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‘Hot Girl Teaching’ in A Faith-Based Environment

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Centering Megan Thee Stallion in PWI Faith-Based College Courses

As the #Hot Girl Semester Syllabus displays, Megan Thee Stallion is a fitting living text for race, cultural, and gendered learning reflections. Its weekly themes cover topics such as controlling images of Black women and Hip Hop feminism and offer readings and multi-media texts for dynamic learning. Indeed, Megan Thee Stallion moved through the patriarchal margins of hip-hop music, claiming centered space (Jimenez, 2020). She resists discredited identity stereotypes (e.g., hyper-sexual woman rapper) (Payne & Halliday, 2023), subverts language (e.g., hot girl summer/coach) (Perro, 2022), transfixes her “hotties” (loyal fanbase), realizes opportunities outside of music, including product endorsements with Revlon and Popeyes (Meisenzahl, 2021; Revlon, 2023), and amassed industry accolades such as Grammy Awards, American Music Awards (Guerra, 2021; Yglesias, 2021) in a culture—still—upholding misogyny.

Provocative lyrics and performances could make it challenging to interject Megan Thee Stallion into communication-themed classes at a predominantly white, faith-based institution (PWI). I specify a faith-based PWI because I (a Black woman) work in such an environment where mainstream text is often challenged. Notwithstanding, interjecting marginal perspectives into courses is challenging work anywhere. Nevertheless, centering feminist and/or hip-hop rhetoric may be problematic at religious colleges actively avoiding temporal content. However, the Apostle Paul cautions us about adopting ideological blinders that prevent us from seeing the full capacity of Christ, noting:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception [pseudo-intellectual babble], according to the tradition [and musings] of mere men, following the elementary principles of this world, rather than following [the truth—the teachings of] Christ. (The Amplified Version, Holy Bible, Colossians 2:8)

Understanding Megan Thee Stallion’s artistry and rhetoric surrounding her elucidates the hierarchical spaces that she operates in. Cognizance of how she is politicized and for what reasons could help students process issues of racism, sexism, and the questioning of women’s credibility today. Also, it can help students critique broader themes of Christianity (e.g., grace, justice, and equity) in applied ways (Woods & Patton, 2010). Still, how to teach this in a faith-based environment effectively is a strategic matter. I will offer some commentary about my pedagogy that may benefit others in similar situations.

Feminist Praxis and Faith

Institutionally, I have support for the race, gender, and culture-themed courses I teach. Still, I understand that faith-based universities may encourage critical thinking, but they also prioritize guiding students toward specific conclusions based on their religious beliefs. Many of my students come with an expectation for learning that upholds conventional Christian values and conservative ideological views. This is likely because they have not reconciled the difference between society’s ideological divisions and those
they were raised with, their critical thoughts, and exposure to new ideas from college (Woods & Patton, 2010).

Popular culture’s relevancy is undeniable now (Grindstaff, 2008; Fiske, 2011). This is the crux to understanding how Megan Thee Stallion is situated as an influencer of the moment. Students often create and understand themselves through the popular culture they engage in and avoid. Thus, students can recognize that their co-constructed identities influence their political choices, ideological preferences, and personal biases. Megan Thee Stallion demonstrates that Black popular culture is fluid. That is, it fluctuates between marginality and widespread approval. Unpacking this wax and wane helps students fathom how gendered hip-hop artistry can be a meaningful expression of resistance, identity formation, and empowerment during key cultural moments.

Mainstream examples might be seen as potentially leading students away from their desired faith-based perspectives because they involve controversial topics or ideas that could be sensitive or divisive to core tenets. Ultimately, using mainstream examples at faith-based universities depends on the institution's educational philosophy, values, and comfort level of its administration, faculty, and students. Given the ampleness of the #Hot Girl Syllabus, those adopting it in faith-based environments should pare down the multi-media pairings to best suit their environment’s sensitivities to certain audio-visual content and take care to place the content within the context mentioned above.

As a Christian, feminist Black woman professor (who enjoys pop culture), I have a real dilemma of figuring out how to speak about current events—which frequently involve matters of social justice—and determining which critical theories and texts to introduce or avoid in my course. After all, flawed thinking about critical frameworks from outside academia has created real concerns about how students at faith-based universities perceive social and cultural information. I recognize that there is an expectation for orthodox teaching at religious institutions. Nonetheless, there is an ethical responsibility to teach the course material objectively and situate it within the context of current lived experiences, not some lived experiences.

I always start the semester with prayer and connect fundamental feminist elements to broad Christian ideas about liberating the oppressed, bringing wholeness to individuals and communities, dismantling social hierarchies and privilege, breaking power structures, and restoring justice (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003; hooks, 1994). Also, living under grace and universal respect for all is centered.

The emphasis on all includes lifestyles and practices different from the students. To make it palatable, women from the Bible (e.g., Deborah, Rahab, Esther) who influenced the hegemonic-masculine ancient world with their suggestive feminist tendencies and radical acts are discussed. Often, this helps to defuse concerns about a hidden agenda to challenge biblical principles in class and clarify my stance on “hot girl” (feminist) teaching in faith-based environments. Despite negative stereotypes of feminist professors, openness about our positions can empower students who identify as feminists, those considering doing so, and those who are unsure about their perspective of feminism (Morris, 2020).

Adopting a feminist praxis of connecting theory to popular culture is vital. However, it requires courage, conviction, and seeing students as co-creators of classroom engagement.
Final Thoughts

Most of Megan Thee Stallion’s lyrics and performances are risqué and arguably far from the core ideals of Christian education when taken out of the context of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017), black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 2009), and feminist pedagogical thought (which seeks to dismantle the oppression of women and promote critical thought about gendered equality and justice). “However, it is noteworthy that feminist pedagogy rarely acknowledges religion as a significant factor even insofar as it does acknowledge other variables such as ethnicity, age, class, disability, sexuality, etc.” (Robinson & Cush, 2018, p. 2).

Therefore, it is tough to see feminist pedagogy and religious institutions co-existing. This will remain muddled thinking until traditions are revised to allow varied ways of knowing. Non-faith-based academia is no different. Individual faculty everywhere must center the study and recognition of Black (women) contributions to popular culture—an effort that requires ongoing attention and advocacy because it centers positionality and intersectionality to create multi-vocal classrooms. Moreover, feminist pedagogy is not in opposition to biblical principles. On the contrary, it is tandem with Christian theology because it centers “the least of them”—those often devalued in society but highly regarded by Jesus (The Amplified Version, Holy Bible, Matthew 25:40). In this way, “Hot girl teaching”—employing feminist pedagogy through the #HotgirlSyllabus resists mono-narratives and narrow perspectives of the world.

References


https://www.revlon.com/eyes/eye-shadow/revlon-x-megan-thee-stallion-big-bad-palette


