Making Lemonade: Examining Female Empowerment Through Visual Music Media

By

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Abstract

This research study explores popular culture through visual music media, specifically Beyoncé's 2016 visual album titled *Lemonade*. Through a social constructionist lens, a phenomenological approach, and by incorporating psychoanalytic film theory, critical theory, feminist theory, and Black feminist theory, this study aims to uncover what aspects of visual music media empower youth girls aged 15-19 years. Through film-elicited interviews and digital focus groups, this study engaged with 11 youth girls from across Canada about what makes and does not make them feel empowered while viewing music videos. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to produce results which included three sensitizing concepts named cloak of competence, cloak of incompetence and generational language along with five emerging themes, listed as voice, unity, persistence, compassion and relatability Thematic results outlined visual, auditory, and metaphorical phenomena that empower and disempower youth girls. Empowering aspects to visual music media included visual depictions of voice, unity, auditory depictions of compassion and persistence, and a sense of relatability between the artist, situation, emotion, or setting.

Keywords: Beyoncé, celebrity feminist, empowerment, feminist activism, and popular culture.

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Table of Contents

Definitions

Beyoncé: a black female identifying artist, known for her lead role in the early 2000s girl band Destiny's Child and later for her independent chart-topping hits.

Black femme: a community of lesbian, transgender and CIS Black women creating resources for themselves in a world/system that denies them safety and security.

Booty: a colloquial term to reference 'buttock.'

Generational language: for the purpose of this study, is a concept coined by the researcher to navigate words, phrases, or speech patterns used by the participants to get at the center of the participants' lived experience.

Hip hop: a style of popular music from US Black and/or Hispanic origin.

Third wave feminism: a branch of feminism that took place from the 1990s to the early 2010s focusing on the many intersecting elements of feminism.

Fourth wave feminism: a phase of feminism that began around 2014 that focuses on the empowerment of women in girls mainly using internet tools and social activism.

Visual Music Media: also referred to as 'music videos' a medium that combines visual and auditory elements for entertainment purposes.

Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Introduction

Beyoncé Knowles is a pop culture icon. She is known for her curvy figure and acrobatic voice. A self-proclaimed feminist, she is listed by *Time* among the 100 most influential people in the world in 2013 and 2014. *Forbes* also listed her as the most powerful female in entertainment of 2015. On April 22, 2016, Beyoncé launched her sixth album, *Lemonade.* The album was debuted at 9pm EST on Saturday night on the cable channel HBO. It was a succession of music videos linked by poetry spoken by Somali-British poet Warsan Shire. The visual album packs in personal stories, experiences, and videos. During its release, Beyoncé supporters and skeptics flocked to the blogs to share their opinions on the artist's newest album, giving their opinions on how it does or does not provide women with the autonomy and self-determination to challenge adversities within their own societies. *Lemonade* is just one example of many pieces of visual media in today's visual world. Rooted in psychoanalytic film theory, critical theory, feminist and Black feminist theory, while undertaking a social constructionist approach, my research inquiry will aim to examine **what aspects of visual music media are perceived as empowering among youth girls?**

The study explores the impact visual music media has on young girls across Canada, in aims of determining what aspects of visual music media, if any, are perceived to empower young women. The researcher investigates these questions by soliciting participants between 15-19 years of age.

The purpose of this study is to provide the space for youth girls to share their interpretations and response of visual music media phenomena, including but not limited to reactions to stimuli, thoughts, feelings, and interpretations. While there is a wealth of research with respect to decoding music videos using discourse and content analysis, few studies have

used qualitative methods to decode visual music media. While informal content analyses of

music videos have been completed and published to blogs, podcasts, and video blogs, many do

not reflect the opinions of young women – which this study aimed to do.

Overview of Literature

Research in the field of power relationships, feminist media studies, and content analysis

of music videos exists in today's journals, books, and texts. Yet few studies have examined the

ways in which visual music media empower young women in a qualitative approach, besides

studies related to body image. The literature surveyed for the purpose of this study is rooted in

power relations, contemporary feminist thought and approach in addition to contemporary

popular culture. While "power to" is central to the research theme, it is important to note the

"power as social relations" as human relationships are always mediated by power (Digeser,

1997). Feminism has its roots in power relations. Third wave feminism is considered a turning

point that focuses less on the oppressive and exploitative power of marketing and media

phenomena and more on their potential for empowerment. The era of third-wave feminism is

considered by many academics as an outcry for change in power in modern society and sets the

stage for the 2017 #MeToo movement and age of digital feminist activism.

After the debut of MTV, academic researchers began to take interest to the network's

output, examining the content and generating interpretations on gender power dynamics present

in the aired videos. Studies show findings that sexual content of music videos exists and can

enhance viewer enjoyment. However, there are limited studies that elicit emotional responses to

empowerment.

Examining Empowerment

In academic discussions on power, the three dimensions of power and the distinction of power as "power over," "power with," and "power to," is seen as the foundation of academic analysis (Haugaard, 2012a,b). "Power over" refers to the power an individual has over the actions or decision-making process of another individual. For example, parents have a power over relationship with their young children as they indicate bedtimes, mealtimes, wardrobe, etc. Rowlands (2016) describes that through gender analysis, "power over" is wielded predominately by men over other men, by men over women, and by dominant social, political, and economic or cultural groups over those who are marginalized. "Power with" refers to an agreement in which all people or groups decide to act in ways that benefit the welfare of all. It is the act of pushing aside our individual wishes to the will of the common good because we know we ultimately are served by doing so (Haugaard, 2012b). For example, democracy in Canada is considered a "power with" relationship.

"Power to" is also referred to as empowerment. In the context of the conventional definition, empowerment has to do with the power some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale. It involves undoing negative social constructions – building the capacity in those affected to have influence. Still we pursue the goal of empowerment, but we do it by focusing on "power with." We live in a world of "power over" and desire a world of empowerment and we get there by traveling through the land of "power with" (Haugaard, 2012a, b). These two concepts are highly relevant and important to this research study as we explore the empowerment factor prevalent in mainstream music videos.

Dahl (1961), Foucault (1979, 1980, 1996 as cited in Haugard, 2012 a,b), Lukes (1974), and Haugaard (2012a,b), are some of the forefathers in the research realm of knowledge and

power. Lukes' (1974 as cited in Haugard 2012 a) writings established the notion of the three

dimensions of power, which include (1) exerting power behavior in making decisions; (2)

controlling the agenda and the creation of barriers to limit power; and (3) the powerful

transforming the powerless). Foucault's approach rejects the belief in the existence of regulating

power, as per Haugaard (2012a,b). In Foucault's world, there is no source of actions, only an

infinite series of practices. He focuses on the decentralization of power, creating the fourth

dimension of power, known as "power as a network of social relations." The idea of power as

"social relations" is important to note in this study as we explore the power of media influence

and then what is done with that power.

Digeser (1992) identifies the critical issue behind the fourth dimension of power as "what

kind of subject is being produced" (p. 5). Although we are examining the empowerment

component in relation to music videos, the notion of power as a network of social relations and

interactions is critical for this research study as Iexplore the components of feminist power

relations.

Power and Influence in a Feminist Context

Various feminist writers (Haugaard, 2012a,b; Rowlands, 2016; Winch et al., 2016) have

described the way in which people who are systemically denied power and influences in the

dominant society internalize the messages they receive about what they are supposed to be like,

and how they may come to believe the messages to be true. This internalized oppression ("power

over") is adopted as a survival mechanism – but it becomes so ingrained that it becomes a reality.

For example, a woman who is subjected to violent abuse (emotional or physical) when she

expresses her own opinions may start to withhold them – eventually coming to not having any

opinions of her own (Haugaard, 2012a). Female youth are often systemically denied power over

what they wear, who they spend time with, what they eat and their physical activity level due to

parental power and oftentimes how they should think and act due to internalized oppression from

media and pop culture. In relation to this current study, I removed barriers for youth females to

express their values, opinions and feelings on media and popular culture, specifically, Beyoncé's

2016 album *Lemonade*.

The historic powerlessness of women is integral to the process of the empowerment of

other women, including youth. The *Voices of the Poor* study conducted in 60 countries showed

that voicelessness and powerlessness are pervasive among the poor, affecting every aspect of

their lives (Narayan, 2005). Narayan (2005) goes on to say that an empowering approach to

poverty reduction is grounded in the conviction that poor people themselves are invaluable

partners for development, since they are the most motivated to move out of poverty. If the same

principles are applied, this example showcases that powerless women themselves are invaluable

in the process of the empowerment of young women. Furthermore, Freire (1970) explains that

traditional pedagogy is a banking model as it treats the student as an empty vessel to be filled

with knowledge, like a piggy bank. However, he argues the need for pedagogy to treat the

learner as a co-creator of knowledge. Freire (1970) states that

> [i]n order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain
>
> their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors,
>
> but rather restorers of the humanity of both. (p. 2)

He goes on to state that "[o]nly power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed

will be sufficiently strong to free both" (Freire, 1970, p. 2). These studies show that oppressed

groups in society are the best drivers for change. For the purpose of this research, we will be

speaking with female youth in order to explore the perceptions of female youth about the power

of visual media. The research will examine how visual media influences perceptions to build

capacity of knowledge, self-identity, and self-worth in young women; and how this power is

strengthened if it is presented via the voices of the oppressed.

Visual Music Media: Its Origins, History of Sexual Explicitness, and Effects on Women

and Girls

The debut of MTV on August 1, 1981 (Irons-Georges & Berman, 2008) redefined the

music industry fusing visual elements and the recording industry together as one. Soon after its

inception in the early 80s, activist groups such as the National Coalition on Media Violence

began expressing concern over the presence of sexual and violent content in music videos

(Cummins, 2007). Due to these concerns, scholars spearheaded empirical studies to determine

the pervasiveness of the content (Cummins, 2007). These studies showed that sexual content of

varying levels of explicitness could easily be found on MTV. Sexual explicitness in music videos

has been related to stereotypical notions of women as sexual objects and, to a lesser degree,

females as subordinate and males as aggressive (Wallis, 2010). These stereotypical notions

reinforce gender inequality and the disempowerment of women. The current research aims to

identify what components of music videos are perceived to elicit empowerment over

disempowerment.

Cummins (2007) speaks of two prominent studies that examine sexual content in music

videos. Zillmann and Mundorf (1987) examined the effect of sexual content in music videos in

relation to viewer enjoyment. They concluded that sexual content had a mixed result, divided

almost entirely along gender lines. Yet sexual content largely increased participants' appreciation

for the musical dimension of the music video regardless of their gender (Cummins, 2007).

Hansen and Hansen (1990) conducted a similar type of study but crafted more naturalistic in its

approach (used 15 videos which had varying levels of sexual content and did not artificially edit

them in any way - which was done in the Zillman and Mundorf study). Findings showed that

videos containing the most amount of sexual content were rated significantly more visually

appealing than the moderate or low sex videos. Although videos with more sexual content were

rated more visually pleasing, my research will aim to examine whether sexual content in music

videos is empowering to young women.

There is a significant amount of literature involving third wave feminism and the

empowerment of young women through media. Yet few studies examine how visual music

media (or music videos) impact young women's perceptions by involving young women. One

study explores teenage girls' critical response to celebrity feminism by asking how girls

understand celebrity feminism, analyzing the tensions that it often raises for girls doing feminism

in their everyday lives (Jessalyn & Ringrose, 2015). Authors interviewed 45 girls who were part

of a feminist club at a London high school or who participated in feminist politics as bloggers.

Results concluded that while many of the teens were pleased that feminism is more visible

within popular culture, most were skeptical of the representations of feminism by celebrities in

the media, which they claim turns feminism into a 'fashion'. Yet, it is important to note that this

study was conducted in partnership with teenagers who have one foot in the 'feminist pool'.

Teenagers part of the 'feminist pool' might have a higher level of savviness allowing them to

interpret celebrity feminism in ways other than through a positive lens. Their experience in

reading and research allows for opportunity to critically assess celebrity feminism.

Other studies, such as Durham (2012), Hamad and Taylor (2015), Lindsey (2013), and

Weidhase (2015) examine responses to celebrity postmodern feminism in music videos and

beyond, yet with a critical content analysis or a textual analysis approach in lieu of interviewing

members of the intended audience. Findings concluded celebrity feminism varies and at times is

critiqued on a continuum scale, yet this goes against third wave feminist beliefs, as there is no

"one way" to be a feminist (Tong, 2014). Critique through a "scale" is problematic as it implies

that there are "good" feminists and "bad" feminists reinforcing the idea that there is "one way" to

be a feminist. These findings provide context and understanding for the current research as it

relates to fourth wave and celebrity feminism. As Tong (2014) mentions there is no "one way" to

be a feminist, this idea is also transferred to fourth wave feminism which Iwill review the

following chapter.

  Buote et al. (2011), Cummings (1998), Emerson (2012), and Wallis (2010) explain the

depiction of body image, Black womanhood, and gender displays in media in their studies.

Through a content analysis of gender display in music videos, Wallis (2010) uncovered that

significant gender displays primarily reinforced stereotypical notions of women as sexual objects

and to a less degree, females as subordinate and males as aggressive. Emerson (2012) found that

the depiction of music videos showcases how young Black women must negotiate sexuality and

womanhood in their everyday lives. Buote et al. (2011) conducted eight studies using a variety of

content analysis, survey, and experimental methods, to examine differences in sociocultural

norms for ideal appearance for women and men in "daily life." Findings state that appearance

norms encountered by women in daily life are more rigid, homogenous, and pervasive than those

for men. Studies also concluded that these norms are more harmful to body image. These norms,

in turn develop a sociocultural communication barrier which causes internal conflict and

alienation along with a cybernetic communication barrier, due to frequency of adverts. These

findings showcase that in daily life, young women are overloaded with body image ideals. From

these studies, we can determine that there is an apparent need for qualitative research studies

focusing on the empowerment impact of visual music media on its intended audience groups. While these studies show that young women are bombarded with body image ideals, the voice of the women themselves are not commonly represented in the studies. Current research in feminist media studies undertakes more of a critical discourse analysis approach in the form of personal essays, textual or content analysis. This approach is useful when using conceptual analysis to identify common themes by clustering similar texts, words, or types of visual images. However, it does not identify emotional responses from the intended audience. Emotional responses help to unveil the lived experience of participants and this exposure of a lived experience provides a foundation of understanding and connecting.

Hip hop Feminism, #MeToo, and Intersectionality Related to Popular Culture Activism

Feminist thought is constantly changing and evolving. While four waves of feminism exist, this thesis examines components on third wave feminism only to provide context for the current fourth wave of feminism and the #MeToo movement.

Tong (2014) states that similar to the postmodern feminist belief that there is no one way to be feminist, third-wave feminists "are more than willing to accommodate diversity and change and are particularly eager to understand the ways in which gender oppression and other kinds of human oppression co-create and co-maintain each other" (p. 271). Third-wave feminists are "feminist sponges" (Tong, 2014, p. 284) who accept that all women are different. Third-wave feminism is also interested in preserving women's voices, and oral history has become a big part of this. Woodward and Woodward (2009) quote Baumgarder and Richards' claim that what has been defined as the third wave of feminism is a "media-savvy, culturally driven generation" (2000, p. 77, as cited in Woodward & Woodward, 2009, p.161), capturing the knowingness and awareness of young feminists today. Yet, fourth wave feminism goes above and beyond the

media savviness and relates specifically to human rights activism leveraging social media and popular culture.

Maclaran's (2012) literature review is a composition of key studies contributing to the debates on whether marketing activities exploit or empower women. The findings illustrate the changing nature of feminist attitudes to the role of the market in women's lives. Maclaran (2012) explains that third wave feminism focuses less on the oppressive and exploitative power of marketing and media phenomena and more so on the potential for empowerment. These findings are relevant to my proposed study, as skeptics and critiques of Beyoncé's visual music media indicate that the feminist approach is a fashion statement and not at the core of the artist's purpose, which is personal branding and marketing, a concept later discussed as commodity feminism.

Other third wave feminist approaches include noting "hip hop feminism." Hip hop feminism, as cited by Durham, Cooper, and Morris (2013), is "an umbrella term to encompass creative, intellectual work regarding girls and women in hip hop culture and/or part of the hip hop generation" (p. 1). Arguments relating to hip hop demeaning women and continuing to marginalize Black people have been on rotation since its inception and continue to rotate today. Tricia Rose (2008) tackles these arguments head-on in her book *The Hip Hop Wars.* The author covers the "ten debates in hip hop," highlighting five critical arguments against hip hop and following up with five of hip hop's defending arguments, notably, how hip hop is not solely responsible for sexism and how there are very few conversations regarding the positivism in hip hop, namely philanthropist activities in Black communities. Rose (2008) covers both critics and defensives with the use of strong examples in a diplomatic way, staying true to the book's title causing a literary war. One chapter specifically talks about hip hop demeaning women, stating

that the visual representations of Black women in hip hop videos "reflect the hallmarks of

mainstream masculinity: they regularly use women as props that boost male egos, treat women's

bodies as sexual objects and divide women into groups that are worthy of protection and respect

and those that are not" (Rose, 2008, p. 119). Rose goes on to say "thus, hip hop does not break

from the fundamental logic of mainstream masculinity so much as to convey it with access,

bravado, and extra insult" (2008, p. 119). The author simply states that hip hop is not the origin

of the demise but rather a product of mainstream masculinity which have "consistently

celebrated male violence as a necessary means to conflict resolution" (Rose, 2008, p. 118).

   Many hip hop artists use the term "keeping it real" when faced with critiques of their

music that perpetuates negative social conditions. Rose (2008) also highlights these arguments

and defenses of the phrase in a chapter called "Just Keeping It Real." This phrase is interpretive

and can mean many things, but generally it speaks to the hard truths about Black urban street

life. Rose states "a good deal of hip hop speaks and has always spoken openly and in depth about

aspects of Black urban poverty," (2008, p. 135) and goes on to mention how hip hop provides a

ground level view of living under what are "nearly warlike conditions in communities that face

[a] myriad of daunting circumstances" (2008, p. 135). In some of the final pages of the text, Rose

speaks about "invisible white consumption" of hip hop music highlighting the underplayed role

of White people consuming damaging stereotypes of Black people, especially when those

stereotypes are perceived as 'authentically' Black (2008) Yet, the author also highlights the

arguments of many hip hop supporters suggesting that hip hop is a "project of racial unity"

(Rose, 2008, p. 228).

   The notion of hip hop feminism as a branch of third wave feminism is relevant to this

current research study as it denotes cultural underpinnings associated with a certain type of

generation and can be specific to geographic locations. It set the tone and helped pave the way

for the current fourth wave of feminism which is centered around empowerment, built upon the

notion of intersectionality, and mobilized through internet mediums. One highly publicized

example of fourth wave feminism is the #MeToo movement.

In the Fall of 2017, the #MeToo hashtag erupted on social media as an anti-rape activist

approach after actress Alyssa Milano turned to social media for a call to action shortly following

the highly publicized rape case with former film producer Harvey Weinstein (Fileborn & Loney-

Howes, 2019). Millions of individuals, globally, used the #MeToo hashtag on social media

within 24 hours of the post. This generated significant and overwhelming response in support of

survivors of sexual harassment and violence (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). The movement

not only sparked conversation and outrage on social media but allowed for a series of questions

about voice and worthiness. Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019) highlight some other questions

that were born from this movement, such as "what constitutes sexual violence, whose

experiences are included and perceived as worthy of redress, and how activist communities

should go about the 'business' of generating change" (p. 5).

Many feminist activists have generally argued that acts of sexual violence are indicative

of "rape culture," versus one off individuals who are "sick." The term "rape culture" has been a

controversial one and refers overall to the social, cultural, and political processes that condone

violence against women but also blame women if and when violence is perpetrated against them

(Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019).

A notable qualitative thematic study was conducted with 117 real-life #MeToo users

unpacking their motives and general experience in participating in the digital feminist movement

(Mendes & Ringrose, 2019). The researchers used surveys and semi-structured interview

questions to uncover a variety of reasons as to why #MeToo users joined the social movement

and added their name to the social hashtag. Answers varied from having a:

> sense of anger and outrage at the pervasiveness of rape culture, to a desire to challenge
>
> rape myths that deny recognition for many victims, to a desire to build a structural
>
> analysis of sexual violence, to generating communities of care. (Mendes & Ringrose,
>
> 2019, para. 21)

The authors shared their general optimism for the power and potential of digital feminist

movements (Mendes & Ringrose, 2019). This type of research is beneficial not only to those

who face sexual assault but also those with varying intersecting identities that cause them to be

placed in the most marginalized groups of society. The fourth wave movement is not limited to

feminist activism for White women who face sexual assault but for Black and Brown women and

men with a variety of intersecting identity factors, including but not limited to gender fluidity,

non-binary identification, transgender identification, intersex, poverty, addiction, accessibility,

and mental health issues. The concept of intersectionality is not a new one.

In her breakthrough 1989 essay titled *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A*

Black feminist critique of anti-discrimination, doctrine, feminist theory and anti-racist politics,

Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term of intersectionality to highlight the marginalization and

oversight of Black women in antidiscrimination law, feminist theories, and antiracist theory and

politics. Later, Crenshaw produced a second piece that expanded on her initial framework called

Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity, politics, and violence against women of color

(Carbado et al., 2013).

Intersectionality allows us to look at structures of power and how they intersect with

marginalized peoples of society. Carbado et al. (2013) reference intersectionality as a fluid, ever

changing and a non-contained entity. Further to that, Dhamoon (2011) argues that

intersectionality is not only a theoretical argument but rather a research paradigm in and of itself,

stating that it can be broadly applied to social relations, contexts, and movements that transcend

the initial discourse of non-White women. Dhamoon's (2011) article suggests five key

considerations for taking on and mainstreaming intersectionality, noting language, complexities

of difference, choice of focus, models of explanation, and principles of analysis for interaction.

The author argues that above all, it is "crucial to frame it as a form of social critique so as to

foreground its radical capacity to attend to and disrupt oppressive vehicles of power" (Dhamoon,

2011, para. 1).

    In relation to the current study, it is imperative to interpret intersectionality as a form of

social critique, especially when considering elements of popular culture, visual media, and power

structures. Already noted in Dhamoon's (2011) article, the application of intersectionality allows

researchers to move beyond ontological foundations created by White, CIS gendered males and

females. This application is important as a reminder that forms of oppression are not merely

additive, as if accessibility, racism, and sexism (to name a few) are separate layers.

Intersectionality theory argues that Black women experience a different type of sexism compared

to white women and Black women experience a different kind of racism compared to Black men

(Cabardo et al., 2013). Intersectionality as a form of social critique is important as it creates an

understanding of how we all carry multiple identities. The importance of these multiple

identities— based not only on race, normative gender, class, sexuality, nonnormative gender,

physical abilities, and age—vary in different times and contexts, creating either disadvantages or

privileges on each of us (Dhamoon, 2011).

Academic Buzz on Beyoncé: Scratching the Surface of Black Feminism in Popular Culture

African studies professor Omise'eke Tinsey describes Beyoncé's 2016 album *Lemonade* as "the most widely distributed black feminist [work] of the current moment," (2018, p.7). She goes on to say that *Lemonade* "offers a spectacular entry point into black feminist conversations" (2018, p.7). Tinsley highlights videos from the visual album, specifically the *Sorry* and *Boy Bye* videos as a tribute to 'Black femme' and mentions a turning point in the *Formation* video for Black transgender sisters, by including New Orleans bounce hip hop star Big Freedia.

Further to that, Adrienne Trier-Bieniek produced an edited collection of essays entitled *The Beyoncé effect: Essays on sexuality, race, and feminism* in 2016, prior to the *Lemonade* album, to analyze and critique the star's collection of art and the progression of her material. This analysis is generally highly supportive of the artist's work, arguing its scholarly relevance to the work of Black feminism.

Aisha Durham (2012) explores Beyoncé as a key figure in contemporary feminist media studies, largely for the artist's unconventional body type and feminist views. The author focuses heavily on Beyoncé's "booty" and how it represents racial and class difference for Black women, mentioning that "the lower half of Beyoncé is emphasized to mark authentic Blackness rooted in the American South" (Durham, 2012, p. 43).

Durham (2012) also draws attention to the artist's strong linkages to Black respectability through her music, specifically in Destiny's Child's music video *Nasty Girls* (2002). In this video, Beyoncé watches women dressed in little clothing dance on television, and later scolds them in her lyrics, linking attire to promiscuity. Beyoncé advises these women "to put some clothes on" because men do not want a "hot female that's been around the block female"in the music video. The author states that "the virtual women are miraculously transformed morally

through fashion—recalling the rhetoric of respectability" (Durham, 2012, p. 41), going on to explain that body studies in feminist communication research has not theorized the influences of Black female bodies with non-Black audiences. Many years of comparative research suggest Black girls having a healthier body image than their White counterparts because of within group appreciation for body differences and the general lack of Black females in mainstream media (Durham, 2012). But, with the advent of social media and amplified access to music videos across class and cultures, this is no longer the case as a recent study connecting media exposure to body disturbance suggests Black and White women have become more dissatisfied with their lower torso with increased television viewing (Durham, 2012). Overall, the author concludes that Beyoncé's ultimate role in popular culture is a role of othering and says that

> through performance, Beyoncé calls attention to intersecting discourses of racialized sexuality and gender, and she highlights the particular constraints that exist for Black girls and women who also want to express their sexuality in a society where Black bodies are always already marked as deviant. (Durham, 2012, p. 37)

Shortly after the release of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* album, Black feminist scholar bell hooks posted a blog on her personal page titled *Moving Beyond Pain* (Salzano, 2020). In there, she states that the *Lemonade* album creates "a powerfully symbolic black female sisterhood that resists invisibility," (hooks, 2016, as cited in Salzano, 2020, p.45) and goes on by saying "[i]t challenges us all to look anew, to radically revision how we see the Black female body. However, this radical repositioning of Black female images does not truly overshadow or change conventional sexist constructions of Black female identity" (hooks, 2016, as cited in Salzano, 2020, p. 46).

Jackson (2016) also digs into the bell hooks narrative on Beyoncé, specifically looking at commodity feminism and the glamorization of gendered cultural paradox. The author goes on to note that hooks suggests Beyoncé's *Lemonade* album "doesn't do enough," (Jackson, 2016, para. 9) and that the artist has power and agency to transcend cultural barriers and move past representations of Black women as a victim. Jackson (2016) concludes that hooks' expectations of Beyoncé outstretch the means stating, "expectations of Beyoncé outstrip the space the artist is herself attempting to make with this work" (para. 10).

These examples are to showcase the fluid and ever-changing nature of popular culture and celebrity studies. There are academics who strongly support Beyoncé as a feminist and some scholars who condemn her for "terrorism" and reinforcing White beauty standards (Salzano, 2020, p. 46). Additionally, these examples show that the majority of academic literature on Beyoncé exists in the form of discourse and content analysis, whether it is with arguments supporting the artist's approach to Black feminist activism, or condemning it, causing it to push the oppressed Black female narrative. The current research is set apart as it focuses on what girls have to say about Beyoncé and her visual music instead of highly educated academic adults.

Chapter Two: Methods

Methodology

This study was situated within the constructionist paradigm (social) to address what aspects of visual media are perceived as empowering among youth girls. The constructionist paradigm was chosen for this research based on its linkage to feminist theory, Black feminist theory, and psychoanalytic film theory, along with its roots in investigating the qualitative nature of values, beliefs, and motivations. While critical theory is more often paired with feminist research, this paper does not focus solely on the theoretical elements of feminism but rather it

explores the use of visual media and popular culture through a feminist lens. Constructionism reminds us our sex, gender, societies, and the media we consume and then create is socially constructed.

Constructionist methods are interpretive and there is the ability to facilitate co-creation between investigator and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) further argue that constructionism "assumes multiple, apprehendable, and sometimes conflicting social realities that are the products of human intellects, but that may change as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated" (p. 111). The current study used both qualitative individual interviews in the form of film-elicitation and focus group interviews for data collection which is consistent with this paradigm. Both individual interviews and focus group interviews provided interaction-based data that were co-created to reach understandings from the participants' perspectives, and experiences (Platt, 2014).

Strategy and Design

Our visual experiences play a key role in identity formation. All visual forms are culturally embedded, and these cultural aspects also play a central role in the creation of identity. Using visual analysis methodology, this study aims to critically examine a piece of visual music media through a social constructionist approach while applying, psychoanalytic film theory, Black feminist theory, and critical theory. The study engaged research participants to share their perceptions, feelings, and thoughts in response to segments of Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade*. The purpose of this research was to create a space for young women to share their interpretations in response to media as the published research in this field is mainly content analysis and/or discourse analysis.
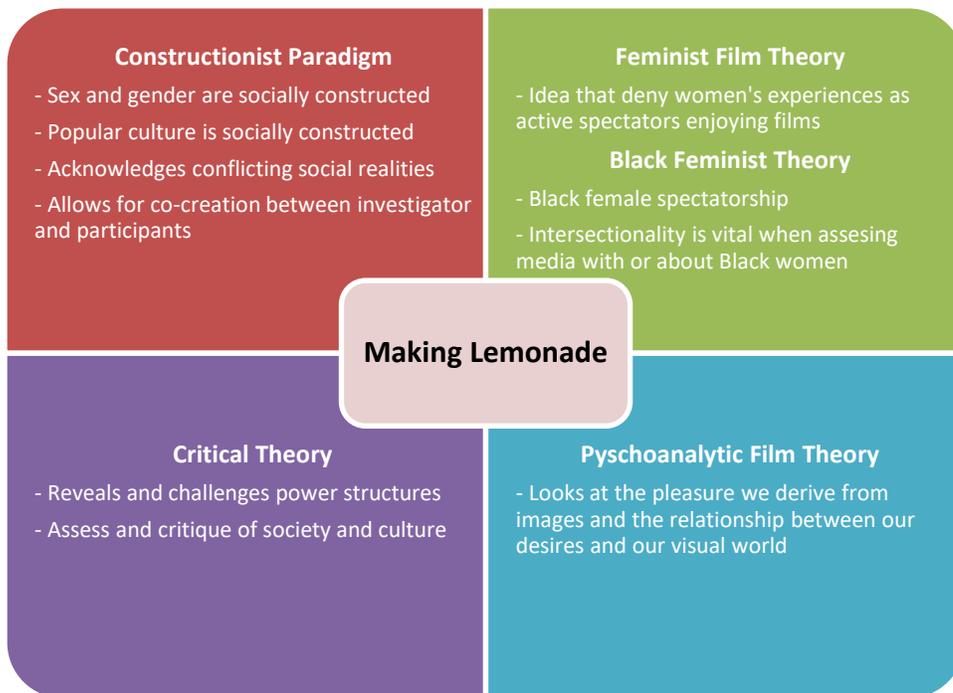
The 1890s witnessed the invention of film and cinema, which was later made more accessible to the North American public with the television in the 1940s and 1950s. More recently, the internet, digital imaging, and social media have engaged hundreds of millions of people globally as a means of communication and entertainment (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). For this study, I look at feminist film theory as an academic discipline that aims to explore the essence of the cinema and provides conceptual frameworks for understanding film's relationship to reality, individual viewers, communities, and societies while considering alienating categories which deny women's experiences as active spectators enjoying films or reading them critically (Allen, 2004). When we look at psychoanalytic film theory, it is closely associated with academic film criticism that developed in the 1970s and 1980s, is allied with critical theory, and analyzes films from the perspective of psychoanalysis, generally the works of Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalysis and psychiatrist (Allen, 2004).

The goals of psychoanalytic approaches are interested in emotional states and the role of the unconscious (Seale, 2012). Allen (2004) states that psychoanalytic film theory "explores the significance for human understanding of cinema's augmentation of perception; it emphasizes what and how the cinema allows us to see, and how this effects our self-understanding" (p. 131). It should be noted that there are limitations to psychoanalytic film theory as historically, it collides with the phenomenology (the study of lived experience) popular in cultural studies. Phenomenology allows researchers to tap into the lived experience of their participants while psychoanalytic film theory looks at how film and media influence the lives of their participants. Psychoanalytic film theory asks the question "what pop culture does to people" where phenomenology asks, "what people do with popular culture?" creating an epistemological disconnect between the two methodologies. Sturken and Cartwright indicate that "perception,

memory, and imagination are key concerns of phenomenological approaches to cultural analysis"

(2001, p. 135). For this study, theoretical elements of psychoanalytic film theory are used along

with Black feminist theory but are situated in a phenomenological approach. This study will aim

to explore the understanding of its participants, examining what and how they interpret meaning

along with how it affects their personal self-understanding as it relates to their cultural

experiences. See Figure 2.1 below for a visual representation of the methodological and

theoretical approach to this study.

Figure 2.1

Methodological and Theoretical Approach

Constructionist Paradigm
- Sex and gender are socially constructed
- Popular culture is socially constructed
- Acknowledges conflicting social realities
- Allows for co-creation between investigator and participants

Feminist Film Theory
- Idea that deny women's experiences as active spectators enjoying films

Black Feminist Theory
- Black female spectatorship
- Intersectionality is vital when assesing media with or about Black women

Making Lemonade

Critical Theory
- Reveals and challenges power structures
- Assess and critique of society and culture

Pyschoanalytic Film Theory
- Looks at the pleasure we derive from images and the relationship between our desires and our visual world

Interviews and focus groups will be used to tap into the participants' lived experiences

and meaning making (phenomenology) that will then be interpreted using a social constructionist

epistemological framework that incorporates feminist and psychoanalytic film theory and critical theory.

Data Collection

To collect data, I solicited research participants (female students between 15-19 years of age) through word-of-mouth, social media, and through contacting youth organizations across Canada. The age range chosen is specific to consumers of mainstream R&B music and music videos. Homogenous purposive sampling was used for the study, often recommended for phenomenological research. A total of 11 participants joined the study, with unequal fragments joining in the focus group sessions due to participant availability. Ethical approval from the Royal Roads Office of Research was granted and approved from the Research Ethics Board (REB). The treatment of participants was consistent with the recommendations for the ethical treatment of human participants. Participants did not receive compensation for their involvement, but each participant had a chance to win a $50 gift card to a place of their choosing. A draw was made after interviews and focus groups were completed.

With the album being just over an hour in length, the participants were provided with a TIDAL (multimedia viewing platform) login and asked to view the following segments:

1) 0:00 - 6:00

2) 10:30 - 27:50

3) 37:50 - 43:40

4) 46:00 - 56:35

After viewing the segments, participants were asked to provide individual responses to structured interview questions through a video submission, no longer than five minutes in length. While structured interview questions were provided, participants were encouraged to include additional thoughts, opinions, and comments. Participants were then placed into focus groups

which were arranged at a later date. The focus groups were strategically composed of participants from different geographic locations in Canada. The focus group sessions were digitally recorded with audio and video and held over Google Hangout Air platform. The interviewer gathered qualitative data in the form of interpretations and descriptions of thoughts and feelings from the participants. Participants watched segments of Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* and respond to questions such as:

1. How does this segment of video make you feel? Do you feel empowered by this segment of video?

2. What components of the video make you feel this way?

3. Do the clothes the artist is wearing in this video make you feel empowered about your clothing choices?

4. Which pieces of the artist's lyrics inspire or empower you the most within this segment of video?

Answers from participants were recorded on video for ease of transcribing and coding.

In order to obtain strong and trustworthy data, I chose to pair film-elicitation with focus group research to gather my data, also known as triangulation. Through this process, I was able to test the consistency of findings and mitigate common threats in the individual methods, that could influence results. Film-elicitation refers to asking participants to 'create' media – in the form of a video composed of their own news stories, advertisements, or personal reflections of an event (Hughes, 2012). Film-elicitation, like photo-elicitation, can be a highly productive research tool for the social researcher, yielding insights and understandings that might otherwise be missed or not be discernible by other methods (Banks, 2001). A focus group is a form of group interview centered on a topic or activity and in which the interaction within the group is

used to facilitate the elicitation of participants' views. I chose focus groups as a data collection method as it is a common method to elicit responses from media occurrences, especially audience studies (Seale, 2012). Furthermore, the focus group method is appropriate due to the participant age range (15-19). This method encourages and fosters conversation, which at times may be difficult in a one-on-one interview. Bloor and Wood (2006) highlight the success of virtual focus groups in past studies. Focus groups have been a fashionable research method in the recent past (Seale, 2012), but the popularity of conventional focus groups (as opposed to virtual focus groups) may now be dwindling (Bloor & Wood, 2006). These methods of data collection were paired, since focus group participants can be influenced by groupthink (voicing opinions out of sync with their true thoughts). Furthermore, critics of focus groups argue that it is not sufficient as a sole method of data collection and should be supported by additional research methods (van den Hoonaard, 2019). van den Hoonarrd (2019) states that focus groups are "particularly appropriate when you are interested in learning about how people understand things that occur in their everyday lives or that they have thought about," (p.128) which this current research aims to do.

Data Analysis

Prior to data analysis, I created a list of personal biases that could affect the research study. These biases included but are not limited to: (a) being a fan of the artist Beyoncé; (b) personally feeling empowered by the artist's syntax, voice, and costume choices; (c) Canadian youth know and are familiar with Beyoncé; and (d) females have similar emotional responses to visual media. These were important reminders as I proceeded with coding and thematic analysis. In qualitative research, it is nearly impossible to be fully objective as the biases and standpoints of the research influence the topic being studied along with methodologies and methods chosen

for the study. While my biases are noted here, my personal standpoint also affected the approach

of this study being a White, CIS gendered female from Prince Edward Island in my late

twenties/early thirties. My life experiences and personal views help to shape the methodological

approach to this study.

Coding

After data collection was completed, I transcribed elicited videos and focus group

sessions in a Jeffersonian format. After obtaining transcribed data, I determined my conceptual

framework based on critical theory, psychoanalytic theory, feminist film theory, and Black

feminist theory. I created a guide sheet that encompassed a list of data driven codes and theory

driven codes. Data driven codes were listed as: depiction of a societal/social standard; negative

mental/emotional reaction to imagery; positive mental emotional reaction to imagery; neutral

mental/emotional reaction to imagery; and lack of resonance with imagery.

The theory driven codes included power, syntax, colors, decoding, flow, semiotics,

objectification, gaze, and race/representation. These codes were chosen specifically based on the

theoretical framework for this study and sub-codes were developed to further break down the

data.

I began coding the individual film-elicited interviews first followed by the focus group

data. I used one coding sheet for this purpose. Some comments and quotes received two or more

codes depending on the nature of the comment. For example, it was common for one quote to

have a code for "power" and one code for "decoding."

Analysis

To validate the thematic coding, I relied on interrater reliability mainly for validation of

process, having the procedural elements reviewed by my thesis supervisor. In order to maintain

confidentiality, I used participant IDs in lieu of participants names. From there, I put relatable

codes into "buckets" to review all data with the same code more closely. Through this process,

themes began to emerge. Van den Hoonarrd (2019) quotes Esterberg by calling this the "so

what" question (p. 182). Similar concepts, quotations, and words emerged from this process

allowing the researcher to identify small themes that eventually turned into larger overarching

themes.

   After I created a list of themes, I reviewed the participants' quotes and comments in the

theme cluster to ensure that they aligned. During this phase, I also referenced field notes taken

during the interviews. Member checking or "member validation" as in *Researching society and*

culture, (Seale, 2012) is the "act of giving your research participants a chance to examine and

comment on themes you have derived from the data that they helped contribute, before findings

are written up" (p. 577). For this study, I provided my sensitizing concepts and emerging themes

to two research participants, chosen at random, for cross-verification. Seale (2012) mentions that

there can be many ways of "seeing" data but this "form of validation may prove useful if the goal

of the research is to identify and apply themes that are recognized or used by participants" (p.

577). The two participants chosen for member-checking both "heavily" agreed with the

sensitizing concept of 'cloak of competence' and both participants noted the notion of 'cloak of

incompetence' as "accurate" with one participant mentioning "I definitely do not feel one

hundred percent comfortable arguing on behalf of something I don't know or haven't

experienced." One participant best connected with the theme "unity" while the second

participant best connected with the themes of "voice" and "relatability."

   Since this study was conducted about film with film-elective interviews and film

recorded focus groups, I had the ability to note facial and body expressions during the

interview(s). Assessing, labelling, and pairing facial and body movements with comments was

intended to strengthen decisions created about themes. However, due to limitations in time and

ability, the assessment of facial and body movements was omitted and is later discussed in the

future research section of this paper.

Chapter Three: Detangling (Results)

Demographics

All participants resided in Canada, with 45% from eastern Canada and 27.5% from each central and western Canada. Approximately 82% of participants identified as Caucasian and 64% of participants were age 17. The age range of participants was 15-18 years, with the median age of participants age 17. Additional information about the demographic of participants is listed in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1.

Table 3.1

Demographics of Participants

Participant ID	Age	Grade	Province/Country	Ethnicity	Preferred Music Style
1	17	Y1[a]	AB, Canada	South Asian	Indie, Blues, Pop, Rap, Top 40
2	15	11	ON, Canada	Caucasian	Other
3	17	12	PE, Canada	Caucasian	Pop
4	16	12	PE, Canada	Caucasian	Pop
5	17	12	ON, Canada	Caucasian	Punk Rock
6	17	12	AB, Canada	Caucasian	Hip Hop
7	17	11	PE, Canada	Caucasian	Indie, Rap
8	17	12	PE, Canada	Caucasian	Pop, Indie, Punk Rock
9	15	10	ON, Canada	Caucasian	Other
10	17	12	PE, Canada	Caucasian	Indie, Top 40, Country
11	18	Y1[a]	BC, Canada	Caucasian	Indie, Pop, Rap, Electronic, Hip Hop

[a] Undergraduate student in first year of university.

Figure 3.1

Participant Age Breakdown
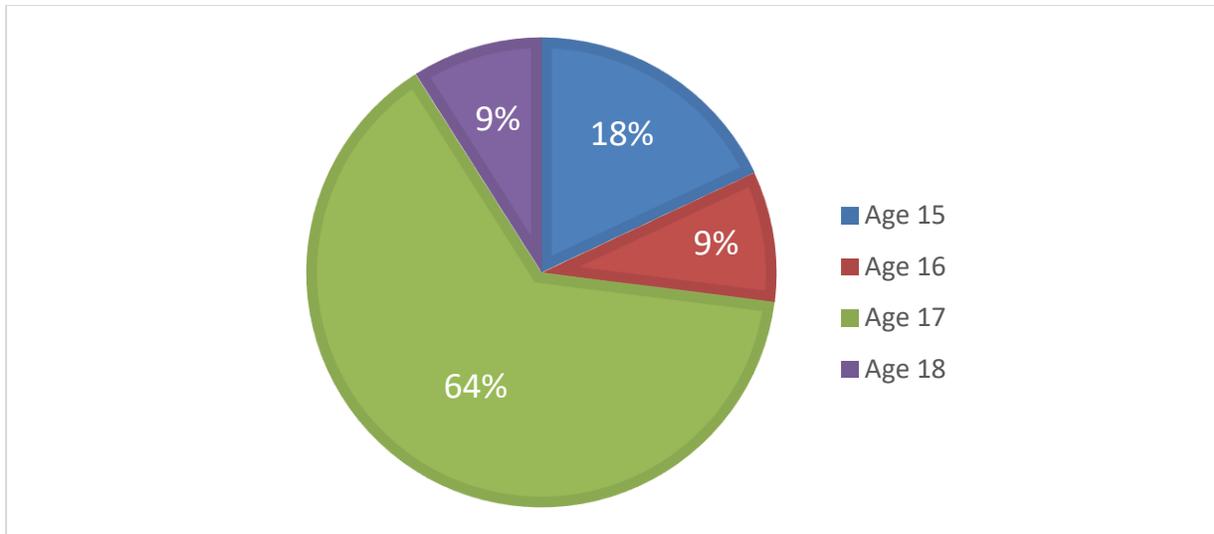
Sensitizing Concepts

Analysis of the data resulted in three sensitizing concepts and five emerging themes. A sensitizing concept is a tool used by the researcher to help understand their participants' worldviews (van den Hoonaard, 2019). Sensitizing concepts come from the data themselves, rather from preconceived ideas before collecting and analyzing a set of data. Sensitizing concepts differ from emerging themes as the concepts are constructs that are derived from the research participants' perspective, using their language or expression (van den Hoonaard, 2019). Results from this study uncovered three sensitizing concepts.

In addition to the five emerging themes, of *voice* (super-ordinate), *unity*, *compassion*, *persistence* and *relatability*, there were three sensitizing concepts identified from the research. Table 3.2 provides examples of questions asked to participants, followed by their quote or paraphrased quote.

1. '*Cloak of competence*' (McLuhan et al., 2014) denotes participants engaging with a question or conversation the way they know how to, versus the way they have been asked to.

2. '*Cloak of incompetence'* (McLuhan et al., 2014) with regards to discussion/comments on

the oppression of women, Black femme/feminism.

3. '*Generational language'* refers to the speech patterns used by the participant

demographic to explain a thought or idea (e.g., low-key, side-chick, etc.)

Table 3.2

Identified Sensitizing Concepts

Sensitizing concept	Example of question asked to participants	Quote or paraphrased response
Cloak of competence	How does this segment make you feel? [a]	1. "Throughout segment one, it had a lot of metaphors for religion as well as her abusive relationship, and it definitely had a lot of anticipation."
		2. "When she says, 'Oh, my God,' in, like, pleasure, whatever [eyebrows tilt in], it was a sign of worship [eyebrows tilt in], as if he was providing her something that was from a higher level or class [corners of mouth turn down]."
Cloak of incompetence	What does this section represent to you and how does it make you feel? [b]	1. "The part with the grandmother was 'cool', sharing stories of strength is motivating but I felt this section and others talking about Black women have 'nothing to do with me'."
		2. "I figured it being more... like, you hear people talking about growing up being Black or not being privileged, and how that's torture, and how it's something that you struggle with. And then you become empowered by it, and it becomes your salvation; it becomes who you are, and it's just... that's kind of more how I saw that quote, just probably just because I really

		[smiles] am not very educated in what's going on. But, like [smiles and shakes head], it was more of a culture thing than anything for me."
		3. "So, I'm White, so I can't really speak much on culture, but [laughs] – you know, just White culture."
Generational language	How did this segment of video make you feel, and what parts of it made you feel that way?	1. "A Black woman is, like, one of the most underappreciated women," that was really cool, how they, like, just these stills, and they did, like, mostly, like, Black-and-white photos, or videos of people, which was kind of... what I felt was supposed to... like, **low-key**, represent, like, the fact that they are in the dark, because they're kind of stuck in this thing people see them as [eyebrows are raised]."
		2. "I think it's really important to address the fact that Beyoncé [smiles] never slanders the **side chick**."

Note. The specific notes below indicate themes within participants 'answers that informed the researcher's attribution of the sensitization concept._.
[a] Searching for metaphors/similes instead of considering how the visual made them feel.
[b] Avoiding topics due to lack of education or experience on the topic.

While the "cloak of incompetence" sensitizing concept is noteworthy in this study, it is important to mention that it did not completely saturate the data. Approximately 12% of codes were related to representation of women and race, some of which directly spoke to the perceived challenges Black women face. As one participant expressed:

I think she really touches on the segment of the second clip where they are talking about how Black women are the most disrespected in America. And I think... I know I said in

the first segment that I liked how she had all of the other girls... well, you didn't really

know why. And I think she kind of wraps that into the segment we just watched] that,

"They may be disrespected, but they're all still queens." And, like, ultimately, I think

that's what she's trying to get across here.

Another participant expressed:

And so, as you go through the video, there's more and more culture, and I think that

represents her [really] going back to her roots. And then, like, the whole... just, like, most

disrespected women... or, yeah, that Black women are the most disrespected women, I

think... like, she really shows that she's not going to let that happen to her…

The "cloak of competence" was routinely used by way of decoding the viewed media.

Participants often relied on their ability to search for similes and metaphors in text or film,

looking for meaning. Overall, there was a reluctance to share feelings and emotions about the

visual album and more of an effort to "decode" what the media meant.

Emerging Themes

The research findings were five emerging themes that informed a model of the *Values,*

Beliefs, and Behaviors of Female Youth and how they interpret music media. Data analysis

identified a core theme pertaining to "voice." The five emerging themes are discussed further in

Table 3.3. The central theme of *voice* refers to the agency and self-determination, specifically of

women, in media and in day to day life. The theme of *compassion* considers that the idea of

"letting go," a visual form of strength, most importantly noting honesty with oneself. The theme

of *relatability* refers to how relatable an artist is to the viewer, which could be linked to attire,

speech, race, or class. *Persistence* considers the use of positive speech and audible depictions of

strength offered by the artist. The final theme of *unity* refers to visual depictions of women

supporting one another, specifically standing together, side by side.

Table 3.3

Values, Beliefs, and Behaviors of Female Youth

Aspects [a]	Explanation	Examples [b]
Voice (central)	Agency/self-determination and owning your independence. Related to understanding one's identity and ability to communicate that identify with others. Not allowing yourself to be "changed" by media, influencers, or peers. Uncovering "invisibleness" to be heard.	1. "I thought that Beyoncé created *Lemonade* to show that she is flawed, and that she has flaws. But then I got another message [smiles] out of it, that, 'We aren't flawed, and we are who we are, and that's completely okay and perfect.'" 2. PARAPHRASED: "I am not empowered through anger and that is what this section seems like to me, angry." 3. "And then, at the end, everything was, like, kind of in color, which was nice [laughs and rolls eyes] because it's kind of like, to me, showing that they wanted basically [shrugs] everyone to be able to be seen in color and be seen as everyone else is [corners of mouth turn down], instead of being seen as, like, a minority." 4. "…where she's like... she tried to change herself [corners of mouth turn down], I was, like, kind of like, "Not empowering at all" [laughs]. Like, you don't change yourself for someone [smiles]." 5. "I felt disempowered throughout the whole thing [corners of mouth turn down], like, the whole segment [corners of mouth turn down]. She talks about a lot about relying

Aspects [a]	Explanation	Examples [b]
		on someone else, and that's kind of the opposite of empowerment to me."
		6. "I was slightly empowered by her vulnerability… ...because I think we're kind of told that, like, we can't be very vulnerable [rolls eyes] now, and she did that."
Unity	Images/lyrics depicting togetherness (specifically women standing with other women).	1. "A lot of the time, the album had her girls or her family there with her. So, it kind of like showed her that, like, that's who keeps her going and, like, no matter what's going on, like, she's able to keep going."
		2. "And she's... in the video, she brings her friends close, so she's basically saying like, 'I still have my friends and they're still here to support me, but... even though you're not there, you're out doing other things, I still have these people around me'."
		3. "I liked that, actually [corners of mouth turn down] for... especially with the other dancers and stuff, it did bring kind of like a community feel to the message, I guess. It was more... like, it wasn't just one girl feeling the need to stand up for herself [corners of mouth turn up], I guess, but it was more of, like, a gendered community feeling."

Aspects [a]	Explanation	Examples [b]
		4. "So, I think it really just shows how strong women are together as one whole, even if it's not a specific group of people, but even... like, all together from different backgrounds [shakes head] and stuff like that. I think it really includes women as a whole and how strong we are together."
		5. "Women are stronger together. Yes, we're strong by ourselves, and we have a voice to a point [corners of mouth turn down]. But whenever we're with other people who share the same values and views, I think we're able to make our voice more heard."
Compassion (forgiveness)	The idea of "letting go" while maintaining honesty and integrity.	1. "[I felt] the most empowered by kind of the end when she started to forgive and stuff and, yeah, that just made me feel empowered because not everyone can do that."
		2. "I think it's very easy to [squints eyes] know... if you're hurt, it's very easy to just close yourself off and be hurt and be bitter [corners of mouth turn down], as she was in kind of the second part of it. It's very easy... I mean it's very common, too; but it's really hard to kind of heal from that hurt, and it was a great way... it was good seeing the transition between, you know, her being hurt and angry [corners of mouth

Aspects [a]	Explanation	Examples [b]
		turn up] – understandably so [eyebrows are raised] – to being forgiving and loving again."
		3. "And I think maybe, like, she was hurt – I'm not sure necessarily [eyebrows are raised] by who; I don't want to make judgments or anything – but she's starting to forgive that [corners of mouth turn up], and move on for maybe the better of herself and her family. That is empowering."
		4. I think the most empowering part of the album was at the end when she showcased her family and friends and, especially, like, all the girls who helped her in the music video – like, all of them. I think that she kind of [sighs] showed that, like, although these, like, things have happened to her in the past, like, she used her friends and her family to get through them. And no mater, like, what she was doing with her music career, like, in her life, like, they were still there to support her.
Relatability	The development of sense of self/identity through clothes, other attire, and speech.	1. "The part where she is underwater seemed like a possible metaphor for drowning which I could relate to, but it didn't make me feel empowered - more on edge."
		2. "But she was able to speak to events that happen in women's lives all around the

Aspects [a]	Explanation	Examples [b]
		world, and she was able to go back to her roots, which created this connection between her and her audience."
		3. "She made plenty of references to the pain of growing up and leaving behind her childish ways to enter into a more professional world with a lot more requirements. And, as a teenage girl going into university and starting to go out [eyebrows are raised] on my own, I could definitely relate to that."
		4. "I thought... [sighs] I felt really sad, actually, at the beginning of it. It was just, like, really emotional, and I could kind of feel her pain. She kind of looked like she was going through something big at the moment, and [I kind of]... the way she organized the whole film. Like, she made it so you could see all of what she was feeling."
Persistence (major)	Using positive self-speech as well as positive word choices rooted in compassion instead of anger. The notion of moving forward even under challenging circumstances.	1. "I know everybody feels empowerment different ways – but seeing people belittle others and treat others [rolls eyes] with what I feel is disrespect, it doesn't empower me." 2. "And this is probably the one [where] I felt the most [eyebrows tilt in] empowered to, just because, like, after all the things that like, the song is, like, talking about

Aspects [a]	Explanation	Examples [b]
		how, like, bad everything is going, she's still able to just be herself and just power through it."
		3. "But I think I felt, like, more happy and empowered at the second ones – like I said before – because they had, like, components with the family and, like, love and happiness and more, like, 'never give up,' kind of thing."
		4. "[There is a sense] that 'you can get through this,' and showing her steps. So maybe you can take inspiration if you're having troubles or you're going through something, you can kind of build off that."

Note. Column headings have been condensed for formatting. Further details are indicated in the specific notes below.

[a] 'Aspects' represents aspects of visual music media that perceive to empower youth girls.

[b] 'Examples' provided comprise participants' quotes (or paraphrased content, where indicated).

Findings from this study reveal a set of values, beliefs, and behaviours that one sample of Canadian youth girls find empowering in music media. The central notion of *voice*, both for self and others, seeks to pull back the curtain on the invisibility that prevails of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Visual representations of women standing together and beside one another, especially in challenging times, speaks to the empowering notion of *unity*. The notion of *compassion* came through with specific comments related to forgiveness. Participants noted vulnerability and sharing the truth was an element that was named courageous and powerful. *Relatability* speaks to the cultural background, attire, word choices, make-up and tone of voice

presented in music media. Findings indicate that when young women able to relate to an artist, they may feel more empowered by their music and/or films. Moving forward during challenging times with grace and dignity, using positive self-speech and showing respect for others spoke to the theme of persistence and positivity. The research findings showed that clothing choices and scenes including females in revealing clothing did not seriously impact the level of empowerment but was rather seen as a choice of the artist. Figure 3.2 depicts the interconnectedness of emerging themes for this study, with "voice" as a central component.

Figure 3.2

Interconnectedness of Emerging Themes
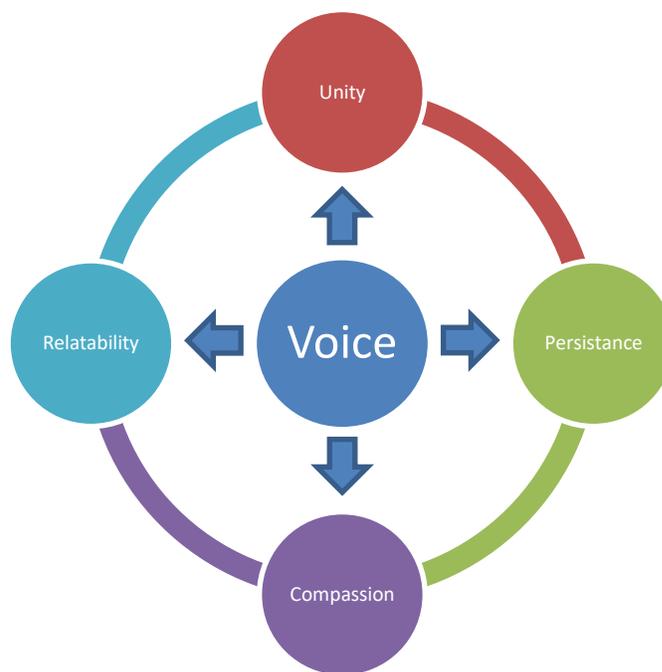
This model affirms the connectedness of the emerging themes and places *voice* at the center as the super-ordinate theme *Voice* was the first of the five themes to emerge and, without it, the remaining themes would not have been uncovered. This study provides a platform for the voice of young women, identifies the lack of voice of women, specifically Black women, and interprets the voice of one of the most famous women of the 21st century, Beyoncé. Because of

voice, other themes emerged. Comments, thoughts, interpretations, and feelings were un-braided

to find themes in *unity*, *persistence*, *relatability*, and *compassion* through the lived experiences of

the participants, but they do not exist solely on their own. The model links these themes using

lines creating a fluid circular response to visual media.

Chapter Four: Unweaving the Braid (Discussion)

Countless studies have drawn conclusions that media is influential (Keller & Ringrose

2015, Turner 2011, and Wallis, 2010). Its images and messages teach individuals how to think,

act, believe, and perceive their worlds, especially when referring to teenagers. In fact, scholars

have argued that mass media is one of the "strongest agents in the socialization process, along

with family, friends, and school" (Goldman et al., 2014 p.1). Within the discussion of Black

popular culture, Collins (2005) frames mass media as appropriation and repackaging of Black

ideas and cultural representations created by Black people.

Drawing on the theoretical framework for this study with respect to psychoanalytic film

theory, I referenced researchers on visible culture and specifically how viewers make meaning.

Images produce meaning, but the meaning of visual music images do not rest fully in the hands

of the producers waiting for viewers to uncover them. Struken and Cartwright (2001) suggest

that meanings are "produced through complex social relationship that involves at least two

elements besides the image itself and its producer: (1) how viewers interpret or experience the

image and (2) the context in which the image is seen" (p. 45).

This is to say that visual music media can be interpreted in ways that differ from

intended, dominant, or shared meanings, and that meaning is created when media is consumed.

Research findings from this study show one central and four main themes to what Canadian

youth girls (aged 15-18) find most empowering in visual music media.

The Essence: Voice

Central to the other four themes found in this research, *voice* emerged as the super-ordinate theme.. The idea of uncovering "invisibleness" is central to the concept, method, and analysis of this study. In *Black women in popular culture*, Goldman et al., (2014) quote Brenda Allen and bring to light the notion of Black women as "invisible rather than as distinct persons who experience and resist multiple jeopardy or interlocking oppressions based on their race, their gender, and intersections of these and other aspects of their identity" (2014, p. 2). In this study, all participants identified the lack of voice women, and particularly Black women, have in society today. While some participants noted this through a *cloak of incompetence* (e.g., "I didn't realize that Black women were treated in this way"), the study unanimously revealed the lack of voice among Black women in North America and around the globe as a result of intersectionality. Each participant referenced this point either during a focus group session or their film-elicited interview.

Many participants (54.5%) stated that they found elements of "changing yourself for someone else" going against your true self and labelled it as disempowering. One participant expressed:

> I found that there was, like, strong feelings of solitude. Like, she separated herself from the world because of what happened; and then, like, trying to change herself over what happened wasn't very empowering.

Another participant expressed:

> The beginning of it, where she's talking about kind of becoming this other woman just [smiles, shrugs and shakes head] ... I don't know, it made me feel kind of uneasy. Like, it's not what I see female empowerment is about is…she's talking about changing herself

into something more desirable, I guess but the way it was brought across makes... it just

…it wasn't empowering at all to me.

Furthermore, at some point, all participants noted themselves as most empowered by images and

auditory reinforcements of women finding and owning their own voice. It should be noted that

voice is not limited only to speaking and the use of one's physical voice, but is widened to attire,

make-up use, physical capabilities (child-bearing and athletic potential), and actions towards

others.

Theme One: Unity

Visual content must be considered in the larger social or cultural contexts in which they

are viewed. With respect to this study, all participants were from Canada and 91% identified as

Caucasian. All participants indicated a strong sense of empowerment after seeing images of

women standing with other women, specifically during challenging times. Participants noted a

sense of community, and one participant responded to these scenes as a "gendered community

feeling."

Other participants uncovered a sense of "generational unity" when responding to video of

grandmothers, mothers, and children gathering together, especially for Black women coming

together to celebrate successes and continue to work towards equality. All participants responded

positively to visual representations of support that appeared in the form other women, including

friends, family, and beyond. Two examples from this theme are:

This was the most empowering part of the album for me because of the images and lyrics

about unity and togetherness and not singing about and showing problems.

> I liked the inclusion of female dancers and stuff, it did bring kind of like a community
>
> feel to the message, I guess. It was more... like, it wasn't just one girl feeling the need to
>
> stand up for herself, I guess, but it was more of, like, a gendered community feeling.

Theme Two: Relatability

Studies of visual culture look at the intersectionality of visual, auditory, and tactile media. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) argue that "when we have an experience with a particular visual medium, we draw on associations with other media and other areas of our lives informed by visual messages" (p. 2). Findings from this research indicate that a stronger sense of empowerment is invoked when the viewer is able to relate to the situation, experience, emotion or artist (and the preconceived notions they have about the artist) more easily. Participants felt most empowered when they viewed an image and could relate it to a personal experience.

In 1998, Jessica Mary Elsie Cummings from the University of Windsor conducted a study on the "effect(s) of visual media on the female body image," and uncovered four in-depth themes. One of these themes references that "people ascribe meaning to things that act or impact on them" (Cummings, 1998, p. 75). Similarly, in the current study, there was a higher yield of responses when a participant was able to relate to the artist, an emotion, image, or verse from the album. Some examples include:

> It made me feel like before she wasn't as strong; and now that she knows what she
>
> knows, she's stronger and she's able to... I guess she doesn't have that wall up, and she's
>
> more open and she's able to understand it, I guess, what's happening and those kinds of
>
> things.

> She made plenty of references to the pain of growing up and leaving behind her childish
>
> ways to enter into a more professional world with a lot more requirements. And, as a

teenage girl going into university and starting to go out on my own, I could definitely relate to that.

Theme Three: Compassion

Brackett (2019 highlights the "RULER" approach, which is an acronym for the five skills of emotional intelligence, as listed here:

> ***Recognizing*** *emotions in oneself and others*
> ***Understanding*** *the causes and consequences of emotions*
> ***Labeling*** *emotions with a nuanced vocabulary*
> ***Expressing*** *emotions in accordance with cultural norms and social context*
> ***Regulating*** *emotions with helpful strategies*

The research and its findings are intended for school-based programs and initiatives that build and support the emotional intelligence of adults and children (Brackett, 2019). Yet, his findings are applicable to people around the globe. I intend to specifically look at the expression of emotions following cultural norms and social context. When we look at various cultures and societies, there are many ways to express and interpret emotions. With respect to this study, many participants responded more positively and observed higher instances of empowerment in situations of compassion and forgiveness. Less than half of the participants felt high levels of empowerment in scenes that depicted anger and resentment, while most of participants felt empowered through forgiveness and vulnerability. Examples from three participants:

> I think it's very easy to [you] know... if you're hurt, it's very easy to just close yourself off and be hurt and be bitter, as she was in kind of the second part of it…but it's really hard to kind of heal from that hurt, and it was a great way... it was good seeing the transition between, you know, her being hurt and angry – understandably so – to being forgiving and loving again.

> I feel like she is being rude, just because someone might hurt you or be rude to you doesn't mean you have to be rude back. I felt discouraged and not empowered.

It can be hard to let go of the power hold someone or something has on you and I think
seeing people do that empowers me the most.

Yet, it should be noted that persons from other cultural, social, or socioeconomic
backgrounds may not respond to the same way to the visual media segments. This theme is
colloquially termed by the researcher as "letting go," moving into the final theme informally
referred to as "moving forward."

Theme Four: Persistence

As this study's interviews and focus groups progressed, it became evident that the idea of
"moving forward," especially during challenging life events, was highly valued. *Persistence* and
the use of positive speech were elements that empowered participants, along with visual
representations of "making the best of what you have in a situation." Some examples from three
participants:

Actions are more empowering than words are. So just kind of flipping someone off and
telling them you're done with them, that doesn't really empower me much; it's just
[sort]of stooping to a level that I don't really want to be at.

I know everybody feels empowerment different ways – but seeing people belittle others
and treat others with what I feel is disrespect, it doesn't empower me.

Hearing stories of determination during a difficult situation and turning to strong women
make me feel the most empowered.

Interrelated and Interlocked: The Connected Nature of Uncovered Themes

Popular culture is ever-changing and involving. van den Hoonaard (2019) encourages researchers to "think about how your various themes and concepts relate to one another and make connections among them" (p. 183). One way she suggests doing this is viewing data considering social processes. While *voice* emerged as a super-ordinate theme from this research, the interconnectedness of *unity, relatability, compassion, and forgiveness* as other major themes provide insight to the lived experiences and values of the participants.

Comments, feelings, and emotions in response to the visual media segments were often intertwined with both empowering and disempowering examples; highlighting similes, metaphors, and other symbols; decoding scenes and clothing choices; and personal experiences. The themes are depicted as interconnected because the lived experiences of the participants and their interactions with media are interconnected. As the interviews and focus groups continued, it become evident that there were multiple ways to feel empowered while consuming segments from Beyoncé's *Lemonade* album, and these means to empowerment were often interrelated with one another. When framed through the lens of popular culture, it is important to view findings as what is true today – versus what is true always. While the participants' impressions of empowerment in this study are fluid and interconnected, media we consume and the way in which we consume continues to shift with youth being at the epicenter of the turnover, causing potential change in this area of study in the coming years.

Chapter Five: Re-braiding (Conclusions)

Through these discussions with Canadian female youth, I have determined that the aspects of visual music media that are perceived as most empowering to them are visual representations of *voice* (owning your authenticity) and *unity* (images of solidarity and standing with one another). Auditory and visual representations of *persistence and compassion*, coupled with the ability to relate to the artist or situation, envelope a stronger sense of autonomy of choices among viewers. Many studies adopting film theory or psychoanalytic film theory focus on the unintended consequences to the female body image (Cummings, 1998; Buote et al., 2011; Maclaran 2012). In this study, participants did not emphasize body image in their comments and only rarely commented on the attire, or lack thereof, in the consumed media. This research might help inform communication planning and marketing for community level youth-based empowerment projects and initiatives in Canada. There are some aspects of this research that may also be helpful in informing communication strategies for female youth engagement in international settings (girls' education, microfinancing, gender-based violence). Overall, this study demonstrates the importance in encouraging and recognizing the individual and collective voice of girls when it comes to the issues and needs of women worldwide.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The primary ethical consideration of this study was the confidentiality of the participants, especially since the majority of them were minors. I committed to concealing the identity of all participants to anyone besides myself and my advisor.. This commitment was also made via an informed consent form signed by each participant, and their parent or guardian if they were under the age of 18.

At the time of the recruitment and data collection, I was working in the recruitment office of the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). My primary role was to recruit students for graduate and professional programs and assist in the application/assessment process. However, in 2017/2018 I frequently assisted in the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students, often visiting high schools in Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Nova Scotia. To mitigate a perceived conflict of interest, I confirmed with PEI-based participants that my role as lead investigator of this research project was independent of my employment at UPEI and they were in no way connected.

There were three unintended limitations to this study worth noting. Firstly, time for participant recruitment and participation was a challenge. I had hoped to recruit 18 participants and conduct film-elicited interviews followed by three focus groups, each with six participants. However, recruitment was more challenging than anticipated, especially since it was not limited to one province, rather spread out across Canada. Coordination and planning for focus groups was demanding and often extremely challenging for the participants considering the up to four-hour time difference and their school and extracurricular activities. Therefore, I put a minimum length on the film-elicited interviews and conducted follow-ups with participants while putting emphasis on the quality and depth of the focus groups.

Secondly, I had intended to use quota sampling, ensuring there were represented voices from female youth of various cultural backgrounds. But, again, due to limitations in time and difficulties in recruitment, the study was adapted for purposive homogenous sample. .

Finally, there were technical challenges with using Google Hangout Air, resulting in parts of focus group sessions were some words or phrases were inaudible therefore leaving word gaps in some transcripts. This created some challenges in data coding and analysis but was not a

damaging factor for the analysis due to the wealth of data collected by both focus groups and individual film-elicited interviews.

Further Research

There are many opportunities for further research in this field. I have selected four recommendations for further study. Firstly, the findings in this study are limited to their context. We still do not know if all girls feel the same way as these 11 girls from Canada do. It would be interesting to repeat the study in another country or region (United States, South East Asia, or East Africa) with youth girls from different cultural, ethnic, traditional, and class backgrounds to see if themes remain similar or differ completely based on cultural identity.

Initially, while coding my qualitative data, I coded the syntax and flow of speech of the participants in order to measure their confidence, sense of certainty, and openness. I also transcribed the interviews to include facial expressions and hand gestures of participants. When it came time to analyze the codes, there was too much to unpack. Therefore, I analyzed the codes relating to flow and syntax and, rather doing a thematic analysis of these specific codes, I framed it as the sensitizing concept of "generational language." Further analysis from this data can be completed that assesses speech patterns of youth girls, measuring their certainty while also analyzing their facial expressions to ensure what they are saying with their voice matches to what they are saying with their bodies.

Next, the data collected from the study included facial and body expression and movement along with comments on ideas, emotions, and feelings from the participants. Due to a lack of time and in-depth formal education in body language, these data were not included in the study. Therefore, future research could include a partnered analysis of the depicted body

language in combination with participants' speech to further validate the emerging themes from this study.

Finally, as previously noted, popular culture is constantly changing and evolving, from what we consume to how we consume it. This study could be repeated after five to ten years to see if time, social movements, or a shift in popular culture change the perspectives of viewers.

Personal Reflection

This research project has been an immense personal learning journey for me. I began this research in 2018 and completed the written portions and requirements in the summer of 2020. While there were periods of time that I was not working actively on this research project, that does not mean it was not actively working on me. This research allowed me to shift my career path, move to Ethiopia to work for a Canadian NGO, work hand in hand with UNICEF and the WHO on public health campaigns in rural Ethiopia, as well as win a request for proposals for CAD$13 million from the Government of Canada.

I began this research project with high levels of excitement and interest, but these levels tapered off after I began working in international development communications and public health promotion. I began to look at my research inquiry and data as frivolous and lacking in ontological purpose as I worked in areas of access to health and education for women and girls globally.

In March of 2020, I returned to Canada due to COVID-19 and was able to make time to complete this research. During this time, the second surge of Black Lives Matter took place with the murder of Black American George Floyd, and a larger social movement to push back against racial inequities and systemic racism in North America and throughout Europe. At this time, I began to become passionate about my initial research once again. I drew parallels between

sensitizing concepts, specifically the "cloak of incompetence," and its link to White silence and

how it is manifested and sprinkled through society. I noted *voice* as a common theme not only in

my research project but in the countless blogs, videos, and social media posts supporting the

overdue Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour movement. This research came full circle for

me at the end, looking not at "what popular culture does to people" but rather "what people do

with popular culture." The opportunity to study and research in this field has put me on a new

career and life path and has helped change and shape my worldview for the better.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

<div align="center">RESEARCH CONSENT FORM</div>

My name is **Rebecca Gass**, and this research project is part of the requirement for a thesis in the Master of Arts in Intercultural and International Communication at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Jennifer Walinga, Director, School of Communication and Culture at XXX-XXX-XXXX. The Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board can be contacted via Colleen Hoppins at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the objective of which is to conduct a study on the topic female empowerment through music videos, specifically to Beyoncé's visual album entitled "Lemonade."

The research will consist of the submission of a personal video and a group interview following semi-structured interview questions that will include information about and references to you. The research will ask you to reflect on personal ideas, feelings, thoughts and views on the subject of female empowerment through music videos. This consent form seeks your consent to be included in the study and relinquishes confidentiality and anonymity as a participant. The method of data collection will take place via Google Hangout Air/YouTube Live. A "private" option for group video focus group will be chosen, yet there is no guarantee of digital security.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Intercultural and International Communication, I will be submitting finding to relevant academic journals and conferences. Information will be recorded in hand-written format **and videotaped** and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. Specific comments may be attributed to individuals in the study unless otherwise requested to the researcher.

A copy of the final report will be published and will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. An exit interview will be conducted for participants withdrawing from the study at any point to ensure participant confidentiality and safety. Digital and written data will be deleted from databases and hard drives and not used in the study. However, participant data may no longer be withdrawn from the study after submission of a personal video and participation in a focus group discussion. It should be noted that while individuals may voluntarily withdraw from the group, your previously recorded comments remain as part of the anonymous data set for the method, as these comments (without

personal identifiers) cannot be separated out of a group recording. Participation in this research study will cumulatively take approximately take four (4) to five (5) hours of your time. The primary benefits produced are for society and for the advancement of knowledge.

Please note that the Principal Investigator is employed at the University of Prince Edwards Island but is enrolled as a graduate student at Royal Roads University. This research pertains to the requirements for a Master of Arts from Royal Roads University and is not affiliated with the University of Prince Edward Island; nor will participants receive incentive from the University of Prince Edward Island to participate in the study.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to be included in this project. You may contact the researcher at any time before proceeding at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian (Please Print): _____

Parent/Guardian email address: _____

Parent/Guardian phone number: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

APPENDIX B: PARTICPANT INFORMATON SHEET

Making Lemonade: Examining Female Empowerment through visual music media

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Name:

Age:

Grade:

Province of resident:

City of residence:

Ethnicity:

Please mark your preferred type of music:

Indie   Pop   Rock   Rap   Top 40 Electronic   Hip Hop

Punk Rock   Techno   Country   Blues   Other

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE EMAIL TO PARTICPANT

Hi _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research! Below is a list of next steps. We will likely look at scheduling the focus group the last weekend of the month - do you think that might work for you?

See the next steps below:

1. Fill out the informed consent form and have your parent/guardian to sign it and send it back to me.

2. Fill out the information sheet attached and send it back to me via email.

3. Download TIDAL and login with the following credentials: username/password.

4. Watch the following video segments:
A) 0:00 - 6:00
B) 10:30 - 27:50
C) 37:50 - 43:40
D) 46:00 - 56:35

* You are welcome to watch the entire video segment on TIDAL if you'd like. But you are only required to watch the segments listed above. You are welcome to use the TIDAL account as your own for the period of this research. Feel free to take notes as you watch the video segments on some of the following elements: tone of voice, words, attire/costumes, make up, imagery (personal or background), etc.

5. Record a video of yourself, answering some questions (these questions will be sent tomorrow) and send to me via email or via text message. There are no wrong answers, only your personal experience. Your video should be a minimum of 5 minutes long at least, and a maximum of 20 minutes (if you have more to say that goes over 20 minutes, that is alight, it is just a guideline).

*You are welcome to take notes while you watch the segments. *

And then answer the following questions, in a recorded video and send to me via text or email. This is your video submission - so feel free to be as creative as you'd like :).

1. What do you think of the R&B artist Beyoncé?

2. How did you feel after watching segments of the visual album?

3. How did each segment of video make you feel? Did you feel empowered by any segment of video?

4. What components of the video make you feel this way (tone of voice, lyrics, attire, visual imagery, etc). * Please note if at any point if you felt DIS-empowered by any of the video content.

For context, empowerment has to do with the power some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale. It involves undoing negative social constructions – building the capacity in those affected to have influence.

Thank you for your participation! If you have any questions at all during the process, you can text, call or email me at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Best regards,

Rebecca