

Queer Feminist and Celebrity Commodity: A Critical Analysis of Lady Gaga

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Since her debut album, *The Fame* (2008), Lady Gaga has become an international pop icon, renowned for her transgressive attitude and advocacy of the LGBTQI+ community. Gaga rejects patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies in her textual and extra-textual work but, although she transcends these ideologies, this represents her celebrity brand, which contributes to her as a moneymaking commodity. Gaga rejects patriarchal and heteronormative values in her textual work by ignoring gender roles and traditional boundaries set by the gender binary system. Gaga also ignores patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies through extra-textual appearances, by openly criticising gender and sexual inequalities, as well as discussing her own relationship with gender and sex. Nonetheless, she is still a moneymaking commodity who uses these values to represent her celebrity brand and capitalise through audience engagement and celebrity discourse.

In order to critically discuss and analyse Lady Gaga as a celebrity brand, it is useful to understand what comprises 'star' and 'celebrity'. Stadler (2009) defines stars and celebrities as highly publicised and highly constructed individuals who are used as mass marketing devices in the media. Stars play lead roles and outshine others in professional fields, have an international reach, have personal lives that attract as much, or more, attention than their work, and they endorse prestigious products (Stadler, 2009: 252). A celebrity's fame does not rely on, though may have emerged from, their professional success, they endorse affordable products, and they are commonly referred to as 'famous for being famous' (Turner, 2004; Stadler, 2009: 250). Gaga's personal life holds as much importance as her professional work, she has an international reach and she endorses prestigious products, which all suggest she is a star, and she herself is a brand outside of her professional field, which suggests she is also a celebrity. For example, Gaga endorses high-end brands including Dior, Versace, McQueen, Chanel, Mugler and more (Marshall, 2014). Gaga has also been featured in many international magazines, from *L'Uomo Vogue* (2014), to *Vogue Hommes Japan* (2010), to *Harper's BAZAAR* (2014). Gaga is both a star and celebrity because her personal life has high media interest, she outshines others in her professional field of music entertainment, endorses designer products and brands, and is famous for being famous.

Stars and celebrities hold, reflect and influence political, social and economic ideologies (Stadler, 2009; van Krieken, 2012). 'Ideologies' are sets of beliefs and values that influence the behaviour of people and societies (Oxford, 2015). Gaga upholds values that reject patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies, and portrays that both in her textual work and extra-textual appearances. Patriarchal ideologies support the institutionalised structure that gives men dominant power over women (Dalla, 2015), and heteronormative ideologies support the gender binary and view

heterosexuality as the normal sexual orientation (Dictionary.com, 2015). Gaga rejects these essentialist ideologies through her text, including her music videos and performances. For example, Gaga blurs the line between femininity and masculinity by cross-dressing. *Jo Calderone* is the name of Gaga's drag alter ego who frequently appears in her texts, particularly in the *Yoü And I* music video (Vevo, 2011). Gaga/Calderone is featured smoking a cigarette and wearing a white muscle shirt, black pompadour hair, and black dress pants, which are intertextual references to 1950s male icons like Elvis Presley and James Dean. By adopting these traditionally masculine aesthetics, Gaga surpasses the restrictions of the gender binary, as well as the Hollywood expectations of feminine glamour and sexuality. Therefore, through the text *Yoü And I* (Vevo, 2011), Gaga rejects patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies.

Gaga also transgresses patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies through extra-textual work and appearances. Take, for example, Gaga's interview in showSTUDIO's *In Camera* series (2010). Gaga, a thin, white, able-bodied American woman, wears wavy blonde hair, red lips and nails, winged eyeliner, false lashes, and a black bra, referencing other female sex symbols, such as Marilyn Monroe and Madonna. Visually, it could be assumed that she adheres to heterosexual and patriarchal ideologies, but in this interview she declares herself a feminist who 'wholeheartedly' rejects gender roles and the sexualisation of women, and uses her art, fashion and work as a tool to do so. Marshall (2014) claims Gaga's hyperbolic femininity and over-sexualisation parodies the constraints of sex and gender, which she regularly discusses. For example, back stage at *PORTER* magazine (2014), she admits that sexuality is irrelevant to her life, and always feels uncomfortable conforming to feminine 'pretences'. In an interview with Barbara Walters (2009), Gaga openly acknowledged her bisexuality, and claimed she portrays herself very androgynously. Gaga has also been a speaker and advocate at multiple LGBTQI+ rallies, including the National Equality March in Washington, D.C in 2009 (Levy, 2014), as well as New York's Gay Pride Parade in 2013 (Telegraph, 2013), which all contribute to her ideologies of gender and sexual equality. These extra-textual examples suggest Gaga rejects patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies. Nevertheless, this textual and extra-textual work contributes to her celebrity brand and allows her to be marketed as a moneymaking commodity.

Stars and celebrities do not only embody social ideologies, they are fabricated products that exist as 'cogs' in the media to appeal to a mass audience (Stadler, 2009: 267-268). Gaga is a moneymaking commodity, and her transgressive values contribute to her celebrity brand, which is marketed through audience engagement and celebrity discourse. According to Stadler (2009: 256-259), the two most common ways of engaging with stars and celebrities as an audience is through 'identification' or 'desire'. Identification is when a person's identity is formed around a celebrity, and desire is when a person is attracted to a celebrity, or their roles, products, lifestyles or ideologies (Stadler, 2009: 257-259). Gaga's brand upholds certain ideologies that her fan base, 'Little Monsters' (Marshall, 2014), identifies with. Gaga's brand is discoursed through mass media platforms including social media, such her social media site,

LittleMonsters.com (2015). 'Discourse' refers to the process of constructing and distributing information in the media (Stadler, 2009). On the site, fans can sign up and engage with Gaga herself, as well as other fans (*LittleMonsters.com*, 2015). When audiences identify with or desire a celebrity, they tend to further engage in the fan culture by buying their endorsed products or merchandise (Stadler, 2009: 257). The site is also used to promote and sell Gaga's merchandise such as her perfumes, music and even concert tickets (*LittleMonsters.com*, 2015). So therefore, as desiring fans, 'Little Monsters' are prone to buying Gaga's merchandise. For example, her unisex eu de parfum, *FAME*, sold over thirty million bottles within the first year of its release (Gaga, 2013). Thus, Gaga uses celebrity discourse and audience engagement to market products and perpetuate herself as a moneymaking commodity.

Lady Gaga rejects patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies through textual work and extra-textual appearances. However, Gaga is still a moneymaking commodity that uses these ideologies to represent her celebrity brand and continue to capitalise. Gaga transgresses ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity by ignoring the gender binary and traditional gender expectations in her textual work. Gaga also transcends patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies through extra-textual appearances by discussing issues related to gender, sex and inequality. Nevertheless, Gaga uses these ideologies to represent her brand and products, which she markets through celebrity discourse, and thus contributes to her as a moneymaking commodity.

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