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Real #HotGirl Sh*T: Practical Application of Intersectional Re-presentation Instruction

This critical reflection outlines the *Real #HotGirl Sh*T: Megan Thee Stallion & Mediated Hip Hop, Black Feminist, and Communication Pedagogy* application in critical and cultural media courses designed to explore intersectional representations of Black women and minorities in popular media. First, this paper discusses how the *Real #HotGirl Sh*T syllabus* helps accomplish course objectives. Next, it discusses the syllabus as an active pedagogical tool that demonstrates how digital media operates as a site of resistance for minority groups. Finally, this paper discusses how the syllabus's vertical education practices are an appropriate model for applying Intersectionality.

I teach a course focused on media representations of women and minorities. The immediate objective of my course is to demonstrate hegemony: the politics of representation and how relationships of power are embedded in media symbols. Hegemony provides a useful starting point to ground discussions about historical media representation of minority groups. The second primary course objective is to explore current representation of Black women in emerging media. Black feminist scholars' theorization of Intersectionality provides a useful framework to explore the complex ways in which Black women identities intersect and are politically structured in media portrayals, and how Black women use new media as political power to negotiate aspects of their identities.

Incorporating New and Emerging Media in Representational Studies

A key question guiding the *Real #HotGirl Sh*T* syllabus is: How can Megan Thee Stallion's work be used to teach about how Black women control their narratives? At various intersections - sexuality, geography, music, body politics, gender, and class - the syllabus explores the ways Megan Thee Stallion's work provides visibility to Black women's experiences absent from mainstream discussions. The *Real #HotGirl Sh*T* syllabus is a useful tool in my course, because it demonstrates how social media has afforded Black women active participation in re-presentational practices. For example, part of my course attempts to help students understand how Black women navigate sexual politics and identities. Weeks one, two, and six provide important media texts about sexual agency, scripts and politics, Hip-Hop Feminism, Ho culture, and more that invite participants to think critically about the role of sex in Black women's agency.

The *Real #HotGirl Sh*T* syllabus facilitates this discussion by centering Megan Thee Stallion visibility to explore the intersection of sex and body politics

for Black women in digital media spaces. Readings in week two and three of the syllabus focus specifically on topics like hashtags as self-definition, new visibility politics, Black Twitter as a conduit for cultural conversations, and more.

Previous critical media pedagogy exploring minority media representation primarily focused on master narratives produced by traditional media. This syllabus's incorporation of digital media helps understand how minority groups use new media as a political tool to resist and challenge representational regimes.

Popular Culture as Application and Scholarship: Active Participation

Another important utility of this syllabus is practical application of popular culture as a venue for scholarship. The *Real #HotGirl Sh*T* pedagogy uses Megan Thee Stallion as a vehicle to demonstrate how marginal groups use popular culture and digital media as a site of resistance to create counternarratives that contest hegemonic representational regimes. Hall (1981) introduced popular culture as a serious text to engage. He saw popular culture as a representational battlefield, a social space where meaning is negotiated between hegemonic and marginal groups. The study of Megan Thee Stallion is a useful pedagogical tool because her self-presentation as a Black woman with purposeful disregard for Black middle-class respectability is a live demonstration of this cultural battleground at the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Lane's (2021) article examined how intersections of body politics, class, gender, and race shaped the public's grief toward Megan being shot in 2020. Useful to this discussion is Lane's (2021) explanation about Megan's intentional portrayal as a 'ratchet' Black woman whose body serves as a particular contested cultural site and a performance of resistance:

When I use the word ratchet...I point out a set of behaviors which are not socially acceptable under Black middle-class ideologies and white supremacist ideologies...And yet, it [ratchet] simultaneously refers to the purposeful...disavowal of 'the politics of respectability.' (p. 294)

In Hip Hop, the epicenter of popular culture, Black women's bodies operate as a prime site for the struggle over meaning and power. In this space, Lane (2021) argued, Megan's physical build is simultaneously admired and attacked for being too masculine. Thus, the way Megan uses her body as a performative site of resistance to dismiss traditional standards of white and Black middle-class femininity makes her a useful pedagogical tool to explore intersectionality in new media.

The syllabus's use of popular culture examples that students engage in everyday communication practices challenges them to assess their online media behaviors and practices, making them more conscious and aware of the impact of re-presentation. For example, in a 2008 study about popular culture and critical media literacy, Tisdell found that popular culture expanded students' "understanding of marginalized groups, hegemony in media, and allowed them to recognize their own internalized racism" (p. 58).

Similarly, the *Real #HotGirl Sh*T Pedagogy* includes timely examples with which students are familiar and often participate with. Take for example the employment of media vehicles like Twitter (@theestallion), communication mapping tools like hashtags (#hotgirlhastag), and multimedia pairings in week three of the syllabus. These digital tools enable students to reflect on their own application of media. Week one and week six, in particular, are useful for making those important connections. The incorporation of digital media and popular culture invites active participation, which helps students in media and marketing communication fields understand their role as purveyors of master narratives in global, predominant, and corporate settings.

Moving Representational Instruction Forward with an Intersectional Framework

This syllabus employs vertical education practices to help students understand the evolution and intersections of past and current stereotypes associated with Black womanhood. This moves forward representation instruction with an intersectional framework that helps instructors appropriately implement intersectionality.

Black Feminist Legal Scholar Crenshaw's (1990) understanding of Intersectionality moved feminist scholarship from an essentialized understanding of identity to a nuanced understanding of the varied experiences and oppressions of Black women. Since then, media scholars have wrestled with the application of Intersectionality in theory and practice. And while Intersectionality is a hot topic, it is often grossly misused and weaponized in academic settings by mainstream voices. This syllabus is a useful model for recentering its rightful discourse to help students understand its social and cultural implication and application.

In conclusion, the radical pedagogy underpinning the *Real #HotGirl Sh*T Pedagogy* is designed to help students participate in deeper reflective processes that promote active learning with social media and digital tools. The greatest benefit of the syllabus is its practical connection between theory and society via popular culture. The Pedagogy's embrace of intersectionality as a model also helps students understand how networks of power shift depending on context

connections, while underscoring how systems and institutions perpetuate inequalities.

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