategy of having the boldest, most newsworthy image possible is no mere mistake.

After the perceived failure of her third studio album, “ArtPop” in 2013, Lady Gaga rebranded herself, effectively releasing a jazz album ‘Cheek to Cheek’ in 2014 and a more tame, mainstream pop album “Joanne” in late 2016. These albums shot her back into the spotlight, securing her ability to stay relevant and sell, especially because the Joanne world tour was the most profitable female tour of the year in 2017 (Graefer 2016). Her success also secured her the Super Bowl LI Halftime show in 2017, self-professed one of the biggest accomplishments of her career. She also had the opportunity to show off her acting skills with her roles in American Horror Story and A Star is Born.

Even all these accomplishments can come at a cost though as seen by a breakdown Gaga had while juggling all these obligations where overlapping. Throughout her career, Gaga has been open about her biggest hardships and most rewarding moments, allowing us fans into her life. Gaga has always been true to herself, no matter the public view or pressure from others, which is a very powerful thing.

### **A lasting impact**

No matter how much her music or image changes, Gaga remains an impact in the lives of young people and young at heart people everywhere. Her powerful lyrics, rebellion, and candidness are what really make her a “Free Bitch Baby”. No matter how much pressure is put on her to conform to the standards placed by society, Gaga always found a way to stand out and speak up for what she believed in. From her humble beginnings to her amassed fame and sold-out shows, you can always count on Gaga for pure inspiration and fun. I believe that Lady

Gaga encompasses what we learned in this class. She was not afraid to use her voice and be heard, use her platform for good, and be unapologetically herself. When everyone else tells women to shut up and sit down Lady Gaga has always told women and minorities that they were “born this way baby” as heard in her song *Born This Way*. Gaga has always embraced and explored her femininity not only inspiring others, like me and my sister, to explore our power as women, but to accentuate it. All women wanting to stand out and be heard can take a note from Gaga on how to be yourself and own it.

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