

Britney Spears Supports Feminism

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The Methods Of Feminism In Music

When we notice a minor situation, it usually helps us see the bigger picture. In this instance, Britney Spears is criticized for her music, but her counterparts are not. The bigger picture is that misogyny is a part of everyday life, especially for those not educated enough to know that hating women is misogyny. The perceived definition of misogyny “refers to lyrics that encourage, condone, or glorify the objectification, exploitation, or victimization of women (Kubrin et al., 2009. P. 10).” In the case of discussing Britney’s music and how the media has perceived her messages, people can “assume that lyrical content derived from limited sources spreads out to the masses and then cultivates a social reality viewpoint consistent with the mediated content (Dixon et al., 2017. P. 468).”

As all celebrities easily influence us, we create the impression that artists cannot be relatable to the average person. People have dehumanized these celebrities regarding their daily struggles, which forces them to make their lives look perfect. This gives us an unrealistic impression that every person has to have a “perfect” life just like them. Because of this, the music Britney Spears made was to debunk that impression and allow us to look at things more transparently and with new perspectives.

When discussing feminism, Sellnow (2017) describes this as males and females supporting women and disagreeing with beliefs and actions that only favor men (P. 139). The premise of feminism is to show that everyone can value and respect women from all backgrounds, as history has shown that there was very little respect for women.

The fundamental principle that demonstrates Britney Spears being a feminist pop-culture icon is the liberal feminist perspective. The liberal feminist perspective, according to Sellnow (2017), focuses solely on giving opportunities for women in male-dominated industries to

achieve their goals. This concept is closely related to second-wave feminism, which “focuses on the goals of equal rights and opportunities for women and men (Sellnow, 2017. P. 142).” When it comes to feminism, we are looking to expand on ideas of how will feminism evolve in the future? Will the idea hurt or help women going forward with evidence from Spears’s music?

Creating a valid argument supporting the feminist ideology involves artifacts that allow critical messaging and how useful it is to the reactions of the media, the public, and the theme of the song itself. Specific artifacts include Spears’ Blackout album with songs such as “Gimme More” and “Piece of Me.” Other artifacts used in this analysis are popular songs from Spears such as “Lucky,” “Stronger,” “Cinderella,” “Every Time”, “Passenger,” “Overprotected,” “Brave New Girl,” “Mona Lisa,” “Rebellion,” and “... One More Time.” These songs were chosen because they fit with the themes of her messaging, which will be discussed in further detail.

Analyzing The Meanings Of Music

Spears has had quite the portfolio for music, as there are many ranges of topics she talks about in her songs. Themes that support this liberal feminist perspective throughout Britney Spears’ discography would be sexual experiences/personality, dealing with the pressure of being an international celebrity, heartbreak, and desire for freedom/independence.

Since there is debate on whether she was a sex icon, she has had some pretty sexualized songs on her Blackout album. Viewers can see that this is where she comes out of her “shell” compared to the other themes of her songs. This is important because this album was reviewed negatively by critics everywhere. Still, when it comes to her counterparts, like her ex-boyfriend Justin Timberlake, they talk so highly of him and praise him for telling “his truth.” In a song Timberlake had released called “SexyBack,” - the music had explicit sexual lyrics about a female he was pursuing. When it was released, many magazines had such positive reviews, and he

became “independent” in his career from boyband to solo pop star. When Spears released her album *Blackout*, the whole album had explicit sexual lyrics like Timberlake’s. However, pictures of her were on every magazine - she was bald due to a public mental breakdown before the release and captions judging her for being this “sex icon” while still having kids. This mental breakdown was crucial to developing these songs as it played a massive part in her life. We will discuss the connection between this and her desire for freedom/independence later on. According to Luckett, “Media coverage shifted from her body to her mind as the self-destructive Britney suddenly became a more interesting individual (Luckett, 2010. P. 40).” She was a “whore” for singing about this topic while getting divorced. It shows the two differences between male and female artists treated by the general public and the media. *Blackout* became her biggest hit album to date, and people loved it as it allowed Britney to explore a new area of her career. She did not have to be “less provocative” for her younger audience because they had grown up with her. It broke the misogynistic idea to many celebrities and the general public that female artists can be whomever they want to be regardless of their circumstances.

For Spears, she gave new opportunities to females to be more comfortable to talk about these topics that were “taboo” to women before. When she released “Gimme More,” one of her hit songs off of *Blackout*, she faced controversy. This song is based on the media and paparazzi begging her to reveal more of herself in a way that would leave her vulnerable. Lyrics such as “Cameras are flashin' while we're dirty dancin' / They keep watching (They keep watching) / Keep watching / Feels like the crowd is saying / Gimme, gimme (more) (Spears, 2007. 0:45-0:55).” Spears almost played the game of what the paparazzi and the media were doing by giving them more in her music videos and creating this sensual sound, but also made a joke of them trying to get more.

The media continued to put a ton of pressure on Britney Spears to be a sex icon. She came out with a follow-up song released on the *Blackout* album called “Piece of Me.” This directly responded to them and what they said about her for years. With constant scrutiny, paparazzi were tailgating her everywhere she went and examining every detail of what she did under investigation by the media to criticize her as a “bad mother” and lousy person to her fans. However, in “Piece of Me,” she is exhausted by the allegations of not parenting her sons right, as well as not being the celebrity she once was, and her wanting to be private about her life. Lyrics demonstrate this point by her saying:

“I’m Miss American Dream since I was seventeen
Don’t matter if I step on the scene
Or sneak away to the Philippines
They still gon’ put pictures of my derriere in the magazine

Well get in line with the paparazzi
Who’s flippin’ me off
Hopin’ I’ll resort to startin’ havoc
And end up settlin’ in court
Now are you sure you want a piece of me?
(Spears, 2007. 0:10-1:23).”

Fans noticed that people and the media constantly compare her to her 17-year-old self, the 90s Pop Princess that stole everyone’s heart with her famous smile. “Spears’s image had always echoed that of other stars/starlets. She was a mass-produced blond pop princess, one of many designed for an ephemeral teen market (Luckett, 2010. P. 40).” Luckett (2010) has a valid

point: Spears is no longer that teenager everyone first saw. She is a mother furthering her career, trying to make a genuine difference in the world through her music. The media pressure her to be something she is not since the release of "...Baby, One More Time" with the sexual innuendos and insults on her music video in a catholic school setting. Comments from them like those are considered slut-shaming. It is misogynistic, and it goes back to the point that female artists are treated differently from male artists. Her record label wanted to give her this innocent yet "sultry" look in the music video. They also promoted the idea of her singing lyrics that were not age-appropriate even when she was underage, lyrics such as "Show me / How you want it to be / Tell me, baby / 'Cause I need to know now. / My loneliness is killing me (And I) / I must confess, I still believe (Still believe) / When I'm not with you, I lose my mind (Spears, 1999. 0:49 - 1:05)." People speculated that she is promoting the idea of pedophilia since she was only seventeen at the time. Looking at male counterparts, Eminem had commented about the singer in his songs, saying he would engage in sexual relations with her underage.

One theme a fan can notice from Spears' music is the desire to be free or be independent again. In 2007, Spears broke out of her "the girl next door" character and shaved her head out of protest. Shaving her head allowed her to be in some control of her life and the narrative. Some people would say cutting off all of their hair is liberating and can make them look at life differently. At the time of Britney "acting out," she was under scrutiny for how she was acting out in public. Her parents put her in a mandatory conservatorship and was controlled by her management for 13 years after 2008. This decision ultimately influenced her music because she speaks on several occasions of wanting to be "freed."

Spears had a song titled "Lucky," which talks about a young girl who rose to fame and had everything, but she was still sad and struggled with the popularity of being a celebrity.

Specific lyrics had questioned people when Spears was in the conservatorship as it reflected her situation, “they say / She’s so lucky, she’s a star / But she cry, cry, cries in her lonely heart (Spears, 2000, 0:41-0:49).” The song continues to tell the tale of a Hollywood starlet who has it all, but when the lights go out at night, she’s sitting there asking if it’s all worth it. She follows up with “Lost in an image, in a dream / but there's no one there to wake her up / And the world is spinning, and she keeps on winning / But tell me what happens when it stops? (Spears, 2000, 1:00 to 1:19).” Hearing these lyrics gives the listener a glimpse into her early developing relationship with the dark side of being famous.

Another song titled “Overprotected” gives listeners a little foreshadowing of her future career. With lyrics such as:

“Say hello to the girl that I am
You're gonna have to see through my perspective
I need to make mistakes just to learn who I am
And I don't wanna be so damn protected

I'll tell 'em what I like, what I want, and what I don't
But every time I do, I stand corrected
Things that I've been told
I can't believe what I hear about the world
I realize I'm overprotected

I don't need nobody telling me just what I wanna
What I, what, what, what I'm gonna (I need) do about my destiny

I say no, no, nobody's telling me just what I wanna do, do
I'm so fed up with people telling me to be someone else but me
(Spears, B. 2001. 0:52 - 2:54).”

Fans can get a sense of frustration from Spears not doing what she wants with her life. This frustration will grow even more as her career develops due to the conservatorship. Another meaning could be her wanting to break out of the “mold” people kept her as the young breakout star they knew.

Spears’ single “Brave New Girl” falls in the same independent theme. As this record was released in 2003, she desired to be free from the strict media following. This shows in the lyrics, where Spears writes:

“She's gonna pack her bags
She's gonna find her way
She's gonna get right out of this
She don't want New York
She don't want L.A.

She wants a good time
No need to rewind
She needs to really really find what she wants
She lands on both feet
Won't take a back seat

She's gonna step outside

Uncover her eyes

Who knew she could feel so alive

(Spears, 2003. 0:25 - 0:47).”

During this time, Spears was at the peak of fame, where she was starting to have a significant influence over all of her fans ranging from different backgrounds. She wanted to give the most to her fans, which were thirteen-year-old fans mainly at the time. From the lyrics mentioned in this song, Spears felt trapped in her fame as she played with the idea of finding what she wanted out of life. It is eerily for some fans to look back and listen to these songs, especially after everything she has gone through recently with her conservatorship and the endless amount of lawsuits involving her primary caregiver, her father.

She touches on the topic of her father a little bit in her music but not a significant amount. However, Nussbaum et al. (2000) say, “Individuals in long-standing relationships tend to build implicit decision-making processes frequently leading to a false sense of knowledge about the other’s desires and wishes (P. 318-319).” It should also be said that Spears related to her father and her management many times she wanted to get out of this situation but was punished negativity for bringing that up. The context of her music is essential to bring up as it has been a significant part of her life, and it has influenced her music and how the media displays her image to the general public for judgment.

As humans, we go through all types of emotions. Emotions cannot be avoided, especially heartbreak. Celebrities are no different; they cannot prevent their hurt from a romantic partner. Britney Spears continues to prove that she is just like us. She sings about heartbreak and the sadness of parting in many of her songs with a significant other.

Throughout the decades of her career, she released songs such as “Stronger,” “Cinderella,” and “Everytime.” They all have the common theme of pain and sadness, and they hold other meanings, such as regrets and struggles. In her song “Stronger,” she talks about her final “goodbye” to an ex-boyfriend. Lyrics demonstrate this send-off as she writes:

“There's nothing you can do or say, baby
I've had enough
I'm not your property as from today, baby
You might think that I won't make it on my own
But now I'm
Stronger than yesterday

It's nothing but my way
My loneliness ain't killing me no more
I, I'm stronger
(Spears, 2000. 0:29 - 1:08)”

This song promotes the idea of being confident enough to let go of someone who is not suitable for their mental health and physical environment. Spears released this with the hopes of allowing people, especially women in the same situation, to be brave enough to move on to better things that life has to offer them.

Another song that Spears has released was called “Cinderella.” This song is the tale of the forbidden princess locked away from everyone except her evil stepmother and step-sisters. Spears compares herself in the single as she is locked away and wants to break free. In lyrics she wrote, she writes:

“I'm sorry for running away like this
And I'm sorry, I've already made my wish
Aah, but Cinderella's got to go
From time to time, I tried to tell just what was on my mind
You'd tell me, "Not today"
"Come back, do that"
"Where's Cinderella at?"
Was all you had to say

I'm sorry, just trying to live my life
Don't worry, you're gonna be alright
But Cinderella's got to go
I used to say I want you
You cast me in your spell
I did everything you wanted me to
But now I shall break free from all your lies
(Spears, 2001. 1:04 - 2:17)”

The general public is unclear if she is talking about her relationship with her ex-boyfriend Justin Timberlake or the media. Spears continues to promote the idea to females of all ages not to let anyone or anything make them upset and, if they do, just to walk away.

Back in the early 2000s, Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears were the “It” couple that everyone wanted to keep up with or be like. They left last impressions even 20 years

later. Spears was deeply affected by the ending of their relationship as they had broken up, and Timberlake only made it worse when he released the music video for his song “Cry Me a River.” He had insinuated that Spears had cheated on him in his music video, which is why the relationship ended. Spears released a response back with a song called “Everytime.” In this song, she writes lyrics such as “I may have made it rain / Please, forgive me / My weakness caused you pain / And this song's my sorry (Spears, 2003. 2:21 - 2:38).”

This song allowed everyone to glimpse into Spears’ deepest thoughts on the topic. The music video released for this song showed her relationship with an actor who resembles Timberlake. It offered the perspective of how damaging their relationship was and how the media thrived on the intensity of the relationship.

The Conclusion Of Feminism In Fame

Because society, throughout history, created a negative perspective towards women by making them feel invaluable as individuals, Britney decided to create music so women could feel empowered. Her music's themes - pressures of being a sex icon, heartbreak, desire for freedom/independence show it is under one theme of self-empowerment. Devoted fans worldwide listen to her music whenever they go through a situation and relate to her feelings in any song. That is why Britney Spears created a discography that ranges for every emotion to give confidence to herself and others in their time of need. “Celebrities have played an important role in shaping people’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward a variety of health issues through their personal disclosures and narratives revealing their struggles (Nisbett et al., 2017. P. 316).” It is essential to acknowledge that feminism is a supporting cause for women because it makes us feel seen and heard.

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