

## Feminism of Stardom: Representation of Body and Sexuality by American Feminist Pop Culture Icons

For couple of decades now feminism seems to have found its safe haven in American entertainment industry with several female icons coming to forefront as its flagbearers. The point of genesis can be traced back to 1980s when Madonna with her eccentric fashion sense and outrageous defense of premarital sex and eroticism through her pop songs and accompanying videos established herself as global youth icon. Madonna has always identified herself as a fierce feminist advocating for assertion of female sexuality and need for women to stand against patriarchal bullying. In five decades from the time Madonna crested, surge of feminism has swept the entertainment industry to the extent that it is hard to single out a female celebrity icon who has not identified herself as a feminist at least once. In fact, biggest celebrities of the age such as Beyonce and Lady Gaga stand tall upon the bedrock of feminism appropriating feminist agendas particularly regarding body and sexuality as their top-notch marketing tool from the time they established themselves secure in the industry.

In today's context, disembodied forces of mass media and internet are largely responsible in shaping and maneuvering public consciousness. Cultural industry as a primary patron of these forces is held up as connoisseur of feminism more than academia. The narratives of oppression, resistance and empowerment disseminated by popular media through a celebrity icon gain more currency in the public spheres, subsequently shaping a feminist consciousness that is removed from the history of origin and evolution of feminist ideology. The image of Madonna sustained by the mass media during 80s with her androgynous fashion statement, overtly sexual songs and music videos accompanied by her unabashed pride upon herself was as seductive to young feminists as it was to the public. The alluring image of a female comfortably exposing her body, singing confidently about her own

fantasies, and making her mark upon people across the globe was an image of empowerment of a kind that could not be fitted under the feminism that was prevailing in academia. While the feminists of 80s were attentive towards the developments in popular culture, they were mostly negative about the way icons like Madonna exhibited their body as commodity. Under the rigid strictures of second wave feminism, academic feminists interpreted women's position in show business as objectification of women's body to disseminate unreal beauty standards and false idea of empowerment. The need for redrawing the boundary of feminism was hence identified by the young feminists, who could not comply with the prescriptions of academia and were allured by the kind of liberty cultural icons were portraying.

The advent of third wave established feminism as an open ideology that embraces multiplicity in ways of performing feminism. The ideology that was believed to be the prerogative of handful of scholars with their strict definition and criteria on aim of feminism, meaning of gender and permissible approaches to attain the ultimate goal of feminist politics was countered as removed from the common place particularly from the reach of margin. Contrary to the strictures of second wave feminism, this relatively nascent stream of feminism claimed to allow the experiences of any women and non-women (men and sexual dissidents); belonging to the mainstream or margin; their take on empowerment, body, sexuality, liberty and resistance inside the project of feminism. In case of images of feminism disseminated by the cultural industry, the third wave feminism embraces all the overtly sexualized visual performances, hyper technological visual experimentations, surrealistic and fantasized portrayal of bodies showcased by the female cultural icons as the celebration of female agency in art, entertainment business and above all individual body.

However, the splinters of second wave and other strands of feminism (individual feminism, post feminism, socialist feminism) that do not locate themselves in the wave metaphor are still pervading the feminist scholarship. Within the academia, considerable

volumes of polemics are surfacing that are cynical about the third wave project and its obsession with the pop culture. There are the voices that claim the irrelevance of feminism endorsed by cultural icons like Madonna, Beyonce and Gaga in the face of real problem. These feminists view celebrity feminists as the gospel of unreal standards of empowerment and beauty that brings more harm than good for overall feminism project.

This research stems from this ongoing debate among the present generation feminists about the place pop culture should occupy inside the feminist project. The contention of this research is to analyze the feminism endorsed by three different feminist cultural icons in light of the debate pervading the feminist scholarship. It examines the means and ways used to depict body and sexuality through their expressions and works. The research brings about contradictory viewpoints circulating within the academia in close reading and analysis of lyrics, music videos, public statements, interviews and speeches made by the celebrity icons: Madonna, Beyonce and Lady Gaga. While the research does not question the right of any icon to identify herself as a feminist and challenge the authenticity of her individual feminist ideal, it critically examines the implication and pragmatism of feminism of stardom in larger social context.

Today's feminism is intrinsically ironic as its project is simple and complex at the same time. Simple because any way of doing feminism is a right way and complex because the aim of feminist politics has now become vaguer than ever blurring the direction of intervention. With its fixation over multiplicity, feminism has become subjective and as R. Clair Snyder observes, "the movement on the surface seems like a confusing hodgepodge of personal anecdote and individualistic claims in which the whole is less than the sum of its parts" (175). This suspension of wholeness in terms of purpose, goals, outcome and implication of feminist project is one of the defining traits of feminism of celebrity icons. While under the banner of third wave feminism the feminism of celebrity icons is deemed as

authentic, the same banner ensures space of skepticism on part of their audience and receiver. This ever-present flexibility of interrogation subsequently reduces that authenticity into provisionality.

Madonna's speech for 2016 Billboard Women in Music can be taken as an example. A long confessional speech made by Madonna after winning the Woman of the Year award was narration of her own experiences rather than a set of prescriptions on how feminism should be. Towards the end of her speech she asserts herself as a feminist different than other; "a bad feminist" (9:19- 9:20) with her own personalized formula for patriarchal resistance. Through her speech, Madonna stands as a materialized dream of feminist project: a woman standing tall against all adversaries laid by patriarchy. However, on a hindsight her version of feminism is not free from paradoxes.

Madonna's public image has always been that of a woman who appropriates and assumes masculinity as a tool for female empowerment. Her androgynous representation of body can be seen during the same ceremony where, before starting her celebrated speech, she extended her legs saying "It's better this way... I always feel better with something hard between my legs" (0:41- 0:57). Carla Freccero long analyzed Madonna's paradoxical influence among her fans. She observed that "For her girl fans, Madonna has suggested ways of appropriating rebellious masculine youth culture, both preserving and subverting femininity, mitigating the adolescent disempowerment of the female position" (164). Freccero made this observation during the turn of century and it remains pertinent even to present when two decades have passed. Freccero's assertion can also be implied to study Madonna's implicit resistance against aging while explicitly advocating for an artist's right to age respectfully. Paradoxically her own resistance against age becomes apparent from her overtly sexual candid statement that is deemed unnatural for someone in her fifties. Germaine Greer in her book *The Whole Woman* positioned Madonna (in her mid-thirties) "as a

figurehead for succeeding generations of aggressively randy, hard-drinking young females, who have got younger with every passing year, until they are now emerging in their pre-teens” (324). Madonna’s speech contradicts her own career long attempts to portray herself as younger than her age while also inspiring her successors to do the same.

Popular culture has always regarded aging as undesirable rather than a meaningful growth. As Imelda Welehan bluntly observes “Physiologically, the ageing female body has been well documented as a process of deterioration rather than framed more positively as a growing towards wisdom or full maturity, and the fetishisation of the young (even pre-pubescent) female body maintains its sway over postmodern popular culture” (xvi).

Madonna’s refusal to act her age at the public sphere depicts her own obsession with youth which she has long passed making her criticism of ageism in entertainment industry seem dishonest. In fact, Madonna has always complied with the rule of entertainment industry to help her sustain her career. When a celebrity’s professional journey is gauged against the unspoken yet pervading rules within the entertainment industry, the incoherence in their activism become more pronounced. On a critical examination, similar internal incoherence is found in Beyonce’s version of feminism.

Beyonce’s most recent album *Lemonade* was released in 2016. The album was publicized as an attempt to represent the strength and beauty of African American women. Filled with the communal conscience and desire to stay true to one’s root, Beyonce’s album garnered her many accolades and strengthened her feminist affiliation. However, her attempt was seen far from being rebellious and ground-breaking by feminist intellectuals of her community. In an essay on *Lemonade*, Bell Hooks appreciated Beyonce’s attempt to portray the black woman’s body aesthetically. She applauds the fact that “a black female creator as powerfully placed as Beyonce can both create image and present viewers with her own

interpretation of what those images mean” (“Moving Beyond Pain”). However, she castigates Beyonce’s version of feminism as lopsided and removed from ground realities. She writes:

[Beyonce’s] vision of feminism does not call for an end to patriarchal domination. It’s all about insisting on equal rights for men and women. In the world of fantasy feminism, there are no class, sex, and race hierarchies that breakdown simplified categories of women and men, no call to challenge and change systems of domination, no emphasis on intersectionality. In such a simplified worldview, women gaining the freedom to be like men can be seen as powerful. But it is a false construction of power as so many men, especially black men, do not possess actual power. And indeed, it is clear that black male cruelty and violence towards black women is a direct outcome of patriarchal exploitation and oppression. (“Moving Beyond Pain”)

Hooks criticism of Beyonce emerge from her insistence upon acknowledging the naturalized cultural matrices of domination such as race and sex. Hooks’ fixity over the “solution to patriarchal domination” implies the demand for the action or direction of intervention.

However, for third wavers the direction of intervention is the incorporation of ranges of narratives to extend the feminist consciousness among the mass. As Snyder writes; “third-wavers embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification” (175).

In line of this notion, the feminist voices circulating the popular media through the popular icons like Madonna and Beyonce can be advantageous in shaping the feminist consciousness among the mass. Considering the top-notch position held by popular culture and entertainment industry in mainstream media, the feminism endorsed by stars has the advantage of reaching over the public while the academic feminism struggles to survive outside academia.

The research is based on the analysis of music videos, song lyrics, public statements and interviews given by three celebrity icons: Madonna, Beyonce and Stefani Germanotta or Lady Gaga. The selected music videos are the ones that have drawn the attention of academic feminists and generally consented or marketed as incorporating feminine sentimentality, undertone of resistance and empowerment. In particular; Madonna's 2016 speech for Billboard Women in Music, Beyonce's selected songs from two of her video album *Lemonade* (2016): "Formation", "Hold up"; and *I am... Sasha Fierce* (2008): "If I were a Boy", and Lady Gaga's 2013 interview for Wendy Mesley of CBC News are taken as primary texts. In addition, Lady Gaga's viral song "Poker Face" and "Telephone"; her duet with Beyonce are also studied during the analysis of Lady Gaga's hyper alienated representation of body and sexuality. All these primary texts are examined against the ongoing debate between the feminist scholars regarding the position of popular culture within the feminist project and pragmatism of popular feminist iconographies.

Primary theoretical tool is derived from third wave feminism that is arguably more inclusive and positive towards the narratives surfacing in popular industry. The feminist works that emerged in the last decade of twentieth century from the young feminists who wanted to debunk the heavy jargons and rigid prescriptions of preceding generations to establish their experiences with gender and identity into premise of feminism are consensually placed under the third wave banner. The third-wave mainly purports to the gender and identity experiences of youths by "emphasiz[ing]the importance of cultural production and critique, focusing particular attention on female pop icons, hip-hop music, and beauty culture, rather than on traditional politics per se" (Snyder 178). This is the reason why third wave insights are imperative in this research. The research borrows theoretical ideas from the prominent third wave academics such as Jeniffer Baumgardner and Amy Richards whose work is based on the study of popular culture in shaping the feminist

consciousness in young women. Academicians EdnieKaeh Garrison and Imelda Whelehan's observation of role of media in prioritizing the entertainment industry and subsequently helping young women internalize feminism as a lifestyle is another major theoretical ground on which the research builds up.

Today western popular feminism is gaining currency in academia through constant debate between the third wavers and the preceding generation feminists. While the third wave embraces feminist popular icons and their professional and social repertoires as gospel of equality and empowerment, several polemics are questioning the politics of feminism endorsed by celebrity icons. These polemics are the splinters of second wave feminism that have not left the academia. Therefore, the voices of second wavers become necessary in dissecting the popular feminism. Theoretical ideas are also borrowed from the second wave feminists like Bell Hooks, Germaine Greer and Donna Haraway. These academicians come together in critically observing the developments in popular culture and interrogating the pragmatism of celebrity feminism. Apart from the generational feminists complying with the metaphor of wave, some insights are borrowed from the dissident feminist like Camille Paglia whose works are anchored on the close study of popular culture and celebrity phenomenon.

The research therefore relies on a wide range of conflicting opinions regarding celebrity feminism and their aims to offer a more balanced and objective analysis on significance and downside of modern-day celebrity feminism in American context. Finally, the research also borrows ideas from queer theory; an extension of feminist project. The insights are brought from Judith Butler, who problematized the attribute of wholeness and inherent identity attuned by second generation feminists to the term "woman" (which they correlated to biology). Butler's argument that "sex" is as much of cultural construct as "gender" extended the feminist project to include those who did not fit under the man/woman



and male/female binary. Building on the Butler's notion and observing the works of Lady Gaga and various other pop icons, Judith Jack Halberstam, a queer theorist suggests a possibility of new kind of feminism which he calls "gaga feminism." The research draws ideas from Halberstam's work to interpret the popular feminism.

EdnieKaeh Garrison observes that the young women from 1980s onwards in United States internalize and claim feminist agency through "historically situated cultural products" that include "print and visual media; music genres, technologies, and cultures; girl-positive and woman-positive expressions; revolutionary and social justice discourses; shock tactics; nonviolent actions; and the Internet" (143). One of the major tools that carve feminist consciousness in American youth culture today is popular media and its inseparable appendage; entertainment industry. Garrison observes the influence of popular culture particularly punk music in translation of feminist politics as a lifestyle for young American women. Acceptance of the power of technology and popular culture in new age feminist project is seen as a quintessential character that marks the departure of third wave from the second wave predecessors.

Entertainment industry today has commodified multiple narratives of resistance in form of cultural product. Featuring female icons as testimonials to assert the possibility of conquering professional world of money (the dominion traditionally held by men) by embracing femininity, mass media has inspired young women to lead lifestyle like those of celebrities. Third wave academicians such as EdnieKaeh Garrison, Rebecca Munford, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards view the popular culture as a force integral in shaping the future of feminism and building a lifestyle where "feminism is ... life" (Baumgardner and Richards 321). The popular iconographies celebrating female bodies and sexuality today are not necessarily the image of female objectification but of the prototype of empowered women. Baumgardner and Richards lash the feminists concern and obsession with the

rhetoric of “objectification” for every image of a woman exhibiting her body in sexual way. They agree with Camille Paglia to argue that “showing herself in sexual ways makes a woman feel powerful and men powerless, they are examples of women’s “subjectification”” (103). The images of women in entertainment industry known commonly as a show business is not an act of objectification rather a demonstration of the power women have over their body in particular and men in general. For such women, body is strength that helps them elevate their material condition, social status and intrinsic aesthetic value. One of the prototypes of such powerful woman for third wavers is Madonna.

Camille Paglia; an individualist feminist who prefers to be called as “anti-feminist feminist” was among the first academics to acknowledge Madonna’s influence on disseminating the dictum of girl’s power. In her 1990 column for *The New York Times* Paglia defended Madonna as a “true feminist” applauding her ability to counter “the puritanism and suffocating ideology of American feminism, which is stuck in an adolescent whining mode”(50). She further accounts Madonna’s significance in feminist project when she writes: “Madonna taught young women to be fully female and sexual while still exercising control over their lives. She shows girls how to be attractive, sensual, energetic, ambitious, aggressive, and funny—all at the same time” (50). Echoing Paglia’s interpretation of Madonna, Jenifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards read Madonna as a “subjectifier” who holds power. They assert that Madonna and other female hip-hop artists “have paralyzed their sexual selves into power in feminist ways. [They] aren’t exploited [but] are whole women—both confident and conscious” (103). Furthermore, “Madonna is in control of her sexual power rather than a victim of it; she wields it in the way like she could a gun or a paintbrush or some other power tool that is usually the province of men” (141). From the time of her rise Madonna has been hailed as a “future of feminism” (51), a gospel of empowerment and materialized dream of feminist project.

However, Madonna's arguably the most feminist speech on 2016 Billboard Awards for Women in Music was characterized by an astounding mishap when she accused her earliest acolyte Camille Paglia as her foremost academic adversary. In her tearful speech, Madonna singled out Paglia as the one who accused her of "put[ting] female down by objectifying [herself] sexually" (8:56 – 9:06). Paglia who has fiercely been rejecting feminist's obsession over the popular images of sexual objectification was wrongly accused by the leading feminist cultural icon amidst the audience applauding the ostensible narration of Madonna's rough journey in Hollywood. While Paglia's feminist scholarship stands on controversial roots, Madonna's bashing of Paglia as her foremost critique demonstrated her distance from the historical roots and development of feminist scholarship.

Along with the new surge in feminism brought by the incorporation of the spurs in popular culture, Madonna during her career peak was widely accepted feminist. Her exhibition of erotica, opening about female sexuality through endorsement of condom brands and publication of a coffee book *Sex*, association with sexual dissidents had garnered the attention of both old and young feminists. Broek studied Madonna's earlier music video as creation of personae to "challenge the traditional catholic iconography"(626). As she climbed up the popularity ladder, she championed the world of money making along with establishing herself as a fantasy icon in the subconscious of both men and women.

Madonna's image of sexual goddess was a power wrapped under the cloak of objectification. Her revealing outfits, sexually explicit musical videos defying the traditional catholic regulations made her an ultimate sexual fantasy for men for whom the closest they could get to her was only in dream. This objectification for Paglia and other emerging third wave academicians was not a regressive one but a promise of rise of new kind of woman who has ability to exert power in society through her artistic talent combined with sensuality. Her earlier musical videos and songs were such as "Like a Virgin" and "Like a Prayer" exhibited

her erotic part that helped to establish her image as a sexual dominatrix who is in charge of her sexuality rather than a shy submissive waiting for a man to unleash her sexual prowess. Unlike the second wave feminists who could only see women's body and sexuality as tool for objectification, new generation of feminists now saw the possibility of new kind of activism in feminist project by assigning women with agency over their body and sexuality.

Madonna reached the summit of her career with an image of an iconoclast whose deviation from normativity helped her build an independent career on her own rules. Madonna's activism for gay rights and more generally gender equality; the issues that are at the margin of media representation complement the image she maintained for herself since the start of her career. Baumgardner and Richards vividly create Madonna's image when they describe the time of her rise and her deviation from the contemporary cultural icons. They write:

In 1984, Madonna came out with her album *Like a Virgin*. Lying on her back on the album's cover photo, elbows propped, looking sexy, bored and tough as hell, she wore fluffy crinolines, black eyeliner, and a belt that said "Boy Toy." She was bad, and looked at you like she wanted it bad... There were dozens of incarnations that followed for the material girl. The video identities: stripper, pregnant girl from the neighborhood, dominatrix, men's suit wearing activist for female sexuality... and Madonna's off-camera identities: strongest thighs in all pop music, bitch, best friend to all the fabulous lesbians, "serious" actress with affective English accent, beatific single mother and most powerful performer in all the pop firmament. Throughout all this she was sending a message, teaching by example: Be what you are then be something else that you want to be (and earn a billion bucks when you are at it. (131)

Madonna's androgynous style statement during her public appearances with seamless appropriation of masculinity embedded in femininity can be interpreted as transgressing of

traditional notion of beauty, decorum and feminine etiquette. For the icon like Madonna whose existence and sustenance in the industry is defined by difference, her statement as a “I’m [sic] a different kind of feminist; I’m [sic] a bad feminist” (7:41-7:43) in the Billboard Women speech can be interpreted as an attempt to establish a strand of feminism deviant from the mainstream scholarship; the Madonna feminism that is empowering in its outrageousness.

However, while Baumgardner and Richards view Madonna’s ownership of her sexuality and its disposal in material pursuit, they do not mention the limitations of her feminist value. Madonna’s strand of feminism poses an integral question upon the direction of intervention. Madonna’s feminism inclines towards individualism and radicalism which do not fit for compound communal situation. Madonna’s feminism at her fifties appeal for solidarity among women and call for universal sisterhood with undertone of hostility to men. In her widely cheered feminist speech Madonna says:

Women have been so oppressed for so long. They believe what men have to say about them and they believe they have to back a man to get a job. And there are some very good men who are worth backing but not because they are men, because they are worthy. As women we have to start appreciating our own worth and each other’s worth. Seek out strong women to befriend, to align yourself with, to learn from, to be inspired by . . . True solidarity amongst women is a power all in its sum and no opposing force stands a chance in a face of this solidarity. (13:17-14:18)

Madonna’s ideal of feminism demonstrates her distance from the realization of forces like community, race, religion and class that subjects women to diverse conditions. Moreover, her positioning of men as adversary demonstrates a hasty judgement without being critical of the way men are subjected in patriarchy (the system that has a long history before contemporary men). Patriarchy is a system that is not conditioned by contemporary men. Though patriarchy

apparently privilege men; they like women have been conditioned into this system and it has not always benefited men. Therefore, on a critical inspection Madonna's androphobia dilutes her criticality in terms of feminist affiliation.

Apart from this, there are several contradictions that need to be critically interrogated. The speech that sprung from her personal experience with entertainment industry starts with benign statement that "[she] stands as a doormat; Oh! [sic] a female entertainer"(1:23-1:31). Following this she expresses her gratitude for "acknowledging [her] ability to continue [her] career for 34 years in the face of blatant misogyny, sexism, constant bullying and relentless abuse (1:03-1:19). The speech that starts with Madonna throwing a victim card readily draws attention from the audience who nod their heads on empathy towards the arguably most revered female entertainer of American cultural industry. Examining Madonna's fame as a star culture icon right after she debuted in 80s, and her legacy in the entertainment industry of a female entertainer who needed no men back up to maintain her star enterprise, her status as a "doormat" as she said is difficult to believe. Camille Paglia rebukes this introductory statement by Madonna as "a startling appropriation of stereotypical feminist rhetoric by a superstar whose major achievement in cultural history was to overthrow the puritanical old guard of second-wave feminism and to liberate the long-silenced pro-sex, pro-beauty wing of feminism, which swept to victory in the 1990s" ("How to Age Disgracefully in Hollywood"). Despite her share of adventures in the industry, Madonna during the peak of her career was hailed as a woman singlehandedly capable of bursting all the patriarchal normativity by exuding sensuality as well as maintaining the professional intellectuality. After thirty-four years of her career when Madonna was felicitated for her unprecedented legacy, her speech followed a pattern that demonstrated her triumph over all sorts of regressive forces that can set a woman back to deserve the honor. Her rhetoric seems scripted to portraying feminism as a trait acquired during the process of growth from a naive victim to a cultural icon who can

survive all adversities (misogyny, sexism, patriarchal bullying and abuse) and stay true to her subjectivity. Madonna's speech therefore puts feminism in the center of a success story; a tool that helped a person to fight one's ostensible battle and elevate her social status.

Avoiding the myriads of ideological complexities and different socio-cultural conditions, this simplified notion of feminism is sensationalized and endorsed by today's media.

Today's world is a dominion of disembodied force called media that maneuvers public consciousness to large extent. The linear hegemony inside the media positions academia at the lower end while entertainment industry and popular culture remain at the top most position. Media today both feeds on and produces cultural values and normativity sustaining on the capitalist market economy. While the feminism produced by popular artists is gaining currency among the public, it is hard yet unexamined fact that feminism is being accepted as a glamorous lifestyle, an object of consumption. EdnieKaeh Garrison contends the parodical "double function of the media as a culture market" that has led "to the representation of feminism and its variants as a label or lifestyle or brand as it gets re-constituted as a commodity for sale" (188). This commodification of feminism as per Garrison has deferred the "the political in favour of the idea of the relation between lifestyle practice and political commitment" (188). She resorts to Bell Hooks' (a second wave feminist) observation that the willingness of some participants of feminist movement to reduce feminism to lifestyle choices links bourgeois liberal feminism to the commercial imperative of popular media" (188). This commercial feminism shuns the political complexity of academic feminism and reduces the ideology to fit with the need of consumer. Madonna's feminism is a sensational feminism that circulates as a glittering commodity among the people who have access to media. Several succeeding artists and entertainers have followed Madonna's footsteps to establish their individual version of feminism.

In January 2014, Beyonce Giselle Knowles-Carter (popularly known as Queen Bey) wrote an essay for the special edition of *The Shriver Report* entitled “Gender equality is a myth.” It was read as her first public assertion of her feminist inclination though in the essay she did not mention herself as a feminist. This edifying essay appealed for equality in terms of payroll. Her emphasis was on bridging the economic disparity between the sexes in order to attain ideal socio-political equality. The essay seems to be a call for action for all those who are bothered by the segregatory payment policy. She writes:

Today, women make up half of the U.S. workforce, but the average working woman earns only 77 percent of what the average working man makes. But unless women and men both say this is unacceptable, things will not change. Men have to demand that their wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters earn more—commensurate with their qualifications and not their gender. Equality will be achieved when men and women are granted equal pay and equal respect. (“Gender Equality is a Myth)

Unlike, Madonna’s speech Beyonce’s appeal does not blame men rather includes them as stakeholder and beneficiaries. However, like Madonna’s Beyonce’s feminism seemingly stems from a general survey exempt from the underlying social and political complexities.

In the MTV Music Video Awards of same year, Beyonce performed her single “Flawless” before the word “FEMINIST” at the background and openly declared herself as a feminist. Though it was her first admittance of the feminist affiliation, ever since the start of her career as a performance artist, Beyonce has been critically scrutinized, read and interpreted through feminist gaze by several academic feminist and cultural critics. Nathalie Weidhasetraces Beyoncé’s musical engagement with feminism or issues related to feminism to her teen years when she was lead in her former band Destiny child giving out songs such as, “Independent Woman Pt. 1” that depicted “a basic, if perhaps naïve and postfeminist “girl powered”- inspired feminism (128). Anne Brooks studied Beyonce’s second solo album as an



attempt to create “black feminists surrogation, that is, an embodied performance that recycles palpable form of black female sociopolitical grief and loss as well as spirited dissent and dissonance” (180). Brooks believed that this “surrogation” displayed by Beyonce along with other contemporary black female artists is the beginning of new form of black feminist revolution. Beyonce’s cultural roots caused her works to be consumed critically as a race specific feminist artistry long before her admittance as feminist.

Beyonce’s most admired singles are those that are known to touch upon deepest emotional and physical terrain of women. Her third solo video album *I am... Sasha Fierce* was promoted as representation of two sides of her subjectivity: one that is soft, vulnerable and typical feminine and the other side that is assertive, affirming and empowered alter ego. Her song “If I were a Boy” from the side *I am...* is about disparity between socio-psychological liberties and sexual liberties entitled to men and women. With an androphobic undertone she sings an emotionally invested woman’s deepest regret on not being returned enough from her male partner. She begins with her wish to be a boy even if it is only for a day so that she could exercise all those freedoms like “throw[ing] what I wanted and go/ Drink[ing] beer with the guys/ and chas[ing] after the girls” (verse 1, 4-6). However, this wish to enter into the boy’s world is not an innocent fantasy but a wish born out of vehemence for the unsympathetic boy that cannot be as compassionately committed in a relationship as a woman. Her deepest wish is to make the boy realize the pain that he has instilled into her by paying him back with all that he has done to her. However, as the song moves forward, she illustrates the desired behaviors from a boy. The song juxtaposes what the “boy” actually does and what she would do “if I [she] were a boy”(verse 1,1). She shares her desire to demonstrate the behaviors of an ideal lover if she could become a boy for a day. The song beautifully makes audience aware about a girl’s fantasy about love which is more often shattered at the hands of a boy and how still a girl manages to overcome her pain and

empower herself. Towards the end, the song catches the sentiment of empowerment where she is determined to get out of the relationship and “put [herself] first” (verse 2, 5) rather than committing to an unsettling relationship and never forgiving the “boy” who left her in emotional turmoil. The song ends with a sneer towards the “boy” saying “but you’re just a boy” (chorus 2, 11) which reiterates the theme of woman’s emotional superiority and resoluteness as compared to a man. This song reflected Beyonce’s worldview that “an independent woman must sacrifice the princess fantasy she was sold as a child, and keep that steely edge, even when her world is melting around her” (Powers “First Listen”). Another song from another side, *Sasha Fierce* from the same album “Single Ladies (Put the ring on it)” encapsulates similar theme of girl empowerment entitling women with sexual freedom.

“Single Ladies (Put the ring on it)” encourages women to take relationships less seriously, unleash their sexuality and put themselves above everything else. Visually, the song is shot in black and white with Beyonce dancing with two background dancers; all in skinny leotard and high heels. The song comprises hardcore choreography in tune with each and every beat where the focus of choreography is upon the movement of hips, thigh and legs. Attuning to the image of her alter ego “Sasha Fierce” who Beyonce believes as “the fun, more sensual, more aggressive, more outspoken side and more glamorous side that comes out when [she is] working and when [she is] onstage” (Knowles qtd in Vineyard) the visual song entitles women particularly “single ladies” agency to take charge of their sexuality. Her focus on exhibiting sensuality however has generated myriads of debate within academia.

One charge that third wavers put upon the preceding generation feminists is their rigidity towards women’s articulation of sexuality. The major bone of contention for emerging feminists during early 90s was the failure of feminism to assign women’s body and sexuality as the prerogative of women. Second waver’s fixation on media representation of body and sexuality as spectacles of commodification had overshadowed other possible

significance of body and sexuality in feminist project. Naomi Wolf's reference to second wave feminism as a "victim feminism" and its castigation as "sexually judgmental and antisexual", "judgmental of other women's sexuality and appearance" (qtd in Snyder 179) depicts the hostility of feminists towards the lapses of second wavers. Wolf furthermore accuses second wave as interpreting sensuality as flippant and viewing fun as "a threat to revolution" (Snyder 179). In reading Wolf's accusation Snyder locates the deviation of third wavers from their precedents in terms of expression of sexuality and embodiment of femininity. As this nascent wave of feminism is about moving beyond the strictures set by their precedents and embracing the nonjudgmental multiplicity, they "feel entitled to interact with men as equals, claim sexual pleasure as they desire it (heterosexual or otherwise), and actively play with femininity (179). Thus, they created the space for "symbols of women's feminine enculturation- Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels- and said using them isn't a shorthand for 'we've been duped[sic]'" (Baumgardner and Richards 136). In this light Beyoncé's message of women's empowerment can be interpreted as embedded in femininity and expression of sensuality that she believes is inherent to women.

However, in the age when ideological strands of feminism are unquestioningly entwined with sociopolitical and economic factors, understanding Beyoncé's feminism exempt from her racial roots would be harked inadequate. After her feminist proclamation, her creative projects and public appearances have attempted to incorporate her cultural roots more than in the past. Her latest video album *Lemonade* is case in point. The album is her biggest black feminist project so far. The album is a rendition of black women's body anchored in different experiential history and cultural roots. The album that was premiered as an hour-long musical narration speaks of Beyoncé's personal experience with her husband's infidelity along with stories of submission and resistance of many other women who stand beside her in her different video songs.

Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in their book *Reading Images* explore different ways of representing cultural ideologies through images and linguistic translation of such images. Interpreting images under the light of Halliday's Grammar as meaning making tool, Kress and Leewen assert that like grammar of language, images attune to "particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction" (2). These interpretations represented in images can be translated linguistically and can have culturally specific meaning. Furthermore, determining the mode of semiotic representations, either visual or verbal is also specified by culture and historical position. They argue that in visual representation tools and patterns of expression like colour can have power to determine meaning of the image as grammar in the language have (2). Kress and Leewen's insights help us locate the cultural and ideological meaning embedded in Beyonce's *Lemonade*.

In an accompanying music video for her song "Hold up" from *Lemonade*, Beyonce is seen walking on the street; smashing multiple cars and windows with a baseball bat; her aggression increasing with every other act of vandalization, as an emotive retaliation against supposed infidelity. On her every vandalizing stride she is cheered on by onlookers and passersby; all of them in different shades of brown, in different shapes and sizes.



Fig. 1. Still from Beyoncé's music video "Hold Up" (3:41)

The video artistically intends to convey the message of empowering self by celebrating one's vulnerability, turning one's weakness into strength and moving on, with Beyoncé's growing aggression standing as a metaphor for empowerment and strength. Beyoncé donned in yellow as Yoruba water goddess stands as a visual rendition of accompanying lyrics; "hold up, they don't love you like I love you" (Verse 1, 1). The Goddess Oshun is believed to be the semblance of undying love, sensuality, fertility and compassion with mysterious sophistication that can be alluded to fresh flowing water. As much she exudes beauty, she is sad and lonely inside with immense wrath and power to destroy. Beyoncé's video aestheticizes the marvelous mystery of Oshun, an epitome of femininity and divinity centralizing the theme of love, infidelity and sexual jealousy.

The video and album as a whole garnered multiple accolades and exemplified what Brooks calls "surrogation" of black female more than in her past works. Another song in the same album titled "Formation" is more pronounced and declarative of black pride. With the black corporeality at its center the song is as Alex Macpherson writes "her blackest song ever" ("Beyoncé's Formation Review") where alongside powerful lyrics Beyoncé rallies

against the racism with her assertive pride over her cultural roots. The video starts with Beyonce on car's hood over the flood ready to be submerged conveying post Katrina scenario in the South as shown below in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. Still from Beyoncé's song "Formation" (0:29)

The above still from Beyoncé's "Formation" is a visual assertion of Beyoncé's power. The subject of the picture is Beyoncé over the car hood in a confident bossy posture. The drowning Police van stands for the downfall of authority that administers the segregatory system under which coloured people of America are wrongly treated even by the law. The flooded background suggest adversity brought by the hurricane Katrina. Amidst all these hostile forces Beyoncé is sitting tall, unharmed and confident demanding the immediate attention of viewers.

Unlike her previous works, *Lemonade* is more culturally situated and racially specific.

The song is boastful consciousness about her nativity as she sings:

My daddy Alabama, mamma Louisiana

You mix that negro with that Creole make a Texas bamma

I like my baby hair, with baby hair and afros

I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils

Earned all this money but they never take the country out me

I got a hot sauce in my bag, swag. (5-10)

In this song she playfully mocks the haters, recounts her position as a wealthy and strong woman and appeals black ladies to “get in formation” with her, that is to make a militia as strong and successful as her.

For Beyonce embracing one’s blackness and inculcating self-love is the only way to overcome the patriarchy embedded in racism. Formation is the song that demands attention towards her prosperity as a black female entertainer. The song gives a nook towards Beyonce’s commercialization of black body; an attempt that has been both cheered and castigated by academicians. Mako Wards examines Beyonce’s appropriation of black narratives and feminist politics as contrary to the process of her evolvment as a wealthy and powerful female icon and detrimental to her artistry. For Wards, Beyonce’s last two albums have uncritically appropriated “systemic violence experienced by marginalized communities” (147) and provocatively used them in her artistry to “build her own empire” (148). Wards echoes Bell Hooks criticism of Beyonce’s failure to understand the ground level. Amidst multiple cheers and applause economic factor behind Beyonce’s artistry is often unexamined and so is the implementation side of her feminism. As Wards writes:

[Beyonce’s] performance is rooted in the glamour of radicalism, not its actual implementation. While there is deep cultural longing for what she represents to thrive amidst a mediascape that historically has demonized Black women, Beyoncé’s fetishized Black feminist radicalism has transformed the politics of social movements into a set of commodities that ultimately sustain her personal empire. (148)

Academician Bell Hooks criticism of Beyonce’s latest album mentions the very loophole Wards points out. Hooks rejects the generic interpretation of the album *Lemonade* as an

exclusively black feminist project and examines it as a commodity; a product of capitalist money making business. While Hooks seems appreciative of Beyonce's ability to use black bodies and narratives in her economic project to consolidate her business empire, she believes that the feminism of stardom fails to understand the ground material reality of black women giving the false intervention to real time problem. For Hooks Beyonce's feminist repertoires often slip to misrepresentation resulted from the superficial examination of black condition. She claims that even despite the powerful voice and lyrics to emphasize the lack of respect for black womanhood, "simply showcasing beautiful black bodies does not create a just culture of optimal wellbeing where black females can become fully self-actualized and be truly respected" ("Moving Beyond Pain"). For Hooks *Lemonade* is non-revolutionary fantasy project sprung from the demand of capitalist politics sustaining the entertainment industry. Though Beyonce positively exploits black bodies by aestheticizing the body, she fails to acknowledge the history of systemic violence and diverse kinds of exploitation engulfing black females to suggest a critical intervention.

Hooks comment on *Lemonade* could not remain untouched by several severe backlashes accusing her as rigid old school feminist monitoring diverse narratives under her personalized strictures. However, Hooks criticism of Beyonce's feminism draws attention to a breach created by capitalist politics of cultural industry in feminist ideology. While third wave feminism embraces the popular culture as a connoisseur of feminism, it does not adequately talk about the economic forces backing up the celebrities' project. Beyonce's "Formation" boasts of her triumph in the world of money-making; her ability to earn fame and branded dress:

Y'all haters corny with that illuminati mess

Paparazzi, catch my fly, and my cocky fresh



I'm so reckless when I rock my Givenchy dress (stylin')

I'm so possessive so I rock his Roc necklaces(li 1-4)

These are her materialized dreams for which she worked hard. The song demonstrates her one-track determination towards material success which she holds as power. Like Madonna's model of feminism, Beyonce appeals for solidarity, and demands to be looked up as an inspiration by young girls whom she asks to be in "formation." The accompanying video represents the black bodies; a microcosm of black community (Beyonce's own native root). However, at the center is Beyonce and the empire she created that she wants to make a standard of success for the black people. Like Madonna's it is yet another success story that ironically others the black community and glorifies self. Beyonce though belongs to black community, she is different from her community; she is an example of success.

In 2013 interview with Wendy Mesley from CBC national news, Steffani Germanotta (stage named Lady Gaga) asserted that her artistic project is detached from the corporate politics and attunes to the desire of her fans to experience "out of touch with reality" (5:11-13). She defended herself as an autonomous artist when she said, "I don't do what the industry wants me to do because I think that when you allow corporations to control what you say and what you do and what you look like that you are feeding the beast and I want to feed the passion and the creativity of my fans"(sic) (7:00-7:16). Since her debut album *The Fame* in 2007, Lady Gaga has earned many accolades for her unconventional artistry which as Mesley calls is a "high speed collision of avant-garde with glam-pop" (1:13-1:15). Lady Gaga's glamorization of outrageousness or unconventional frenzy in both her music and public life has attracted attention of several cultural critics and academicians. Mathieu Deflem; a sociology professor in University of South Carolina announced a course called "Lady Gaga and the Sociology of Fame" in 2010 that deals with the study of sociology of fame based on case study of Lady Gaga. In 2012 queer scholar Jack Halberstam wrote a book on which he

sees a possibility of new strand of feminism “Gaga feminism” inspired by artistry and other repertoires of activism conducted by Lady Gaga and various other celebrity icons.

When we examine Lady Gaga’s influence on gender theory and feminism, her activism deviates from that of Madonna’s and Beyonce’s in her unique experimentation with visuals incorporating sophisticated technological elements, her personal fashion statement and her LGBT activism titled *Born this way*. Lady Gaga’s unusual, alienated and sometimes even grotesque experimentation in her musical project and stage appearances triggers the futuristic sensation. From the time of her debut, Gaga’s fame consistently relies upon her one-track advocacy of anti-sexism and gender equality problematizing the traditional gender dichotomy. While Madonna is equally known for her advocacy of homosexuality, Gaga’s activism is incorporated in her art.

From the time of her media debut in 2008, Gaga has exuded a sophisticated aura among her fans and critics by merging the binaries in creation of her media personality. She is outrageously randy and intellectual; sensual and robotic; erotic goddess and cyborg; all at same time. The Gaga personae is a seamless blend of masculinity and femininity. Her most celebrated single “Poker Face” from her first album demonstrates this complex parody of gender dichotomy.

The song co-written by Germanotta herself is admittedly about bisexuality and comprises multiple sexual innuendoes. The phrase poker face literally means the blank and undecipherable expression generally made by poker players. The song takes the meaning a step further as Lady Gaga’s personal experience with bisexuality. She said that the song was “about poker facing with sexuality. When [she] was making love with [her] old boyfriend, [she] used to think about women sometimes” (0:56 – 1:07). The song features Lady Gaga in greyish blonde hair, bizarre makeup, revealing space time outfit, gambling, kissing a man and dancing alongside the background music and lyrics. The lyrics is explicitly about a

female's possession and ownership of her sexuality. First four lines of the lyrics can be taken as an example:

I wanna hold 'em like they do in Texas plays

Fold 'em, let 'em, hit me, raise it baby stay with me (I love it)

Love Game intuition play the cards with spades to start

And after he's been hooked I'll play the one that's on his heart. (verse 1, 1-4)

The lyrics blend the gambling with a “love game.” Playing poker is a way to get the man “hooked” so she can play “that’s on his heart.” As the song develops, the tone of promiscuity overpowers the song accentuating the lady’s sexuality with the innuendoes like “I wanna roll with him a hard pair we will be” (verse 2,1). The song is an open expression of a sexual appetite of the female articulating her desires through the metaphor of gambling. When Lady Gaga was asked about the meaning of the very line she replied that “it was about her [vagina’s] poker face” (qtd in Scaggs, “Lady Gaga Worships Queen”). The line she said was taken from her unreleased song which is an expression of her desire to be served a cunnilingus by her boyfriend (“Lady Gaga Worships Queen”). This open representation of women’s sexuality and more specifically bisexuality, unabashedly talking about it in her outrageously shocking outfits and looks and her open support of sexual dissidence make Gaga a prototype feminist for many critics.

Based on this quirky image of Lady Gaga that has garnered her fame and applause from the wide range of audience, Jack Halberstam sees the Gaga feminism as a new space in feminist school of thought. He explains:

Gaga feminism is a politics that brings together meditations on fame and visibility with a lashing critique of the fixity of roles for males and females. It is a scavenger feminism that borrows promiscuously, steals from everywhere, and inhabits the ground of stereotypes and cliché all at the same time. Gaga feminism is also a

feminism made up of stutter steps and hiccups, as is clear in the world opened up in Telephone in both the music and in the image: the offbeat, flickering, humming aesthetic that the video creates depends upon the liveliness of the objects in the Gagascape (and the inertia of human bodies), and it creates a beat for gaga that is created as a sonic form of hesitation. (30)

Halberstam, here reads Gaga's popular music video with Beyonce as showcasing of a new kind of lesbian sisterhood that is different from the preceding feminists' notion of universal sisterhood rooted on biological essentialism.

"Telephone"; Lady Gaga's 2009 duet with Beyonce is an electro-pop dance song accompanied by a video that has predominant overtone of violence, revenge and nudism. As the video starts Lady Gaga is held capture by two women cops into the semi-nudist prison. Her already revealing outfit is ripped apart leaving her with her lacy lingerie. Around three minutes in a video Lady Gaga in her bizarre outfits (metallic black leotard with goggles made up of cigarettes, police tape wrapped around her and shiny metallic bikini) performs a hyper-sexual act in the prison as shown below in the Figure 3.



Fig. 3. Still from "Telephone" (1:53)

The above still from the music video exemplifies Gaga's eccentric costume and overt exhibition of sexuality and body. The heterosexual intimacy depicted in the picture is not intended to arouse sensuality but to disrupt the conventional tendency of correlating heterosexuality with normalcy and romance.

The video has frequent glimpse of a mobile phone in between Lady Gaga's extravaganza and viewers can guess that she is planning an escape over the mobile. The lyrics starts in the third minute of the video after which Gaga is bailed out of prison by Beyonce and in a yellow car taken to a diner where they poison Beyonce's cheater boyfriend to death. Lady Gaga; Beyonce's accomplice is culinary expert who poisons all other heterosexual couples in the diner through her honey and waffles. The Sapphic sisters then escape promising never to return back in their yellow car named "pusssywagon." Here the sisterhood between the two is as mysterious as the whole visual act of revenge and violence.



Fig.4. Still from "Telephone" (5:25)

The video apparently is a dark comedy that celebrates femininity and accentuates the dictum of "girl power." Halberstam interprets the video as "an exciting and infectious model of Sapphic sisterhood that moves beyond the sentimental models of romantic friendship and into

a different kind of feminism” (30). However, this different kind of feminism rooted in violence and desire to out-sex the world does not seem pragmatic and in line with the politics of feminism of any age. Basing a new model of feminism and sisterhood in an absolutely randy representation of lesbian relationship does not define the direction of intervention within the prevalent inequality. Nevertheless, “Telephone” certainly debunks the normative feminist premise and shows an otherworldly realm of affiliation between women. While the overtone of violence can certainly be condemned, there is still overpowering undertone of activism for liberation from conservative feminism and gender normativity.

“Telephone” is deliberately shocking and disruptive. This choice to disrupt however is admittedly Lady Gaga’s exercise of creative autonomy. In the interview with Wendy Mesley, Lady Gaga defends her visual experimentation and onscreen delirium as a projection of her inner self that “takes pleasure in creating surreal fantasy for you [her fans]” (5:22-5:29). She adds that the major purpose is “detachment from everything else; bit of escapism” (5:55- 6:01). Lady Gaga, who is inscribed with this responsibility to serve her fans the most dissociative versions of art believes that this non-conformity and rebellion is not a forged performance but an expression of self. When Stefani Germanotta was asked about her stage name she replied that calling Lady Gaga a persona or a character is a misconception. Addressing Lady Gaga in first person pronoun “I” she said that she is gaga every day and even her mother calls her Gaga (Scaggs). Lady Gaga’s delirium can possibly be situated in a mythical postmodern feminist model suggested by Donna Haraway; cyborg feminism.

In her 1985 book *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway establishes a mythical creature “cyborg” as a solution to disrupt the cultural sense of gender, sex and identity. Haraway explains the “cyborg” as “myth about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities, which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (14). For Haraway, Cyborg is high-tech organism that breach boundaries between human and

machine and assimilates the dualism of nature and culture that can possibly take us apart from the necessity of biological determinism. The cyborg diffuses the eminent dualism of meat and metal problematizing the essentialist identity based on gender, race and other naturalized cultural matrices. Studying Lady Gaga's work from the perspective permitted by postmodern feminist like Haraway allows to anticipate a liberating form of feminism that transgresses the patriarchy, gender normativity and biological essentialism. Her incorporation of high-tech visuals, off beat electro-pop music and radical experimentation with her outfits and looks (that are often revealing space costumes with metallized fabrics) attunes to the breaching of boundaries between animal, human and machine. Her eccentric sense of style in her musical projects and public appearances problematize the consensual assumption that identity is inherent to biology. Lady Gaga's enigma eschews all the presupposed notion of acceptable gender performances and leads towards ever contingent and fluid notion of sex, gender and identity.

This obscure representation of body and sexuality makes Gaga influential to sexual dissidents. Lady Gaga's image draws affinity to ideological roots of Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble* Butler identifies the problem in feminism association with the identity politics and its separation of sex and gender under the nature-culture dichotomy. She argues that the sex is not a fixed category that intrinsically produce an identity. Rather "sex" and "gender" both are discursive term that do not exist beyond socio-cultural realm. She asserts:

It makes no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex when sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and

established as “prediscursive” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (7)

For Butler both sex and gender find their meaning within the representational or linguistic terrain and thus are performative by nature. The identity generated thus is not fixed but contingent and provisional. Butler therefore argues that limiting the feminism as a representational politics of “women” who are not a universal unified subject but subjects constructed by complying with the various unspoken cultural normativity does not suffice. Feminism should extend its ideological scope to all those “who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subjects” (6). Halberstam builds on this very proposition of Butler, when he studies the significance of Lady Gaga in the modern feminism. Lady Gaga is a subject forged by non-conformity. Her advocacy and activism for sexual dissidents is as significant as her musical project and public life in interpretation of her influence.

In her interview with Measley, she established herself as a harbinger of equality. When asked about her idea of power she claimed that for her power does not mean not to allow anyone to control herself, it rather means not to allow anyone to control anyone (6:12-6:23). Her idea of the world is both eccentric and utopian. She asserted that her project is “a movement and a crusade of that one in a world preaching the spreading of love and compassion and equality ...andI [she] wants all youths to know that their ideas are valuable, I [she] want[s] them to know that they can penetrate society” (6:43- 7:21). In the same interview, she said that she is concerned about equality and human rights and it is the only activism she will be doing for her life. Interpreting her statements, public appearances and creative projects from the feminist perspective, they all comply with her “movement” to disrupt the stereotypical sets of values and norms surrounding body, sex and gender to show possibility of the other kind of world which is chaotic but free.



In popular culture today body and sexuality are the apparatuses for ideological project of feminism. All three of the celebrities: Madonna, Beyonce and Lady Gaga assign their exhibition of body and representation of sexuality through their creative projects with larger goal of empowering their fans to be confident about their individuality. Celebration of self and individuality are at the center to the meaning of their works. Madonna's "bad feminism," Beyonce's "black womanhood" and Lady Gaga's "gaga" feminism emerged from the realization that the subjectivity is fragmented under the complex set of spoken and unspoken norms and other naturalized cultural matrices. The revealing outfits, bizarre makeup, sexually explicit songs and videos are the part of their personal attempt to sanctify the body and sexuality from the dominion of such forces and exert the personal agency.

As Imelda Whelehan observes, "the pleasurable and refreshing aspects of third wavers' playfulness are most notably highlighted by their embracing of popular culture which young women consume, appropriate and reuse to their own purposes" (xviii). The incorporation of popular voices of resistance certainly has made feminism more fun and meaningful for larger domain of public. However, at the same time, Whelehan also draws attention towards the pertinent concerns about the political purposes of celebrities' feminism. In today's world dominated by capitalism and media; it is essential to gauge the market politics behind celebrity feminism. While meaningful narratives and agendas concerning equality and liberation are foregrounded, they are shared as consumable commodity rather than politics with larger underlying goals.

It is imperative to understand the contradiction inherent in the activism of the cultural icons. Madonna's narrative of empowerment and relentless resistance against negative forces (ageism, sexism and patriarchal bullying) is both progressive and regressive at the same time. The underlying didacticism in her speech motivates young women to own their subjectivity on one hand while her refusal to age and unnatural adherence to youth is regressively

stigmatizing “ageing” disseminating the discourse of timeless youth. Amidst her fans and audience, Madonna stands both as a prototype postfeminist woman (who owns her profession, money and power) and a victim who is constantly thrashed by existing stereotypes. Beyonce’s creative ventures comprises the overtone of women’s inherent strength and resilience and loyalty towards her native culture. However, on closer reading her works have uncritical appropriation of black culture and experiences of black women without defining their material roots and history of struggle. Finally, Lady Gaga’s frenzy attunes to the extended scope of feminist project including the sexual dissidents within the crusade of liberation. However, her activism exists in the realm of fantasy with undertone of violence and alienation.

One of the impacts of third waver’s obsession with popular culture and media is the escalated seriousness of academicians towards popular voices. However, significant part of third wave is involved in differentiating its goals and objectives from the preceding waves. Today western feminism is engaged in project of sanctifying the agendas of third wave as more inclusive, liberal and playful than the second wave. In this debate, the liberation politics of feminism is diluted. While feminism has successfully disseminated its vision of equality and liberation, the critical side of activism is lost during the process of translation of ideology as lifestyle. Feminism has been new marker of living standard that is in reach of those who have access to media and technology. Therefore, it is necessary for third wavers to critically reflect on their own agendas by assimilating the ideological contribution made by preceding generation in order to step up the project of feminism. Subsequently, popular feminism will be studied more critically with all its contradictions rather than its value being monolithically judged as good or bad.

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