Black Women and the Politics of Representation

Justification: We are inundated with media representations of African and African American women, via television, films, social media, advertisements. These representations have impacts on the lives of African and African American women, and often influence complacency towards violence against African and African American women, domestic policies impacting poor African and African American women, funding opportunities for women and women's groups. The similarities and histories of the representations of African and African American women are intertwined. Those representations have roots in colonialism and slavery, Eurocentric views of Black women's sexuality, and a lack of economic power to challenge dominant representations of Black women. The representations of African and African American women present similar stereotypes; for example, the begging welfare queen with several children is analogous to the poor African woman with several children begging for help. The devaluation of Black women's bodies in the U.S. and Africa follow similar trajectories. Due to the similarities, the course would address the experiences of both African and African American women.

Students could benefit from a class that sheds light on the importance of cultural representations in defining societal views and treatment of Black women. This course is being proposed as hybrid course, aimed at upperclassmen and graduate students. The Department of African Studies currently only has few courses on women in Africa, and this course would allow our students to engage more with topics around women in Africa.

Course Description: This course is an examination of the representations of Black (African and African American) women that have dominated popular culture. The course looks at the history of those representations, especially in systems of colonialism and enslavement. These representations have fed tropes about Black women, tropes that have reinforced patriarchal structures, silence around violence against Black women, and domestic policies that negatively impact Black women's lives. The course also looks at how Black women are creating content to challenge those familiar tropes. The course considers how women create their own representations, which create spaces within patriarchal environments for women to exercise their agency and create counter narratives.

Course Goals: The goal of the course is for students to critically engage with representations of Black women, and identify skewed representations of Black women. Students should be able to understand how skewed representations of Black women have shaped our ideas about Black women and Black womanhood, as well as the real-life implications for Black women. Students should also understand the social, political, and economic power of cultural representations in both shaping skewed views of Black women, and in allowing Black women to present their own counter narratives.

Relevant Text:
1. Adomako, T and Kyere, A. 2016. A Deeper Look into the Web Series, "An African City". In Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa.
   http://www.cihablog.com/deeper-look-web-series-african-city/

2. Andrijasevic, R. and Mai, N. 2016. Trafficking (in) Representations: Understanding the recurring appeal of victimhood and slavery in neoliberal times. In Anti-Trafficking Review

3. Dines, G., and Humez, J.M. (2014). Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Critical Reader. 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

4. Gordon-Chipembere, N. 2016. Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman. Rutgers University

5. Graham, A. 2014. One hundred years of suffering? "Humanitarian crisis photography" and self-representation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies

6. Harris, A. A., & Goldman, A. Y. 2014. Black Women in Popular Culture. Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues, 1.

7. Harris-Perry, M.V. 2011. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale University Press.

8. Haupt, A. 2016. Queering Hip-Hop, Queering the City: Dope Saint Jude's Transformative Politics. Media Culture Journal

9. Ikpe, B. E. and Lasisi, S. 2005. Print Media Coverage of Sexuality Issues in Nigeria. In Sexuality in the Media: Emerging Issues in Africa

10. Kowalski, J. (2009). Stereotypes of History: Reconstructing Truth and the Black Mammy. Transcending Silence.

11. Kwenaite, S., & Van Heerden, A. 2011. Dress and violence: women should avoid dressing like" sluts" to avoid being raped. South African Journal of Art History, 26(1), 141-155.

12. Leclerc-Madlala, S. and Kearney, S.L. 2005. Media Coverage of Sexuality. In South Africa. In Sexuality in the Media: Emerging Issues in Africa

13. Mbure, W. G. 2015. Busted Cultural Myths and Nairobi Nights: A Critical Analysis of Gendered Social Media Spaces in Kenya. Africa Media Review, Volume 21, Numbers 1&2, 2013, pp. 63–87

14. McGlotten, S. and Davis, D. 2012. *Black Genders and Sexualities*. Palgrave Macmillan

15. Njiru, R.N. 2005. Coverage of Sexuality Issues in the Print Media in Kenya. In Sexuality in the Media: Emerging Issues in Africa

16. Oloruntoba-Oju, T. (2006). "Dèdè n dẹ ku ikú n dẹ Dèdè": fe/male sexuality and dominance in Nigerian video films (Nollywood). Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien, 11, 5-26.

17. Olujinmi, O. 2008. The City Girl and Sexuality in Yoruba Films: An Assessment. Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series '08

18. Smith, M.R. 2013. "Or a Real, Real Bad Lesbian": Nicki Minaj and the Acknowledgement of Queer Desire in Hip-Hop Culture. Popular Music and Society.

19. Stephens, D. P., & Few, A. L.2007. The effects of images of African American women in hip hop on early adolescents' attitudes toward physical attractiveness and interpersonal relationships. Sex Roles, 56(3-4), 251-264.

20. Tamale, S. Researching and theorizing sexualities in Africa. Sexuality and Politics: Regional Dialogues from the Global South.

21. Tamale, S. 2011. African Sexualities: A Reader. Pambazuka Press.

22. Ward, J.R. 2015. Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV. Rutgers University Press.

23. Whaley, D.E. 2015. Black Women in Sequence: Re-inking Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime. University of Washington Press

Topics

1. **The history of Black women's representation in colonial Africa and post-emancipation America**

Tamale, S. Researching and theorizing sexualities in Africa. Sexuality and Politics: Regional Dialogues from the Global South.

McKoy, S.S. 2016. Placing and Replacing "The Venus Hottentot": An Archeology of Pornography, Race, and Power. In Gordon-Chipembere, N. 2016. Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman. Rutgers University

Kowalski, J. (2009). Stereotypes of History: Reconstructing Truth and the Black Mammy. Transcending Silence.

2. **The familiar tropes about African and African American women**

Harris-Perry, M.V. 2011. Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America. Yale University Press.

Bakare-Yusuf, B. 2011. Nudity and morality: legislating women's bodies and dress in Nigeria. In African Sexualities: A Reader. Independent Publishers Group.

3. **Representations of African women in TV & Film**

Olujinmi, O. 2008. The City Girl and Sexuality in Yoruba Films: An Assessment. Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series '08

Oloruntoba-Oju, T. (2006). "Dèdè n dẹ ku ikú n dẹ Dèdè": fe/male sexuality and dominance in Nigerian video films (Nollywood). Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien, 11, 5-26.

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4. **Representations of African women in advertising and digital media**

Whaley, D.E. 2015. African goddesses, mixed-race wonders, and baadasssss women: Black women as signs of Africa in U.S. comics. In Black Women in Sequence: Re-inking Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime. University of Washington Press

Mbure, W. G. 2015. Busted Cultural Myths and Nairobi Nights: A Critical Analysis of Gendered Social Media Spaces in Kenya. Africa Media Review, Volume 21, Numbers 1&2, 2013, pp. 63–87

Imma, Z. 2016 "Just Ask the Scientists": Troubling the "Hottentot" and Scientific Racism in Bessie Head's Maru and Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy. In Gordon-Chipembere, N. 2016. Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman. Rutgers University

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Njiru, R.N. 2005. Coverage of Sexuality Issues in the Print Media in Kenya. In Sexuality in the Media: Emerging Issues in Africa

Ikpe, B. E. and Lasisi, S. 2005. Print Media Coverage of Sexuality Issues in Nigeria. In Sexuality in the Media: Emerging Issues in Africa

5. **African women as the face of poverty among donor agencies**

Andrijasevic, R. and Mai, N. 2016. Trafficking (in) Representations: Understanding the recurring appeal of victimhood and slavery in neoliberal times. In Anti-Trafficking Review

Graham, A. 2014. One hundred years of suffering? "Humanitarian crisis photography" and self-representation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies

6. **Representations of African American women in TV & Film**

Wynn, F.M. 2015. Where is Clair Huxtable when you need her? The desperate search for positive media images of reality TV. In Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV. Rutgers University Press.

Jones, S.L. 2015. Contemplating Basketball Wives: A critique of racism, sexism, and income-level disparity. In Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV. Rutgers University Press.

Jackson, C.K. 2014. Visible but Devalued through the Black Male Gaze: Degrading Images of Black Women in Tyler Perry's Temptation. In Black Women in Popular Culture. Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues

Wright, J.K. 2014. Scandalous: Olivia Pope and Black women in primetime history. In Black Women in Popular Culture. Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues

7. **Representations of African American women in advertising and digital media**

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Puff, S. 2014. Writing (about) the Black Female Body: An Exploration of Skin Color Politics in Advertising within Ebony and Essence. In Black Women in Popular Culture. Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues

8. **Representations of African American women in music**

Stephens, D.P. & Few, A.L. 2007. The Effects of Images of African American Women in Hip Hop on Early Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Physical Attractiveness and Interpersonal Relationships. Sex Roles

Whittington, E.Y. and Jordan, M. (2014). "Bey Feminism" vs. Black Feminism: A Critical Conversation on Word-of-Mouth Advertisement of Beyonce's Visual Album. In Black Women in Popular Culture. Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues

Howard, N.R. 2014. I Am Not My Sister's Keeper: Shifting Themes in Female Rap Videos (2005 – 2011). In Black Women in Popular Culture. Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues

9. **Representations of queer Black women in popular culture**

Lewis, D. 2011. Representing African sexualities. In African Sexualities: A Reader. Independent Publishers Group.

Gqola, P.D. 2011. Through Zanele Muholi's eyes: re/ imagining ways of seeing Black lesbians. In African Sexualities: A Reader. Independent Publishers Group.

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