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# Crazy in Love with a Smooth Criminal: An In-Depth Look at Parasocial Relationships and How Celebrities Affect the Relationship

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Crazy in Love with a Smooth Criminal: An In-Depth Look at Parasocial Relationships and How  
Celebrities Affect the Relationship

By Alyssa Termini

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## **Introduction:**

Within this thesis, the celebrity careers of Beyoncé and Michael Jackson will be evaluated while keeping in mind the classic theory of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships. Donald Horton and Richard Wohl penned the classic parasocial interaction theory in 1956 speaking of the persona, a celebrity, and the one-sided relationships spectators develop with personas. What is not said by Horton and Wohl, and what is said in this thesis, is that although the celebrity persona may not be aware they are involved in a parasocial relationship, their actions contribute to the creation of a parasocial relationship. By examining scholarly articles, celebrity readers and journals, enough research was gathered to create a foundation for my argument. When it came to the case studies on Beyoncé and Michael Jackson, an approach of evaluating song lyrics and music videos was used, as well as evaluating popular websites such as *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone*. Overall, the approach of scholarly research combined with music lyrics and videos, as well as articles led to a conclusion expanding upon the original thoughts of Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction theory.

## **Chapter 1: Celebrity Obsession**

As human beings we are often looking to other people for inspiration and direction in life, whether it be socially, cosmetically, or just for the fun of it. What is interesting about this observation is that more often than not, audiences and observers are turning to contemporary celebrities to fuel their inspiration. While many people have a detached relationship with their favorite icon, there are occasions when the fixation gets out of hand and develops into a nearly psychotic obsession. There are copious amounts of literature and reports on the causes of celebrity obsession, fixation, and veneration, but it all begins with a history.

It has been said time and time again that the ancient Egyptians paved the way for modern society. Egyptians were polytheistic, and much of their lifestyle was centered on worshipping their many gods, deities, and pharaohs. Lay Egyptians believed in everything their icons did, and undoubtedly followed their lead in life. Because the gods and pharaohs held such prominent roles in society, and because they were seen as all knowing or powerful, the Egyptians worshipped them. Between worshipping in temples and performing symbolic dances, the ancient Egyptian people perfected the concept of idol adoration (Roberts). Research on ancient Egyptian societies suggests that with power, superhuman-like qualities, and reverence from others, a person can be the subject of someone else's veneration. To provide an example, Amon, Egyptian king of the gods, was one of the most prominent deities of ancient Egypt. He was the god for those who felt oppressed, and was so highly revered that his temple was the largest and wealthiest in the land (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

Long after the ancient Egyptians roamed the Earth, there was a monarchy in the country of England. In England, the monarchs, or social gods, were looked to for guidance on protocol, fashion, and decorum. Not too long ago, Queen Victoria donned the iconic white wedding gown,

and today it has become a staple in nearly every Westernized wedding (Pappas). This scenario resembles both the Egyptian pharaohs and gods, and today's celebrities.

Like the Egyptians worshiped their gods and pharaohs, modern-day fans fixate on and try to attach themselves to celebrities' lives. Just as Egyptians worshiped in their temples, contemporary fans gather in arenas to worship their favorite comedian, musician, or upstanding figure. As human beings we sing and dance along with our favorite star(s), just as ritualistic dances were performed for the gods in ancient times. Why were the gods and pharaohs revered so highly? Because they were prominent, they were rich, and they were in a position that appealed to the commoners (Roberts). Much like yesterday's gods and pharaohs, today's celebrities are put up on a media-created pedestal and are portrayed as rich, superhuman, and youthful. Two contemporary performers have even earned royal monikers: Beyoncé and Michael Jackson have been referred to as the Queen and King of Pop, respectively. In the following scholarly works that have been evaluated, the focus is on both Beyoncé and Michael Jackson, to see what has been said about the pop royalty up to this point.

*Celebrity Cultures: An Introduction* does not speak of Beyoncé, but Michael Jackson is discussed at different times throughout the celebrity studies literature. The star's infamous court case is chronicled and evaluated for its ability to aid Michael in maintaining his celebrity status, and the reader even labeled the case a "media whirlwind." This label was placed due to the amount of press it received, and how the publicity often replaced world news on televisions across America. Another part of Michael that was examined were his body enhancements and the effects they had on his fan base (Brown).

*Popular Music and Society* contained a surplus of information regarding Michael Jackson and his celebrity status. Professor Stan Hawkins examined the style of the star's performances

within his article, “You Rocked Our World, Michael: Your Moves, Your Look, Your Music, Everything!” and acknowledged what attributes of the performer led to fans worshipping him. Hawkins attributed much of the fans’ admiration to Michael’s ability to blend identities and styles, and to diversify the music market. Hawkins even mentioned the King of Pop tailoring his movements and performances in order to achieve ideal audiovisual entertainment (Hawkins). Through observation and evaluation, much was found on what made Michael appealing to various crowds and age groups.

*Popular Music and Society* contained three additional articles relevant to this topic. Dr. Jacqueline Warwick examined the star’s transition from child star to adult pop icon in “‘You Can’t Win, Child, but You Can’t Get Out of the Game’: Michael Jackson’s Transition from Child Star to Superstar,” and concluded that not only did young Michael’s sassy nature lead to crowd adoration, but the fact that he came from a wholesome and loving family contributed to the audience’s love for Michael Jackson (Warwick). In his article “Black or White? Michael Jackson and the Idea of Crossover,” Professor David Brackett spoke of the “crossover effect” that Michael possessed as an artist, meaning his music succeeded in multiple genres and target audiences. The most profound argument Brackett made in his article was that Michael’s relationship with his music is what led to a relationship with his audience, alluding to the statements he made as an artist and the musical innovations he created with every passing album and lyric (Brackett). In her article “Difference that Exceeded Understanding: Remembering Michael Jackson (1958-2009),” Professor Susan Fast talks of Michael’s uniqueness and how he was a difficult man to decipher, leading to audiences becoming infatuated with him. She also touches lightly on Michael’s upbringing and how it played a role in his adult life, but does not expand on the topic (Fast).



In the *Celebrity Studies* journal there are several articles on the late Michael Jackson. In “Michael as he is not remembered: Jackson’s ‘forgotten’ celebrity activism,” Michael’s great amount of philanthropic work is mentioned, and how his controversies in life overshadowed what he gave back to the world (Van Den Bulck and Panis). Additionally, there are many retrospective articles about Michael; one in particular, “Michael Jackson: celebrity death, mourning, and media events,” examines the events that occurred immediately after the untimely death of the King of Pop, and how his sudden death may shed light on some of the oddities of his celebrity status (Bennett).

As for Beyoncé, much of the findings are recent, within the last five years, providing scholars with an up-to-date look at the narrative behind her celebrity status. In the *Gender and Education* journal, Barbara Read talks about Beyoncé as a role model for adolescent girls. “Britney, Beyoncé, and me – primary school girls’ role models and constructions of the ‘popular girl’” concludes, based on interviews with primary school girls, that Beyoncé’s dance moves, likability, and the fact that “she doesn’t say no bad stuff or anything like that” contribute to fans’ love for the star. Furthermore, Read determines that Beyoncé exists as a role model because of her accomplishments, appearance, and personality (Read).

Madison Moore, Ph.D., a freelance writer and pop culture scholar, recently wrote two pieces about Beyoncé. His first piece, an e-book entitled *How to Be Beyoncé*, speaks of how the world is currently in a “Beyoncé moment.” Moore also discusses why fans like the celebrity, what her place is in pop culture, and what audiences can learn from her. Moore touches on the fact that Beyoncé is very much a manufactured celebrity with excellent branding, one who is creating demand for her fans to buy a piece of her celebrity status (*How to Be Beyoncé*). In his second piece, “Beyoncé’s New Weave Swing, or How to Snatch Wigs With Hair

Choreography,” Moore evaluates Beyoncé’s hair choreography and how it plays into her brand image. He speaks of Beyoncé playing with race and appealing to everyone, how she shapes the way her music is heard with her hair, and how her hair allows her to fit into more demographics (“Beyoncé’s New Weave Swing, or How to Snatch Wigs With Hair Choreography”). In her article “Resounding Silence and Soundless Surveillance, From TMZ Elevator to Beyoncé and Back Again,” Priscilla Peña Ovalle suggests that Beyoncé has mastered observing her audience and tailoring her actions accordingly. Ovalle utilizes recent examples of Beyoncé reacting to media controversies to reinforce her statements (Ovalle).

Within the *Celebrity Studies* journal, Ellis Cashmore evaluates the brand of Beyoncé in his article, “Buying Beyoncé.” He states that she has accomplished marketing herself in a way that makes her unable to be ignored by audiences, thus forcing them into contact with her celebrity status. Cashmore elaborates on the varying aspects of Beyoncé’s marketing and what they do for her as a brand ambassador and as an entertainer, such as making her very present in the eyes of a consumer. Between makeup, clothing lines, soft drinks, music, and perfume, pieces of Beyoncé’s lifestyle are in every facet of the market, therefore forcing consumers to buy into her celebrity status (Cashmore).

Various journal articles and readers demonstrate that the scholarly world possesses a fascination with celebrity statuses, how they came to be, and how they continue to develop. These articles collectively inform us that Michael, in particular, was a mysterious man, a man whose affinity for musicality spoke for him, and that is what led to fans becoming intrigued with him. A couple of the articles touched on the topic of Michael’s upbringing and how it contributed to the oddities of his later life, but they did not go into any sort of detail. Conclusions about his musicality and upbringing are somewhat obvious. What cannot be gathered from these

articles regarding the King of Pop is what specific occurrences within his childhood led to defining moments in his career. Nothing was mentioned about Michael's many relationships, or the effect those relationships had on his life. Finally, several of the articles were written retrospectively, drawing conclusions about each and every aspect of his career, especially the private and the public aspects. Due to their retrospective nature, the articles took a broad view of his career as opposed to an up-close examination of each milestone throughout his life and the consequences of each pivotal moment.

The available scholarship on Beyoncé indicates that there is a consensus among researchers that she is a manufactured, well-branded and marketed celebrity. Moore also touches on Beyoncé's race, something that is highly prevalent when discussing a woman of color with a great amount of power. Again, many of the conclusions reached are what is to be expected when discussing Beyoncé, race, power, branding, and marketing. What is not mentioned is how she times the marketing and branding to create a crucial moment in her career, or how her branding works so well with her fan base. There is no mention of a pattern to Beyoncé's career, nothing more than the continuous success of her feminist songs, dance anthems, or global accomplishments.

This thesis fills these gaps by exploring the two aforementioned celebrities, the theme of their career, and how said theme fits the mold of a parasocial relationship. In the process, it draws on the theory of parasocial interaction. Parasocial relationships are a type of interaction that can be described as an interpersonal relationship where one person, the spectator, knows a significant amount about the other, the persona or celebrity, but that knowledge is not reciprocated. However, it will come to be known by the end of this thesis that the persona has much control over what the spectator knows about them, thus unknowingly controlling the

parasocial interaction. This significant aspect of the parasocial bond will also be an area of the relationship in which Beyoncé and Michael Jackson greatly differ. Horton and Wohl state, “The interaction, characteristically, is one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development (1-2).” With the development of radio, television, and cinema, celebrities are more accessible than ever before, and because of that accessibility, audiences have been presented with ample opportunities to connect with stars (Horton and Wohl).

The classic theory speaks of the “role of the persona,” which explains how a celebrity gains the attention of spectators, and what actions lend themselves to the creation of a parasocial relationship. Whether or not a celebrity connects with his or her fan base on a personal level, if the star speaks about times in their lives that are relatable to spectators, or how they conduct themselves in public all contribute to the creation of a parasocial relationship. From there, Horton and Wohl progress into discussing the intimacy of a parasocial relationship and how it is structured, how the spectators fit into their roles as observers and worshipers, how the audience’s attitudes can be coached, and the values of this complex relationship (Horton and Wohl).

Within the theory of parasocial interaction are several subtopics that help better explain the overall concept, many of which are discussed in the following chapters as they apply to specific case studies of Beyoncé and Michael Jackson. Parasocial interaction is highly focused on the spectator’s relationship with the persona and how they handle the relationship, but Horton and Wohl also note what the persona can do to encourage the relationship. For the sake of this thesis, the majority of Horton and Wohl’s theory is incredibly important, but there are some terms that play a key role for understanding the manifestation and continuation of a parasocial relationship, terms that will shed light on this manuscript’s case studies. “The bond of intimacy”

refers to a persona's ability to distort the segregation between his or her professional life and personal life, thus leading to a stronger parasocial relationship between spectators and persona. "The coaching of audience attitude" means marketing that creates a loving, sincere, and admiring image for the persona. Coaching typically leads to spectators offering their allegiance to a persona because of his or her genuineness and honesty. The sincerity that the celebrity projects to fans makes spectators feel like they must aid the persona on their journey to success or help maintain an already successful career. Horton and Wohl's concept of coaching audiences is incredibly important to all cases of celebrity worship and fixation, but it becomes highly significant in the subsequent case studies.

Horton and Wohl's classic theory of parasocial relationships focuses on television stars, but it lends itself to nearly any celebrity career. While the theorists brought to light a new concept of celebrity fixation, obsession, and veneration, there were later studies and articles published that expanded upon Horton and Wohl's initial conclusions, providing more clarity when discussing parasocial relationships between audiences and celebrities. In the *Journal of Communication*, R. Glenn Cummings and Boni Cui further examined parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships and discovered that a parasocial interaction was simply the interaction between a persona and a spectator *during* exposure, whereas a parasocial relationship develops over time and *extends past* the moment of exposure (Cummings and Cui). Another major expansion upon Horton and Wohl's original theory, is "Horton and Wohl Revisited: Exploring Viewers' Experience of Parasocial Interaction," which is also found in the *Journal of Communication*. In this article, Tilo Hartmann and Charlotte Goldhoorn speak of the causes, consequences, and the outcomes of a parasocial relationship (Hartmann and Goldhoorn). Moving towards physical factors, the article "Celebrity Culture," by Howard Altman states there is a

“beauty factor” that makes a celebrity appealing to spectators and causes fans to develop a one-sided relationship with celebrities. He goes on to say there are “golden proportions” that in fact make a celebrity more attractive than another (Altman). Finally, straying from the physical reasons of infatuation and reverting back to the extension of Horton and Wohl’s theory, Diane Ashe and Lynn McCutcheon hypothesize in their article, “Shyness, Loneliness, and Attitude Toward Celebrities,” that shy and lonely people are more likely to enter into parasocial relationships with a persona. After conducting their study, the researchers realized their hypothesis has little to no validity and is nonexistent in most cases (Ashe and McCutcheon).

From examining the various articles that expand upon Horton and Wohl’s original theory of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships, several facts become apparent. Largely, parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships are based upon television stars and spectators’ interactions with a TV character. Because of the focus on TV character relationships, nearly every article discussing the topic neglected to include what the relationship would be like should it exist between a “real” persona and spectator. Additionally, many of the attempts to understand the manifestation of a parasocial relationship are developed in an expansive nature and spoken about in a broad sense. Scholars and researchers concluded that general body proportions of the persona, common personality traits of the spectator, or common and basic actions of the persona are what led to the creation of a parasocial relationship. What the scholars did not say was that the conception of a parasocial relationship can vary from case to case, and that specific actions of a particular persona lead to the development of this complex and vastly misunderstood relationship. As developments continue to be made about developing parasocial relationships with celebrities, the causes should be examined in a more specific manner as opposed to general hypotheses based off of large studies or observations. It should also be noted

that no studies have been conducted or journals published on parasocial relationships in the case of Beyoncé or Michael Jackson, at least not until now.

Beyoncé is arguably the Queen of Pop, and was chosen to be profiled and evaluated in this thesis due to her astounding success, and a surprisingly private personal life despite always being in the spotlight. Generally speaking, Beyoncé is profiled in this thesis because, at the time of this writing, her career appears to be at a high point, and there is much media buzz surrounding her name, career, and family. Similar to Michael, Beyoncé has been a child star surrounded by family, one who has also experienced a highly public life while struggling to maintain some privacy. Especially intriguing about Beyoncé's career is that she carries a theme throughout all of her albums, lyrics, music videos, and career moves, a theme that is highlighted and further explained in chapter two. The aforementioned theme of Beyoncé's fans growing up alongside the star, as well as all other aspects contributing to Beyoncé's highly successful and sometimes controversial career, are considered and extensively evaluated in terms of Horton and Wohl's theory of parasocial relationships. The Beyoncé case study will evaluate aspects of her career, such as lyrics, dance moves, outfit choices, and relationships that led to the development of a parasocial relationship. It is evident that her career moves and personal choices coincide with Horton & Wohl's concept of the persona coaching the audience insofar as a celebrity alters her actions in order to grasp the attention of her fans. The extent of this coaching is evaluated and extensively explained in chapter two. By the end of that chapter, it can also be noted that there is a unique aspect to the star's career, which is that she has been able to grow up as her audience has grown up alongside her. Many popular musicians stick to one recurring theme or topic within their lyrics, a topic that attracts a specific target market or age group. By Beyoncé's lyrics reflecting what is currently happening at varying moments in her life, her music is growing

and changing as much as she is as a person, just as fans do. So rather than maintaining a common theme and singing for a certain target market, Beyoncé markets herself to anyone who is going through what she is at that moment of the song production.

Michael Jackson was chosen as one subject of this thesis because of the slight mystery and odd nature that surrounded his highly public and successful life. The King of Pop, as he was nicknamed during his career, endured ultimate highs and lows throughout his career, obstacles continuously arose in front of him, and he accepted the challenges time and time again. The case study in chapter 3 will look at how the pop star's upbringing, childhood stardom, courtroom controversy, desire for privacy, and generally peculiar ways of living lend themselves to spectators creating a parasocial relationship with him. From familial relationships to borderline inappropriate relationships with young boys, the associations in the pop star's life play a key role in the manifestation of a parasocial relationship between spectators and Michael. Specifically, Horton and Wohl speak of the persona acting as a role model for spectators, in turn fueling the parasocial relationship between the celebrity and the fan, and this is a concept that Michael Jackson undoubtedly achieves during his reign as the King of Pop. Within that case study, it is also noted that the pop star experienced varying types of familial relationships in his life: his blood relatives who contributed to the adult pop sensation, and his hand-picked relationships with older women and young children to substitute for the mother and sister relationships he did not have while growing up.

After evaluating the deficits of knowledge and information regarding the topics of Beyoncé, Michael Jackson, and parasocial relationships and interactions, I was able to develop a study of these topics. At the conclusion of this thesis, it will be learned that parasocial relationships can be applied to celebrities who appear in "real" life and not just on the television



screen, seeing that contemporary celebrities appear across multiple media platforms. Additionally, this thesis will suggest that specific actions of a persona contribute greatly to the conception of a parasocial relationship. In regards to Beyoncé, an evident pattern of her career will be revealed, along with a theme of Beyoncé's fans joining her throughout her career and growing alongside her from the beginning. And finally, when discussing Michael Jackson, it will be noted that apart from his musicality, his reactions to the media play a major role in the type of parasocial relationship formed. Michael's case study will also shed light on the human development of the star, speaking about his chosen relationships to substitute for the lack of sufficient father-son, mother-son, and sister-brother relationships during his upbringing.

Because Michael Jackson and Beyoncé experienced somewhat similar careers, their careers allowed for much comparing and contrasting between the two. With both stars' careers, it is clear that both were child stars, were originally family oriented, broke out into a solo career, and ran into controversies brought about by fans and the media. More than this, the likenesses allowed for a more comprehensive evaluation of the celebrity's side of the parasocial relationship, or the "role of the persona" (Horton and Wohl). Overall, studying two music industry icons allowed for a more cohesive thesis, and showed how seemingly similar careers can be vastly different and handled in ways that significantly alter fan relationships. Horton and Wohl spoke extensively about the nature of a parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship, how they are created and prolonged, but not much was said about a persona's actions and how they affect the type of parasocial relationship. Within the following case studies, it is discovered that a persona inadvertently creates a platform for a parasocial relationship, which is known from Horton and Wohl, but it is also discovered that a persona can control whether or not the

parasocial relationship is healthy or not for spectators based on his or her actions, an important development beyond the classic theory.

An added benefit to the nature of Beyoncé's career, one that is discussed in the case study in chapter two, is that a lot of the research gathered and evaluated was derived from Beyoncé, such as her self-directed documentary, lyrics, or album formats. A disadvantage that comes into play as far as the Michael Jackson case study is concerned is that he has unfortunately passed away, so much of the reading material available is written retrospectively. However, most of the research used in that case study is taken from sources dated earlier than the star's untimely death, or are interviews with Michael's family and acquaintances.

While it could have been interesting to gather research for the following case studies via interviews with those involved in parasocial relationships, all of the research gathered was taken from videos, songs, photos, blogs, and news articles. The evaluation of parasocial relationships in this thesis is from the perspective of a persona's actions, what s/he does or does not do to fuel the conception of a parasocial relationship. For the Beyoncé case study, I chose materials based on what was already known about the persona and her career, considering that she is current and these materials are much more accessible now than in earlier years.

In the case of Beyoncé, I adhered mainly to secondary sources such as the pop culture websites *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone*. Insight into the foundation of Beyoncé's career allows for readers to see where a parasocial relationship can derive from. Other secondary sources referenced are biographies, including *Beyoncé: Running the World: The Biography*, and *Beyoncé: A Biography of a Legendary Singer*. Both chronicle every aspect of the star's career, including record-breaking achievements, her love life, motherhood, and what happens behind closed doors in her life. This insight also sheds light on the star's humble beginnings. Gaining

insight into the persona's background led me to look into song lyrics that were produced at troublesome times in her career and seeing if the lyrics coincided with occurrences in her life. Generally speaking, that is how much of the lyric evaluation occurred for the case study. Collectively, about fifteen of Beyoncé's songs were evaluated as primary sources, all from different times in her career, spanning twelve years in total. The expansive timeline of song choices allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of Beyoncé's career progression, and this timespan was crucial to the overall conclusion of the case study. By doing so, I was able to detect evidence of sincerity and instances of Beyoncé coaching her audience's feelings, which coincided seamlessly with parasocial relationships. Horton and Wohl's theory allowed me to research Beyoncé's career with a parasocial relationship mindset, and led to the detection of Beyoncé inadvertently creating a platform for her spectators to formulate a parasocial relationship with her.

Aside from lyric evaluation and a thorough back-story of Beyoncé's career, an assessment of music videos, live performances, and documentaries was included in the compilation of research. About three music videos were directly referenced in the case study, but the entirety of Beyoncé's visual album was used as a reference for the star's career. The videos directly referenced were some of Beyoncé's racier works, chosen specifically for that reason. I wanted to provide all views of the celebrity, from wholesome and humble to iconic, controversial, and provocative, all to complete a far-reaching conclusion at the end of the case study. I evaluated the live performances and documentaries with the mentality of Beyoncé coaching the mindset of her spectators. I also took note of how she used direct platforms to influence viewers by blurring the line separating her and her fans.

The final research component of the Beyoncé case study included secondary articles, photographs, and blog posts referencing the pop star. Since the lyrics, music videos, documentary, and live performances provided a look into Beyoncé's side of her celebrity status, the secondary resources offered a spectator's view of the celebrity's career. To see the critics' and fans' reactions to Beyoncé's actions, I looked at various articles conveying spectators' reactions to Beyoncé's actions, and those responses allowed for me to evaluate the creation of a parasocial relationship. Primary and secondary articles came from a range of sources, including scholarly articles looking at how Beyoncé markets her image, photographs included in famous publications such as *Sports Illustrated*, and reputable sources ranging from *The New York Times* to *MTV News*. Overall, the goal was incorporating sources that provided voices from varying levels of journalism. Blog posts, scholarly articles, famous newspaper articles, and Beyoncé's firsthand material allowed for an all-encompassing review of the celebrity's career, thus leading to a well-informed and thorough conclusion.

Evaluating Michael Jackson's career proved to be more difficult than Beyoncé's, both because of his untimely death and retrospective articles, and because I was not alive at the height of the King of Pop's career. Similar to the Beyoncé case study, *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* were responsible for the material providing a back-story of Michael Jackson and the Jackson 5. Additionally, two biographies were referenced when collecting information about the story behind the pop icon: *Michael Jackson: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of a Billion-Dollar Empire*; and *Moonwalk*. The former served as a secondary source seeing that it was written by a writer for *Forbes*, and the latter autobiography was a primary source, seeing that it was actually penned by Michael himself. *Moonwalk* offered personal accounts of the pop star's life and his perspective of his upbringing, and how he felt about his familial relationships, which was a crucial aspect of

his case study (Jackson). *Michael Jackson: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of a Billion-Dollar Empire* truly showed how Michael was a pioneer of the industry and included interviews, private notes, and court documents that provide an all-inclusive look at the life and times of the late Michael Jackson (Greenburg). A study of the background of the pop star allowed for a chance to see what fans knew about Michael, and what created the foundation for a parasocial relationship. The information gathered led to the confirmation of theories presented in the parasocial relationship theory; because Michael's career began decades ago, it had a much more humble and classic beginning that led to a parasocial relationship.

The many articles chosen, from secondary sources such as *Newsweek*, *CNN*, and *ABC News*, allowed for information to be gathered from the perspective of those in Michael's life. In addition to articles, a retrospective documentary was viewed in order to gain insight into how others viewed the celebrity. These resources were selected to work into Horton & Wohl's theme of coaching the audience's perspective, something that proved to be incredibly beneficial to the case study. All in all, around ten different perspectives were evaluated--those of family members, close acquaintances of the pop star, and journalists fixated on the topic of the King of Pop. Such vastly dissimilar perspectives allowed the case study of Michael to be conclusive and unbiased, and eventually led to a leading-edge conclusion about the late celebrity.

Of course the infamous controversies surrounding the performer were mentioned, which again played into the persona showing sincerity in exchange for his spectators' loyalty. These controversies were chosen to show the ugly side of a beautiful career, and how a celebrity copes with allegations. To coincide with the controversies, very few direct interviews with Michael were provided as part of the case study material, due to Michael refusing to speak with the media. He believed the media was on a mission to destroy his reputation and did not want to

provide them with any insight into his life. Not having many interviews with Michael played a major role in the conclusion of the star's case study.

The following two case studies can be read in any order, each study standing alone in its arguments. Overall, using a case study approach to apply Horton and Wohl's theory to modern-day celebrity worship and how it comes about proves that the smallest of celebrity actions can lead to the manifestation of a parasocial relationship. By applying the classic theory of Horton and Wohl to Beyoncé's lyrics and branding, and to Michael Jackson's upbringing and his infamous court cases, I arrived at conclusions about the manifestation of parasocial relationships, Beyoncé's iconic career, and the late Michael Jackson's short but revolutionary career.

## **Chapter 2: Let Me Hear You Say Hey Mrs. Carter:**

Critics have observed, however hyperbolically, that Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter has been taking over the world, with her record-shattering visual album, Super Bowl halftime show, lip-syncing accusations, elevator fights, divorce rumors, and lengthy world tour. Most recently, Beyoncé's sexuality and raciness have been at the forefront of her brand, but she has not always portrayed a provocative persona. In fact, Beyoncé began her career as an innocent Christian girl living with the support of her parents and acknowledging the presence of God (Dunn). Because it seems as though we—those who watch her videos, read gossip about her, and listen to her music—see Beyoncé in nearly every facet of their lives, it begs the question of why people are talking about her and what they are saying. Does it matter? Do headlines and other people's opinions cause fans to pay attention? Has she developed into a respectable role model in today's society? Is she too provocative now? It has become imperative to take a closer look, because it seems that the life of Beyoncé parallels the lives of her fans. There is something about her career progression that is relatable to fans; she sparks interest with every business move she makes. It is important to start at the beginning of Beyoncé Knowles-Carter's astounding success in order to see what aspects of her personality and career make her so fascinating.

In 1990, nine-year-old Beyoncé Knowles' father, Mathew Knowles, created an outlet for his daughter to soar into stardom. Destiny's Child (DC), a girl group named after a Bible passage, was based out of Houston, Texas, and consisted of Beyoncé, LaTavia Roberson, and Kelendria "Kelly" Rowland. As time progressed, the group gained more notoriety and added a fourth vocalist, LeToya Luckett, to their repertoire in 1993. After seven years of appearances, competition shows such as "Star Search," and club performances in the Houston area, Destiny's

Child experienced its first major break when Columbia Records signed the girl group (“Destiny’s Child”).

In 1998, Destiny’s Child’s released its self-titled album. The track “No No No” proved to be a massive success for the group, and other songs followed suit. Just one year after the group’s self-titled album, DC’s second album, “The Writing’s on the Wall” came to fruition. “Bills, Bills, Bills” soared to the top of charts and just behind that was the ever-so-popular “Say My Name.” That song gained a large amount of popularity for the group, and it marked a turning point in DC’s career. December 1999 was a time of turmoil for the admired girl group when LeToya and LaTavia angrily removed themselves from Destiny’s Child. Both girls claimed that Mathew Knowles received a disproportionate amount of money, and that he unfairly favored his daughter Beyoncé by placing her in the spotlight (“Destiny’s Child). After the girls’ departure, Mathew Knowles, along with the remaining group members, replaced LeToya and LaTavia with Michelle Williams and Farrah Franklin. Interestingly enough, the newest members of Destiny’s Child were featured in the “Say My Name” music video, much to the former members’ chagrin, and with that came a pretty serious lawsuit (“About Destiny’s Child”). Music groups often experience difficulties, so this lawsuit is not surprising, but what makes it more questionable is what happened shortly after its conclusion. On the topic of difficulties, the turmoil that Destiny’s Child experienced made the group of celebrities appear to be more average human and less superhuman celebrity. It can be assumed that everyone, for the most part, experiences trials and tribulations throughout their lifetime, so by Destiny’s Child’s issues being known, a platform based on relatability was created for fans to attach themselves to, therein adding to the creation of a parasocial relationship (Horton and Wohl).



Within five months of Farrah Franklin joining Destiny's Child, she was fired from the group. As time progressed and more statements were released, she was dismissed for reasons related to lack of control and an abundance of negativity among group members (Schumacher-Rasmussen). Once Franklin departed, Destiny's Child assumed its final and most popular lineup of Michelle Williams, Kelly Rowland, and of course Beyoncé Knowles. The trio then set out to create their next album, *Survivor*, whose title referenced the group's recent obstacles. Interestingly, the then nineteen-year-old Beyoncé co-wrote and produced the majority of the album. This brings me to ask the question of why Beyoncé was in the spotlight of Destiny's Child.

When dissecting what is known about Destiny's Child, it is too easy to assume the creation of this powerful girl group was a ploy to produce the now-popular idol, Beyoncé. The evidence is well accounted for: her father developed and managed the group, her mother dressed the group, and her sister danced for the group at some point in time. It was all Knowles family, all the time (Dunn). It can be assumed that fans enjoy seeing a celebrity that is family-focused. Because a family entourage surrounded Beyoncé, she appeared humble and relatable, thus luring fans in to observe her life. Horton and Wohl state within their classic parasocial interaction theory that a celebrity, or persona, who surrounds themselves with supporting cast mates, or in this case, family members, blurs the line between fantasy and reality, this is known as a bond of intimacy (Horton and Wohl). Because of the Knowles family remaining close-knit, fans viewed this as a way that they too can be an extension of Beyoncé's family, and with that relatability and humbling nature, a parasocial relationship between Beyoncé and her fans was conceived.

Other than Kelly Rowland, Beyoncé was the only girl who stuck around for the long haul. Even more curious is that the group's third album, *Survivor*, featured Ms. Knowles far

more than either Michelle Williams or Kelly Rowland, because her vocals were highlighted, she co-produced a majority of the album, and she co-wrote the bulk of the album (Dunn). Beyoncé performing in the spotlight can be attributed to her impressive talent, her appeal to fans everywhere, and to her familial support and connections. Another aspect of Mrs. Carter's position in the spotlight is that she was seen as a woman in power, especially in a primarily male dominated world; this dominance further contributed to her desirability, and again, fueled the parasocial relationship (Cashmore).

Furthering the discussion of the Beyoncé-focused spotlight, but straying away from any theory of favoritism, it is important to analyze what Beyoncé had that Kelly, Michelle, Farrah, LaTavia, and LeToya did not. Observers such as journalist Josh Tyrangiel stated that “the industry perception of Destiny's Child as Beyoncé and two warm bodies in stilettos,” alluding to the clear spotlight shining upon Ms. Knowles (Cashmore). During harmonies, fans everywhere could pick out Knowles' renowned vocals. Additionally, Beyoncé had a body that portrayed an image of curves and a “real” figure as opposed to the unrealistic stick-thin, malnourished-looking models of that time. Through several interviews it became apparent that young Beyoncé was a woman of God (Dunn), an identity that created a wholesome image of her, and there are fewer things parents love more than a wholesome role model. Finally, Beyoncé appeared in several film productions in the early 2000s. At this point, the young Beyoncé had already accomplished a successful music career, a budding film career, and a flourishing writing and producing career. Ms. Knowles seemed to have it all, and the people who have it all go on to become acclaimed idols. So, one answer to the question of why Beyoncé was in the spotlight of Destiny's Child may be that she had all of the components of a star such as her beautiful vocals, wholesome values, a gorgeous and realistic body, and a multi-faceted talent. All of these aspects of

Beyoncé's career set the cogs in motion to create the powerhouse talent machine that we have come to know.

In life, people are constantly growing and moving on to different opportunities, and Beyoncé is no exception. She, as well as Kelly and Michelle, grew out of their Destiny's Child persona in order to pursue a solo career. Of all the girls' solo careers, Beyoncé's career seems to have soared the highest and proved to be the most prosperous. The Destiny's Child version of Beyoncé was a virtuous young girl growing into herself and coming to terms with who she was as a woman, a professional, and an entertainer. Through her many interviews, Beyoncé spoke about keeping her personal life private and living her life praying to and thanking God for her many blessings. It was a new concept for people, an entertainer in the spotlight who had good morals, so Beyoncé's unique beliefs and stances helped mold her into an icon for young girls everywhere. She stated in interviews that she routinely attended church in her own community, admitting she would take red-eye flights back to Houston in order to attend service (Dunn). Additionally, Beyoncé rarely, if ever, commented on social issues in the world, keeping her opinions to herself in order to avoid conflict, thus adding to her mass-market appeal (Cashmore). However, as time moved forward, it seemed that Beyoncé's virtues had slipped through the cracks.

Beyoncé's first solo endeavor was her album *Dangerously In Love*, released in June of 2003. This was a new Beyoncé, riskier, stronger, and most importantly for this argument, more naked. The album cover displays Beyoncé sporting an array of diamond chains that barely cover up where it is necessary. *Dangerously In Love*'s cover photo provided people with a chance to see, in every sense of the word, a new side of Beyoncé. She progressed from a moderately covered up young woman on the cover of Destiny's Child albums to a nearly nude woman alone

in the spotlight (Klinko). The young girls who spent the bulk of the late nineties following Destiny's Child's every move are now seeing this once virtuous performer dive into a world that is significantly less appropriate. However, it deserves to be stated that despite the nudity, this cover clearly portrays to fans that Beyoncé is strong enough to stand on her own, and does not need the support of two women by her side. This strength displayed by Beyoncé shows fans she is worthy of being admired and worshiped, of being part of a parasocial relationship.

Moving past the image *Dangerously In Love* portrays, it is important to evaluate a few of Beyoncé's lyrics and song choices. The album begins with the ever-so-popular anthem "Crazy In Love," which features Beyoncé's then friend Jay-Z. At this point, Beyoncé was in her early twenties, a time when women typically begin dating and finding love. "Crazy In Love" suggests that there may have been a man in her life that she was falling in love with. Lines such as "'Cuz I know I don't understand, just how your love can do what no one else can," exemplify that the seemingly untouchable Beyoncé is capable of being a victim of puppy love just like the non-famous girls of her age who listened to this album (Knowles, *Crazy In Love*). This image she portrayed made her relatable, likeable, and clearly lovable. As mentioned before, relatability and likability contribute to the conception and manifestation of a parasocial relationship. While Beyoncé definitely had a multifaceted career at this stage of her life, it already lent itself to various routes of fans crafting a parasocial relationship with Ms. Knowles.

Moving on from "Crazy In Love," *Dangerously In Love* included the risqué single "Naughty Girl." Throughout this song, Beyoncé belts out lines such as "I'm feelin' sexy, I wanna hear you say my name boy," and "Tonight, I'll be your naughty girl," all of which sheds light on the pop star's sultry side (Knowles, *Naughty Girl*). It could be argued that this song encourages female fans to sexualize themselves in order to gain the attention of men. In the "Naughty Girl"

music video, Beyoncé is featured stripping on stage for an audience, clearly sexualizing her body in order for people to notice her (*Naughty Girl*). The message is confusing, seeing that Beyoncé once adhered to being an innocent young woman who did not need a man, but then shifted into sexualizing herself for attention. This can be attributed to several factors, such as confusion of how to present oneself throughout the growing up process. Growing up in the spotlight warps values for celebrities, so Beyoncé could just be misguided as to how to wholesomely or traditionally present herself to men. Additionally, by objectifying herself in this video, Beyoncé is making herself desirable to fans with a visual they can truly latch on to (*Cashmere*). Perhaps she made this decision to convey herself as a product of the entertainment industry, a product that audiences can buy into.

*Dangerously In Love* came full circle with its last song, entitled “Daddy.” This track basically speaks for itself; Beyoncé is paying tribute to her father, who just so happens to be her manager, her inspiration, and her support system. The album that started off with Beyoncé being in love, and then transitioned into lyrics that point to her “self-sexualization” for attention, finished with lyrics such as, “Even if my man broke my heart today, no matter how much pain I’m in I will be okay, cause I got a man in my life that can’t be replaced, for this love is unconditional it won’t go away” (Knowles, *Daddy*). With lines of that nature, Beyoncé is telling her fans that even if she does fall in love, or acts naughty for her male counterparts, her father will always be the guiding light and support system in her life. By ending the album with “Daddy,” Beyoncé is concluding the album on a wholesome note. She is thanking her father for all he has done for her in her career, and by doing so her fans were able to see a Beyoncé who acknowledges and appreciates her roots. So while *Dangerously In Love* includes sexier tracks, Beyoncé comes full circle and returns to her wholesome values.

Seeing that this album was her first big solo move, returning to her wholesome values can be linked to her possible desire to cling to her previous lifestyle. For the bulk of her life, innocent values and people surrounded Beyoncé, but as she broke into her solo career she realized that that image would only carry her so far. This album is highly representative of Beyoncé attempting to break out of her virtuous shell and become raunchier, which in her mind means becoming more appealing to a mass audience. However, Beyoncé eventually returned to her roots of innocence because it was all she had known until *Dangerously In Love*. Unknowingly, Beyoncé's construction of *Dangerously In Love* played into the formation of parasocial relationships with fans, allowing her relationship counterparts to view her as a woman subject to feelings that non-celebrities experience as well. The structure and nature of *Dangerously in Love* coincides with Horton and Wohl's theory of coaching audience attitudes. Coaching audience attitudes is a way for the persona and the persona's marketing team to market the celebrity in a way that will place the persona on a pedestal of admiration and love (Horton and Wohl). Because spectators saw a raw and emotional Beyoncé, it allowed them to be sympathetic towards her, and in turn strengthened the parasocial relationship between them.

On September 4, 2006, Ms. Knowles' twenty-fifth birthday, Beyoncé released her sophomore solo album, *B'Day* just three years after *Dangerously In Love* ("Beyoncé Knowles"). This album showed the world a Beyoncé who was coming into herself even more; she was more independent and focused. *B'Day* began with "Déjà vu," another Jay-Z collaboration. On this track, Beyoncé and Jay-Z come together to profess their love for each other (Knowles, *Déjà Vu*). Although the song is about their love, the "Déjà Vu" music video does not make much sense. From the beginning, Beyoncé is seen in scandalous outfits parading around for Jay-Z, which provides audiences with an opportunity to believe that their relationship is based on sexuality

(*Déjà Vu*). Does this provide a good image for Beyoncé's fans? That is definitely questionable, as many feminists would argue that women should feel loved by their men due to intelligence, skill, and personality, not because of their sexual nature. Because of her outfit choices and choreography, it is easily arguable that Beyoncé is telling her fans to use sex appeal to attract a man. Again, this change from the purity of her talent to what some conservatives and religious figures may consider the impurity of her image can be attributed to her process of growing up and figuring herself out while existing in the spotlight. However it could also be argued that this inclusion of a sexual display is Beyoncé's way of conveying to her audiences that she, just like other people her age, is trying to figure out what is appropriate for her. In other words, Beyoncé succeeds yet again at being extraordinarily relatable for listeners.

Later in the track list of *B'Day*, Beyoncé included her song "Freakum Dress." When first listening to this song, it seems that the lyrics are simply about a woman feeling great in one of her favorite dresses, but it is soon learned that that is not the case. "It's time to get it, cause once again he's out doing wrong," "soon as you saw me, turned on by how the dress was fitting right," and "when you put it on it's an invitation," are all somewhat controversial lyrics that Beyoncé included in the track (Knowles, *Freakum Dress*). Essentially, Beyoncé is conveying a message to her fans that when your significant other makes a mistake, one should put on a risqué outfit and attract other men to make him jealous. Again, Beyoncé is sexualizing herself for the attention of men, which is the opposite of setting a decent example for her followers. Another reason for this hyper commodification of sexuality could be that Beyoncé is attempting to appeal to her fan base. She may believe that this overtly sexual content is what will grab the focus of audiences and convince them to purchase more of her brand (Cashmore). Conversely, Beyoncé may have been confused about how she wants to present herself to society. Because she was innocent for

so long, she may have been unsure of ways to present herself. She clearly wanted to break free from the virtuous girl she once was to become a more provocative woman, but it seems that she struggled with balancing this newfound freedom and her old ways of acting in a virtuous manner.

Towards the end of *B'Day* is “Irreplaceable,” perhaps one of Beyoncé’s most famous songs. In this track she sings about telling a man that he is replaceable, especially when he does something wrong. Both the song and the video paint Beyoncé as an incredibly strong and empowered woman. She boasts, verse after verse, about kicking a man out for messing the relationship up, and displays that she is independent. While the bulk of this album represents excessive sexuality, “Irreplaceable” represents a different, stronger, and more appealing side of Beyoncé that girls can and should relate to. It has become apparent that with every passing track and album, Beyoncé is growing up and growing into herself more and more.

More than that, Beyoncé’s fans seem to be growing up with her. The topics of discussion within Beyoncé’s many songs were topics that were on the forefront of her audiences’ minds. Younger Beyoncé music seemed to appeal to girls her age at that time, and that pattern continued throughout her career. At whatever age Beyoncé released an album, she included songs that girls her age could identify with, and because she has kept that strategy in mind, her fans have been able to grow up alongside her. By coming across as unfiltered and slightly provocative, Beyoncé is continuing a pattern of honesty woven in her lyrics, and that has created and will continue to create a continuous fan base consisting of the same group of people since the commencement of her career. It seems this honesty is something that was lost among celebrities, so Beyoncé including this into her lyrics really allowed fans to “get to know her” on a more personal level. This insight and honesty led to the kindling of a parasocial relationship, keeping in line with Horton and Wohl’s theory, specifically the section discussing the “bond of intimacy” when the



persona blurs the line between performance and personal life. If Beyoncé were to stop singing about different phases in her life and froze her career in one time period, she would plateau and maintain the same age group for years and years. It seems that she has realized the changes in her life are what allow for a continuous fan base, and by realizing that she has been able to create a long-term business strategy for her music and entertainment career. Neal Gabler, a journalist, has stated, “the size of the celebrity is in direct proportion to the novelty and excitement of the narrative,” (Cashmore) which provides great clarity as to why audiences are so infatuated with Beyoncé, because she constantly makes her life story sound interesting to admirers.

In between recording albums and videos, Beyoncé graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 2007 donning a skimpy bikini (Watts). She was pushing her butt out, and posing in a way that drew attention to her chest. The cover text reads “Beyoncé, the dreamgirl as you’ve never seen her,” insinuating that there are similar sultry pictures of the pop goddess featured inside the magazine. Based on the picture and the quote, this cover is once again, like her music videos and lyrics, sexualizing Beyoncé. She was presented in a way that makes her appear as beautiful, graceful, and strong, and therefore a great influence to girls everywhere. Additionally, she is standing out as a woman taking over all facets of the media, a woman who goes after everything and achieves her goals. Beyoncé endorses multiple products such as cosmetics, soft drinks, accessories, perfume, kid’s products, and fashion lines. Not to mention she also started a fashion line of her own alongside her mother, starred in multiple movies and commercials, and produced record-breaking CDs (Cashmore). These facts add more evidence to the case of why people admire Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. Furthermore, Beyoncé’s face being attached to multiple products provides fans with the opportunity to, for lack of better words, buy a relationship with Beyoncé. They can buy the perfume she wore, the clothes she designed, the makeup she painted

herself with, and the soda she drank. Those fans that have now been involved in a serious parasocial relationship with Ms. Knowles have gone even deeper into the infatuation by attaching themselves to her in any and every way possible. However, positive notes aside, the way in which Beyoncé presents herself trumps all other reasons for fans to admire her because her presentation blurs her image as a self-starter, determined, perseverant woman. This cover displayed Beyoncé in a way that conveys her need to use her body as advertisement as opposed to her skillset.

Soon after the *Sports Illustrated* cover, Beyoncé released her third album “*I Am... Sasha Fierce*,” a two disc album that showcased both Beyoncé’s and Sasha Fierce’s personae in 2008. The Beyoncé part of the disc features her popular slow ballads of “If I Were a Boy” and “Halo.” Throughout “If I Were a Boy,” Beyoncé attempts to convey that men do not treat women appropriately in relationships. She tells men that they cannot just step back into a relationship after messing up; she stands her ground and remains a strong, independent woman. “If I Were a Boy,” much like previous ballads from Beyoncé’s repertoire, exposes the role model side of Ms. Knowles (Knowles, *If I Were a Boy*). Fans experience her belting out line after line of stating that she is stronger than what any man does to her, and that she can stand up for herself. Reasons such as this are why people admire Beyoncé; she stands her ground in tough situations, and she does not apologize for doing so.

On the Sasha Fierce side of the album, Beyoncé lets loose more, sings in a fiercer tone, and shows her audiences that she is more than ballads and sexualized words and choreography. On the Sasha Fierce disc resides Beyoncé’s most popular track, “Single Ladies,” an upbeat song in which she tells men they missed their chance to marry one hell of a woman (Knowles, *Single Ladies*). Sure, many of her previous songs of hers have featured similar themes, but this one has

a beat that appeals to the masses. “Single Ladies” received a lot of radio airtime, and inspired a plethora of videos mimicking Sasha Fierce; with this one song, Beyoncé supersized her already massive career.

Sasha Fierce acted as a product diversification business strategy for Beyoncé. This album allowed for mass marketing to occur for her multiple products, especially her fashion line House of Deréon, which was mentioned in “Single Ladies” in the lyric “a man on my hips holds me tighter than my Deréon jeans” (Cashmore, Knowles, *Single Ladies*). *I Am... Sasha Fierce* created a whole new brand for Beyoncé, thus boosting her popularity exponentially, something that Beyoncé was adamant about achieving (Cashmore). Just before the release of this album in October of 2008, Beyoncé was interviewed for *Marie Claire* magazine and stated, “I’m over being a pop star, I don’t wanna be a hot girl, I wanna be iconic,” (“Beyoncé Interview”); this comment revealed to the world her plans of taking over all facets of the entertainment industry.

*I Am... Sasha Fierce* remained on people’s radar for over a year, thanks to the *I Am...* world tour, which Billboard said was in the top fifteen highest grossing tours in history (Allen). Soon after the tour, Beyoncé broke records at the Grammy Awards in January of 2010. Ms. Knowles was nominated for ten awards that evening, and left the show with six Grammys, thus becoming the first female artist to receive that many trophies in one night (Smith). This moment adds to the ever-growing list of reasons why people are infatuated with Beyoncé. Fans everywhere knew Beyoncé’s name— she was a force to be reckoned with. She had three chart-topping albums, a world tour, a plethora of magazine covers, a superstar husband, and finally, an abundance of golden Grammys. A woman with so many accomplishments under her belt at such a young age, and with no plans of abolishing the momentum anytime soon, certainly deserves to be admired by millions because she represents the image of the American dream. Beyoncé has

equality, opportunity, and material success (Cashmore). Someone who has it all is easily worshiped by fans because most people yearn to have it all too.

It is appropriate to pause right here at what could arguably be the peak of Beyoncé's career to talk about her intense parasocial relationships with fans. By definition, Beyoncé is likely unaware of the relationship her fans create with her, or with the idea and image of her. Arguments could go either way about whether a parasocial relationship, in general, is healthy for the fan, whether it is a ridiculous concept, or if there are benefits associated with it. The final conclusion can be found in chapter four, but from what has been revealed of Ms. Knowles' career thus far, it seems that maybe not all parasocial relationships are negative, depending on the persona or celebrity being idolized.

While Beyoncé did not completely stop her momentum, she did take a six-month hiatus from her career in 2010, parting ways with her father and manager, Mathew Knowles. There were many speculations as to why, but Beyoncé stated that the roles of father and manager were becoming too intertwined, that she needed a separation of the two, and thus ventured on alone (Sieczkowski). Not only was her father fired, but Beyoncé also made the very risky decision to manage her own career. In many of her past songs and performances, she portrayed herself as a woman who can be strong and stand on her own in this world. When news broke about her business decision to separate from her manager, she solidified that image of strength and independence. Business moves such as this cause frenzy for fans and gain the iconic entertainer a large amount of notoriety. At age twenty-nine, Beyoncé officially stepped out alone into the entertainment industry and adopted a more mature, adult role in her life. She progressed from leaning on her family every step of the way to taking charge of her life, her business, and her actions, an accomplishment that contributed to her personal and professional growth from young

and innocent to mature and eventually provocative. It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that supporting cast mates, or in this case family members, allow for easier attachment to a persona for the creation of a parasocial relationship. Beyoncé detaching herself from her father does not detract from their parasocial relationship; rather that detachment strengthens the relationship due to her declaration of independence.

As a self-managed artist, Beyoncé had to make a smart business move in order to maintain her celebrity status. With that management challenge ahead of her, Beyoncé's fourth album—which was appropriately titled *4*—was released. Looking at and listening to the track list for this album, listeners can instantly realize that Beyoncé wanted this album to be a personal representation. Of course, there were ballads and there were pop songs, but mixed in with that were influences of reggae, live instrumentals as opposed to the popular digital influences, and lyrics that reflected her monogamous relationship with husband Jay-Z (Rosen).

The album opens with yet another ballad, "1+1." Throughout this track, Beyoncé chants verses such as "And it's me and you, that's all we'll have when the world is through," and "Pull me in close and don't let me go, make love to me." Both lines convey that Beyoncé is devoted to her husband, that she loves him more than anything, and that together they will survive the world (Knowles, *1+1*). She feels safe and comforted in Jay-Z's embrace. This song marks her progression from overly sexualized numbers like "Freakum Dress" and "Naughty Girl" to sexually appropriate ballads such as "1+1." While both songs talk a lot about sex, there is maturity and grace within the vocals of "1+1" that her previous records lacked. Fans saw a Beyoncé devoted to the love of her life, a trusting partner, and a strong woman. Again this shows that with every passing lyric Beyoncé has shed her innocent and virtuous skin to develop a voice as a stronger, more provocative woman. She has moved forward from sexualizing herself and

progressed into singing about her inner feelings and thoughts, and singing about what matters to herself, such as her husband, and her life. She has grown immensely since her Destiny's Child days.

It seems that there is a theme of “two steps forward, one step back” with Beyoncé’s albums. In other words, she kicks off her albums with a statement song, a track which reveals who she “really” is, but later on in the album, a track contradicts the point Beyoncé had previously vocalized. In regards to *4*, the sixth record on the album is entitled “Rather Die Young,” a song which essentially boasts that Beyoncé will forfeit her life if she cannot live it with her man of choice. Suddenly, Beyoncé transforms from a strong woman who is not afraid to stand on her own to a woman who cannot live without a man (Knowles, *Rather Die Young*). Her previously strong message was immediately rescinded once this track hit radios everywhere, and it becomes confusing and misleading for her fans. As a role model in the spotlight, it is incredibly important to declare and maintain an image because that is what fans look for. A stable role model who stands behind her beliefs is what makes a celebrity significant and admirable to those who are looking for guidance and direction. It can be said that Beyoncé continuously changed her beliefs because she was still growing, still trying to figure out what her image should represent. She wanted to be in the spotlight as the focus of audiences’ attention, but was still maturing into the woman she has become today. Beyoncé entered the music and entertainment industry at a young age and needed to develop simultaneously as an individual and celebrity, a balance that was continually sought after with every passing album in her repertoire.

Just seven months after *4*’s reign on the charts, Beyoncé and Jay-Z welcomed their first child, Blue Ivy Carter. Once again, Beyoncé proved to her fans that she has it all, and people fell more in love with her. With the birth of Blue Ivy arrived a different version Beyoncé, a more

self-aware woman, if that was even possible. After her daughter was born, Beyoncé revealed a woman who was in love with herself and with her body, and she attributed this new self-love to experiencing childbirth, thus realizing what she believed was her true purpose in life: to be a mother (*Life Is But a Dream*). At this point in her career, Beyoncé moved far past her Destiny's Child and early solo career identities, and was now relating to new mothers. Her growth and progression was unique, as Beyoncé gained fans from her DC days, grew up with them, and maintained them as new mother fans. It was a rarity for celebrities to accomplish such a feat, but Beyoncé soared effortlessly over that obstacle.

2013 was the year of Beyoncé. While the year brought some of Beyoncé's biggest accomplishments, it also carried her largest controversies to date. January kicked off her monumental year with a performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" at President Obama's inauguration. The incredible honor ended up being tarnished due to Beyoncé lip-syncing the event ("Beyoncé Admits Inauguration Day lip sync, says she'll 'absolutely be singing live' at Super Bowl"). That controversy had the potential to ruin a career, but the queen of pop quickly denounced haters by opening a press conference while singing the iconic anthem live. In just that short time of her singing the National Anthem, Beyoncé proved to her fans that she too is human, subject to mistakes, but she also proved she knew how to mend her mistakes in the long run.

Just days after the "Star Spangled Banner" fiasco, Ms. Knowles took the stage at the Pepsi Super Bowl halftime show. This showcase was arguably the pinnacle of her career, a performance in front of millions of people and fans at the largest hallmark event in America. Throughout the show, Beyoncé sang verses from some of her most famous tunes, and at one point her former Destiny's Child band members made an appearance and graced the world with a short but amazing DC reunion (*Super Bowl XLVII Halftime Show*). It was an event to remember,

and many did solely because some not-so-flattering images of Ms. Knowles popped up all over the Internet. Beyoncé's camp released a statement just days after the Super Bowl requesting that all unflattering pictures of the celebrity be taken down (Shapiro). These photographs featured Beyoncé with a scowl on her face, abnormal expressions that caused wrinkles, and unappealing body movements that were not her finest. What message did her camp's request send to the millions of girls who idolize her? Beyoncé was inadvertently stating that she does not accept herself the way she is. Sure, everyone has seen her at her absolute best, but the moment fans saw her at a not-so-pretty moment, she attempted to remove all evidence. Many of her songs and ballads portrayed a woman who was strong and believed in herself as a woman no matter what anyone said, but by requesting the removal of the photos, Beyoncé contradicted what she previously stood for.

Once the Super Bowl was over, Beyoncé announced an extensive world tour, entitled the "Mrs. Carter Show." The promotional images for the tour featured the celebrity as a queen, a woman in power (Rubenstein). Beyoncé had previously prided herself on being a humble woman who knew she was accomplished, but did not feel the need to flaunt that fact. Choosing to portray herself as a queen raised some eyebrows and had people questioning why she suddenly felt so cocky. It can be argued that Beyoncé's choice to portray herself as a queen stems from her belief that she felt whole after giving birth (*Life Is But a Dream*). Once Blue Ivy was born, Beyoncé had an amazing career, a faithful husband of many years, self-acceptance, personal growth, and a child. In her opinion, she had it all, and that could be why she chose to depict herself as a queen.

During the Mrs. Carter Show world tour, new songs were leaked, fueling rumors about a new album from "Queen Bey." It had been about three years since Beyoncé Knowles-Carter



released an album, and she had not mentioned releasing one anytime soon, so the leaked tracks were definitely curious, especially because they were unlike anything fans had heard from the celebrity (Vena).

As the Mrs. Carter Show world tour came to an end, Beyoncé shocked the world and shattered records with her self-titled album, *Beyoncé*. There was no promotion, no official pre-released singles, and no sign other than rumors that this album was on its way. One night on her Instagram account, Beyoncé's announced the album would be exclusively released on iTunes. Beyond it being a new method of releasing an album, this was also a visual album, an album that had a video for every song, an audiovisual integration that was uncommon at best (Hampp). This album was a feat for Beyoncé, seeing that she wrote, recorded, produced, and filmed the entire album while embarking on a world tour. *Beyoncé* broke records; seemingly everyone was listening to and talking about this album, and in a phenomenal way. Praise was emitting from all facets of the media, especially from Beyoncé's fans, the affectionately named "Beehive" (O'Malley Greenburg, Bellassai and Nigatu).

Of course with every colossal accomplishment comes criticism. *Beyoncé* featured songs and videos that were so provocative, sexual, and explicit that the album actually received a parental advisory. As with every album of Beyoncé's, this one revealed a new version of the pop icon. Lingerie, scandalous outfits, vulgar words, and incredibly explicit dances and videos graced almost every track (Knowles, et al). Yet again this is a display of Beyoncé's personal growth and maturation. At this stage, she was a woman who was more in tune with herself sexually, and a woman who was comfortable speaking of the love she shares with her husband. *Beyoncé* really captures the performer's thoughts and feelings with every passing lyric.

As usual, the album began with a wholesome statement song entitled “Pretty Hurts.” Within the verses and video, Beyoncé portrays a beauty queen who goes through the motions of body shaming from the media and the public. The title said it all. Beyoncé stated throughout the song that “it’s the soul that needs the surgery,” conveying to girls everywhere that you are as beautiful as you perceive yourself to be from the inside and not the outside (Knowles, *Pretty Hurts*). Inner beauty is what matters, and that is what Mrs. Carter wanted her fan base to know. She was back to setting a phenomenal example for her audiences.

The visual album progressed into extremely sexual content like the song “Blow,” which essentially speaks of oral sex amongst other racy concepts (Knowles, *Blow*). From “Blow,” Beyoncé proceeded into “Partition,” seemingly a song for Jay-Z, Beyoncé’s husband; the video took place in a strip club that Beyoncé took Jay-Z to after their engagement in Paris. In the video she proceeds to put on a strip tease for her husband. Within this track are lines like “Driver roll up the partition please, I don’t need you seeing Yoncé on her knees,” and “He popped all my buttons and he ripped my blouse, he Monica Lewinski’d all on my gown” (Knowles, *Partition*). It goes without saying that those lyrics are far removed from the innocent Beyoncé we once knew in Destiny’s Child. Once again, her personal growth and life experiences are what caused this newly sexual version of Beyoncé. Not only does Beyoncé allude to having sex in a limo with her husband, but she also references the infamous scandal between former President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.

It can be argued that this explicit visual album eliminated a large amount of her fan base, but that is a somewhat misguided argument. Because Beyoncé has grown with every album, she has gotten to have the unique experience of her fan base growing up with her. She started innocently in Destiny’s Child with a younger fan base that was equally innocent. As Beyoncé

grew up and put out more albums, her fans grew up too, the same fans that followed her in Destiny's Child. This goes for *Beyoncé* as well: her fans for this album are the same people who worshiped her in her *Dangerously In Love* and *B'Day* days; this album is older and more provocative, but so is her fan base.

Similar to "Partition," the track "Rocket" chronicles Beyoncé enjoying intimate time with her husband (Knowles, *Rocket*). This album was home to several sexual anthems that were criticized by many people, but it was different than her past sexual songs. Early-solo-career Beyoncé created tracks that sexualized Beyoncé in a way for her to attract attention from men. Later-solo-career Beyoncé created songs that showed a celebrity who was comfortable with her marriage, her sexuality, and herself.

Straying from the sexual nature of the album, Beyoncé included the track "\*\*\*\*Flawless," which perhaps created the most controversy of the entire visual album. Within "\*\*\*\*Flawless," are verses where Beyoncé chants "Bow down bitches," and "I know when you were little girls you dreamt of being in my world." These lines portray a strong woman, an angry woman, and a woman who wants to prove her point. Beyoncé did not hold back in this track, and it definitely showed fans that she is strong and not afraid to speak her mind. Later in the song, Beyoncé breaks into a feminist rant, including feminist philosophy from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichí. By inserting Adichí's feminist words about political, economic, and social equality, Beyoncé opened the door for listeners to vocalize their anger (Knowles, *\*\*\*Flawless*). Here Beyoncé is spreading the word about the true meaning of feminism, but at the same time she is continually ordering people to bow down to her. This position is highly contradictory and misleading because on the one hand she wants everyone to be equal, but on the other wants everyone to stop what they are doing and bow down to her, a woman who is seemingly superior to the rest. After evaluation,

this contradiction could stem from Beyoncé's desire to be recognized as more than just a pop star, that more than anything else, she wants to be respected (Cashmore).

*Beyoncé* was one of the greatest feats by an entertainer to date. It shocked the world, it produced amazing reviews, but it also received harsh criticisms. This visual album presented audiences with a current view of Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, a strong and sexual woman who is comfortable with herself and is not afraid to be who she truly is. Everything that came along with this album altered the view of Mrs. Carter. Beyoncé was not afraid to be vocal about her true feelings, and although it was a definite risk, her fearlessness strengthened the parasocial bond between her fans and her celebrity status.

With the release of the visual album, we are able to draw several conclusions about the lengthy and inspiring career of Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter. First, *Beyoncé* really brought the celebrity's career full circle. She began as a nine-year-old Christian girl under the guidance and care of her parents who put her on the map. Young Beyoncé was joined by her friends in the famous group Destiny's Child and took the world by storm. When Beyoncé set out to begin her solo career she slowly left behind her virtuous and innocent past to become the sexual, more provocative, strong woman the world has come to know today.

Does it matter? In regards to this question, "it" refers to the comments people make regarding Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. Whether or not people's criticism and comments influence the view of Beyoncé is an important question to ask and answer. In my opinion, yes, it does matter. When formulating one's own opinion it is important to consider the outlook of surrounding people. Someone may see Beyoncé as a god-like, robotic individual who can do no wrong, making all the correct moves in her career, while someone else believes that she is a contradictory, no-good person whose entire life is a lie. Without considering all options

presented, it is impossible to create a well-informed opinion about someone of Beyoncé's magnitude.

Does it cause people to pay attention? Again, "it" refers to what people are saying about Mrs. Knowles-Carter. When there is a headline about Beyoncé, it will undoubtedly grab the attention of thousands of people. She is a woman who has spent twenty-four years of her life building the empire she currently stands on. Her career has spanned decades and generations, and has garnered so much notoriety and attention, that every opinion printed for people to see will gain their attention. And because people are influenced by the media, what those headlines say most definitely influences people's perception of the celebrity ("The Role and Influence of Mass Media").

Has she developed into a respectable role model in today's society? Is she too provocative now? As mentioned countless times throughout this case study, Beyoncé has been in the public eye for quite some time, and her actions are scrutinized constantly. Whether she wanted to be or not, Beyoncé developed into one of the biggest role models for girls of all ages, and she created a career that perfectly lent itself to a parasocial relationship. Over the years, she has changed her image and her message countless times, each time appealing to a certain age group. If one were to pay close attention to her fans at each pivotal moment in her career, their ages changed with each phase of the Beyoncé timeline. As Beyoncé grew up, so did her fans. The fans she had at the release of *Dangerously In Love* are the same people who worshipped her at the release of *Beyoncé*. While many may disagree, I stand firm in my conclusion that she is a respectable role model in today's society, and that she is not too provocative; after all, she is not aiming to please every imaginable listener. It is okay that young girls are not mature enough to handle the content of the latest visual album, largely because many would not understand the

progression of Mrs. Carter's career. The older fans, the people in their twenties and early thirties, are Beyoncé's target market, and she is a phenomenal role model for them. She is comfortable in her skin, faithful to her husband, and is not afraid to show her sexual side as a married woman and as a mother. Those in her target market are at the same age and life stage as Beyoncé, they can relate to her now just as they have related to her throughout her career, and that fan growth is a wondrous and beautiful concept to watch unfold.

The career of Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter has withstood the test of time, and she has provided her global audience with an ever-changing spectacle to admire. Morphing from a young Texan girl with religious values to a grown woman who can do whatever she wants, Beyoncé has treated every era of her career as a chance to show the world a different side of her. With every side shown, the parasocial relationship strengthens, and this is due to how exposed Beyoncé chose to make herself. People will continue to watch, criticize, and comment on her life, and that is okay, because as long as they are talking about her, she will remain the icon she is today.

### **Chapter 3: The Glove Comes Off**

Michael Jackson, commonly dubbed the “King of Pop,” was a superstar, an entertainer extraordinaire, and a man with a lengthy career who had a lot of controversy surrounding his life. Born on August 28, 1958 in Gary, Indiana, Jackson belonged to a large family of musicians. He had eight brothers and sisters, all of whom were involved in the music industry at one point or another. It was said that Michael was a sheltered young boy, partly due to his mother Katherine’s beliefs as a Jehovah’s Witness, and partly because of his father Joe’s strict ways of raising children (“Michael Jackson Biography”). However, Joe Jackson realized his sons had great talent within them and decided to form a family music group. In 1962, Joe gathered the three oldest sons— Jackie, Tito, and Jermaine—to create a group. Just a year later, in 1963, a five-year-old Michael Jackson joined the lineup. From early on it was clear to both Joe and Katherine Jackson that Michael housed a great amount of talent. He quickly became the focal point of the family band, and many attributed his leap to stardom to his James Brown-esque dance moves and his exceptionally mature and soulful voice (“Michael Jackson Biography;” “The Jackson 5”).

The Jackson 5 did not immediately skyrocket to America’s attention-- it took much time, hard work, and effort put in by Joe Jackson and his five sons: Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael, the lead. 1964 is the year when their official careers commenced, by way of Joe Jackson entered the group in multiple talent shows throughout the Gary, Indiana area. Soon after the talent shows, Joe began booking the Jackson 5 at nightclubs in Gary. Time passed and the Jackson 5 won nearly every show they entered. At one point, they took a risk by entering an amateur night talent show at the famous Apollo Theater in Harlem. August 13, 1967 marked not only the day the Jackson 5 won the amateur talent show, but also the day when Motown, a famous record label, discovered this soulful young group. The family band signed with Motown

in 1968, and the rest is quite literally, history (“Michael Jackson Biography;” “The Jackson 5”). All of Joe Jackson and The Jackson 5’s hard work, determination, and perseverance were what led to the creation of a parasocial relationship between the band and the fans. Once the group “made it big” in the industry and began appearing on television shows, their story was revealed, and audiences could see that the Jackson 5 was the actualization of the American Dream, something highly desirable at that time, and because of this, the parasocial relationship began. Horton and Wohl’s article on parasocial relationships speaks of how radio and television presents the persona or personae to audiences in order to build a foundation for a parasocial relationship. In the case of Michael Jackson, he was debuted to the masses on television shows, revealing his story and how he came to be the famous singer he was, and because of this presentation from trusted shows and hosts, a foundation was laid for a parasocial relationship between the King of Pop and his fan base (Horton and Wohl).

Those who know the name Michael Jackson have an idea in their heads of a weird man who developed odd relationships with those around him. Michael’s relationships became so curious that child molestation charges were brought against him. This scrutiny and observation magnified all relationships Michael had ever had and brought his life to the forefront of audience attention. It becomes imperative to look at Michael’s familial relationships as he was growing up in order to see the effect they had on him as an adult in the spotlight. Did his tumultuous relationship with his father lead to an adult who was confused about how to act towards children? Did his upbringing create a man without social boundaries? Were the many accusations made against the celebrity valid, or were they blown out of proportion and taken out of context? Within the following observations, these questions will be answered, along with other insights about the star’s relationship saga.



Parents have the power to mold their children's lives--they are influential throughout the growing-up process, especially as children look to their parents for guidance. Children watch the way their parents act and mimic them as they age. Michael was a child star in the spotlight, but most importantly for this argument, he was the child of Katherine and Joe Jackson, the two people responsible for raising the King of Pop.

When looking back at Michael's roots, observers should take note of how he was raised in order to gain a better understanding of his actions throughout his short adult life. As mentioned previously, Katherine raised her children as devout Jehovah's Witnesses, and father Joe raised his children with plenty of discipline, both emotional and physical. Jehovah's Witnesses, by nature, lead extraordinarily conservative lifestyles. They do not celebrate holidays of any sort, and generally cannot associate with non-Jehovah's Witnesses unless absolutely necessary ("141 Jehovah Witness Rules."). That being said, the Jackson's religion insinuates that Michael and his siblings were sheltered while growing up. They interacted with each other and others in their faith, but outside of that it seems that not much else happened. Because of the sheltered nature of the religion, Michael did not experience "normal" life, he did not interact as most children his age did, and he missed out on occasions such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and even his own birthday celebrations.

They may have been sheltered spiritually, but Joe placed his children in the public eye. He trained his children on a regimented schedule. Michael's father admitted in an interview with Piers Morgan that he physically disciplined his children while they were growing up. Many of the Jackson children have admitted to having a strictly business and not at all personal relationship with their father, a man whom they did not call "dad." Joe saw to it that his children were rehearsing their vocals and their dance moves at all times-- that is, when they were not

performing or completing their mandatory tutoring hours. In his interview with Piers Morgan, Joe stated, “I’m glad I was tough because look what I came out with, I came out with some kids that everybody loved all over the world.” With those words, it became evident that he wanted his children to be stars and performers, not children (McLaughlin). Joe regularly called his son ugly, ruining Michael’s self-esteem in the process (Jackson). It is evident that the way Michael’s parents chose to raise him and put him in the spotlight from an incredibly young age hindered his ability to function “normally.”

Because of the show business-focused upbringing the King of Pop experienced, he later went on to tell *Newsweek* that as he was growing up he was “surrounded by bodyguards, tutors and his immediate family circle – a child at sea in a world of adults.” Michael explains that his father sheltered his siblings from “normalcy,” and had tunnel vision for stardom (Newsweek Staff). In interviews conducted after the unexpected death of the celebrity, several of his friends revealed what childhood was truly like for the young Jackson children, specifically young Michael. Abusive would be an understatement when talking about Joe’s “parenting” methods. Should any of the Jackson 5 miss a note or struggle with the choreography, Joe would be waiting on the sidelines with a belt to whip his children. Friends of Jackson stated that Joe was a genius for instilling in them the discipline to present a great stage act, a huge feat for a man who acted as a manager and a father (*Michael Jackson: Life, Death and Legacy*). Because of the abuse and hardships, Michael experienced a very abnormal father-son relationship; he even told Oprah, “I love my father, but I don’t know him,” further confirming the relationship never existed for Michael; he never had a father--he had an employer and manager (Jackson, “Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah”).

Friends of Michael revealed that some of the brothers in the Jackson 5 were strong and able to handle the harsh parenting conditions Joe put into place, but Michael was different: he was incredibly sensitive to his father's treatment. Some observers said that the young star worked too hard for a child, and said the regimented lifestyle absolutely impacted the young sensation psychologically. More than that, the lifestyle was said to have severely stressed Michael out. So much so that Michael's face would contort in pain when discussing Joe's parenting and his relationship with his father (*Michael Jackson: Life, Death and Legacy*). When Joe's abusive tactics were leaked to the press, it could definitely be said that his disciplinary actions strengthened the parasocial relationship between Michael's fans and the pop sensation, though there was no actual proof. First, Joe's reveal provided insight into the personal side of the pop star's life, and second, it created a situation where fans of Michael's would feel sympathetic towards him for the hardships he endured, thus creating an empathetic nature to the parasocial relationship. Both the deeper insight into the pop star's life and the attempt at gaining audiences' sympathy are aspects that fuel a parasocial relationship. Horton and Wohl's theory states that spectators create a parasocial relationship with a persona based on their ability to learn about the chosen persona, and by Joe Jackson revealing this insight into Michael's personal life, it allows spectators and fans to learn more about the King of Pop personally, thus creating more opportunity for a parasocial bond. Second, Horton and Wohl state that when a persona projects a sympathetic image, it is reciprocated with loyalty from fans, simply meaning sympathy is yet another way for fans to attach themselves to the persona (Horton and Wohl).

Due to his pursuits and varying degrees of discipline, Joe robbed his kids, especially young Michael, of their innocence and youth, and Michael searched for the rest of his life to find youth once again. Michael openly admitted that he focused so much on children and making

their lives better because it was an experience he did not have while growing up (Jackson). However, it is important to also look at how far the performer took his relationships with children.

Not having a traditional father figure truly altered Michael from a young age, and created a man who was confused and forever trying to make up for lost time and lost experiences. Coming from a large family, Michael also had five brothers and three sisters. Seeing that his father-son relationship was out of the ordinary, it is no surprise that his relationship with his brothers and sisters was similarly altered and unusual. He and his brothers were part of the famous family band, The Jackson 5. Due to the nature of his upbringing, the King of Pop did not have the opportunity to create friendships outside of his siblings while performing and working with the family band (“The Jackson 5”). Traditional sibling bonds were not even present; they were a show business family that connected on terms of albums, choreography, and publicity. This upbringing created an incredibly lonely and isolated boy, a boy who did not know how to create functional relationships with others.

Acting as a father figure, Michael yearned to protect children. He focused on ailing children, ones with debilitating diseases and various forms of cancer. Charity was a large part of his life; the pop star always looked for ways to give back to those who had given him so much in life. Specifically, Michael gave to children; he wanted to make their lives better than they were. He wanted to do for children what no one had done for him while he was growing up. Protection, safety, love, and affection: these are all expected parental traits, traits that young Michael never experienced with his father, and ones that Michael adopted to help the children of the world (“His Humanitarian Work”). Fans realizing the philanthropy that Michael participated in in order to make the world better for so many children was a way of Michael inadvertently coaching

audience attitudes, a concept taken from Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction theory.

Coaching audience attitudes is a way of propaganda promoting admiration towards the persona (Horton and Wohl). The King of Pop's philanthropy showed fans that he was not only successful, but had given back to those who need it most, a trait worthy of worship.

In early 1993, Michael Jackson entertained the world at the Super Bowl halftime show, and during his performance he included hundreds of children. It is a safe assumption that Joe never brought his kids to any ball games, possibly because the record deals, talent shows, talk show appearances, and record breaking took up all of the family's time ("The Jackson 5"). The attendance of sporting events by fathers and sons is a Norman Rockwell-esque tradition shared throughout time. This is yet another fatherhood experience Michael did not receive; by including children in his halftime performance, Michael made up for lost time in his personal life.

At this halftime show, Michael performed one of his successful hits, "Black or White." This song creates an interesting argument for the fatherhood story. Parents, as said previously, are responsible for raising their children and molding them into adults. Parents are expected to instill morals, ethics, and values into their children so that kids learn right from wrong. Michael learned business ethics, how connections helped him to further his career, and how to make the right moves in life to become more successful in the entertainment industry. No one acted as his guiding force; he learned his ethics and morals from the media ridiculing his life choices and by realizing how misinformed gossipers tarnished his character and wounded him as a human being and as an artist (Jackson, "Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah"). That said, Michael yet again donned his father-figure hat and decided to instill good morals pertaining to race and ethnicity into the world. "Black or White" communicated to fans and listeners that skin color did not matter, that whether black or white, human beings are human beings, and should be treated as

such (Jackson, “Black or White”). Learning from personal ridicule how to father his fans, Michael drew from vital experiences and hot political topics to educate his fans and listeners with very important morals, thus acting like a father. Speaking out and advocating proved to create an even better image for the King of Pop, and although the song “Black or White” may have been controversial, it showed his fans that he was not afraid to speak about the hard topics in life. Michael Jackson’s fans, who were already knee-deep in a parasocial relationship with the pop star, now received more kindling to add to the burning fire of the parasocial relationship. Within the parasocial interaction theory penned by Horton and Wohl, they state that a persona can act as a model, and in this case that is definitely what Michael Jackson was. He stood up and took on the part of a role model, paving the way through a controversial conversation about race and equality, proving he was worthy of being listened to, and because of that, spectators continued their admiration for him (Horton and Wohl).

Mostly everyone who knew of the King of Pop knew of his home Neverland, a ranch complete with a movie theater and full-size amusement park. Many people said Michael created Neverland because it provided him with the opportunity to be a child as an adult, especially because he did not receive the opportunity to be a child as a child. However, the celebrity continually invited ailing and healthy children over to his ranch (Jackson). Growing up as a mega child star, the recording studios, talk shows, and live performances were Michael’s theme parks and movie theaters; he was the amusement and entertainment to so many, but never experienced true entertainment for himself. Young Michael was always on stage performing, recording albums, or participating in interviews, none of which are particularly entertaining for children, at least not as traditionally entertaining as school dances and birthday parties. Bringing children to

his ranch allowed him to yet again act as a parent who protected “his kids”—the children of the world—in a safe and fun environment.

Animals were another large aspect of the Neverland ranch Michael owned, lived in, and operated. Birds, tigers, monkeys, exotic insects, and reptiles made up the list of his pets (Ryan). He loved animals as much as he loved children, and it is interesting to view his collection of animals as pets he gave to his children of the world, the children who visited Neverland. Parents providing their children with pets is a common act, so Michael’s animal menagerie could have been a way for him to provide his children with the experience of having pets, just on a larger scale. He wanted his thousands of children to have that experience in their lives, so he provided pets like any nurturing and giving parent would.

Because Michael lacked the proper guidance and father figure while growing up, his sense of social boundaries became distorted when acting as a father figure. Indeed, Michael wanted to give children a life and experiences that he himself had not had, but often times the lines were blurred and Michael may have overstepped his social role. The molestation accusations showed that while Michael believed his actions were platonic and simply a way for him to communicate his fatherly affection towards children, social definitions of propriety tell the rest of the world that his actions were too far from fatherly to be considered appropriate or legal. Without that role model in his life, Michael did not know any better—he did not know when he pushed the limits; he simply wanted to show love that he had not been shown. After much observation, it seems that malicious or intentionally wrong beliefs were not on Michael’s agenda (Morales).

As accusations of molestation emerged, the performer actually admitted to sharing his bed with young children, adolescent boys in particular. He adamantly professed to the public that

his actions were in no way harmful or sexual, sharing the following statement: “I give them hot milk, you know, we have cookies. It’s very charming, it’s very sweet, it’s what the whole world should do” (Bonicci). Perhaps society had created this sexual fallacy surrounding his life, and the King of Pop was actually an entertainer to all and a father to many. While their children are growing up, parents spend time with them, they talk about their day, help with homework, kiss their boo-boos, and tuck them into bed, sometimes lingering in bed to ease the fear of boogie men, to read a bedtime story, or to have a late night snack. Looking at the parallels between expected parental roles and Michael’s actions towards children, it becomes clear that he acted as a father, a protector, and a nurturer. Unfortunately, the star did not seem to understand that his actions were not socially acceptable. The line between right and wrong behavior is often drawn, however correctly, by the interpretations of the one committing the actions, and although Michael believed he was right, society sees the situation through a different lens, a lens providing a vision of social misconduct, illegality, and sexual abuse (Morales).

Up until this point, it can be argued that the parasocial relationship between Michael and his fans has been fairly “normal.” Aspects that contributed to the relationship were realization of the American Dream, being surrounded by family, astounding success, philanthropy, and sympathy due to the pop star’s abusive upbringing. These are all fairly wholesome and substantial reasons that contribute to the infatuation with a celebrity, not to mention that Michael was the King of Pop, an icon in the entertainment industry. However, when these accusations came out, it can be assumed that fans divided into two groups: those who stood by Michael’s side through the controversy and those who denounced him for committing such crude acts. These molestation accusations created vast amounts of controversy among fans everywhere. Michael also refused interviews for nearly fourteen years, ending that hiatus with his live



interview with Oprah in 1993 (Jackson, “Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah”). Between the allegations and his refusal to acknowledge the media, Michael was allowing other people to dictate his reputation. This showed fans that Michael possibly did not care enough to defend himself in the media, and therefore let stories run rampant with theories and rumors, taking fans involved in a parasocial relationship for a wild ride of ups and downs with his career.

Transitioning back to the controversy surrounding Michael regarding his actions towards young boys, Michael stated time and time again that he was innocent. With his innocence being stated, there was still blame to place for the actions, and that blame came down to one man’s fault. This scandal was not Michael’s doing; he believed he was adding to the world in a positive way, but unfortunately society tangled his purposes and shed a negative light on the King of Pop. Joe created a pop star but he did not raise a child, and because of his lack of a traditional childhood, Michael was left with no guidance and no direction on social structure and social roles. Joe did not just create a troubled Michael, but also created a swarm of criticism surrounding his child-star-turned-pop-sensation son and client.

While Michael treated the children of the world as his own, he also had three biological children whom he loved endlessly: Prince, Paris, and Blanket. Michael wanted his children to have a “normal” childhood, a luxury he did not receive from his own parents. He wanted his children to have “normal” life experiences and see the world, and because the performer was swarmed with paparazzi whenever in public, he made the decision to keep his children’s faces concealed while in the public eye. Yet again, Michael used his abnormal childhood experiences as a way to act out what fatherhood should be, and he did this tenfold with his own children. He protected them, loved them, and gave them everything they needed to become “normal”

members of society who could live their lives without having to worry about the public (“Fatherhood:: True Michael Jackson”).

Michael played many roles in his short lifetime: entertainment icon, father, philanthropist, son, brother, uncle, mentor, role model, and friend. However, Michael was wary of building friendships with the people in his life, and at one point solved his problem of lacking friendships in a peculiar manner. Michael admitted to having mannequins in his room; they acted as a platform for Michael to create friendships and bonds on his own terms and in his own ways. He stated time and time again that he was “one of the loneliest people on this earth,” and that he felt isolated because of his upbringing and the nature of his career as a child star (“On Fame, Loneliness, Pain and Desire for Love”). Michael felt strange interacting with people because he grew up on stage, under the influence of his father (Newsweek Staff). The mannequins acted as his friends because those relationships went at his own pace, and they did not ridicule him, taunt him, insult him, or harm him. It can be concluded that Michael yearned to create his own family and his own web of relationships that made him feel happy and whole. An interesting theory that can be devised based on Michael’s affinity towards mannequins rather than humans is that fans involved in a parasocial relationship with Michael may believe that they are there for Michael. Within Horton and Wohl’s parasocial interaction theory they speak of a term they dubbed “extreme para-sociability,” which is when the audience uses the parasocial relationship as a substitute for “autonomous social participation, when it proceeds in absolute defiance of objective reality (Horton and Wohl).” In this case it can be argued that Michael’s mannequins offered a chance for the audience, or Michael’s fans, to place themselves in the position of the King of Pop’s mannequins, pretending they are the ones involved in this odd relationship between the persona and the fake friends. So while the mannequins are bizarre, the situation

actually lent itself quite nicely to the ongoing parasocial relationship between an unknowing Michael and his fans, and even created an opportunity for extreme para-sociability.

While Michael attested to keeping mannequins in his life as friends, that is not to say he did not keep the company of living friends. The King of Pop admitted to being influenced by major female figures in the entertainment world, as well as in his personal life. Much like Michael crafted his own paternal relationships with young fans all over the world, he also built maternal, sisterly, and friendly relationships with famous females throughout his lifetime. That being said, the biological female influences in Michael's life included his mother and sisters. As mentioned previously, Katherine raised her children as Jehovah's Witnesses, thus providing them with incredibly sheltered lives ("Michael Jackson Biography"). Michael was described as a "momma's boy" by people close to him, alluding to his close relationship with his mother. She was a very nurturing mother, always protecting her children, even stepping in if father Joe's abuse got out of hand. Katherine stood by Michael through the triumphs and pitfalls of his career, and Michael even named her as primary caretaker of his three children after his untimely passing (Mandina). Katherine's relationship with her son, it can be assumed, mainly served the purposes of nurturing and protection, though she arguably coddled Michael after his father's strict management and parenting styles. The relationship with his mother and sisters did not provide the star with an example of proper or socially acceptable relationships with women. That said, Michael seemed to have interesting relationships with women ("Michael and Women," "Michael Jackson Turns 30," "On Fame, Loneliness, Pain and Desire for Love").

Many people close to the King of Pop revealed that he enjoyed looking at women in a sexual way: he enjoyed holding their hands, and he enjoyed pinching their butts ("Michael and Women"). While some of these actions, such as pinching women's butts, may be deemed

sexually and socially inappropriate, it is easily arguable that Jackson knew no better. There was not a woman in his life around at all times to inform him of how to properly treat women, or how to approach situations in a socially acceptable manner. To the celebrity, his seemingly inappropriate actions were how he communicated his affection, appropriately or not.

Reports also revealed that Michael enjoyed the company of older women such as Elizabeth Taylor, Diana Ross, and Sophia Loren (“Michael Turns 30”). It can be argued that Michael’s fixation on older women was a way for him to create a new maternal relationship in his life, a relationship outside of the one with his own mother. These women, specifically Elizabeth Taylor and Diana Ross, led eccentric and vibrant lives, something Michael emulated throughout his career. It seems they were role models to him, and his relationships with these older women were outlets for Michael to express his desires for that quintessential mother-son relationship.

As mentioned before, much of the King of Pop’s relationship with mother Katherine was focused around nurturing and protection, but when it came to the show business and stresses of being in the spotlight as a celebrity, Michael could not necessarily relate to his mother. At a young age, he met Diana Ross, and instantly took a liking to her. Over time, Miss Ross developed into a mentor and role model for Michael; he even lived with her for a while in California, and many referred to Diana as Michael’s “showbiz mom” (Major). Yet again, Michael filled a relational void in his life, and while this one was not questioned nearly as much as his preference for young boys, it did not seem normal to his fans. Further proving the maternal relationship Michael experienced with Diana Ross, the King of Pop’s will stipulated that should Katherine Jackson not be able to act as primary caretaker for Jackson’s three children, Diana Ross would do so (Major).

Yes, Michael had sisters, and he did grow up with his sisters, but when he was in the spotlight and performing all around the world, Michael and his sisters grew apart simply because they were experiencing different things in life. This was where his relationships with Elizabeth Taylor, Princess Diana, and Brooke Shields came into play. One thing that could not be denied about the pop sensation was that he had a tumultuous upbringing and a conflicted career, and not many people understood what that was like. Elizabeth Taylor, however, knew what Michael endured; she herself was a child star and experienced scrutiny as Michael did, and because of that they had a foundation on which to build a friendship. Taylor was one of Michael's most trusted friends in life; she stood by him in times of joy and in his times of deep pain (Major). Although Taylor was not related to the pop sensation by blood, they created a sibling bond seemingly stronger than biology would allow. Aside from Diana Ross and Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Jackson harbored relationships with Brooke Shields and Princess Diana. Both of these women were prominent in the world, were surrounded by cameras and fans wanting to know more about their lives, and shared a connection with the King of Pop. As he did with Taylor, Michael shared similar experiences with these women, and because of that they were able to create a strong bond. Michael even wrote a song for Princess Diana entitled "Dirty Diana (Major)." So although Michael and his sisters never had a falling out or outright ill feelings towards each other, his sisters simply did not share Michael's lifestyle. He felt the need to create sisterly bonds with women who had experienced what he had throughout his lifetime.

Constructing these relationships with such powerful, influential, and strong women showed fans that Michael had a lot to offer, and that he was desirable to people of such high status. The pop sensation was able to have a loving and protecting biological mother as well as a superstar show business mother. He had a seemingly normal relationship with his biological

sisters, but also managed close relationships with British and entertainment royalty. These facts reveal the ongoing parasocial relationship between fans and Michael. Supporting cast mates, or in this case family members and pseudo-family members, add to Michael's relatability and therefore make him more desirable to fans, deepening the desire to create a parasocial relationship.

As can be concluded after much observation and evaluation, Michael Jackson's upbringing and parental influence created a very complicated man. Michael was a child star from a very young age, and his career maintained momentum until his untimely death in 2009. The King of Pop's career put him in the public spotlight forty-five years of his short fifty-year life. His father provided a wealth of opportunities for Michael to be confused about how "normal" father-son relationships function, and his other familial relationships were complicated enough to create oddities in adult Michael Jackson's life.

Did his tumultuous relationship with his father lead to an adult Michael Jackson who was confused about how to act towards children? Did his upbringing create a man with no social boundaries? Yes, Michael seemed to have stepped over the line of socially acceptable behavior towards children. Without that influence, that guiding force, and that role model of a traditional father, Michael's actions were very much left up to his own interpretation, and thus no limits were visible to him. The performer believed the children of the world were his children too, and he wanted nothing more than to provide them with a life full of experiences and opportunities that he himself was not provided with as a child. Unfortunately, Michael believed he was acting as any father would, but because of the nature of society, his kind-hearted actions were misconstrued as harmful and offensive acts.

Were the many accusations made against Michael Jackson valid or were they blown out of proportion and taken out of context? In keeping with socially acceptable behavior, the accusations were definitely valid. However, it should have also been further evaluated that Michael truly knew no better, that he wanted those children to feel loved and safe, feelings he did not have as a child.

All said, Michael experienced two families in his lifetime: his biological family filled with show business, contracts, choreography, ridicule, and sheltered lifestyles, and the family he created through relationships with younger children and older women. His biological family molded him into the adult that the world came to know as the King of Pop; Katherine, Joe, and Michael's many siblings were responsible for the celebrity's adult actions just as much as he was. The nature of Michael's biological family--his brothers, sisters, and parents--was what led to his second family. This second family was the family and relationships that he built. The children of the world were his children, and he believed he was their father. Elizabeth Taylor and Diana Ross, and other older women of their magnitude, were Michael's mother and sister figures. These women were responsible for providing Michael with career aspirations and inspiration. Michael also had his mannequins, figures in his life that posed as his friends, relationships he cultivated and built on his own terms and at his own pace. As mentioned before, the star also had animals, his pets and his children's pets-- these animals existed as Michael's friends as well. Finally, as an adult, he had three biological children of his own, providing the King of Pop with a chance to instill in his children the values, experiences, morals, and opportunities that he did not receive during his childhood. A man conflicted in so many ways managed to build an empire of inspiring music and a family that completed him in all ways that

he felt necessary. He also managed to create a career that allowed fans to participate in a rollercoaster parasocial relationship, including many highs and many lows.



#### **Chapter 4: Mr. Jackson and Mrs. Carter:**

The media—tabloids, celebrity gossip television channels, blogs, etc.—have created a world where people can learn about the lives of any and every celebrity they wish. With technology always improving and quickening, the rate of spreading information and the number of available platforms are continually growing. This velocity has created ample opportunity for people to better relate to stars. As a result, fixation and obsession develop through the continuous research of a star, and this infatuation leads to a parasocial interaction between the non-famous fan and the unknowing, and assumingly non-desiring, celebrity. Both Beyoncé and Michael Jackson have been victims of their fans' parasocial interactions, and these reactions and occurrences contributed to, and even dictated at times, the development of each celebrity's career. It is imperative to observe the careers of Beyoncé and Michael Jackson, and from that analyze how each entertainment icon handled his or her celebrity status.

The career experiences of Beyoncé and Michael Jackson appear to be vastly different in progression, accomplishments, and personal development. However, looking beyond the surface and further into the specifics, their careers share many similarities. Both pop icons began as members of a single-gender singing group; family continually surrounded them in the early stages of their careers; they grew up in the spotlight, represented major brands, and expressed their growth through music. The biggest similarity between the two also happens to be the largest difference, and that is that Beyoncé and Michael Jackson responded to constructions of their celebrity, but in dissimilar ways.

Beyoncé began her impressive career as a religious, family-oriented young lady who was a member of an all-girl music group. As time moved on, so did Beyoncé; she grew out of her pious, girl-band phase and into a solo career that smashed records and left millions of fans in awe

of the Queen B. The greatest discovery that came about from this study of the lengthy and ever-changing career of Beyoncé is that she truly grew up with her fans. She did not transform from innocent to overly provocative, but simply grew as any other woman would in life. Because she had the unique experience of her fans growing alongside her, Beyoncé took it as an opportunity to mold her career in a way that would express her growth as a human being and woman first, and as an entertainment icon second (“Destiny’s Child”).

Beyoncé is iconic; she represents many brands and has been a spokesperson for several charities, social groups, and products. Her fan base is not only sizeable, but also incredibly vocal on media outlets, which could very easily lead to Beyoncé losing grasp on her celebrity status. As her fans further attached themselves to the idea of Beyoncé, her ability to maintain composure grew stronger. It can be assumed—based on her reactions to criticism—that instead of rebelling and spiraling into a self-destructive path, she took in all that her fans had to say and used the feedback to fuel her career. Beyoncé took into account her fans’ life experiences, their goals, and their ideas, and she in turn discovered how to be a relatable figure that audiences could look to for guidance and reassurance in life. Just by observing the lyrics of her song “Irreplaceable,” it can be seen that Beyoncé realized that girls her age at that time were experiencing relationship troubles just as she was, and so she created a song that made her relatable to fans. By using her celebrity status as a way to relate to her audience, Beyoncé created the platform for fans to develop a somewhat healthy parasocial interaction (“The Role and Influence of Mass Media”).

Stating Beyoncé created a “healthy” opportunity for parasocial interaction is arguable, considering that such interaction does not seem to be healthy for those involved. The core belief of this theory is that it is a one-sided relationship where one participant knows a great deal about

the other, but the relationship and knowledge is not reciprocated. However, Beyoncé has created a positive parasocial interaction environment by embracing her fans' adoration, criticism, ideas, growths, and issues, and weaving them into her always-developing career. Although much of the research previously conducted on the topic of parasocial interaction discusses the unhealthy nature of a parasocial relationship, it has become evident through research of Beyoncé's career that there can be healthy parasocial relationships. Because of this discovery, it seemed appropriate to use the general concept of the theory and expand on it to relate it to both healthy and unhealthy relationships, thus expanding the limitations of the original theory (Horton and Wohl).

Beyoncé has handled criticism quite well. Any person in the public eye is subject to criticism, some of which is constructive, most of which is harsh and offensive. Celebrities can change the way fans see them in a matter of seconds when celebrities react to criticism. Learning how to hear the critiques and rise above them is an important aspect of a celebrity's career. Whenever rumors, insults, or gossip has surfaced about Beyoncé or her family, she has put an end to it, but not in the rash way that many people react. Social media have made instant gratification and instant reaction possible. This simply means that at any given moment, celebrities and the general public can post their thoughts, ideas, complaints, and rebuttals instantly for the whole world to see. While it can be tempting for celebrities to post their frustrations through rumors on social media, and many celebrities do so, Beyoncé has taken it upon herself to let the rumors marinate while concocting a thought-out plan of retaliation, a point which will be proven and expanded upon below (Vena).

Twitter is one of the largest platforms for instant posting and interaction with fans, but to prove the point of Beyoncé not making rash rebuttal choices, she currently has over thirteen

million followers, but only eight tweets, all of which are from the year 2013 or earlier. The tweets, which do not state anything of significance, show that Ms. Knowles is not keen on the idea of instantly bashing those who have bashed her. Additionally, in February of 2013, Beyoncé released a documentary entitled “*Life is But a Dream*,” chronicling some of her more recent career moves, addressing rumors, and speaking about the pregnancy and birth of her daughter, Blue Ivy Carter (*Life Is But a Dream*). Within the documentary, Beyoncé denounces many rumors that circulated about her, not in a vicious manner, but in a way that reinforces her class, style, and grace in handling situations. She did so by including narratives where she is sitting in her home with no makeup and speaking about her life in a calm and collected manner, shutting down rumors that may be circulating about her. Most recently, during the summer of 2014, a video of Beyoncé, her sister Solange, and her husband Jay-Z involved in an elevator fight leaked/spread across the internet/went viral, etc. Many rumors surfaced about the famous family, none of which were truly addressed until Beyoncé made the bold move of releasing the song *Flawless (Remix)*. Within this song, the musician addressed the altercation and essentially denounced all rumors surfacing about the elevator situation (Vena). Lyrics from the remix include “of course sometimes shit goes down when there’s a billion dollars on an elevator,” alluding to the infamous fight (Knowles and Minaj). To once again touch on the media’s contribution to parasocial interaction, it is clear that Ms. Knowles’ fans and audiences react to her on social media, and later see her reactions to fans, perpetuating the cycle of parasocial relationships. With the rapid rate of posts on various websites from Facebook to Twitter to Buzzfeed, it is difficult to escape information a particular celebrity, all of which adds to the obsession on the part of fans.

Mrs. Carter takes her time to devise a mature and polished plan to address those who try to knock her down, and because of this well thought-out reaction process, fans can look to her as a major icon who can stave off naysayers while maintaining composure. Beyoncé turned one of the most ugly parts of being a celebrity into an inspiration for her artistry. This progression, provides great insight into how Beyoncé handles her celebrity status, how she absorbs everything, and how she presents a well-versed, artistic, and relatable celebrity image that fans can aim to emulate (“The Role and Influence of Mass Media”).

Similar to Beyoncé’s music group start in the entertainment industry, the late Michael Jackson began his life-long career at a very young age while performing in his family band, The Jackson 5. He soon became the star of the show and captured a place in Americans’ hearts, leading to his breakout as a solo artist. Michael always was a family man, working throughout his lengthy career to maintain solid relationships with those close to him. The pop star’s father, Joe Jackson, ran a tight ship while managing and raising Michael—for example, he admitted to beating and pressuring his children to succeed in the music industry (“The Jackson 5”).

Due to the combination of starting to work at such a young age and having a father who was a manager and coach first, and a father second, Michael developed into an adult with a warped sense of traditional and socially appropriate relationships. He admitted to having relationships with young boys, sharing experiences like sleepovers and play dates with them. The celebrity knew no better simply because of the way he was raised. Lacking a father figure while growing up left Michael clueless as to how a father should act, and in his mind he was not crossing a line, though society believed he crossed the socially appropriate lines when interacting with young boys (McLaughlin, “Michael Jackson Biography”).

Michael, like Beyoncé, was an entertainment icon, so much so that he was dubbed the king of pop. He also supported several charities, especially ones benefitting children; he created a Neverland Ranch to lift the spirits of visitors; he represented major brands; and he spoke out on major social issues. Michael's fan base was unlike most musicians': he had young girls screaming and crying after him, grown people worshiping the ground he walked on, and fellow artists left in awe of his talent and style. The king of pop broke the mold on traditional music careers, befriended older women like Diana Ross and animals like his best friend Bubbles the Chimp, and sent his children into public with costume masks on their faces to conceal their identities. And yet a turning point in his career was when Michael began a downward spiral. His skin began turning white, raising eyebrows about Jackson not wanting to be a member of African-American society; he had increasingly intimate relationships with young boys at his private home; he experienced two unconventional and unexpected marriages; and named three children after himself, hanging one off a balcony to introduce him to the world. Additionally, Jackson underwent multiple plastic surgeries that drastically altered his appearance; he eventually became addicted to narcotics and ultimately died a highly controversial death ("On Fame, Loneliness, Pain, and Desire for Love").

The performer made the conscious decision to stay out of the media spotlight, not giving interviews for many years. Because of this, the media went on gossip and rumor frenzies, continuously demolishing the musician's character by printing exaggerated stories about his escapades and life choices. By choosing to ignore the media and not commenting on the rumors, Michael sent a message to his fans that he was going to let the rumors consume his celebrity status. With the media outlets printing countless stories, fans were able to concoct an idea of who Michael Jackson was, leading to an unhealthy and negative parasocial interaction between the

fans and the king of pop. What is most interesting about the choices Michael made is that they did in fact create an unhealthy parasocial relationship with his fans, but he also created a positive parasocial relationship with his fans (Jackson, “Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah”).

For example, when Michael chose to speak, rather than maintain his notorious silence about his life, he spoke of his adoration of fans and supporters. Additionally, he continually framed the media as a group of monsters whose main goal has been to assassinate his character. The celebrity continued to say that no one should believe the so-called nonsense about him in the media. After much observation, it can be deduced that Michael did not handle his celebrity style with much class, style, or grace. Rather than embracing the obstacles and using them to fuel positive projects or artistry, he saw it as an opportunity to get angry and display himself in a negative light to audiences. Time and time again, the musician stated that he was vastly misunderstood, but other than getting angry, he did nothing to change the image the media portrayed (*Michael Jackson: Life, Death and Legacy*).

Besides his lack of attempts to save his character in a positive and dignified manner, Michael continually danced along the line of socially acceptable relationships. As stated previously, the performer admitted to spending the night with young boys, sharing the same bed and having play dates with them. Michael never saw an issue with this, but many expressed how socially inappropriate and unacceptable this situation was. Even after being confronted about it, he never backed down on his beliefs, which is admirable in a certain sense, but poses questions about his morals (Bonnici).

The pop star actively chose to ignore the rumors, gossip, and media, letting them consistently assassinate his character. Michael unswervingly defended his decisions, decisions that went against social norms and were nearly always questionable. Rather than considering a

positive way to react to the negative allegations and rumors, he chose to bash the media time and time again, and would become visibly upset when talking about his popular image. His passionate hatred for the media became quite apparent in Michael's live television interview with Oprah Winfrey, where he stated that the media were monsters and fabricated lies about himself and his family (Jackson, "Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah"). While it was admirable for Michael to not feel obligated to defend his life choices, his continuous decisions to either ignore or aggressively retaliate against the accusations created a negative impression of the controversial pop sensation. When all was said and done, Michael Jackson was a highly conflicted and controversial individual, a man in the spotlight who carried the weight of serving as an admirable role model for fans and audiences all over the world. He became a worldwide sensation but was incapable of handling his celebrity status in a responsible and poised nature. This lack of responsibility added to a parasocial relationship between fans and the king of pop that was toxic and negative, all because of Michael's controversial choices (Jackson, "Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah").

Celebrities work arduously to enter the spotlight and capture the attention of global audiences. Once in the spotlight, it becomes a celebrity's duty to maintain an image, despite what the media say about him or her. Fans depend on the media to inform them of the daily occurrences of their favorite stars. While much of that information may be gossip and rumors, that is what the general public is given, and therefore they have no reason not to believe it. At the time of this writing, information is rapidly being spread to the masses, whether through phone applications, social media platforms, tabloid magazines, or gossip television channels, and because of that spreading, fans are able to further justify their obsessions with a celebrity and the parasocial relationship they experience.



How a celebrity chooses to handle his or her celebrity status can define the nature of his or her career, or the way their identity is interpreted. Being in the spotlight creates a vast amount of pressure on a celebrity; it makes a star feel obligated to have his or her actions be representative of a model citizen. Every move, decision, purchase, interview response, outfit, and picture taken becomes evidence of the kind of human being a celebrity is. Celebrities' actions typically either make them seem relatable, or they create a person who is enviable or looked up to by their fans ("The Role and Influence of Mass Media").

This spotlight and the actions of a celebrity add to the reasons why people develop infatuations. It is human nature to want to know more about someone who is enviable or desirable. Celebrities seem to have it all: the fame, the fortune, and the ability to maintain the status, a concept many people yearn to experience. Because of this natural desire and want to know more, the infatuation begins; every piece of information the media put into the world contributes to an obsession, and eventually a parasocial relationship is created. Beyoncé and Michael Jackson had it all--the supersized fame, the massive fortunes, the admirers, and the endless opportunities. It makes sense that millions admired the king and queen of pop because they fit the bill for people who are capable of being envied. The sheer nature of their celebrity status laid the foundation for a parasocial relationship.

It is also part of human nature to fixate on someone who is relatable. When a celebrity is viewed as relatable, fans and audiences begin to believe that they too can become celebrities or icons. When looking at the careers of Beyoncé and Michael Jackson, it is hard to argue that Michael Jackson was relatable, but Beyoncé undoubtedly related to her fans and audiences. She truly grew as a woman and a person alongside her admirers, something that her fans can latch onto, because they are experiencing the same trials, tribulations, and peaks that she is

experiencing. Because Beyoncé made herself more human and less pop-icon-powerhouse-robot, she provided her fans with a glimmer of hope that they too could become as renowned as Beyoncé.

Beyoncé's fans experienced a healthy parasocial relationship because her management of her celebrity status was more stable than Michael Jackson's. She focused her attention on turning the criticism into positive artistic expression, and created a name for herself that represented personal and professional growth, relatability, responsibility, and class. Beyoncé defended her character without retaliating in a way that would offend others, and that made an excellent case for people to develop and maintain an infatuation with her.

Conversely, Michael Jackson's fans did not experience a healthy parasocial relationship experience, and that is because he chose to handle his celebrity status in a combative way. He either remained silent and let the media create his image, or angrily fought back and made accusations about others. He did not always make sound decisions, and his poor decisions led to the downward spiral of his character. However, when Michael chose to speak out, it was in defense of himself, his family, and his character, so in those rare instances he created an opportunity for a healthy relationship, but more often than not, Michael's fans were involved in an unhealthy parasocial relationship.

Seeing that Michael passed away in 2009, researching his celebrity status and qualities proved to be difficult at times. Beyoncé is still very much relevant in today's world, perhaps more relevant now than ever before; this is not to say that Michael is no longer relevant, but that he is just not physically present to report on. Because of this, much of the materials available to research his life trials, successes, and tribulations were retrospective in nature, providing an overview of his career and personal issues. While this thesis focuses on two entertainment icons,

one alive and one deceased, it can be assumed that the struggle of acquiring adequate sources for dead icons is just as difficult as acquiring sources for living ones. Michael Jackson's life was nearly always surrounded by controversy in one way or another, and much of that was touched on in the numerous retrospective articles referred to in this thesis. Digging deeper and diving further into research eventually brought about the discovery of insightful, informational, and lesser-known facts about the late king of pop. However, it deserves to be said that the retrospective articles, in this particular case, provided great insight into parasocial relationships simply because many articles, videos, and websites were retellings of Michael's life and career from close friends, fans, and industry professionals. By reading, watching, or listening to the retellings, an audience's perspective was gained, something that is excellent when discussing parasocial relationships and interactions.

Numerous factors contribute to celebrity obsession and fixation, many of which have been discussed in this thesis. Beyoncé and Michael Jackson both experienced a supersized career as celebrities and as major household names in the music industry. While the two entertainment icons shared many similarities, they greatly differed in their methods of handling their celebrity status. Because of the ways each celebrity chose to treat his or her status, their choices crafted careers that lent themselves to attracting the attention of millions of fans worldwide. The talent and notoriety are what initially lure a fan in to pay attention to a celebrity, but the celebrity's choices, business decisions, and reactions to the media and critics are what prolong the one-sided relationship between the fan and celebrity.

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