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The Male Gaze

Social media interprets Beyoncé as a strong and confident woman—many young girls look up to her as a role model. However, in her music video *Pretty Hurts*, Beyoncé is seen as an insecure woman who tries her best to keep her thin image. The video takes place in a real-world setting, a beauty pageant—where women are judged based on their looks. The pattern exposed in the video shows that women who are confident with their looks or with low-self-esteem are criticized—there is no middle ground when it comes to objectifying women. The only place they can truly be themselves is in an alternate universe.

In today's society, women who are confident with their looks and aren't afraid to show it are criticized for being 'conceited'. For example, in Justin Bieber's music video *Love Yourself*, the main character is portrayed as vain and abrupt. The video is based on a couple who tell a story through their choreography that takes place throughout their whole house. The video starts off with the boyfriend trying to cover himself with the blanket but the girl pulls it away, keeping it all to herself. As the video continues, there is a part where the woman only pays attention to her cell phone. In this section, Justin sings, "Cause if you like the way you look that much, oh baby you should go and love yourself"—meanwhile, her boyfriend dances around her, trying to captivate her attention. Already, we see that the woman doesn't care for her boyfriend and instead, she is more interested in her own reflection from the phone. Towards the end of the

video, there is one scene where it focuses on the woman checking herself out in more than one mirror, while her boyfriend looks at her the whole time. Justin portrays this woman as vain because she is confident with who she is, but brings her down by saying that she is so self-involved with her looks that she forgets the world around her. In the end of the video, the woman is sitting in bed reading a note that says “Love Yourself” left from the boyfriend. She thinks about it for a while and throws her head back into the pillow as if she was punched. This scene shows that the patriarchal men knock down women for being themselves—she lost her man for being too self-assured. The male gaze contributes to how society brings down women for being themselves or lacking self-esteem.

The male gaze, according to Janice Loreck, “invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and suggest a sexualized way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women”. The male gaze is seen in the Justin Bieber video *Love Yourself*, when the man is looking at his girlfriend checking herself out. For about forty seconds, the woman looks into more than four big mirrors where she fixes her hair and checks her make-up. Her boyfriend dances behind her, trying to captivate her attention once again, in which she gives him the cold shoulder. Here, the boyfriend looks at his girlfriend as an object and her feelings “are less important than her being framed by male desire”. In the male gaze, men typically try to control the female by objectifying them, which can also be seen in the Beyoncé music video as well. When the host of the beauty pageant asks Beyoncé a question, he looks at her up and down and looks confused with her response. He

looks at her as an object, and by doing so, he is criticizing her looks. This makes it is hard for women to fit in because they are constantly being judged for their bodies and image, which puts too much pressure on them to look a certain way to fit into society's standards.

In the video *Pretty Hurts*, Beyoncé portrays the critical standards society puts on women which they can't live up to. However, in another Justin Bieber video, *Sorry*, women of every shape and size are accepted for who they are—they aren't judged by any patriarchal men. The video takes place in an alternate universe, where a group of women joyfully dance in a white space. All of the twelve women have different clothing—from bright pink crop tops and blue shorts to polka dot tracksuits and timberlands. According to Annia Licata, who interviewed Parris Goebel, the choreographer for the video, Goebel wanted the style to be Nineties themed. In this music video, we see some women wearing crop top shirts revealing their stomachs or low cut tank tops. If they were to wear this out in public, many people would shame them for wearing “revealing” clothing and this also contributes to how women are brought down by society. In middle school, we are taught that by wearing shorts past the knees can be “distracting” to other people—referring to the boys. But many people today “fail to recognize that, for men and women alike, fashion is a form of self-expression” as stated by Jen Marie in “7 Reasons to Stop Shaming Women.” The male gaze can also be seen here because if women wear something that may be “provocative”, men tend to pull their attention towards them and look them up and down—looking at the women as if they were an object. The constant judging of a woman's

apparel can potentially destroy their positive self-image and their confidence. However, in this bright white parallel universe, the women are free to express themselves by wearing whatever they want and are accepted by one another.



Many Justin Bieber fans anticipate for Justin to come out in the video and show off some of his dance moves along with the group of women, but he fails to make an appearance. What makes this alternate universe a place of acceptance for who you are is the fact that no men are around to judge or objectify anyone. Although living in a parallel universe where women feel liberated to dance and be themselves seems like a wonderful place—we eventually have to return to reality and face the real world once again. Society pressures women to conform to a specific image that it sees as beautiful. Women shouldn't be judged for not being able to live up to society's expectations. Instead, they should be accepted for who they are.

There really is not much to dispute in the analysis I have offered that the only place women are respected is in an alternative universe—away from patriarchal men. The real question

concerning this issue has to do with where are women truly welcomed for who they are? Put simply: if we can't escape to an alternate universe, what real world setting are women able to feel liberated and accepted? Some other videos show the way forward in plus size modeling. In a video entitled "Addition Elle at New York Fashion Week 2016", we see that women of every shape and color are in setting where they have total freedom to be themselves. This video takes place at New York fashion week, where plus size models, such as Jordyn Woods and Ashley Graham, walk the runway. While the plus size models show off their beautiful curves in an all new Addition Elle clothing line, the audience applauds after every girl walks the runway. Some of them try to stay in character, but a few of the models can't resist but to smile. This real-world setting allows women who are targeted in social media as "ugly" to feel accepted in an environment that encourages women to embrace who they are. In an interview with Addition Elle about her clothing line, her goal is to "deliver trendy, flattering and fashionable clothing for plus size women...to feel their best in every aspect of life". This video shows that there can be place where confident women are not brought down by patriarchal men.

To conclude, the patterns exposed in the music video *Pretty Hurts* and *Love Yourself* reveal how women are being constantly brought down by patriarchal men and society. Women who are confident with their looks or with low-self-esteem are criticized—there is no middle ground when it comes to objectifying women. The only place they can be themselves is in an

alternative universe that is exposed in Justin Bieber's *Sorry* music video. Women should embrace their confidence and be comfortable in the skin they're in, despite what patriarchal men say.