

Beyond the pale

Destiny's Child lead singer Beyonce's hair gets blonder with every hit - what kind of a role model is she for black teenagers?

Beyond the pale?



Is the bootylicious blonde, Beyonce (of Destiny's Child) a good role model for us teens?

Could Beyonce bounce Britney off her most popular slot and if so, would she make a better role model for young girls? As the group becomes more successful, Beyonce's hair gets blonder and blonder.

Just as the Supremes were icons to millions of young girls during the 60s, so the all-conquering girl group Destiny's Child, are their modern-day successors.

And at the helm of the DC success story is lead singer Beyonce Knowles, who, depending on your opinion, is either a cultural icon in the making or another talented yet, predictably, Europeanised version of what comprises black beauty.

In years to come will she, like Madonna and Oprah Winfrey before her, become the subject of wacky media studies degree courses in US universities? And, if so, what will the students of tomorrow make of the 19-year-old temptress?

Below two young journalists discuss whether or not Beyonce deserves all the flak she's been getting. Is she a representation of diluted black beauty or a role model for girls everywhere?

An icon in the making? Della Hicks-Willson, 15, isn't sure. Make mention the multi-platinum selling girl band Destiny's Child and most will immediately envisage the blonde and beautiful Beyonce Knowles. But don't feel guilty because you tend to overlook the other two members, Kelly and Michelle, it's not your fault. And believe it or not, neither is Beyonce fully to blame for her unquestionable popularity.

Thought it's obvious that she dominates the stage with her exaggerated dance moves and vigorous weave-shaking; the media, as always, have a major input into how we view her position in the band.

Airbrush

You may have noticed that Beyonce sometimes appears lighter on magazine and CD covers but looks comparatively darker when performing on stage. Whether this is the airbrush effect in play or bright studio lighting, who knows?

But what we have to keep in mind is, she's the lead singer and her 'most popular' status is therefore inevitable, right? Not convinced? Think of TLC's T-Boz or even the mighty Diana Ross formerly of The Supremes.

DC blew up the Summer Jam stage at London's Finsbury Park recently. Starry-eyed fans looked up to them as if they were icons, but I'm still undecided on whether they deserve such a profound title.

Yes, they sold 12 million copies of their last album, *The Writing's On the Wall*. Yes, they have been featured in what many may consider to be 'uppity' newspapers, such as the Observer's glossy Sunday supplement. Publications who, years ago, probably wouldn't have given the R&B group the time of day.

And yes, they've won two Grammys and dominated the US Billboard charts for weeks. But being an icon isn't all about statistics, it's about redefining history because of what you've brought to the music industry.

DC are undoubtedly talented, but they're not doing anything that has been done in the past. Icons? I think not. But I have to give Beyonce props. While nonchalantly flicking through the album sleeve of their latest smash, *Survivor*, surprise surprise, Beyonce has produced, not one, not two, but EVERY track.

Not only does this mean more royalties for Knowles, but once again she's managed to outdo the other members who she constantly refers to in her Texas drawl as "my sisters."

Beyonce was recently voted the world's sexiest black women in a New Nation poll and though their hit, *Survivor*, preaches about not compromising her Christianity, I think those hot pants and tight tops do that job very well.

There's more to black beauty than the blond Beyonce, argues Senab Adekunle, 18.

Anyone claiming not to have heard of Destiny's Child must have been living under a rock for the past two years.

The media has been saturated with all that is Destiny's Child. Not since the Supremes have a female group been elevated to such a level.

And even though the group are currently on their third line-up, no one can escape the power of Beyonce, Michelle and Kelly whose undeniable talent acts as a magnet for girls of all ethnicities.

However, the overwhelming success of DC does raise questions as to whether the almost iconic status of the lead singer, Beyonce, has resulted in a negative role model for young black girls.

Talent, drive and determination all attribute to the achievement of the group, but while we keep on 'surviving' because we too are deep down 'bootylicious' and 'independent', is Beyonce really a true representation of young black women? Obviously not.

The progression of the group clearly shows a dilution of black beauty because as the group becomes more successful, Beyonce's hair gets blonder and blonder.

Many may contrive this opinion to be born of jealousy, but one of the main goals of ethnic minorities, performers or not, should be to be accepted for who we are. Singers such as Lauren Hill, Angie Stone and Erykah Badu, to name but a few, are artists who accept their ethnicity and beauty.

Diva

Naturally she's been likened to queen diva, Diana Ross, the one-time lead singer of the 60s girl group, the Supremes. Ross eventually left the group under much controversy to launch a phenomenal solo career.

Many questions have been asked about the equality that exists in DC. Beyonce's father is manager, her mother is the stylist and her sister is a dancer. This strikes a familiar tone to the days of the Jackson 5, who were an amazing family business.

Michael Jackson's voice was more notable than the rest and he went on to become one of music's greatest legends. With Beyonce's undeniable talent, model looks and drive (be it hers or her family's) she has the platform to become an amazing solo artist. But the question remains; if she were offered a solo deal would she take it?

While it can be said that Beyonce is still young, we'll have to see if she ever chooses to shrug off her popular anglicised image.

About the team

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