

On the Edge

Beyoncé's Gym Clothes

Beyoncé, the star singer, teamed up with fashion tycoon Sir Philip Green to develop a line of women's gym clothes called Ivy Park.¹⁷ In an interview, Beyoncé stated that her goal with Ivy Park was "to support and inspire women who understand that beauty is more than your physical appearance . . . I know that when I feel physically strong, I am mentally strong and I wanted to create a brand that made other women feel that way."

However, on May 7, 2016, the British tabloid the *Sun* revealed that it had interviewed several young women in Sri Lanka who were making Beyoncé's Ivy Park gym wear in a factory the tabloid described as a "sweatshop" that paid low wages. According to the tabloid, one young seamstress said she earned 65 cents an hour, or \$6.23 a day. Another, a 22-year-old, said she worked 9 hours and 45 minutes a day, five days a week, for a basic wage of \$126 a month. This wage was above the Sri Lankan minimum wage (\$92 a month), but too little for her to survive on. So she also had to work on weekends and work overtime on weekdays to earn extra money. A living wage in Sri Lanka is estimated to be about \$292 a month.

The work of the seamstresses involved stitching the same clothes over and over every day. Speaking about herself and her 19-year-old sister who had recently joined her, the 22-year-old seamstress said:

All we do is work, sleep, work, sleep . . . We don't have much spare money and what we do have we send back to our family.

We had to come and work here because our father could not afford to feed us and there are no jobs there. We have no choice. I have worked here for three years now . . . The work is hard—it's just the same, same, same every day. We don't get to go home much because we work all the time. They say if you work you can go up, up, up, but that's just office workers. For us it stays the same always.

The conservative magazine the *National Review* published an article arguing that it was better for the women to have the jobs they had than to have no job at all, and that the salaries they got were "better than prevailing wages in Sri Lanka, and . . . the factory is probably a relatively modern and safe place to work." Sri Lanka was going through a necessary stage of economic development, the article suggested, and "as those workers have more choices, salaries will rise, and so will quality of life."

WRITING PROMPT

Is This Job Better Than None?

1. In your judgment, are the wages paid to the young women who make Beyoncé's line of clothing just wages? Explain why they are or are not fair wages.
2. Suppose that what the *National Review* article suggests is correct. Would that show that the wages of the young women are just? Explain.

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

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