Savage, Classy, Bougie and Ratchet Feminist Pedagogy

Katrina Marie Overby
Rochester Institute of Technology, kmogpt@rit.edu

Gheni Platenburg
Auburn University, gnp0006@auburn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/feministpedagogy

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Digital Humanities Commons, Hip Hop Studies Commons, Other Arts and Humanities Commons, Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/feministpedagogy/vol4/iss3/1

This Introduction to Special Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@CalPoly. It has been accepted for inclusion in Feminist Pedagogy by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CalPoly. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@calpoly.edu.
“To make a revolutionary feminist pedagogy, we must relinquish our ties to traditional ways of teaching that reinforce domination. This is very difficult.” (hooks, 1989, p.52)

In 2019, rapper Megan Thee Stallion’s (Megan) first charting single “Big Ole Freak” hit radio airwaves around the country. The song, a single from her 2018 EP Tina Snow, debuted at number 99 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 and later earned platinum certification. The song’s lyrics intertwine unfiltered sex-positive lyrics usually associated with male rappers with the sensuality of R&B and a slow tempo nodding to her origins as a Houston rapper. The track commanded the attention of audiences eager to hear what the Black, female, Southern rapper had to say, a respect not typically granted to Black women regardless of profession.

The summer of 2019 also birthed the #HotGirl Movement. What began with a #HotGirlSummer tweet led to a chart-topping song featuring fellow rapper Nicki Minaj and soon a large fanbase of “Hotties” (Lal, 2019, para. 2). This popularity also spurred the growth of a visible and active digital community engaged in online discourse seeking to empower and support Black women. According to Wortham (2020):

The genius of “Hot Girl Summer” is that it was much more than a song — it was a feeling, propagated by social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, of freedom and abandon that could contain everything from a performance of Megan twerking while wearing a particularly bright pair of lime green chaps to a photograph of Tom Hanks smiling beatifically while wearing a white dress shirt tied in a knot. (para. 1)

The buzz surrounding Megan and the movement she represents has only gotten hotter with time. In 2022, she became the official owner of the federal trademark registration for Hot Girl Summer. Additionally, the very public 2022 court case between Megan Thee Stallion and Canadian rapper and singer Tory Lanez, in which he was found guilty of shooting her two years earlier, illuminates the need for further conversations about, both offline and online, and actions leading toward justice, respect and protection for Black women.

Despite being labeled as the “most disrespected,” the “most unprotected,” and the “most neglected” demographic in America (Mrholtshistory, 2008), Black women are making the rebellious choice to shun outdated double standards and respectability politics and instead live freely and openly without regret or shame. In other words, Black women continue to openly embrace and embody the hot girl mantra.

Providing further support for our academic scholarship on Megan is her prioritization of academia alongside her entertainment work, earning a bachelor of science degree in health administration from Texas Southern University, in 2021 (Ruf, 2021).

As Black women scholars and hot girls, who keep their fingers on the pulse of Black culture, we felt compelled to examine Megan’s body of work including her lyrics, visuals, and social media influence. We are a collective of Black women scholars and educators in the fields of journalism and media and rhetorical studies. Our research and teaching are often rooted in Black feminist praxis and thought. We are excited to share our special issue centering education based on Megan Thee Stallion with the Feminist Pedagogy community.

With this in mind, we believe courses integrating popular culture resources and tools as a pedagogical approach simultaneously facilitate and promote discourse on important societal topics such as race, gender, class and politics. The late author, educator, and Black feminist bell hooks (1989) wrote:
Every aspect of popular culture alerts us to the reality that folks are thinking about gender in both reactionary and progressive ways. What is important is that they are thinking critically. And it is this space that allows for the possibility of feminist intervention, whether it be in our classroom or in the life of students outside of the classroom. (p. 51-52)

Thus, the inclusion of popular culture and its vast influence in the classroom creates unique opportunities to disrupt and circumvent normative ways of teaching and lean toward a feminist pedagogical praxis.

Hip-hop is a major influence on popular culture. It should be noted, this year marks the 50th anniversary of hip-hop. In commemoration of this golden milestone, celebratory events have been planned globally to “uplift and honor” what began as a musical genre in a Bronx apartment and quickly evolved into a way of life and culture with far reaching influence (The 50th Anniversary of Hip-Hop, 2023, para.1). This influence has even stretched to the White House. Among other recognitions, former U.S. President Barack Obama was also known as the “first hip-hop commander-in-chief” and was often praised for his efforts to bridge hip-hop culture and politics (Associated Press, 2017, para. 1). In September 2023, current U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, a Black woman, even hosted a celebration at her home to recognize the anniversary of hip-hop, which she described as “the ultimate American art form” (Associated Press, 2023, para. 4.)

It is important to understand how hip-hop culture plays a part in the dissemination of the values and beliefs about groups of people, particularly Black women. In this moment of social media trends and viral content, students practice cultural mashing and remixing for entertainment, connection, meaning making, and critique. Students are not defined solely by enrollment in academic institutions. Conversations about Black feminism, sexuality and gender politics happen in classrooms, social media threads, beauty salons, sorority events, kitchens, strip clubs, work break rooms, happy hours, brunches, nightclubs, churches, book clubs, and more. Thus, we hope this syllabus can be utilized by Black women, their allies, and even their critics.

To that end, we first came together to discuss and explore the spread and use of the hashtag #HotGirlSummer and to create a syllabus that could serve as a starter toolkit to have classroom and community conversations about the influence and “werk” of Megan Thee Stallion. The syllabus is situated in conversation with the Black Digital Syllabus Movement (Williams, 2020), where Black academics and educators have created a variety of cultural digitally accessible syllabi to serve as reading guides for deeper exploration of the Black experience from television shows and music albums. One such example released in connection with hip-hop’s 50th anniversary is Janell Hobson’s “Hip-Hop Feminist Syllabus,” a compilation of resources highlighting hip-hop’s impact on gender, race and feminism. Other examples of the Black Digital Syllabus Movement include “Black Lightning Season 1” (Berry-McCrea & Flowers, 2019); “#CharlestonSyllabus” (Publishers Weekly, 2016);”Lemonade” (Benbow, 2016); “4:44 Syllabus” (Boynton, 2017) “A Seat at The Table” (Barber et al., 2017). We value and support this type of public scholarship that reduces barriers to accessing educational resources and sparks meaningful and long-lasting conversations and dialogue outside of the walls of the ivory tower.

In this special issue, our project titled #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus, curated by Katrina M. Overby, Gheni N. Platenburg, and Niya Pickett Miller, offers several interdisciplinary readings
and multimedia resources. The eight-week syllabus includes a variety of themes and subthemes exploring the definition of “hot girl” and affirming the need to believe and protect Black women. Examples of those themes include controlling images of Black women in popular culture, the performance of thick Black bodies, Black women’s place, space and culture, misogynoir, respectability politics, Black women’s digital resistance, self-love, and Black female protectionism.

As co-editors, we chose to intentionally extend invitations for this special issue to fellow Black women scholars within our close networks. We appreciate that each of our contributing authors understand and have engaged in discourse about Megan Thee Stallion’s reach and influence, and they simply enjoy her musical talent and artistry as a performer. Our contributing authors are Black women who *also* have their finger on the pulse of Black culture, and each offers a critical and fresh approach to the special issue. We requested they engage our #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus in their original teaching activities and critical commentaries and explore how they could use this resource in their classrooms or as a pedagogical tool and approach. Just as Megan Thee Stallion is a cultural icon for a wide range of music fans, collectively, we hope this work is generative in possibilities for pedagogical praxis and approaches.

The original teaching activities in this issue task students with honing their research and critical analysis skills to better understand the experiences of Black women through the lens of popular culture and media. For example, Makini Beck and Nickesia Gordon’s Original Teaching Activity, “A Hip Hop Dialogic: Exploring Hip Hop Feminism in the College Classroom,” prompts students to engage in purposeful dialogue about Black women’s identities and representations in hip hop culture. On the other hand, Gheni Platenburg’s original teaching activity, “Listen to Black Women: Newsgathering in Digital Third Spaces,” challenges students with using digital spaces to find newsworthy stories for and about Black women. Lastly, Katrina Overby’s teaching activity, “The Mini Syllabus: Locating and Engaging with Black Women in Popular Culture,” directs students to expand their knowledge on Black and female identities using different mediums.

The critical commentaries challenge readers to consider the importance of assessing our pedagogical approaches and the need for Black centered cultural resources in the classroom. More so, they provide justifications for centering Black women’s popular culture, intersectional representation, agency, liberation, and creativity in their pedagogical praxis. In sharing her engagement with Megan Thee Stallion’s body of work as a supporter, fan, and academic, Qiana Cutts’ Critical Commentary, “Megan Thee Stallion’s Southern Black Feminist Poet(ic) and the Hot Girl Semester Syllabus,” details how she envisions utilizing the #HotGirlSemesterSyllabus in a future course titled “Southern Blackgirl Feminist Poet(ic)s” in a First Year Experience (FYE) or Gender Studies curriculum. Specifically, she theorizes how “centering the creative” through a “Southern Blackgirl Feminist Poet(ic)s” framework can render empowering and critical discourse on resistance, power, identity, mental health, self-love, and power.

Through Niya Pickett Miller’s Critical Commentary “Hot Girl Teaching’ in A Faith-Based Environment,” she shares her experiences and challenges with teaching feminist and social justice-oriented content at a faith-based predominantly white institution as a Christian and feminist who enjoys popular culture. Specifically, she discusses how she navigates including culturally diverse and secular texts, especially mainstream and hip-hop feminist rhetoric, in her classrooms as a Black woman. Meanwhile Jessica Love’s Critical Commentary “#HotGirlSemesterSyllabus: Practical application of Re-presentation Instruction” suggests
instructors can utilize the syllabus to guide students in reflecting on their digital media usage and active participation with popular culture in critical and cultural media classrooms. Further, she insists readers consider Black women’s re-representational practices and their utilization of digital tools and media.

This special issue is an ode to Black women and our academic version of a music EP. We dropped this compilation with intentions of offering content that assists with reclaiming and reframing the narrative of what it means to be a Black woman while also bringing awareness and excitement to recent and future academic work about Black women. We invite you to explore, critique, and share our content in every learning space because that is real #HotGirl shit.

References


Kendall, M. (2021). Hood feminism: Notes from the women that a movement
forgot. Penguin.


The 50th Anniversary of Hip-Hop (2023). What is the 50th?. https://the50thanniversaryofhiphop.com/


Meet the Contributors

Katrina Marie Overby, Ph.D. (Editor), is an Assistant Professor in the School of Communication at RIT. As a virtual and digital ethnographer whose research, rooted in Black feminist thought and critique, Dr. KO investigates and explores broadly communication, race, and identity. Specifically, she analyzes Black social media usage, primarily Black Twitter; online discourse by and about Black women; Black women’s epistemology and praxis in, through and out of the academy; and race and gender in sports communication. Her recent co-authored publications include: Breaking bread with storyworlding methodology: Black feminist/womanist commentary on unearthing communal lifeworlds published in the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, as well as the book chapters, Black and Quarantined: Celebrating Black Identity during COVID-19 via Instagram and #BlackInTheIvory: Utilizing Twitter to Explore Black Women’s Experiences in the Academy. Finally, Dr. Overby was recently the keynote speaker for Rochester Institute of Technology’s 6th annual Let Freedom Ring program Commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Gheni Nicole Platenburg, Ph.D. (Editor), is an Assistant Professor of journalism at the University of Houston’s Jack J. Valenti School of Communication where she primarily teaches
newswriting, multimedia and solutions journalism courses along with graduate-level research courses. Her research focuses on the intersection of Black identity and media, which includes the historic and contemporary Black Press, pop culture, and racial impact on journalistic decision-making and newsroom experiences. Platenburg earned a doctorate in media and public affairs from Louisiana State University. Prior to her career in academia, she worked full time as a multimedia journalist at both newspapers and television stations across the South. In addition to teaching, she currently works as a freelance journalist for The Washington Post and Solutions Journalism talent networks. Her recent academic publications include a co-authored book, *Lizzo’s Black, female and fat resistance* (2021, Palgrave Macmillan); journal articles in the *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal* and the *Howard Journal of Communications*, as well as book chapters in *Sustaining Black music and Black culture during COVID-19* (2020, Lexington Books) and *Black identities & media* (expected publication: Summer 2023, LSU Press). Twitter: @G_Platenburg

**Niya Pickett Miller, Ph.D.,** is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Samford University. She teaches communication studies courses related to race, gender, and culture in the department of Communication and Media and within the university’s core curriculum. Her scholarly work centers on visual and rhetorical criticism of marginal and liminal identities in popular culture. Her recent publications include the books: *Deconstructing the albino other: A critique of albinism identity in media* (2020, Lexington Books), *Lizzo’s Black, female, and fat resistance* (2021, Palgrave MacMillan), *Sustaining Black music and Black culture during COVID-19: #Verzuz and club quarantine* (2020, Lexington Books), and the article, Primitive or Empowered: Representations of Native Americans and COVID-19 in News Media (2022, Communication Quarterly).

**Qiana Cutts, Ph.D.,** is a teaching artist and Associate Professor in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Foundations at Mississippi State University. Her teaching and research focuses on the scholarly legacy of Dr. Asa Grant Hilliard, III; critical pedagogies in teacher education; recruitment and retention of Black teacher candidates; and poetic inquiry as both an arts-based research methodology and healing practice for Blackgirls and Black women. In her work as an educator, speaker, and workshop facilitator, Cutts centers race, queerness, and culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies and promotes awareness, healing, policies, and practices to transform schools to liberatory, loving spaces for all students. Cutts is also a creative artist, having written a collection of poetry, *In Somebody Else’s Blood* (2017), and written, directed, and produced two stage plays, *Alabama Moonstruck* and *I Said, She Said*. Twitter: @eclecticgrits

**Makini Beck, Ph.D.,** holds a dual appointment as an Assistant Professor in the School of Individualized Study and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Rochester Institute of Technology. She focuses her academic inquiry on critical feminist theory and research methodologies, co-mentoring practices among women of color in academia, as well as understanding the teaching practices and experiences of international teachers in urban school settings. She has presented her research at various national and international conferences, and has published her work in handbook chapters and peer-reviewed journals such as Gender, Work, & Organization, Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, and NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education.
Nickesia S. Gordon, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the School of Communication, RIT. Her research focuses on Communication and Gender, Race and Nationality as well as Communication for Social Change, with emphasis on the Caribbean region. Additionally, her research agenda includes examining how the Communication curriculum in higher education can engage experiential learning practices and help foster civic/community engagement among college students. Dr. Gordon earned her doctoral degree in Communication and Culture from Howard University, a Master’s degree in English Literature from Clark University, Massachusetts and a BA in Literatures in English from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

Jessica F. Love, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Jackson State University and an integrated marketing communication expert with nearly a decade of experience in minority brand development. The activist scholar’s research centers critical and cultural media studies about the intersectional representation of minorities in the media. Love’s latest publication, “Serena Williams: From Catsuit to Controversy” (2020) is featured in the International Journal of Sports Communication. Love’s committed fight to address marginalized communities in the media is best demonstrated by her more than seven years of industry experience working to advance global, minority funding initiatives for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church (GBHEM). Love's entire professional and academic formation has been about using multimedia, strategic communication, and critical media research as tools of social justice to amplify minority educational initiatives like the Black College Fund, The Hispanic Pipeline Initiative, The United Negro College Fund, The Women of Color Scholarship and The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program. Outside of the academy, Love serves in the Mississippi Air Force National Guard, with more than a decade of experience.