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## The Meat Dress

In 2010, one of the most iconic moments in pop culture took place; Lady Gaga's meat dress at the MTV VMA's. During this time, the repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell bill was being pushed forward and as a strong LGBTQ ally, Gaga made several political statements at the award ceremony. On the "white" carpet, Gaga walked with four discharged soldiers who were removed from the military for being openly gay.

Known for being very vocal about social issues and an LGBTQ ally, Lady Gaga made a name for herself for being an icon in the gay community. Her outlandish costumes, performances, and music are just the outer layer of reasons why she is so beloved. With every costume, performance, or song, there is intention and reason for it. The 2010 VMA's however was a huge moment in pop culture that merged both awareness and absurdity. The iconic meat dress was worn with intention and reason to highlight an important issue that Gaga knew her influence could infiltrate the media like wildfire. At face value, Gaga wearing the meat dress looks like another absurd outfit like one she would wear at any other award show, but a master of semiotics, Gaga always has a reason for every attention grabbing moment. Knowing her stature in the entertainment industry and the attention she always seems to acquire in the media, Gaga knows exactly how to make a spectacle out of every song, performance, or in this case, outfit choice.

In her own words in an interview with Anderson Cooper for 60 Minutes,

“The moral and ethical and political implication of that outfit was far beyond what most people think, which is, 'Eew.' Right? — And, you know what? What I was really trying to say was dead meat is dead meat. And anyone that's willing to take their life and die for their country is the same. You're not gay and dead, straight and dead. You are dead”

At face value, Gaga's meat dress just looks like another attention-seeking fashion statement from some “Hollyweird” artist. What most people don't realize or even care to understand are the semiotic approaches to her choices in fashion, music, and performances. Explanations for these choices are obviously expected and are awaited with anticipation, especially from her fans. But looking at this with the semiotic message in mind, explanations aside, what do we see?

Roland Barthes' *The Photographic Message*, introduces the idea of the denotation and connotation of an image. To denote the image of Gaga in the meat dress, again we can depict it simply as another one of Gaga's outlandish costumes. But to connote this image, we can delve further into the message Gaga tried to portray. The meat she is wearing as high fashion to a highly publicized award ceremony is seen as a political statement. The choice to wear something as raw and gross as actual raw meat from head to toe has to have a reason behind it other than just another bizarre red carpet costume. This can be connoted in many different ways however, and yet that is what Gaga wants from this statement, “However, it has many interpretations, but for me this evening... If we don't stand up for what we believe in and if we don't fight for our rights, pretty soon

we're going to have as much rights as the meat on our own bones. And I am not a piece of meat". As stated in her interview with Ellen Degeneres, Gaga is no piece of meat but connotatively, she is just that.

