FEMINISM THROUGH BODY LANGUAGE IN POPULAR CULTURE
A qualitative study on Beyoncé’s body language in her visual album *Lemonade*

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Abstract

By performing a qualitative discourse research, this study seeks to analyse the modern day feminist woman as presented in Beyoncé’s visual album *Lemonade* (2016) via two body language aspects: postures and gestures. By connecting the presence or absence of specific postural and gestural aspects to meanings attributed to these by researchers and theorists, this study concludes that *Lemonade* portrays sexual objectification mixed with an authoritative rejection of powerlessness. The study puts these findings in context with postfeminist trends in popular culture and finds that *Lemonade*’s version of feminism is in coherence with these.

Key Words

Beyoncé, feminism, body language, popular culture
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1. Introduction

The meaning of feminism is ever changing and socially constructed. This thesis looks at global musical superstar Beyoncé’s latest visual album *Lemonade* (2016). It examines the album from the perspective of body language, analysing what messages are conveyed about being a feminist woman, and puts the findings into a historical and social context relating to contemporary traits and shifts of the definition of feminism.

Beyoncé has long cultivated a reputation for building her career on a foundation of female empowerment. In 2016 she released her sixth album and second visual album *Lemonade*. What defines *Lemonade* as a so-called ‘visual album’ is the fact that every song has a music video (Urban Dictionary, 2017). In addition, all videos are tied together to a film creating a narrative and thereby offer more context to the music (Quinn, 2017). In *Lemonade*’s case the full duration of the film is one hour long. *Lemonade* gained a reputation for being politically outspoken and strongly feminist by various reviews on popular websites such as *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*. However, some scholarly writers have thought differently and have criticised Beyoncé for conveying anti-feminist messages through her work (Trier-Bienik, 2016).

In this respect, the opinions on Beyoncé’s feminism are polarised and without consensus. This study does not seek to define whether Beyoncé is a feminist or not, but rather identifies her as a highly influential and contemporary artist of our time, and consequently acknowledges the part she plays in popular culture, shaping the meaning of feminism. These polarised opinions on Beyoncé’s work and its representation underpin the motivation to closer investigate how women are represented in her work. This study will aim to do so from the perspective of body language in Beyoncé’s film *Lemonade*.

To create an understanding of Beyoncé’s role, on what social and historical platform she releases her work and what role her album *Lemonade* plays in the shaping of society, the thesis introduces background information about feminism, Beyoncé’s reputation as a feminist, her album, representation and the popular culture. It then introduces theoretical concepts by scholars and researchers about specific body language signals to look for in her production to further conclude what *Lemonade* defines as a version of a modern day feminist woman.
2. Background

2.1 'Bey Feminism': Influential and Debated

Beyoncé is a globally famous pop star. She’s been active in the music industry since the late 90s has been rewarded with 23 Grammys and 66 Grammy nominations (GRAMMY.com). She has moreover been rewarded various titles by several platforms, such as the Top Female Artist the 2000s Decade by Billboard in 2009 (AllMusic) and has been listed by Time Magazine as one of the hundred most influential people two years in a row, 2013 and 2014 (TIME.com, 2014). To some part, such influence is reached via her 127 million followers on Instagram which puts her in the top ten most followed fan pages and Instagram accounts (Forbes.com, 2019). Beyoncé, undoubtedly, plays an influential role and her representation has the power to influence the world around her.

The messages Beyoncé conveys about feminism in terms of gender stereotypes have been debated both in the press and by scholarly writers, with some arguing that she is representing, and thus spreading, positive feminist messages, and others holding that she is doing the very opposite, i.e. representing an anti-feminist stance. Beyoncé herself has claimed the title of being a modern day feminist, and performed in front of a big screen displaying the word ‘FEMINIST’ at the VMAs in 2014 (Blair, 2016).

Adrienne Trier-Bienik’s book The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race and Feminism (2016) is a collection of several essays written by various writers on Beyoncé as a feminist. One of those essays is Elizabeth Whittington Cooper’s essay Sex(uality), Marriage, Motherhood and “Bey Feminism”, which deals with both the praise and criticism that Beyoncé received in conjunction with the release of her first visual album in 2013. Cooper looks at several publicly stated viewpoints dealing with Beyoncé’s work from different angles and refers to something that has come to be known as Bey feminism, a feminist platform created by Beyoncé herself. Cooper argues that feminism had grown to be elitist and thus far only been available to women in academia, but that Beyoncé introduces a new platform of feminism through her work that has a much broader outreach. In fact, her work speaks to and is accessible to some of the most vulnerable and less privileged people in society: young black women with no or little academic background. Cooper writes: “Beyoncé embraces both her marriage and her feminism, she once again gives a platform that many feminists have not given the everyday woman, a place to celebrate their womanhood, independence, and marriage. Bey feminism allows the everyday woman to be proud of her role as a wife, to still embrace her sexuali-
ty, and to strive for career achievements without being ashamed.” (Cooper, 2016: 157). Whittington and Jordan similarly defined Bey feminism as feminism that “combines traditional feminism with the everyday woman” and “allows a more grassroots platform for women to start discussing feminism and even embrace it in a world where feminism has remained rather elitist.” (Cooper, 2016: 154). Hobson moreover argues that it is contradictory to call Beyoncé a non-feminist when feminism is meant to be a place allowing diversity to exist. She comments that it is as if there is a rejection of Beyoncé’s sexuality (Cooper, 2016). Trier-Bienik wrote that “Beyoncé is challenging the passivity of the male gaze, setting a foundation for a new wave of feminists who simultaneously celebrate their bodies and provide cunning intellectual fodder.” (Cooper, 2016: 155). Cooper states “how she [Beyonce] portrays sexy is not an attack against feminism and not for the attention of male fans. Instead, it should be seen as a woman who is comfortable in her own skin and challenging this idea that her body is situated in the male gaze.” (Cooper, 2016: 155). In an article for Madame Noire in December 2013 writer Ball says that Beyoncé “spits in the face of what we chiefly believe to be an appropriate display of a woman’s sexuality (i.e., asexual) post-motherhood.” (Cooper, 2016: 156). Cooper herself argues that her feminism lies in the fact that Beyoncé portrays a new woman who is not ashamed of her choices. This is her way of giving women “a platform to feel comfortable with their bodies no matter how much or how little clothing they wear.” (Cooper, 2016: 156).

In some contrast to the views noted above, Beyoncé has also been accused of surrendering to female objectification by sexualising her body. One of these critics is feminist author and activist bell hooks\(^1\) who has publicly referred to Beyoncé as being both “an antifeminist” and a “a terrorist” during the event *Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body* at Eugene Lang College, 2014. In a YouTube video showcasing the event, she states: “the major assault on feminism in our society has come from visual media.” (hooks, 2014) and describes Beyoncé as looking like “a deer in headlights” (hooks, 2014) on the cover of Time Magazine (Spring 2013 Edition). She comments “it is interesting’ how Beyoncé is being held up as one of the most important people in our nation, in the world” and asks “[w]hat is that cover meant to say about the black female body?” (hooks, 2014). hooks further notes that Beyoncé comes from a place of privilege that most young black girls can neither embrace nor relate to. She says “one cannot destroy this imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal by creating your own version of it.” (hooks, 2014).

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\(^1\) bell hooks’ name does intentionally not begin with capital letters with her reason being that she wants readers’ attention to be drawn to her work, and not to her.
Overall, the debates about Beyoncé’s feminism appear to most frequently deal with the portrayal of her sexualised female body. Some say it stands for her claiming a multifaceted identity as a woman by being sexy, and at the same time being a mother and a wife. Others say that the objectification of her body is a way of giving in to social acceptance of belittling the woman to a sexual object when she has the power to do otherwise. After gaining an insight on the different takes on Beyoncé’s feminism and portrayal in general, it is of interest to take a closer look at the reception of her most contemporary and recent visual work *Lemonade*, which is also the object of this study.

2.2 LEMONADE

*Lemonade* was released on the 23rd of April in 2016 by Parkwood Entertainment and Columbia Records. It is Beyoncé’s sixth studio album and second visual album. *Lemonade* became the best selling album globally of that year by selling over 2.5 million copies (Rys, 2017).

The visuals are divided into eleven chapters: "Intuition", "Denial", "Anger", "Apathy", "Emptiness", "Accountability", "Reformation", "Forgiveness", "Resurrection", "Hope", and “Redemption”, and do not only contain Beyoncé’s songs and music videos, but also poetry that is adapted from other writers and combined with visuals. The songs are not tied to one specific genre, but vary in style. Thematically, *Lemonade* supposedly deals with Beyoncé’s husband Jay-Z’s infidelity and her emotional response and journey to forgiveness (Sheffield, 2016, The Telegraph, 2017).

*Lemonade* received a reputation for being feminist, political and commenting on racism. Kitty Empire who wrote a review of the album for *The Guardian* in 2016, described the album by saying “Female endurance and pragmatism are celebrated with warmth, anger and wit” (Empire, 2016). Ryan Pinkard from the streaming service Tidal defined it as “a conceptual project based on every woman’s journey of self knowledge and healing” (Pinkard, 2016). Chris Richards, in a review of the album for *The Washington Post* in 2016, wrote ‘*Lemonade* is a surprisingly furious song-cycle about infidelity and revenge” (Richards, 2016) and Andy Kellman wrote for *AllMusic* that “Beyoncé delights in her blackness, femininity, and Southern origin with supreme wordplay.” (Kellman, 2016).
In spite of the generally positive response to the release of the album, critical reviews can also be found. For instance, author bell hooks, commented on the album in an essay she published on her website called *Moving Beyond Pain* on May 9th 2016 by referring to the album as “the business of capitalist money making at its best.” (hooks, 2016). Whilst awarding credit to the fact that there is a “black female sisterhood that resists invisibility” (hooks, 2016). But this is not enough in hooks’ opinion. “It still does not change conventional sexist constructions of black female identity” she comments (hooks, 2016). She moreover describes the album as a “celebration of rage” (hooks, 2016) and that it is a misconception that a woman can gain self-love through anger. hooks praises the fact that Beyoncé chose to include references to elders and previous generations, but again finds that “this is not enough to heal trauma” (hooks, 2016). The album being solely about Beyoncé’s emotional journey, hooks also finds that there is a neglect of the man’s willingness to transform (hooks, 2016).

### 2.3 A BRIEF LOOK AT FEMINISM HISTORY

The book *Understanding Film Theory* (2018) by Christine Etherington-Wright and Ruth Doughty defines feminism as “an advocacy of the right of women based on the theory of equality of the sexes” (Doughty and Etherington-Wright, 2018: 173). Looking at feminism historically, it is often divided by several stages, or so called ‘waves’. The objectives of each wave will be briefly outlined before a description of where the evolution of feminism has landed today – the most recent concept of feminism to date.

**Wave 1:** Around the early 1900s

The first wave’s main focus was fighting for women’s rights such as the right to vote or own properties.

**Wave 2:** The 1960s - 1980s

This wave is often referred to as the “Women’s Liberation Movement” (Doughty and Etherington-Wright, 2018: 174). This wave was concerned with women pursuing careers, reproductive rights, addressing violence against women and equal pay (Trier-Bienik, 2015). However, the second wave was criticised to leave out important voices by only standing for white women. Whilst fighting the oppression of women within patriarchal ideology in society, feminists of this time gained a negative
reputation, often being described and referred to as women who “burnt their bras and disliked men” (Doughty and Etherington-Wright, 2018: 174).

It was during this wave that Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), introduced the term “Male Gaze”. Gaze here refers to the fact that we as humans change our behaviour when we know that we are being observed by others. Laura Mulvey thus defines ‘male gaze’ as adapting behaviour to the gaze of a heterosexual man in order to please him. She finds that a majority of productions within popular culture adapt the way they portray women to the male gaze, primarily by portraying women as sexual objects. (Mulvey, 1975).

According to Mulvey this can happen on two levels. Firstly the objectification of women takes place to please the male viewer, but also, to strengthen the power position or ‘boost’ the male characters in the film. Such ends are viewed as often achieved by the producers and not merely by how the characters behave or look, but how the production is edited with effects to enhance a sexualised representation of women with, for example, the use of camera perspectives or slow-motion. Mulvey also argues that because media typically presents women from the perspective of men, women often take on the male gaze perspective when viewing themselves or other women. The objectification of women into sexual objects as such translates into our society by not only men, but also by women (Mulvey, 1975).

**Wave 3: The 1990s - 2000s**

The third wave’s main focus was the inclusion of different kinds women that previous waves had been criticised for excluding, such as non-white, non-Western women and women of all sexual orientations. A further emphasis during this wave was the fight for women’s “right to be able to access contraception and abortion” (Doughty and Etherington-Wright, 2018: 174).

**Wave 4 / Postfeminism: post 9/11**

The fourth wave is the most current and is thus the one in which we are currently in today. Trier-Bienik describes the fourth wave as the understanding how inequality affects us not only locally but worldwide. It is especially characterised by the use of technology and digital culture as a tool for female empowerment. Doughty and Etherington-Wright define the main objective of this wave as “peace-making” (Doughty and Etherington-Wright 2018:174). By peace-making is meant a belief in
shared bonds as women, regardless of cultural, racial or spiritual differences. Women gather at conferences to fight together for peace in the world, replacing violence with tolerance. Generally, this wave is less defined, still uncovering and taking directions, and encompasses different definitions such as ‘Postfeminism’ or ‘Neo Feminism’. In contrast to the second wave, there is a “rejection that femininity and feminism are polarised” (Doughty and Etherington-Wright, 2018:175). There is an inclusion of all types of women and their varying narratives and identities (Doughty and Etherington-Wright, 2018).

### 2.4 MUSIC INDUSTRY AND POST FEMINISM IN POPULAR CULTURE

When reviewing Beyoncé’s work, it is crucial to see it in the context in which it is created and published, as this defines its main objectives. She is essentially both a product and a representative of the music industry. She is not the sole person to benefit from her work’s success and there are many people involved in the making of her music and her visuals. The music industry, in turn, can be viewed to have a specific culture and tradition when it comes to gender and power representations.

The article *I Ain’t Sorry: Beyoncé, Serena, and Hegemonic Hierarchies in Lemonade* written by Sarah Olutola and published in 2018 looks at Beyoncé as a product of the music industry. She writes that, if “Beyoncé is part of the same industry that produces successful stars like Katy Perry and Pink, then we also have to understand her work, and its political undertones as emerging from the same system.” (Olutola, 2018: 101). Olutola points out that we need to remember that what is released under Beyoncé’s name and may seem like Beyoncé’s work is in fact the work of an industry that seeks to profit from her success, on a world-wide scale. Olutola also writes that “Today, the process of producing stars often involves the strategic creation of pop spectacle, regardless of its content.” (Olutola, 2018: 104), and in Beyoncé’s case this role can be defined as “a powerful black queen” (Olutola, 2018: 104) with black female women being a target audience to invest in her by consuming. Whilst Beyoncé highlights “black struggle and black beauty” (Olutola, 2018: 113), her product is still a display of “self-elevation in favor of celebrating her radical progressiveness” and that those tensions “ultimately reinforce a society of winners and losers.” (Olutola, 2018: 113).

The music industry is part of the so called popular culture, or pop culture, which has power in shaping our understanding of the world. Trier-Bienik writes that “Pop culture is generally the images,
narratives and ideas that circulate widely in contemporary culture. What makes something “popular” is its general availability to the masses and, from a social science point of view, it is usually something that we can consume.” (Trier-Bieniek, 2015: xiv). Due to this accessibility, visual design within pop culture has a powerful role. Trier-Bienik also states that “The juxtaposition of feminist theory and popular culture has an inevitable impact on the consumption of culture mainly because popular culture has the power to put up a mirror to our lives and show connections between media, socialisation and identity.” (Trier-Bienik, 2015: xiv). Anne Thorpe writes in her book *The designer's atlas of sustainability* (2007) that design has the power to make actions “modern or outdated” (Thorpe 2007: 214). Allison Latagne comments in her article *Gender Roles in Media* for *The Huffington Post* that media has enormous impact on creating social norms about gender roles due to images being part of almost every place we go (Lantagne, 2014).

It is important to mention that in recent years the lines between what it means to be feminist and anti-feminist in regards to sexualised body portrayal have gotten blurry. As stated previously, there are debates specifically about Beyoncé and Bey Feminism in these terms. This is a trait of the current feminist wave postfeminism. Rosalind Gill writes in her paper *Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility* (2007) that because there is no clear definition and agreement about what postfeminism actually stands for, makes it hard to analyse material if there are no specific features to be looked for. Gill sums up what she finds to be the characteristics of postfeminism: She argues that, in postfeminism, femininity is defined by being sexy, not by being nurturing or claiming motherhood. Femininity lies in the body as a property. Rather than being passive sex objects, women are active, liberated sexual beings. There is also a strong emphasis on individualism where everything we do is done within our own freedom and will to please ourselves. However, Gill points out that it is strange that this mindset results in the same beauty standards as past times of passivity and objectification, such as slim waists and hairless bodies. She finds that there is also a general idea that our lives are flawed and in need of lifestyle and relationship advice in order to do make-overs (Gill, 2007). There is an acknowledgement of the fact that women and men are fundamentally different by nature. Gill points out that media culture has allowed terrible comments to exist dealing with homophobia and sexism whilst claiming that no offence was intentionally made (Gill, 2007), which in Gill’s opinion encourages a culture of ironic misogyny and invitation to objectification. She also finds that media culture has grown to be both feminist and anti-feminist, and that that is what characterises postfeminism: its contradictions. There is an underlying rejection of that femininity cannot
exist together with feminism (Gill, 2007). As an example of this, Trier-Bienik brings up the popular and contemporary TV series *GIRLS*. She finds that the series “tells us a lot about how young women both reject and buy into their objectification” (Trier-Bienik, 2015: 26).

2.5 REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPING VIA POP CULTURE

In his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Stuart Hall defines representation as what “connects meaning and language to culture” (Hall, 1997: 15). When representing a thing with a word, it is necessary that two people share the same concept of what the word is representing to be able to communicate. Hall calls those shared understandings of a thing “shared conceptual maps” (Hall, 1997: 18). Shared conceptual maps are also necessary on a broader basis for society as a whole to function. By interacting with our surrounding, not only by talking to other people but also looking at messages conveyed by, for example, popular culture, our conceptual maps adapt to what is represented to be normal or abnormal.

The so called “discursive approach to representation” (Hall, 1997: 43) is of particular interest for this study. This way of looking at representation was introduced by philosopher Foucault in the 1960s. It puts great emphasis on the cultural and historical contexts in which something is represented, and furthermore identifies a relationship between power and knowledge. Together, the two have a high influence on a thing’s meaning during a specific time period, affect people’s self-identification and, consequently, how they behave. (Hall, 1997). Beyoncé’s status in the world gives her productions immense power in the shaping of meanings, in this case the meaning of feminism. A more elaborate explanation of discourse and discourse analysis is given in the ‘Methodology’ chapter.

Within all representation we categorise things in order to make sense of the world. Categorisation, or “typing” (Hall, 1997: 257), is therefore necessary and does not reduce something, but foregrounds specific traits of a thing that we can easily remember. This is to be distinguished from stereotyping, the act of taking those traits from typing and furthermore reduce the thing to only those traits, or an exaggeration or simplification of them. (Hall, 1997: 258). Stereotyping can thus be viewed as “part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order” (Hall, 1997: 258) because it draws a line between what is normal and abnormal, and acceptable and unacceptable. Hall notes that stereotyping seems to occur especially when there are inequalities of power. All people have
power in the creation of representations, types and stereotypes simply by being part of a civilisation. However, some people have more power than others as their voices are heard by more people. People who are powerful in that sense can shape a worldview that accepts their own beliefs, but dooms others’ beliefs to be unacceptable. (Hall, 1997: 258-259).

Beliefs manifest themselves in values. In her book The designer's atlas of sustainability (2008) Ann Thorpe sees the visual culture, by being part of almost every place we go, as an incredibly powerful tool to create values in society. It has the power to make actions “modern or out-dated” (Thorpe, 2008: 214). She argues that this power has been misused and created materialism and false beliefs on what creates happiness, and comments that it should be a designer’s responsibility to balance “total freedom and strict moral rules” (Thorpe, 2008: 217).

Hall states that language stands for all kinds of communication that convey a message. Hence, one category of communication in which representations, typing and stereotyping take place is via non-verbal communication, i.e. any communication that is not words. According to Nilsson and Waldemarson’s book Kommunikation: samspel mellan människor (In English: Communication: interaction between humans) (2016), nonverbal communication is a broad term that can be divided into different categories, such as body movements, gestures, physical contact, clothing, all sounds that are not words, spacial aspects, room environment and symbols. Nonverbal communication is the first language we speak as humans before we can communicate verbally. Babies use eye contact and facial expressions to impart information, and in early years children start pointing fingers at things to communicate their intentions. Often, nonverbal communication can communicate more than words can, for example in moments of grief a hug can convey comfort more effectively than can words (Nilsson and Waldemarson, 2016: 54).

The power of nonverbal communication within popular culture no doubt represents a powerful tool to shape stereotypes, meanings and concepts regarding aspects such as gender, race and age groups.
3. Objectives of the dissertation

3.1 PROBLEM AREA AND AIM OF RESEARCH

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of what Beyoncé’s visual production *Lemonade* (2016) communicates about being a modern day feminist woman. Beyoncé - as a globally famous pop star, self proclaimed feminist albeit much debated - plays an influential role in our society. Given her position of influence, her messages have the power to shape and affect the meaning of feminism.

As a visual communicator, the researcher of this study is particularly interested in understanding nonverbal communication. Body language is part of nonverbal communication. Compared to other nonverbal communication factors, such as mise-en-scene or technical productions aspects like camera movements and lights, body language is the form of nonverbal communication that is closest to Beyoncé herself, independently from the production. It is her specifically, independently from the rest, that her target audience most likely identifies with and wants to be like. They can replicate Beyoncé’s self-expression, but not her team’s technical production aspects.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

In reference to Beyoncé’s influential role, the researcher is interested in what her visual album *Lemonade* communicates about feminist womanhood. Therefore, the study poses the question:

What does Beyoncé’s visual album *Lemonade* communicate as the definition of a modern day feminist via postures and gestures?

3.3 LIMITATIONS

Due to the limited size of this research, this study does not include all body language aspects, but only focuses on postures and gestures. This study does not look at who Beyoncé is as a person, or whether Beyoncé is a feminist, or not. It does not offer a definition of feminism. This study only looks at what *Lemonade* communicates as being a modern day feminist within popular culture. It does not strictly narrow down the perspective on modern day feminism within popular culture to any specific dimensions or traits of a person within popular culture, such as the music industry, a
specific music genre, a specific race, relationship status or age. Hence, it does not compare Beyoncé’s representation within *Lemonade* to solely e.g. other black women, other married women, other global music superstars, or other singers representing the same music genre as her. Instead, this study simply takes the general traits of modern day feminism within popular culture into account and puts the findings of this research in context with those. Consequently, this study leaves great opportunity for further research on many interesting levels as discussed in the ‘Further Research’ chapter.

### 4. Relevant Theories

The analysis in this study rests against a broad backdrop of research and theories on body language and the messages body language communicate about a person. In addition, and relevantly to this study, it gives an insight to theories on stereotypical character traits considered representative of specifically male or female expression.

Furthermore, it is crucial to mention that in one of the clips there is another woman seen. However, this study strictly sticks to solely looking at how Beyoncé is communicated due to her being the influential person of this production who her target audience is likely most interested in, and to keep the analysis of all three sequences coherent regarding what and whose body language is being analysed.

#### 4.1 BODY LANGUAGE THEORIES

This study highlights body language as a strong communicator and will elaborate on theories about posture, gestures and clothing by writers Nilsson and Waldemarson (2016), Paul Ekman (2004), Albert Mehrabian (1972) and Erving Goffman (1979).

It is important to mention that most of the theories collected for this study about body language are general conclusions about the ways we use our body to communicate for example status, power or fear. However, some of the theories are gender specific to begin with as they were concluded by analysing the portrayal of genders. For example, Goffman’s theories are based on his study specifically regarding gender displays in advertisements. He analysed typical body languages portrayed by
women and men in advertisements and furthermore concluded on what they communicate about the representation of each gender. The analysis intends to use such gender specific findings on body language, too, like Goffman’s findings, but not take their gender specific nature into account, solely taking the meaning into account that he placed on the body languages.

**Posture**

According to Albert Mehrabian, forward leaning is part of a combination that conveys positiveness (forward leaning, smiling, keeping hands still, and having more eye contact). It also gives a feeling of the speaker approaching the addressee. A negative, refusing, or repulsed posture communicated by drawing back or turning away communicates withdrawal. An expansive posture in the form of expanded chest and erect or backward-leaning trunk, can communicate pride, conceit, arrogance, or disdain. A depressed, downcast, or dejected posture in the form of forward-leaning trunk, a bowed head, drooping shoulders, and a sunken chest can communicate contraction. Mehrabian also writes that the contraction category also correlates with weakness. Bodily relaxation plays an important role in the communication of status. A person is more relaxed in their body when they speak with someone who has a lower status. (Mehrabian 1972:19-25).

In a study by Machotka from 1965, it became clear that closed-arm positions are often interpreted as “cold, rejecting, shy, and passive” (Mehrabian 1972: 24) whereas open-arm positions are seen as “warm and accepting” (Mehrabian 1972:24).

Goffman finds that the way the body is held can either communicate “deference” (Goffman, 1979: 4) versus “unashamedness, superiority and disdain” (Goffman, 1979: 40). Deference is communicated by lowering one’s body in some form, whilst unashamedness, superiority and disdain are communicated by standing up tall and holding the head up straight. However, whilst this study does not place emphasis on surroundings elsewhere, it is crucial in this case to add that Goffman argues that a body lowering itself can also communicate sexual availability if for example laying on a sofa, chair or bed (Goffman, 1979: 41).

**Gestures**

According to Nilsson and Waldemarson and their book *Kommunikation: samspel mellan människor* (2016), gestures emphasise what is communicated verbally. For example, the use of hands can rep-
resent warning about something, praying, greeting, preventing or commanding. Touching something it can have various different meanings, such as claiming ownership, punishing or strength. (Nilsson and Waldemarson, 2016: 69-76).

Paul Ekman grouped certain kind of gestures into different groups called *illustrators, emblems* and *manipulators*. (Ekman, 2004):

**Illustrators** stand for “movements that illustrate speech” (Ekman, 2004: 43). They can be done with any body part. Ekman mentions that an increased use of illustrators is often associated with friendliness and sociability. An increased use also demonstrates that the speaker is involved, both positively or negatively, whereas a decreased use of illustrators indicated tiredness and boredom.

**Emblems** refer to signs we make that carry a clear meaning which we have agreed on within our culture. They are “socially learned” (Ekman, 2004: 39). An examples of this is the thumbs up sign, which indicates approval.

**Manipulators** stand for movements when one body part “manipulates” another. This can happen in the form of for example scratching, licking or biting. We as humans are often not aware of doing this but do it surprisingly much. However, they often “reflect nervousness, or habitual activity” (Ekman, 2004: 43) and for many it is subconsciously off putting to interact with someone who uses many manipulators. Ekman states that research has shown that people often read an increased use of manipulators in others as a sign of dishonesty, and find it hard to trust them.

Goffman drew connections between specific manipulators and certain emotions. According to him, touching oneself indicates that one’s body is fragile and precious. This implies to soft touches, not grabbing something with force. (Goffman, 1979: 29). But touching oneself by covering the mouth with one’s hands can also be interpreted as “licensed withdrawal” (Goffman, 1979: 57). Goffman argues that such a gesture stands for stopping an emotional outburst and withdrawing from a situation. Sucking or biting a finger indicates anxiety or contemplation, and again a withdrawal from the actual situation by covering part of the face. It communicates a need for protection.
4.1.1 GENDER STEREOTYPES

Below is a brief outline of some commonly occurring gender stereotypes found across several aspects of media.

**Stereotypically female representations**

According to Nilsson and Waldemarson’s book *Kommunikation: samspel mellan människor* (2016), social conventions have caused women to be expected to be more passive, emotional and invested in relationships (Nilsson and Waldemarson, 2016: 117-121). Goffman’s study of advertisements argues that women are stereotypically portrayed as submissive, in need of protection, passive, objectified into sexual objects and weak.

In her book *Music Video and the Politics of Representation* (2013) Diane Railton analyses the difference in how black and white women are portrayed in music videos. She finds that there are major differences in how white females and black females are represented in music video culture. Railton finds that the black woman is portrayed with “hypersexuality” (Railton, 2013: 94) and as being animalistic and argues that especially the emphasis on the buttocks is a symbol for sexual appetite. Railton argues that this differs a lot from the representation of the white woman in music videos, who is supposed to give an impression of being pure and keeping her sexual behaviour under control. It is as if the white woman is “positioned as responsible for the restriction of sexual behaviour” (Railton, 2013: 92).

**Stereotypically male representations**

Men are taught and expected to more rational, active, independent and dominant. (Nilsson and Waldemarson, 2016: 117-121). According to Goffman, the stereotypical man is dominant, aggressive, superior and active. (Goffman, 1976).

4.1.2 RELATED RESEARCHES: GENDER IN MUSIC VIDEOS

*Cara Wallis (2010)*

Relevant to the present research is a study done by Cara Wallis in 2010. She conducted an investigation into gender stereotypes in music videos based on Goffman’s findings and theories. She coded the five gender stereotypical female body language based on Goffman’s categories, i.e. Men being
taller than women (1), ‘The Feminine Touch’ indicating the female body is fragile (2), ‘Function Ranking’ meaning that men are more active than women (3), women taking on submissive postures (4) and ‘Licenced Withdrawal’ as an indicator of needing protection (5). Wallis looked at 30 seconds segments of 24 music videos played on MTV and MTV2. She analysed them from the objectification theory, and found that women are still, 34 years after Goffman had stated his conceptual framework, generally portrayed as sexual objects and subordinate, whereas males are portrayed as active and aggressive.

Jennifer Aubrey and Cynthia M. Frisby (2011)

Jennifer Aubrey and Cynthia M. Frisby’s study Sexual Objectification in Music Videos: A Content Analysis Comparing Gender and Genre (2011) looked at 50 music videos by each of three different genres: pop, R&B/hip hop and country to see whether or not sexual objectification is gender specified and/or genre specified. They did this by coding specific indicators of objectification. Their research concludes that women are far more sexually objectified than men, and this takes place mostly in the genre pop/R&B, which is the genre Beyoncé represents. The authors acknowledge the fact the feminist movement in more recent years is not condoning objectification, but sees it as a woman’s freedom to define herself and claim her sexuality. The objectification itself can therefore not be defined as anti-feminist, but the lack of variety in the way women are portrayed suggests a narrow stereotype of what it means to be a woman, therefore an absence of the feminist mindset of diversity and freedom.

5. Material and Methodology

5.1 MATERIAL

Within Lemonade, there are 11 music videos and spoken poetry sequences between each music video. Because of playlists and radio stations, people are generally more familiar with the music than the poetry parts. Six of the 11 music videos are also published on YouTube and thereby accessible to a wider audience than the remaining 5 videos, which are accessible only via the film. The film itself is only available to stream for members of the streaming platform Tidal. The three videos with the most views on YouTube out of these, to date, are Sorry (293 Million views), Hold Up (167 Million views) and Formation (169 Million views). Both Sorry and Hold Up start with a spoken
part not belonging to the song, which lasts between 1 and 1.5 minutes. Even though Beyoncé is visible in some of those introduction parts, many viewers are likely to forward the videos to where the song starts as they would click on the video to watch the music video for the specific songs. It moreover seems very plausible that the viewers are particularly interested in seeing Beyoncé perform the songs as she is the communicator from their perspective, and admire her for her vocals and lyrical content. Based on these assumptions, this study has set out to start the analysis of each video from the beginning of when the verse vocals come in. The end point of the analysed sequences is then marked where the video cuts to a new setting, because that is where the arguably strongest impression of Beyoncé in the video ends. The sequences that are most popularly viewed in *Lemonade* were thus chosen for analysis, and are:

*Sorry*: 1:23 - 1:26  
*Hold Up*: 1:52 - 2:04  
*Formation*: 0:22 - 0:25

### 5.2 METHODOLOGY

#### 5.2.1 INTRODUCTION TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Philosopher Foucault introduced the term *Discourse* in the 1960s (Hall, 2013). According to Foucault’s concept, the word ‘discourse’ does not just refer to actual linguistic language, but blends language and actions together as one language, constantly in circular motion and affecting one another. Discourse analysis criticises a realist approach of looking at data such as texts or visuals. In other words, it refuses to look at reality as something with a defined and fixed meaning that data simply mirrors. When several statements represent a topic a certain way, their representation of it becomes “authoritative” (Rose, 2001: 142) in creating a common concept of it. Rather than the world giving meaning to the texts, the texts shape the meanings in the world, which then consequently shape our concepts, actions and behaviours. In this respect, discourse analysis places great importance on the relationship between language and behaviour of a social group. Discourse does not only decide how we think and act towards a topic, in fact “Discourse . . . constructs the topic” (Hall, 2013: 44).

Power and knowledge are closely linked according to Foucault (Hall, 2013). The two of them together can take on a role of authority. Foucault uses the example of how the way criminals are pun-
ished is a result of commonly shared and exchanged knowledge about criminals mixed with a powerful authority using that knowledge to decide how to best treat them. Also, beauty standards are socially constructed by discourse. Several institutions, advertisements and statements together can socially construct a society’s beauty standards by sending out coherent messages about what defines something as beautiful. Our attitudes and behaviours are not naturally determined, but they are results of as what role we perceive ourselves to be within a context and society, e.g. as beautiful or not beautiful. Discourse analysis asks what the data contributes to the flow of knowledge in a society, and how it naturalises what it claims to be true in a persuasive way. Because all meanings are so dependent on the context discourse analysis sees the data and the findings in the social and historical context that it was produced in (Hall, 2013: 44-49).

According to Foucault “what we think we 'know' in a particular period about, say, crime has a bearing on how we regulate, control and punish criminals.” (Hall, 2013: 49). In this respect, what we, in our current historical context, think it means to be a feminist has an effect on how feminists are behaving and represented. In other words, feminism takes its meaning from discourse, such as conversations, music videos, TV series and books. Beyoncé’s self-proclaimed title as a modern day feminist, undoubtedly, makes her contributions to society influential parts of the discourse that defines modern day feminism due to her incredibly influential status in the world.

5.2.2 QUALITATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON LEMONADE

This study is a qualitative research of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* (2016). The way the data is prepared and organised is by choosing three short sequences believed to be the most popular sequences of *Lemonade*. The process and reasoning for this is explained in the material chapter. The data is referenced to by the song titles. This study approaches the data through discourse analysis as the research method.

A discourse analysis offers a “‘deconstruction’ of the data in order to expose the ways in which text or visual images do the work of creating or sustaining particular aspects of social life.” (Denscombe, 2010: 287). Therefore, the present discourse analysis is to be viewed as a deconstructive discourse analysis that applies a detailed examination of the data, in this case the described sections of *Lemonade*, and focuses on contradictions, inclusions and absences found (Denscombe, 2010).
This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of modern day feminism by looking at the female gender representation in *Lemonade* and what it communicates about being a woman via Beyoncé’s body language. Hence, the discourse analysed in this study is the one of modern day feminism in popular culture. What does *Lemonade* portray as being a feminist woman? How does it do so via body language? It puts the findings in context with the current trends of postfeminism in popular culture and stereotypical representations of women in music videos thus far, as found out from related researches.

The analysis will seek to understand the discursive representation of the chosen segments by connecting specific body language to meaning and indications about a person’s mood and/or character. Those connections are not drawn upon personal interpretations, but on a catalogue of body language theory by previous scholars as listed in the theory chapter. In order to this systematically, the analysis begins with two tables that on one side list specific gestural and postural traits to look for, and on the other side list the three video sequences. The identified postural and gestural traits are ones that have been given a meaning to by scholars and theorists in regards of mood or character. To give an example, if a scholar has attributed confidence or a lack of confidence to a specific hand gesture this would then be included in the table as a trait to look out for. The two tables are filled out by the researcher in regards to whether these attributes are found, or not found, within the sequences and, in some cases, to what extent. The research then proceeds to a more detailed written out analyses of each sequence, summing up findings from the tables. The next step of the analysis consists of a text comparing the findings of each sequence. This is done to furthermore look out for any consistencies and contradictions as to what the sequences may communicate about Beyoncé via her body language, to create a more general picture of what *Lemonade* discursively communicates as the traits of a modern day feminist. Following this analysis of the chosen sequences within *Lemonade*, there is a summed up conclusion answering the research question about what *Lemonade* communicates as the definition of a modern day feminist via postures and gestures. In the name of discourse analysis, the results are furthermore discussed in regards to the historical, cultural and social context of *Lemonade*’s release, in this case postfeminism, popular culture, gender stereotyping in music videos and the music industry.
6. Analysis

The research data is analysed using discourse analysis methodology. Below follows a detailed look at each sequence, first in the form of two charts creating an overview, followed by a written analysis of each sequence. The analysis then moves on to a comparative analysis putting the findings of all sequences in context with each other. The results are later discussed within their historical and social context from the perspective of feminism.

6.1 ANALYSIS OF EACH SEQUENCE

The two charts blow present the sequence titles on one side, and postural or gestural aspects to look for on the other side. The postural and gestural aspects chosen are ones that the theory chapter places meanings on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSTURE</th>
<th>SORRY</th>
<th>HOLD UP</th>
<th>FORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaning forward</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open arms versus closed arms</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight head versus tilted head</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Straight overall in context with rest, but slightly moving and less perfectly straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansive versus closed</td>
<td>Expansive</td>
<td>Expansive</td>
<td>Expansive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily relaxation</td>
<td>Yes, upper body leaning backwards, arms and one leg resting on chair</td>
<td>Yes, it the ways possible when walking: relaxed shoulders</td>
<td>Hard to define as her upper body looks straight and not relaxed, but her arm is relaxed on her leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowering body versus standing up tall</td>
<td>Lowering, but on a chair which changes the meaning according to Goffman</td>
<td>Standing up tall</td>
<td>Lowering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Posture aspects found in the analysed sequences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GESTURES</th>
<th>SORRY</th>
<th>HOLD UP</th>
<th>FORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Manipulator 1: Soft self-touching</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Manipulator 2: ‘Licensed Withdrawal’ by covering mouth</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Manipulator 3: Sucking or biting finger</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any other kinds of manipulators</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustrators</strong></td>
<td>Yes, emphasising the line “I ain’t sorry”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emblems</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Gesture aspects found in the analysed sequences*

**6.1.1 SORRY**

*Image 1*
Beyoncé is seated on a chair sideways with one leg touching ground whilst the other is leaning over the side of the chair. Her upper body is leaning backwards, resting on the back of the chair. Her head is held up straight. In fact, it is so straight so that it lines up with the straight shapes of the vertical edges of the chair. Her arms are open, one of them leaning on the side of the chair, the other illustrating the vocalised parts with small movements.

The backwards leaning nature of Beyoncé’s pose suggests the absence of positiveness (Mehrabian 1972: 19-25). It’s important to mention that the absence of one thing does not necessarily mean the presence of its opposite, in this case negativity, and the aspects of body language need to be seen in a context with each other to make sense. In this respect, rather than standing for negativity, this study finds the backwards leaning to be a form of expansive bodily relaxation, together with the arms and one leg resting on the side of the chair. An expansive posture communicates pride, arrogance, or disdain, and relaxation indicates a higher status than the addressee (Mehrabian, 1972). The open arms are also indicators for warmth and acceptance (Mehrabian, 1972). Beyoncé’s body is lowered, but due to the fact that it is lowered in the context of being seated on a furniture with her head is held up straight, there is a mixture of superiority and sexual availability (Goffman, 1979). The absence of any sorts of manipulators suggests no lack of confidence, fear and discomfort. She does use some illustrators to emphasise the lyrical lines she’s singing whilst keeping the rest of her body still. Ekman distinguishes between the meaning of an increased and decreased use of illustrators, the first indicating involvement and the latter indicating tiredness and boredom. (Ekman, 2004). Because it is the only body part Beyoncé purposely moves it’s tempting to look at as as an increased use. However, looking at it more critically, the movements remain small and effortless. Not much energy is invested, and that is why to the researcher they remain a decreased use indicating boredom (Ekman, 2004). In addition to that, the absence of any other illustrators that could emphasise the message, suggests that they are not used because of an emotional reaction, but in fact the opposite: they are deliberate and controlled.
Beyoncé is walking with a straight back and head. Her shoulders are relaxed. Her arms are hanging down on each side, indicating no specific gestures.

Beyoncé’s erect and straight back communicate pride, conceit, arrogance or disdain (Mehrabian, 1972). In her walking position, her relaxation can be identified via her relaxed shoulders which indicate status. Her body is not lowered in any form, but it is held up tall with a straight head which indicates superiority and disdain (Goffman, 1979). Her open arms communicate warmth and acceptance (Mehrabian, 1972) and the absence of any manipulators claims that she is in no need of protection, her body is not fragile and she is not ashamed (Goffman, 1979). Even though the absence of any illustrators may convey tiredness or boredom (Ekman, 2004), it needs to be looked at critically in context with the other findings. This study finds that her erect body posture all over by standing up and walking, in fact, contradicts boredom.
6.1.3 FORMATION

Beyoncé is half seated half laying down, sideways. Only one leg is visible to be folded up. On that leg, one arm is resting which remains still throughout the sequence. Her head is not as still as in the other sequences, slightly moving to the music and tilting to the side. But compared to the rest of the posture, her head remains the straightest component.

What is interesting about this posture is the difference between its interpretation at first glance compared to after looking at the specific body parts in more detail. At first glance it appeared relaxed, but looking at it closer her position appears uncomfortable and unnatural. This is the case because her back is straight and erect, but her lower body is seated sideways on the ground. It seems contradictory that half her body is laying down naturally and half her body is sitting up straight. Her straight back and head stand for pride, conceit, arrogance or disdain (Mehrabian, 1972), and her relaxed lower body is an indicator of status (Mehrabian, 1972). However, it is debatable whether any part of her body can be defined as being relaxed when the upper body is so erect. It is also debatable whether this pose is expansive or not, as the visible leg is folded, and in addition to that Beyoncé is lowering her body, which in its laying form can either communicate deference or sexual availability (Goffman, 1979). That contradicts itself with the pride communicated by her straight upper body. There are no manipulators which makes her seem non fragile, nor afraid or ashamed (Goffman,
Her slightly moving head illustrates the singing lines as it moves to the rhythm of her vocals. Like the hand movements in *Sorry*, this illustrator does not require much invested energy which indicates a decreased use, hence boredom (Ekman, 2004). Here too, like in *Sorry*, the absence of any additional illustrators, but the use of one specific movement, strongly contradicts an emotional unplanned reaction, but suggests self-control.

### 6.2 ANALYSIS OF SEQUENCES IN CONTEXT WITH EACH OTHER

Overall, in all three sequences there are certain coherences in what Beyoncé’s body language communicates that lets the study create an overall persona. Beyoncé is consistently communicated by the sequences as being in no need of protection and having no shame. This is apparent by her consistent lack of manipulators and her consistently held up straight head. It contradicts the general notion of women appearing to be submissive and in need of protection, and rather sends out a message of pride and independence. Because she is not using many illustrators, and when she does they are deliberate rather than natural, and it contradicts the stereotype of women existing thus far as being overly emotional. In fact, she appears male by simply looking at her postures.

The related researches from Cara Wallis (2010) and Jennifer Aubrey and Cynthia M. Frisby (2011), that investigate gender portrayal in music videos particularly, both found that female sexual objectification is an ongoing reality within music videos, and Beyoncé’s postures, 5 years later, do not contradict this. She appears sexually available by laying down on the ground or on a chair. However, it is crucial to mention that, in contrast to the related studies, in *Lemonade* this only happens on one single level via her body posture: laying down. Beyoncé’s sexual availability is not portraying her as subordinate in the context with pride being conveyed through other body language aspects. It therefore appears conscious and self-chosen.

Combining this self-chosen and conscious display of sexual availability with the pride, independence and lack of being overly emotional, there appears to be an overall authoritative sentiment communicated via Beyoncé’s body language. She appears to be in control, and her being in control welcomes the objectification of her body via posture.
7. Conclusion and Discussion

This study’s aim is to contribute to the understanding of modern day feminism and looks at the female gender representation in *Lemonade* to analyse what it communicates about being a modern day feminist via Beyoncé’s body language.

In this respect, the findings are in some ways coherent with what many say characterises the postfeminist attitude in terms of contradictions. As mentioned in the background chapter, Trier-Bienik finds that the TV series *GIRLS* is exemplary of the postfeminist modern day woman to both be condoning and welcoming objectification (Trier-Bienik, 2016). This study finds that Beyoncé’s body language in *Lemonade* supports this attitude of contradiction by being both sexually available and in charge of her surroundings. Beyoncé’s body language in *Lemonade* reinforces and supports some of the most recent trends of postfeminism in popular culture, communicating the modern day feminist to be contradictory, welcoming the male gaze, but rejecting a powerless position. *Lemonade*’s communicated version of femininity embraces male attributes such as rationality, absence of being overly emotional, status and independence.

What she appears to convey most markedly is the appearance of a strong woman who chooses rather than is chosen. She is in control over her surroundings, like a queen, much in coherence with what Otula writes may be Beyoncé’s marketing tool within the music industry, a “pop spectacle” as “a powerful black queen” (Olutola, 2018: 104). Beyoncé’s body language neither buys into the subordinate, pure or sexually restrictive stereotype of white women in music videos, as described by Railton, nor does she communicate animalistic hypersexuality as commonly seen by black women in music videos according to Railton. Instead of representing any female stereotype in music videos, she appears rationally in charge, not just like a queen, but also like a man. She appears dominant and rational, much like the stereotypical male representation. Hence, in her postures and gestures there is an absence of femininity. Yet, there is a sexuality present in her poses laying down and displaying herself for the gaze of the viewer.

In the name of discourse theory, meanings and actions are intertwined. What sells the most is coherent with what is trendy, before even making the album. To the researcher of this study it is unknown whether the aim of *Lemonade* is deliberately responding to certain postfeminist trends in order to sell, or to redefine the postfeminist woman, or both. From a moral viewpoint, Anne Thorpe’s argument that designers have power to modernise or outdate things suggests a responsibility when de-
signing. Therefore, it is important to keep the production’s main objectives in mind to gain an insightful perspective of the study’s findings. What raises questions over *Lemonade*’s messages is the music industry’s main objective being financial gain (Olutola, 2018), and not bettering the world by fighting for equality. As previously stated in the background chapter, Beyoncé’s portrayal as the one seen in *Lemonade* may just be what sells the most (Olutola, 2018). To sell well, a product needs to respond to a target audience’s preferences. It is the listeners’ and viewers’ behaviour that her work influences by giving them a version of what it means to be a feminist woman today.

Tying these findings to the much debated Bey Feminism, it seems that where the debates are rooted lies the ‘characteristic’ of Bey Feminism. It lives off of its contradictions. The debates cause a hype around what feminism is and if Beyoncé’s releases are feminist, and *Lemonade* reinforces what has been both condoned and celebrated: sexuality mixed with authority, even male authority. However, her motherhood or role as a wife is not visible in *Lemonade*, but play a crucial part in the debated Bey Feminism. Therefore, it is curious that much of Beyoncé’s reputation as a feminist is based on people’s background knowledge about her private life. It is not her work that conveys that multifaceted version of a woman. *Lemonade*’s version of a modern day feminist does not place emphasis on a nurturing warmth or motherhood.

What becomes apparent in this analysis is that body language components need to be seen in a context with each other. Meanings attributed to certain body language aspects are influenced by the presence or absence of other aspects of body language. This is why this study wants to mention that it may be the case that the postures and gestures tell a different story when separated from the context of Beyoncé’s clothing or facial expressions than when viewed combined.

8. Further research

There are several areas of Beyoncé’s most recent visual album *Lemonade* that have not been included in the scope of this study, leaving ample opportunity for further analysis and scrutiny.

Regarding production aspects, it is of value to note that clothing and facial expressions may have added significant meaning to the overall message. At a first glance, it is curious that the posture that
has been analysed to convey the most subordinate attitude combined with sexually availability (Formation) is combined with the least skin exposure, and the more manly postures are combined with feminine and sexy clothing. In fact, there seems to be a lot more femininity displayed via Beyoncé’s clothing. It is also of interest to take a further look at facial expressions displayed. They may, at firm impression, appear rather neutral and emotionless. Technical aspects such as camera perspective would further challenge findings in the posture in regards to aspects such as “lowering the body” because it is debatable whether a so called lowered body refers to lower than a person standing up straight, or lower than the camera.

On a broader scale, there are several contextual aspects that are likely to have had an impact on the making of Lemonade and may serve as a foundation for further examination. It would be of interest to narrow down the perspective on modern day feminism in popular culture to more specific traits that Beyoncé represents despite being a woman. Some of these traits may include that she is a black woman, a married woman, a musical superstar, a mother, or a singer representing a specific music genre.

Taking the example of looking at her as a global musical superstar, it would be of interest to examine common traits among other global musical superstars representing similar or different genres, e.g. Madonna, Miley Cyrus or Rihanna.

Or, by looking at her as a black woman singing about her husband’s infidelity, it may be of interest to look at how the history of slavery in United States may be intertwined with her husband’s infidelity: Beyoncé is most likely not only speaking about her personal marriage crisis in this album, but a more general, racial and generational issue. She may want to break the cycle by offering forgiveness. There is indeed a considerable wealth of writings and theory that relate and discuss the issue of male infidelity to the history of slavery and cultural trauma that this study does not comment on. Moreover, Beyonce’s lyrical content is itself very interesting as material to analyse from a feminist perspective. Again, they may to some extent support the messages conveyed by body language but may indeed also contradict the same.

Race may have great influence on the body language portrayed in Lemonade. Beyonce’s strong body language that was found through this study to very much be in line with postfeminist sexuality as powerful and self-guided, may indeed also relate to a representation of herself as a black person
of Afro-Caribbean decent. This study does not seek to separate whether the strength and power position through her body language is saying ‘I am a woman in control’ or ‘I am a black person in control’ or indeed ‘I am a strong black woman in control’. Certainly the latter possibility may come across most relevantly to the recipient as she is both a woman and of black identity but we cannot be sure of the intent of the message and this study is only seeking to understand her position, through her body language, within feminism.

It would moreover be of interest to see how her representation has changed with time, as time and concepts of feminism have changed and evolved.

9. References


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## 10. Images


Ayelle - ‘Parts’

Music Video: Documentation

by Magdalena Wolk
Visual Communication VT2019
Malmö University
Problem area

When we think of musicians gaining exposure within the music industry we think of music as the primary tool of communication between an artist and their audience. However, through the growth of social media the first thing we see of an artist is in fact visual, by for example scrolling through the Instagram feed. Often times we come across adverts of songs where only see a glance of the music video with no sound until we are curious enough to turn the sound on. That’s why an artist’s visual identity is more important than ever. They need to communicate visually as clearly and strongly as they aim to do sonically in order to be given a chance by potential listeners. Music videos are one way of visually communicating for musicians, and they are special because they represent the actual music. Even if music videos are mostly available in their full length on platforms such a YouTube rather than social media platforms they do also exist in the news feeds on Instagram and Facebook in the form of teasers, so they remain a possible first impression to new potential fans. Ben Madden who wrote an article for Cool Accidents states that “Music videos often don’t just complement the song, but build on it - which, for fans, can be the difference between simply enjoying the song and truly understanding it.” (Madden, 2018). That gives a music video the ability to connecting the audience to the song more.

Musical artist Ayelle has a very distinctive music style, a well established fanbase, but she has only released two official music videos in the 5 years that she’s been an active musician. The visual side of things is not her priority and therefore not incredibly coherent. This is an opportunity for me as a visual communicator to help her communicate a song visually to the audience that already exists with the image she’s already representing.

Sender

The sender of this music video is the artist herself, Ayelle. Ayelle’s musical style is R&B influenced mixed with rather slow tempo and ambient production styles. She has been releasing music since 2016, and has managed to build a following of 4577
followers on Facebook and 8283 followers on Instagram. She is currently not signed to any label but she has management based in New York and London, and is currently speaking and negotiating with various labels about her future plans in hopes to sign with one that aligns with her visions. When speaking to me she revealed that it is important to her not to rush into any deal as she wants to make sure that any deal with a label will be a deal that supports and respects what she has already built as an independent artist and trusts her creatively, rather than trying to change her. Therefore, it is in Ayelle’s interest to create a video that resonates with her current fanbase.

**Target audience**

Her current fan base and potential new fans (target audience) are the receivers. Before starting the MP production I got access to some of Ayelle’s insights on her target audience from her social media accounts.
It turns out that the information from the different platforms varies and are not coherent in terms of gender, age and location. However, it can be generalised into the group of 24-35 year olds, both male and female, living in London and Los Angeles mainly.

London and Los Angelos are both not only international and big cities, but also homes to a big part of the music industry. In fact, it has become evident that New York, London and Los Angeles are the three major music capitals in the world producing most music and musical stars (Florida, 2015). Additionally, Ayelle tends to collaborate with several producers on different songs rather than sticking to one. Therefore, it is plausible that a big amount of her fanbase consists of the music industry itself, such as producers.

Ayelle’s music always has very audible lyrical content. Her lyrics mostly deal with relationships from an autobiographical viewpoint, and are quite analytical of the human psychology. I believe that music is well received when the listeners recognize themselves in it. The fact that Ayelle’s lyrics are always written from an autobiographical viewpoint and yet people seem to recognize themselves in the lyrics must mean they think like her. It makes it plausible that her target audience is reflective, emotional and interested in the human psychology.
Combining these aspects, I assume that the persona of Ayelle’s target audience consists of a producer, or other music industry people who are interested in working with and taking inspiration from music with a meaningful reflective messages.

**Publishing**

The music video will be published on YouTube via Ayelle’s YouTube channel. Either way, in real life this aspect is up to the artist, and not to me as the producer of a music video. However, YouTube is the most common platform to upload full music videos to, whilst promoting shorter teasers of it on social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. As mentioned in my definition of my problem area, on both Facebook and Instagram videos autoplay as people scroll through their newsfeed which is why it makes sense to tease it with actual teaser video uploads on those platforms rather than just a photo or link to the YouTube video. But the actual full length version of this video will be available on YouTube, next to the artist’s previous music video releases which also supports coherence in her way of releasing. In addition to that reasoning, according to Medium.com YouTube is “the second biggest search engine over Google and the largest streaming music service worldwide” (Boardman, 2016) and a blog post on Reverbnation wrote recently “YouTube has helped break massive acts like The Weeknd and still remains one of the best music discovery tools around.” (McGuire, 2018).

**Research**

In this part I am going to take a look at Ayelle’s other music videos and her social media content in general in order to sum up visual key factors of hers. I will then look at related media productions that work as an inspiration for this project. Finally, I will sum up how all of these aspects can be adjusted to Ayelle’s target audience in this video project.
Ayelle’s previous music videos


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wd1d5b_458

This video does not portray Ayelle, but instead shows a dancer dancing in the woods with modern looking narrow lights situated in the nature. There is a man featured too whose role I cannot identify clearly, but he seems to observe the woman. This video has a very clean look.

2. “Mad” (2018)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO3puzUcenU

This video is shot in a studio and features Ayelle lip syncing whilst dancing to the song.
The video incorporates shots of a body covered in paint and fabrics. Again, there is no clear storyline, but all very monotone until the end.

Comparing these two videos to each other, they have a wide screen, sleek and clean look in common, and an emphasis in movements rather than story lines. However, they are not coherent in my opinion. They don’t share a certain atmosphere, environment, colour scheme or editing style. They do therefore not provide much of a visual identity, but rather expose a lack of this.

Ayelle’s social media content
When looking at Ayelle’s social media posts I could identify some clear key factors in her representation: Whilst she is not tied to certain colours, vintage or modern looks, or layouts in any form, there is a coherence in her clothing style which is mostly sporty and casual:
She also uses a logo, but she is in the process of changing the logo, so for this music video I made use of her new logo:

**Logo so far:**    **New logo:**

But regardless from visuals, there is also an aspect of her writing style that speaks about her image strongly: Her communication style is brief and casual (you = u, though = tho) which to me strengthens the impression of her being casual and informal rather than precise or elegant in her communication:
Related media productions

1. BANKS - ‘This Is What It Feels Like’ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4W4uNZfAOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4W4uNZfAOg)

This video serves as a reference because of the setting where it is filmed. My video for Ayelle has in common with this video that is filmed in a modern apartment, indoors.

2. Lolo Zouai - ‘Blue’ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLWQyntxh54](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLWQyntxh54)
This video is a good reference for the editing style. Ayelle and I agreed a vintage look early on, and she mentioned this video to me as an inspiration. It also mixes different formats which is something we spoke about during our first meet up too.

**How these findings can be adjusted to target audience**

Ayelle’s visual coherence lies in her sporty and casual clothing and a non formal way of communicating, not just in visuals such as photos or videos but also in the way she visually writes. This can easily be incorporated in our music video project in the form of outfits and subtitles.

But also showing skin exposure and appearing feminine and sexy is beneficial to the current trends of postfeminism in popular culture. Modern day feminism often rejects that femininity and feminism cannot exist together (Gill, 2007). For example, the contemporary and popular TV series *Girls* portrays the typical feminist young woman to both “reject and buy into [her] objectification” (Trier-Bienik, 2015: 26). By mixing Ayelle’s casual sporty style with high skin exposure, she aligns with the contemporary trends of postfeminism in popular culture, which may help the video’s popularity.

The visual references that me and Ayelle agreed on as inspiration for different aspects for the video lay out the direction of the video being filmed indoors in a modern apartment but in a vintage looking style.

In order to make sure it fits with her target audience I think it is important to make clear that her target audience has already proven to support what she has been doing so far by being consistently growing (in January her following on Facebook was 2400 whereas now it is 4577). Therefore it is adjusted to her audience already by making sure it supports whatever elements have shown to be coherent in Ayelle’s visuals, such as the aspects I mentioned above. But beyond that, there are factors that can strengthen the connection felt between a viewer to the video. In a YouTube videp, Ralph Murphy, a professional songwriter and musician, speaks about what makes a listener like a song in a class he teaches about songwriting at Loyola University. Murphy explains that what makes a person like a song is when they feel that the song is about
them. I believe this does not apply to just songwriting but to any form of communication such as video making, too. Therefore, to adjust the music video to Ayelle’s target audience further I needed to make sure Ayelle somehow represents who her target audience is: 24-35 years old, living in London or LA. Even if the video setting is set indoors it is clearly set in London. You can tell by the Victorian houses outside the window, but also in general the lifestyle of it being a small apartment has a big-city vibe to it. By the look of the apartment, she also seems slightly wealthier than a young broke student, which makes her seem between 24 and 35 rather than younger.

The rooms of the apartment are rather modern with no personal belongings, but only furniture. The minimalistic style with an emphasis on certain features, such as an artwork on the wall, suits Ayelle’s musical style. Ayelle’s music production is ambient and stripped back, but builds up with further sounds when the vocal, lyrics and attitude demand to be emphasised. In addition to that, the story of the song deals with loneliness. Therefore, it makes sense to make the surrounding seem like a juxtaposition of a home and a vacancy. It’s as if she is home, but not really at home, because something or someone is missing which takes away the homely feeling.

As analysed in the target audience chapter, Ayelle’s listeners may consist of people in the music industry. Hence, people interested in arts. Therefore, it would make sense to film in an apartment with some “artsy” features such as artwork on the wall, or the art book that can be seen in the final video at 0:58 - 1:16.

### Material, method and working process

1. **Sending my portfolio to artist:** The first thing I did was contacting a few artists I was interested in working with via their facebook pages by sending them my portfolio and explaining that I was looking for a music video project. I got two artists saying yes, Ayelle being one of them, and as I felt most connected with her musically I went for her.

2. **Meet-up:** As both she and I were in London in January I met up with the artist for a coffee to discuss ideas, decided filming dates and location. Because this
artist is mostly US based, and only in London occasionally, these things needed to be planned first. We decided on filming February 4-6 and to hunt for an AirBnB apartment for those dates that looks stylistically fitting. During our meet she explained to me that she had looked at my portfolio and liked my vintage style that I incorporate in many of my productions, and that she would like to combine that with a modern look. Speaking of the related media productions as visual inspiration, we decided it would be good to find an apartment that had a modern look to it, but that the edit itself would be more vintage looking. This is AirBnB we eventually decided on:

We spoke through a narrative for the video. The story-line was to remain simple. The song deals with how someone has parts of you and the missing of the person equals a missing of those parts. So we decided to make the video about Ayelle being alone in an apartment whilst throwing in memory shots of her and her partner in the same locations as she is alone. By including a mobile phone in Ayelle’s hand we could strengthen the message of somebody being missed and far away.

3. The artist sent over statistics of her social medias and I made some research on her previous releases and overall identity. This is something I have discussed above in my chapter about target audience. At this point of research we had already met up once and talked through ideas, so the way I used my findings
was by making sure our decisions aligned with the target audience and the key factors of Ayelle’s visual identity.

4. Mood board: I sent over a mood board to Ayelle which included ideas through during our meet u and which I had further developed after doing my research. This included ideas for editing styles, clothing, perspectives. The idea was to make a video that involved several different formats as a way to distinguish between parts, but a monotone setting. Inspired by the video for ‘Blue’ by Lolo Zouaï (one of the related media productions), in my moodboard I included trials of what different kinds of formats and modern vs. vintage effects could be used for the edit by using of Ayelle’s social media photos as an example:
I also included ideas for apartment and partner shots inspired by the other related media production (“This Is What It Feels Like” by BANKS):

Our initial idea was to keep the video in black and white. There was no reason to this except our personal taste.

5. Filming: We filmed between February 4th and February 6th. One of the days, Ayelle’s boyfriend was there too in order to film the partner shots. During the filming days we were spontaneous with many shots. My equipment was my camera and my tripod, but we only used natural light for this shoot which worked well as the apartment was bright. We combined handheld instable footage recordings and very still and static ones filmed with the tripod. However, during the process we developed a liking for the handheld material.
6. **Editing:** I spent about one month creating 8 edits. I quickly changed my mind about keeping all the video in black and white as it was hard to make a clear distinction between the present and the past shots that way. So I decided to keep the present shots in colour and the memories from the past in black and white. The video was to look as if it was being recorded in real time with a VHS cam recorder with a play time sign and a timer. In addition to having no color, the throwback memory parts were to be distinguished from the present ones by not having the play time sign and timer. I created the VHS look by cropping the size of the video on the left and right sides. I used a YouTube tutorial in order to create my own preset in Premiere with effects that imitate the VHS look, and in addition to that I also downloaded a VHS filter with the play sign and timer. The first edits made the chorus into a completely different style than the verses, as I had spoken to Ayelle about using different formats in the video. These are some examples of looks I tried out:

**Verses:**

VHS look, present shots in color, memory shots in black and white
The black and white scenes are representing the past, whereas the coloured scenes are representing the present.

Because both the present and past clips take place in the same scenery setting of the apartment they needed to somehow be distinguished in an obvious way. I believe black and white is often in our minds associated with a vintage style because of the simple reason that black and white TV and photography existed before coloured visuals. Hence, I decided to make use of that connotation by marking the clips displaying the past with an absence of colour. The coloured clips of the present are faded in the colours because I felt this fit the melancholic mood of the song better than strong bright colours.

The song is about a sensation of missing someone and feeling alone. It’s not a feeling of strength, but rather vulnerability. I find that vulnerability often results in feeling self-conscious. The fact that Ayelle is filmed throughout the video in the style of a handheld VHS cam whilst also being seemingly alone in the apartment stands for her feeling of self-consciousness.

The overall vintage look does not have anything to do with Ayelle specifically, but more with what to me appear to be the current trends within music video production as I have witnessed many musicians within various genres create vintage looking music videos in recent years. Furthermore, as mentioned in my documentation, Ayelle’s previous music videos and photos do not suggest a very specific visual identity in regards to how things are edited. Therefore, her identity does not seem to be based on most production choices as much as her clothes or facial expressions, leaving much stylistic freedom to play with.
Choruses:

Wide screen, clean, no VHS look, full screen, occasional collage look

These are some images of previous cuts. They differed from the final edit in the way that the choruses were edited. Initially, I felt would be more interesting if the formats and looks vary depending on the song parts. However, it ended up feeling disruptive of the storyline that the verses were conveying. The verses already portray two time dimensions, the past and the present, and to then go to a new format and look in the chorus ended up confusing. Also the artist preferred the VHS hand held camera look, and part of my job as a visual communicator is of course to please the clients wishes.

We also preferred the material that was filmed in a more hand held style rather than shot with a tripod in a still setting. Ayelle was happy with the edit that I then brought into the 50 % MP seminars where I got the following feedback: I was advised to use more close-ups, and to try out different solutions with the play time timer as it was resetting itself after one and a half minutes. I was also advised to find a way to
separate the past time black and white shots more from the present ones.

7. **Subtitles:** Ayelle chose which lyrical parts to highlight via subtitles, and I then created yellow subtitles in the font Avenir Oblique as I found it to look neutral and modern, a contrast to the VHS look but fitting with the modern apartment. I chose yellow because it is a colour that distinguishes itself from the blue tones of the video:

![Subtitle Example](image)

The reasoning for including the subtitles lies in speculation that the target audience may consist of the music industry itself (as analysed in the target audience chapter) such as producers who have an interest in meaningful lyrical content has been embedded in the making of the video by highlighting certain lyrical content as subtitles, and visually creating a narrative that emphasises the lyrical content.

The subtitles also reflect on Ayelle's casual writing style by using informal ways of writing words, such as “u” instead of “you”.

8. **Changes after 50% MP seminars:** After the feedback I got at the 50% seminar I looked for other VHS filters with timers but could not find one that would last over a minute and a half. Also, both me and Ayelle liked that look of the current one and wanted to keep it. So I decided to let it reset itself to zero
after chorus 1 as that seems like a new day visually so it makes sense to restart. I also added a few more close-up shots to chorus 1, and I added date and times in the corners of the black and white memory parts to communicate stronger that those shots are from the past:

![Image of close-up shot](image.jpg)

**Documentation of end result**

Video can be watched here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEF2zX5_tGQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEF2zX5_tGQ)

**Reflection**

Generally I am happy with how the project went as it did go according to the plan mostly. But I am also aware of that the plan was loose and there was space for trials and new approaches which is also easier. In future projects there might be more of a pre decided concept that needs to turn out as it is planned to on the mood board, and there won’t be the flexibility to change things stylistically depending on what shots ended up looking the best. Due to this challenge I want to improve my technical skills for my future video shoots such as for example the implementation of non natural lights, and how to light settings properly. I also want to learn more about my camera settings. Technical skills will enable me to plan outcomes better and to stick to plans more, rather than spontaneous decisions.

For my thesis I am analysing non verbal communication messages in Beyoncé’s visual album Lemonade, and by doing so I have come to realise how the smallest details can in fact contribute to messages we are unaware of sending out as the visuals
producers

but need to be aware of. This is something I want to think about more in my future music video productions.

On a more general note, in regards to long term ethical aspects, by producing visuals I, as a visual communicator, need to acknowledge my moral responsibility I have when creating as everything being put out contributes to the general worldview and people’s values. Anne Thorpe writes in her book *The designer’s atlas of sustainability* (2008) that design has the power to make actions “modern or out-dated” (Thorpe 2008: 214). Therefore Thorpe finds it to be a designer’s job to balance what is so hard to balance: “total freedom and strict moral rules” (Thorpe 2008: 217). I think especially in the world of music video production it can be easy to forget as there is a fine balance between a music video being a commercial product looking for high exposure and an art project led by creativity and intuition rather than moral rule books.

References


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