

SAMPLE MLA ESSAY WITH SECONDARY SOURCE



Name/Instructor/
Course/Date—
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top margin

Elizabeth Burton

Burton 1

Dr. Laura Dubek

English 3000

15 December 2010

Title—centered

“Put a Ring on It”:

Female (Dis)Empowerment in *The Taming of the Shrew* and American
Popular Culture

Note that the author puts quotations around this part of the title because it is the name of a song. Normally, titles will not take quotation marks.

Attention-getter opens the essay

Gazing through the cultural lens of the increasingly malleable gender roles of modern society, it may be difficult to imagine a world similar to that of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*—a world where gender roles are non-negotiable. In Shakespeare’s day, the domestic life was the domain of the “submissive wife,” while the external world of commerce was the domain of the “masterful husband” (Dolan 13). A woman knew “her place” and a man monitored her closely to ensure that she remained there. The two spheres and their keepers traditionally were never to be intermingled or exchanged. Such mingling of spheres only occurred when a woman’s failure to fulfill her “wifely duties” necessitated her husband’s use of authority, which commonly manifested itself in the form of physical violence or verbal abuse, in order to restore her to her rightful subservient position within the relationship, household and community (Dolan 13).

This set of disturbing social norms perhaps comes as a shock to modern minds that, since infancy, have benefitted from movements

toward racial and gender equality in mid-twentieth century America. In the current “progressive” culture, women can do anything from working as CEOs of Fortune Five Hundred companies to burning their undergarments in protest against traditional patriarchal values—or both concurrently. These women frequently work outside the home in occupations of their own choosing, raise children without the aid of “father figures,” and hold authoritative positions within their families regardless of their marital statuses. However, these two seemingly contradictory societies may not be as far removed from each other as they initially appear. Katharina Minola of Shakespeare’s *Shrew* has quite possibly met her match in the most unlikely of places—twenty-first century American popular culture. Within the presently overpopulated constellation of homogenous female pop stars, there is one, Beyoncé Knowles, who shines above the rest. Although these two women come from seemingly dissimilar cultures, they share a common goal and, more importantly, a common means by which they seek to obtain this goal: **Both Katharina and Beyoncé benefit from artfully employing the male-constructed feminine stereotypes of their respective societies in order to acquire power within those societies.**

Thesis statement—this sets up the paper up as a literary analysis that compares and contrasts two works.

Topic sentence that provides the overall focus of the following paragraph.

Within her community, there is little debate regarding Katharina’s long-standing status as a shrew. Her demeanor satisfies all of the necessary requirements: she is excessively talkative, loud, assertive, and often hostile. In short, she is the stereotypical “bossy woman” (9). However, as Frances Dolan reveals, a shrew is more than just

The author uses a block-by-block comparison, discussing *Taming of the Shrew* first and then “Put a Ring on It” next, both in blocks of multiple paragraphs.

an outspoken woman; she is “a woman refusing to submit to a man’s authority and aggressively asserting her independence”—a woman who “strive[s] for mastery” (10). Although Katharina aims for mastery, her straightforward approach is unsuccessful because her overt assertion of dominance only serves to perpetuate her own submission. She fails to realize that her reputation within her patriarchal society is dependent on the reports of men with whom she interacts. In this way, Katharina unintentionally bestows upon men the power to turn their personal opinions of her into public facts. As a result, men portray her as “the devil,” the enemy of her society, because her ideals, and thus her behavior, threaten the highly regarded patriarchal tradition (*Shr* 3.2.146).]

After the utter failure of Katharina’s initial approach, she finds her “occasion for revenge” by turning to her only other option—marriage (2.1.35-36). When Hortensio taunts her about the unlikelihood that she should ever find a willing mate, she boldly asserts:

I’ faith, sir, you shall never need to fear;
 Iwis it is not halfway to her heart.
 But if it were, doubt not her care should be
 To comb your noddle with a three-legged stool,
 And paint your face, and use you like a fool. (1.1.61-65)

If Katharina must resort to marriage, she will triumph over her new husband and make a fool of him by whatever means necessary. Her plan

Compare this long quotation and how the documentation is placed to the short quotation in the previous paragraph.

The author uses a short quotation from *Taming of the Shrew* and incorporates it effectively into a sentence that begins with her own words. Note how the line from a play is documented in the parenthetical citation at the end of the line.

of attack can best be evidenced by her first encounter with the unfortunate “fool” Petruchio (2.1.250).

PETRUCHIO: Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife.

KATHARINA: Moved? In good time! Let him that moved
you hither

Remove you hence. I knew you at the first

You were a movable.

PETRUCHIO: Why, what’s a movable?

KATHARINA: A joint stool. (2.1.190-194)

In this exchange, the adaptations of the word *move* seem to emphasize physical action; however, Katharina’s wordplay actually hints at the refinement of her strategy. Rather than attempting to physically dominate her husband, she will mentally mold him into her desired product. For instance, the noun *movable* may be interpreted as both “one easily changed or dissuaded” and “an article of furniture” (Dolan 79). In this case, Katharina claims ownership of both meanings. She employs the interpretation that a *moveable* is a joint stool in order to outwardly insult Petruchio by comparing him to furniture while she secretly divulges her scheme to carefully whittle him down into a stool (or fool)—a joint stool being a “well-fitted stool made by an expert craftsman” (79). Katharina, the craftsman, utilizes Petruchio, that which is crafted, as a prop in order to enhance the believability of her performance.

The author italicizes any particular word that she is defining or discussing.

Once married, Petruchio delivers his notorious “She is my goods, my chattels” proclamation and announces to his servants that he has “politicly begun [his] reign” over Katharina, which will undoubtedly be a success (*Shr* 3.2.219-4.1.157). Although Petruchio intends to kill his wife “with kindness” by depriving her of basic sustenance, Katharina finally demonstrates her mastery over him during the “sun and moon” confrontation when she tames him with her amiable disposition: “And be it moon, or sun, or what you please;/And if you please to call it a rush candle,/Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me” (4.2.177-4.5.13-15). By submitting to Petruchio, Katharina gains her independence through the guise of dependence. Petruchio believes he has successfully changed her into the ideal gentlewoman when, in fact, she has tricked him into accepting the authenticity of her reformation.

Katharina’s subtle, yet satisfying victory culminates in her final Oscar-worthy performance at Bianca’s wedding reception.

Fie, fie! Unknit that threatening, unkind brow,
 And dart not scornful glances from those eyes
 To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor.
 It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,
 Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,
 And in no sense is meet or amiable.
 A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
 Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty; (5.2.140-147)

The focus of this speech has traditionally been placed on Katharina's complete lack of shrewish qualities, on her obedience to Petruchio, and on her instruction of other women to follow the example she has set with her own behavior. Although the latter may be correct, Katharina's behavior, and consequently her instruction, is often misinterpreted as the promotion of submission. In this context, *moved* is commonly interpreted as a synonym for *angry*, which suggests that Katharina intends to criticize the supposed hostility of her female audience (Dolan 137); however, the reemergence of the word *moved* implies Katharina's continuation of her previous wordplay. In her speech, Katharina furtively hints that a woman changed, or altered, is not a thing of beauty. As she dominates her clueless audience with her captivating tongue, which was once considered only to emit "meaningless noise," she instructs the other women not to begrudgingly submit to their husbands but instead to apply her method in order to obtain subliminal control (17). Thus, Katharina reveals Petruchio's perceived taming of her as a farce cleverly orchestrated by her via the usage of time-honored social traditions to her own advantage. Simply stated, Katharina succumbs under her own terms.

Much like Katharina, Beyoncé Knowles has obtained power in modern culture by way of her own devices; however, unlike Katharina, Beyoncé has managed to escape the stigma of being labeled a shrew. Although she appears to be an unlikely candidate for "shrewhood," a quick review of Dolan's definition of a shrew will prove most enlightening

Notice how the author supports her argument (highlighted) with examples of particular wordplay within the play. She not only uses quotations, but also uses a summary of information from the play to make her point.

Observe the last sentence of the previous paragraph and how it sets up the transition from the Katharina block to the Beyoncé block.

because Beyoncé *is* “a woman refusing to submit to a man’s authority and aggressively asserting her independence.” Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, Beyoncé achieved success by relentlessly promoting herself as *the* image of modern female empowerment and independence—as a “Survivor” (“Survivor”). Even Beyoncé’s public abandonment of her surname—forced upon her at birth in compliance with an archaic patriarchal practice—exudes defiance against a male-centered society. One superficial glance at her song lyrics clues the reader into the explicit nature of her message: I am a self-sufficient woman, and you can (and should) be one too. Her song “Independent Women Part I” is quite possibly her most obvious assertion of dominance.

I buy my own diamonds and I buy my own rings

Only ring your celly when I’m feelin’ lonely

When it’s all over please get up and leave

Question: Tell me how you feel about this

Try to control me, boy, you get dismissed

Pay my own fun, oh, I pay my own bills (“Independent”)

In order to extinguish any doubts listeners might still harbor about the legitimacy of her declaration of independence, she then proceeds to list her material possessions and continually brags, “I’ve bought it” and “I depend on me” (“Independent”). In the form of a conveniently concise and catchy phrase, Beyoncé has effectively armed the modern shrews of the world

with their newest mantra: “I’ve bought it” (also known as the lengthier and less popular “I don’t need a man to provide for me”).

Perhaps more puzzling than Beyoncé’s success as an updated version of Shakespeare’s shrew is her simultaneous compliance with and perpetuation of the male-conceived standards of feminine beauty and behavior. In addition to her provocative clothing, voluminous hair and overstated makeup, her songs “Bills, Bills, Bills” and “Crazy in Love” reveal Beyoncé’s submission to gender-biased ideals. In the former, she warns a potential suitor that he has no chance to date her unless he can pay her “telephone” and “automo’ bills” (“Bills”); while in the latter, she confesses to a man, “Got me hoping you’ll page me right now, your kiss/Got me hoping you’ll save me right now” (“Crazy in Love”). This embarrassingly intimate confession begs the question, “Save you from *what*, Beyoncé? His own *absence*?” Her plea for a man to “save” her supports the classic view of woman as damsel-in-distress who not only desires but needs a prince to ensure her continued existence. At this point, one might ask, “What happened to your previous “Survivor” mentality?” [Just as Katharina betrays her coveted principles by allowing Petruchio to publicly tame her, Beyoncé contradicts her own image of female empowerment in order to reinforce sexist ideologies by claiming that a woman’s financial and emotional successes are dependent on the presence of a capable man in her life.](#) Meanwhile, without so much as the appearance of a skeptically elevated eyebrow, her devoted female

The author refers back to the previous block about Katharina here to link this section of the paper to the last.

followers digest this blatant inconsistency in personal beliefs, and Beyoncé gains an entirely new set of listeners or, perhaps more accurately described, viewers from the male population.

Although Beyoncé's two attitudes about gender roles appear to be incompatible, her identification with these patriarchal ideals allows her to manipulate her audience in order to advance her independent lifestyle and to assert her dominance over the aforementioned audience as it grows larger and larger each year. Once again, she returns to her initial status as an undercover shrew. In one of her latest successes, "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)," Beyoncé embraces her incongruous, yet simultaneous roles as both empowered individual and objectified sex symbol. While repetitively expressing admiration for "all the single ladies," or independent women of the world, she informs the men of the world, "If you liked it, then you should have put a ring on it" ("Single Ladies"). *Beyoncé's mastery of her audience is evident in her ability to praise self-sufficient women while also encouraging their compliance with the cultural institution of marriage. Furthermore, remaining true to her ambiguous form, she demands that men take the dominant role in relationships by putting "a ring on it."* In this respect, Beyoncé takes her cues from Katharina by taming men while allowing them to think *they possess absolute power.* They remain oblivious to the fact that, in actuality, she *bestows upon them* this power. Inadvertently paying tribute to Katharina's wordplay, Beyoncé's use of "ring" also suggests

Once again, notice how the author inserts a direct comparison back to the previous section of the paper, so the reader does not lose track of what two things are being compared.

ambiguity in meaning because the word may be understood literally as a wedding ring or figuratively as a means by which men seek to trap or tie down women. Beyoncé also seems to imply a third kind of ring—the metaphorical circus ring in which she performs daily her delicate balancing act between sovereignty and acquiescence.

After completing the two blocks of material about Katharina and Beyoncé, the author now makes a direct comparison to conclude the paper.

Although their cultures come wrapped in different packages, when the casings are removed, Katharina Minola of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Beyoncé Knowles, the shining star of American popular culture, undoubtedly confront the same fundamental societal injustices. Once the motives behind their manipulative behaviors have been established, the focus must necessarily shift from *why they* do it to *what it* does to them. What are the effects of this deception on the deceiver? By using the patriarchal system against itself in order to reclaim their own individuality, these women actually risk losing themselves because they compromise their own belief systems in defense of those very same beliefs. It is no coincidence that only until Katharina relinquishes her right to speak can she finally be heard. Consequently, as Hortensio appropriately proclaims, "The field has been won," but who declares the victory (*Shr* 4.5.23)? The women who covertly control a sexist system by submitting to it? Or the men who retain their precious patriarchal practices, ironically assisted by the women who seek to control that system rather than to dismantle it? *By playing the puppet, the shrew becomes the puppeteer; however, confined by the necessity to conceal her*

Observe how the author ends the essay not with only a summary, but also with a final statement about how both Katharina and Beyoncé are caught in the roles they choose to portray.

duality, she creates a new form of oppression for herself as she is destined to perform the traditional show of the previous master and thus to preserve the interests of those whom she claims to despise.

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Works Cited

This entry is for a print book and follows the MLA format.

Dolan, Frances E. *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*. Boston, Massachusetts: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. Print.

Knowles, Beyoncé. "Bills, Bills, Bills." *The Writing's on the Wall*. Columbia, 1999. CD.

This entry is for a song from a CD and follows the MLA format. Be sure to put the type of recording (CD, MP3 file, or LP).

When two (or more) entries in a row are by the same person or group, use three hyphens in a row followed by a period in all entries after the first.

---. "Crazy in Love." *Dangerously in Love*. Columbia, 2003. CD.

---. "Independent Women, Part I." *Survivor*. Columbia, 2001. CD.

---. "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)." *I Am... Sasha Fierce*. Columbia, 2008. CD.

---. "Survivor." *Survivor*. Columbia, 2001. CD.

Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew. The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*. Ed. Frances E. Dolan. Boston, Massachusetts: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. Print.

1. Place the first line of each entry flush to the left margin. Each line after that in the entry will be indented.
2. Do not forget to alphabetize the list of sources.
3. Double space all entries.