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Dasharah Green

Saint John's University, Jamaica New York

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CLASSY, BOUGIE, RATCHET:
ANALYZING HIP-HOP ARTISTS' MEGAN THEE STALLION'S #HOTGIRL
PHRASE AS A PERFORMATIVE IDENTITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCE

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ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Dasharah Green

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Dasharah Green

Dr. LaToya Sawyer

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ABSTRACT

CLASSY, BOUGIE, RATCHET: ANALYZING HIP-HOP ARTISTS' MEGAN THEE STALLION'S #HOTGIRL PHRASE AS A PERFORMATIVE IDENTITY

Dasharah Green

In 2019, female hip-hop artists' used their platforms to break through the glass ceiling of hip-hop misogynoir by reclaiming what it means to be unapologetic. The artists' unapologetic lyrics, which explores the power in owning their sex appeal has shifted how listeners regard female hip-hop artists. With strategic marketing, these artists' have used their social media platforms as a tool to reclaim what it means to be sexy while dominating in hip-hop. Megan Thee Stallion's catchphrase and the accessibility she provides to her fans via social media stands out most. With over ten million Instagram followers her use of hashtags, uploading consistent content, and utilizing various in application features, like going on Instagram live, to connect with her fans helped to heighten her visibility. I will analyze the cultural impact of the summer 2019 "Hot Girl Summer" phenomenon and its mass circulation on social media, particularly via Instagram hashtags. I use both a Black feminist and ratchet framework in the analysis. I specifically target Black women Instagram users' use of the hashtag #hotgirl as a subjectivity and how it has become a performative identity.

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Introduction

In 2019, female hip-hop artists' used their platforms to break through the glass ceiling of hip-hop misogyny by reclaiming what it means to be unapologetic. Their resistance happened in two folds. First, by providing catchy lyrics that accompanied hard hitting hip-hop beats. Second, by utilizing social media to spread awareness of their brands through the use of hashtags. Most successful hip-hop artists' rely on their ability to connect with their fans on social media just as much as a connection through music. This past year showed how much hip-hop and social media are intersected. In "How Megan Thee Stallion, City Girls, & Saweetie Won the Summer With Carefree Anthems," Inman reacts to the musical and social media impact female hip-hop artists' have had over the course of summer 2019. They write:

with catch-phrases, hashtags, and, of course, music women not only prepped, cooked, and served the rhymes but devoured every meal this summer. They did so by being themselves, defying rap's cultural standards and centering their own wants, needs, and aggressions, unmatched, and unbothered by their male counterparts.

The artists' unapologetic lyrics, which explores the power in owning their sex appeal has shifted how listeners regard female hip-hop artists. With strategic marketing, these artists' have used their social media platforms as a tool to reclaim what it means to be sexy while dominating in hip-hop. Though many hip-hop artists' such as, The City Girls, Cardi B, Missy Elliot, Saweetie, and Rapsody had a hand in resisting the genre's pervasive misogyny, Megan Thee Stallion's catchphrase and the accessibility she provides to her fans via social media stands out most. With over ten million Instagram followers her use of hashtags, uploading consistent content, and utilizing various in

application features, like going on Instagram live, to connect with her fans helped to heighten her visibility. I will analyze the cultural impact of the summer 2019 “Hot Girl Summer” phenomenon and its mass circulation on social media, particularly via Instagram hashtags. I specifically target Black women Instagram users' use of the hashtag #hotgirl as a subjectivity and how it has become a performative identity.

For my data, I specifically looked for the hashtag #hotgirl in conversation with other hashtags that worked to uncover the multiplicity of its identity. The hashtags that stood out most included varying Black women descriptors and identity markers. In the beginning of my research, I had a heightened focus for #hotgirl being used as a performative identity. My research uncovered that #hotgirl is not only an identity marker, but a tool to help Black women explore other parts of their intersecting identities. This is expressed through the use of other hashtags and descriptors used within the #hotgirl posts caption.

I began to research Instagram posts under the hashtags #hotgirl and #hotgirlsummer in October 2019. I chose Instagram, as opposed to other social media platforms, because #hotgirl is a performative identity that works well visually. The phrase works intrapersonally and externally, often simultaneously. In my early research, I gathered an idea of the type of content included under the hashtags, which hashtag had the most content and the type of users posting content. The goal was to uncover content trends that linked differing uses of #hotgirl. I studied how #hotgirl would display commonalities and differences within how the users identified themselves. Focusing on posts from a particular time period was the first challenge I came across. Instagram's

in-application algorithms does not allow users to search through hashtags based on specified filters. Posts from users of varying racial backgrounds, gender and location were made available. At this stage I decided to focus my lens on content that featured women and men on vacation, outdoors, on beaches or in costume using #hotgirlsummer. I chose these strands to gain a better understanding of #hotgirl as performative. The identity was rarely used as an identity trait. Instead it was used to express a moment in time or public image.

For the next phase of my research, I sought to cut down on anomalies by not limiting my focus to the hashtag but also the types of user content to look for. As my research of Black feminist literature lead me to analyze #hotgirl as a performative identity through a Black feminist and ratchet framework the user content to research became easier to decipher. I abandoned #hotgirlsummer to inspect how users were engaging with #hotgirl. I specifically looked for Black women users, posts with multiple hashtags in conversation and posts with one person pictured. The commonality that set the posts chosen apart from those I overlooked were the use of hashtags. I pinpointed hashtags that expressed a part of the users identity. For example, some posts I chose not to include in my research incorporated hashtags of an element or setting, like, #beach, #sunlight, #relaxation. Those hashtags are not personal descriptors of how the users view themselves.

The next phase of my research focused on analyzing: 1) how identity is expressed by the users, both through their use of #hotgirl and the hashtags in conversation; 2) the oppositions and similarities discovered while putting each post in conversation with the

other; 3) how do these posts demonstrate #hotgirl as a performative identity; and 4) how does #hotgirl work as a Black feminist tool to combat respectability politics.

Analysis

For my analysis, I pinpointed images from Black women Instagram users via the application's explore page and searched through the #hotgirl hashtag. The images are specifically of Black women in solo photographs or videos with a caption that showcase #hotgirl as a subjectivity. I specifically looked for #hotgirl in conversation with other hashtags that worked to uncover the multiplicity of its identity. The hashtags that stood out most includes varying Black women descriptors and identity markers. The hashtags illustrates the intersections of #hotgirl, as a performative identity, when in dialogue with other identity traits. For example, one of the posts chosen includes #hotgirl and #hotmama in its caption. The commingling of these two identities exemplify how intersectionality plays a major part in how Black women identify themselves. Kimberle Crenshaw coined the phrase, intersectionality, in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap. That particular user is neither solely a #hotgirl or a mother; instead she exercises both identities proudly. Most of the photos and captions I chose to analyze are not overtly sexual, a coincidental factor. This reveals #hotgirl as more than a call for sexual freedom, but a protest in favor of women choosing how to identify themselves.

Common industry knowledge suggests that it takes much more than talent and good songs for an artist to sell records. It also takes money, employee hours, and aggressive marketing and public relation campaigns (Moras & Rebollo- Gil 127). In 2019, we have seen female hip-hop artists use aggressive marketing and public relation campaigns, specifically on social media, to promote their brand and music. Branding and

public persona was a key feature in the success of these acts. For example, Miami rap duo, The City Girls' slang and brand of music puts a spin to the Miami Bass sound of the 1980s and 90s rap duo The 2 Live Crew. The duo has been praised for living up to their raunchy hustler focused lyrics unapologetically. A major part of the groups success is the comfort provided through their authenticity for fans to admire. North Carolina artist Rapsody's 2019 album, *Eve*, placed her Black womanhood to the forefront as she paid homage to the women before her. Each song is titled after one of her heroes showcasing the intersectionality of her gender and race. Although her social media presence differs from The City Girls and Megan Thee Stallion's activity, Rapsody's fans are provided a lens into her spirit through the intricate personalization of her music.

Megan Thee Stallion created a movement that promotes Black girl fun and self-love while simultaneously de-centering men. Inman writes, "the hashtag #HotGirlSummer has over 300,000 posts on Instagram and has grown into somewhat of a household phrase that has become popular enough to prompt the rising rapper to work on trademarking the slogan." Megan dutifully executed a rollout to dominate summer 2019. "Yeah, I'm in my bag, but I'm in his too," is a line from her song, "Cash Shit," that took social media by storm. She credits her fans, referred to as "Hotties," for her mass success on social media. In 2013, Megan's social media following more than doubled after a clip of her participating in a rap cypher went viral. Since then, she's been able "to capitalize on the pulling power of digital platforms" by consistently posting content true to her brand and image. In a New York Times feature, "How Megan Thee Stallion Turned 'Hot'

Into A State of Mind,” Megan proudly attributes her fame to the internet. In the interview Megan goes on to discuss the strategy for managing her social media content,

I don't like my Instagram to look like it's a commercial. I want you to come to my page and feel like I'm still your classmate. I do post when I'm taking a quiz because I want my Hotties to know I'm still going to school. I want people to look at my page and think, this is real life.

On any given day Megan's followers may stumble upon a photo or video of the rapper dancing with friends while sporting Daisy Duke shorts and a crop top. Most recently, the “#SavageChallenge” features fans completing a dance routine to the rapper's song “Savage” and posting it online. Megan's encouragement for others to join in on the dance led to participation from celebrities and followers from all over the world. Social media engagement is a driving force in her music promotion. However, just as followers may see Megan “driving the boat,” a phrase used to describe a woman pouring liquor directly from the bottle down another person's throat, with her friends they may also catch her studying in between shows. Being a #hotgirl is a performative act, not a monolithic identity. For Megan, multiple identities can exist at once and she illustrates that through her social media presence.

Her self-proclaimed image of a “Houston Hottie” led to the major #hotgirl and #hotgirlsummer hashtags that caused gendered debates and major pushback on Instagram. Megan Thee Stallion's phrase, “hot girl,” sought to liberate women, but was condemned by those opposing the term as overly self-righteous and promiscuous. In her own words, “hot girl summer” refers to anyone who is “unapologetically them, having a good ass time. You know, just a bad bitch.” She also asserts the phrase transcends gender or identity. By introducing the phrase as a fluid identity, the phrase becomes appropriate

to analyze through both a Black feminist and ratchet framework. One major component in both frameworks is to combat the restraints respectability politics forces onto Black women agency. In “Gatekeeping and Remaking: The Politics of Respectability in African American Women's History and Black Feminism,” Harris analyzes the multiple understanding of respectability politics within the African American community. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham first coined the term “politics of respectability” to describe the work of the Women’s Convention of the Black Baptist Church during the Progressive Era (Harris 213). Harris goes on to elaborate on the history of Higginbotham’s phrase by writing:

She specifically referred to African American’s promotion of temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity. The politics of respectability entailed “reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform.” Respectability was part of “uplift politics,” and had two audiences: African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable, and white people, who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable (213).

Respectability politics works differently depending on the audience. For African Americans, specifically women, respectability politics is based on a performance. The art of acting “respectable” or tolerable to white audiences. This performance is rooted in “reforming” one’s behavior to rid the individual of unsatisfying behaviors mirroring those that are condemned by the Black Baptist Church. The term “reform” insists a change in function or action that reveals an evolution from unrespectability to respectability. This evolution is a major component in respectability politics because it portrays the transition to be attainable for everyone. The other audience Harris mentions are white people. They make up the audience who needs to actively see respectability

performed by African Americans. However, for Black feminist and ratchet frameworks, those who oppose the fullness of Black women's intersecting identities make up the third audience.

Many Black feminists have shifted their ideology of identity from being theoretical to a performative practice. By analyzing the #hotgirl through a Black feminist lens it illustrates how the hashtag is a "site of becoming" (Conley 23). In "Decoding Black Feminist Hashtags as Becoming," Conley analyzes Black Feminist hashtags at work and explores how they "do things." They also analyze how hashtags are encoded by discussing cyberculture and technology. Conley refers to "black feminist hashtags as processes of renewal and strategy, mediation and embodiment, and as sites of struggle over representation, as becoming" (23). Conley's interpretation of Black feminist hashtags as "becoming" is based on its functionality: "Black feminist hashtags are not simply a confluence of text, hypertext, symbols, and 'racially charged' feminist trends on social networking platforms. They do things. They proliferate to mediate connections across time and space" (Conley 23). *They do things* based on subjectivity and sameness, which makes them more than social networking trends. The hashtag #hotgirl embodied subjectivity and sameness. Most of the users of the hashtag find a connection within their identities that allows them to diversify their performance as a "hot girl." While the meaning may be the same, the approach of performing as a #hotgirl is fluid and subjective to personal identity intersections. Those who use the hashtag bond over the commonality of centering one's sexual desires over those of men. This is expressed by allowing women to be the main subject intersected with the creator, Megan Thee

Stallion's, overall carefree and sexual image. The success of the hashtag is due in large part to its ability to exist outside of social media as a real life practice.

The hashtag #hotgirl serves a particular purpose for Black women. The purpose is to bridge the gap between Black women's inner self and external persona. The hashtag performs the opposite duties of respectability politics and actively resists it. It refutes male masculinity, centers female desires and allows women to perform the image in different varieties. There is not one way to be a #hotgirl. A #hotgirl is not a rigid portrayal of women. The hashtag encourages an intersectional identity model that works to portray Black female dichotomy. In "A Ratchet Lens: Black Queer Youth, Agency, Hip Hop, and the Black Ratchet Imagination," Love analyzes Black feminism and respectability politics to explore the policing and agency of Black women identity. She writes:

The word ratchet has emerged in mainstream culture as a means of describing Black people, particularly Black women, as loud, hot-tempered, and promiscuous. This one-dimensional view of Black women has sparked outrage and debate in social media, historically Black college and university campuses, popular blogs sites, and Black feminist communities (539).

Ratchet varies in meaning depending on the person using it and the context of its use. Love's analysis of the term particularly harps on its use to berate Black women. The same way Black women are fighting back against respectability politics, they are also fighting back against the negative connotations of ratchet. Both terms illustrate Black women as one-dimensional. The #hotgirl image not only showcases that Black womanhood exists, but that their identities are more than two opposing images coming together. The way that ratchet as a concept has emerged in mainstream culture does the

same work as respectability politics. Black women are thought to choose between these two images and act accordingly. Images like #hotgirl seek to combat the notions of both ratchetness and respectability. The fluidity showcased within the users who identify with the image do not fit within either image. The criticism on social media of #hotgirl diminishes the positivity and freedom associated with the phrase. We can argue that in some cases ratchet has been used dutifully by women to combat its use as a divisive tool, Love writes, “the term ratchet is used to exclusively describe lower-class Black women and their behavior, she acknowledges that upper-class and professional Black women also enjoy letting loose, dropping respectability politics for a moment in time, and getting ‘ratchet’” (539). Unlike the identity fluidity expressed by Love, the #hotgirl image drops respectability politics overall. The “hotties” that follow Megan Thee Stallion movement tend to resist grey areas and present their whole selves autonomously.

I, too, am a proud self-proclaimed “hot girl.” And, like most “hot girls,” I spent most of my summer living carefree and independent, which to no surprise caught the attention of men on social media. My content of choice included posts with my friends and I partying around NYC, enjoying vacations, occasional selfies where I bask in natural sunlight and Black feminist quotes with the purpose of uplifting women. And, like many of the other hotties, I made my love for Megan Thee Stallion abundantly clear by sharing her photos and videos on my Instagram account. One guy I conversed with via Instagram direct message, blamed his inability to find companionship on the influence of Megan Thee Stallion. He remarked, “I’ll just be talking to someone and the women be expecting for a nigga to be doing that chasing shit and I’m not for that.” The conversation went on

with him calling the “hot girl” trend “corny,” a slang term meaning trite or worn out. His opinions of the “hot girl” summer trend is not uncommon for social media. It has become normal for men to poke fun at women when they express joy or interest in a common trend, especially one that does not directly benefit men. There is no shortage of parody videos, memes and hashtags on social media, showcasing men making fun of the things women enjoy. For example, towards the end of 2019, Instagram released a photo and video filter where the letters “LV” would show up in glitter on your face. Many women users were drawn to the filter and used it often. There were plenty of posts where men drew “LV” onto their face and mocked the photos and videos being made by women. Men made it seem as though the purpose for the filter was not to take pictures with it. The use of filters and photo retouching is a very common source of mockery of women by men. Much of this mockery stems from the desire most men have for the women who use photo enhancements. Not only is it based on desire but the unattainability of access to those women. It may also stem from the idea that photo enhancement is a “feminine” practice that men should not rely on. It is as if women are not allowed to have fun unless the activity revolves around or includes men. The “hot girls” stood firm in relishing a movement that allowed us to enjoy life on our own terms, especially at the expense of toxic masculinity. The backlash from Black men regarding Megan Thee Stallion’s hashtag reveals a major plight of Black women. If Black women’s solidarity does not feature men or fails to portray them in ways that are in relation to how men view themselves then their voices are a threat. Other Black women’s self-care movements like #blackgirlmagic and #blackqueen failed to garner similar backlash as #hotgirl due to

respectability politics. Black women can express self-love as long as they remain respectable and susceptible to male interest.

Black women solidarity is a driving force in Black feminism. Tension between the intersections of gender and hip-hop misogynoir existed long before the social media era. The women of *The Crunk Feminist Collective* lend their voices to speak back to a variety of stigmas, concerns, rage and woes that riddle the Black feminist's mind in their collection of essays, titled, *The Crunk Feminist Collection*. They reveal the struggle between loving hip-hop and ratchet culture but hating the patriarchal views upheld. The collection provides a bridge between race and gender politics to intersect with popular culture and media. Furthermore, the women divulge personal experiences involving dating while engulfed in academia, personal hardships influenced by controlling images of Black women and coping mechanisms and downfalls experienced by being an active voice in popular culture. Controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life (Collins 69). In the essay, "On Black Men Showing Up for Black Women at the Scene of the Crime," Cooper writes, "Why? Is it so incredibly difficult to show up for me-for us- when we need you? Is it so hard to believe that we need you? Is solidarity only for Black men?" (16). Black women have historically shown up for Black men dutifully without hesitation. In this new wave of Black feminism, Black women are showing up for themselves first.

In the midst of backlash and ridicule, men opposing the #hotgirl hashtag came up with the opposing #hotboy and #cityboy hashtags. The latter hashtag is a play on words

from the name of the female rap duo The City Girlz who also ruled social media in summer 2019. The two hashtags were often used in conversation to combat #hotgirl and #hotgirlsummer. While #hotgirl celebrated women, #cityboy was used as a weapon to disrespect women. Women used the hashtag #hotgirl to showcase themselves having fun, being unapologetically themselves and practicing self-care. Instead of joining the trend of positive expression, men made fun of the “hotties” and created a one-sided competition. This may be, in part, because men were purposefully de-centered from being a part of the movement. Cooper argues that men:

have little to no motivation to cultivate the habits of character- emotional generosity and maturity, selflessness, self-confidence (not ego)- that are necessary for good relationships... They want these things from women, benefit from the time we spend cultivating these attributes in our friendships with other women, but are ill-equipped to provide them themselves. (218)

This lack of healthy communal support amongst men becomes evident when women rally to support one another in mass numbers. Specifically, Black feminism and its cultivation of literary works serves as a blueprint for just how much Black women show up for one another. One Black woman alone is often a threat, imagine thousands of Black women showing up with the articulation to combat misogyny. As Cooper explains, Black women are creating safe spaces, like through the use of the hashtag #hotgirl, to exercise self-confidence and ingenuity. Hashtags within Instagram’s digital platform allows mass participation into self-care practices from Black women throughout the world. Men have the same access to each other as women but have not mastered showing up for each in the way as their counterparts. While men could have used their hashtag to promote their own version of self-care and self-love, they attempted to steal the joy from women harmlessly

enjoying their summer. The healthy self-care journey women have used to carry themselves through outweighed the cynical narcissism of the #cityboy fandom. This is proven by #hotgirl and #hotgirlsummer hashtags having over a million content posts versus the thousands of posts #cityboy hashtag has.

When a movement flourishes in placing the spotlight on Black women liberation those that promote and submit to Black women controlling images seek to problematize the movements legitimacy. In *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* Morgan writes, “racism and the will to survive creates a sense of intra-racial loyalty that makes it impossible for black women to turn our backs on black men- even in their ugliest and most sexist of moments” (36). When Black women show up for each other in large numbers excluding men from the conversation they become instant targets. Black women want to feel good about themselves. Megan Thee Stallion’s lyrics and public persona illustrate that Black women can feel good about themselves and display that love unapologetically. The point of the movement is to de-center men. In her song, “B.I.T.C.H.,” Megan sings, “*you say you want respect? Well treat me how you wanna be treated/You told me to keep it real but you don't practice what you ¹ preachin'.*” She expects men to treat her in the same manner that they would like to be treated. This language sets a standard which puts both genders at an equal level. Many female hip-hop lyrics that seek to shatter the glass ceiling of misogynoir tackles the problem boldly. Megan actively pushes back against the idea of Black women being unable to turn their

¹ Megan Thee Stallion, “B.I.T.C.H.” *Suga*, 300 Entertainment, 2020.

backs on Black men. It is no longer Black women's job to make other people feel safe within the spaces they occupy without making sure they feel safe first.

Megan Thee Stallion's focus on her public persona and brand makes the #hotgirl movement desirable for women to maneuver towards. Accurate portrayals of Black womanhood need to be visible to mainstream audiences (Williams 218). Hypervisibility of diverse portrayals of Black women expressing fulfilment and joy refute stereotypes used to showcase them as monolithic. Controlling images and perpetuating ongoing stereotypes on the mass level triggers an acceptance from others outside of Black culture. It creates a system of acceptability that stunts Black female growth and progression.

The most prominent images of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality are portrayed in hip-hop, both in its lyrics and videos. Since its birth in the 1980's, hip-hop has been male dominated and highly problematic in protecting the preservation and discovery of Black women's identities. Williams discusses the objectification of women in hip-hop by writing, "one popular stereotype is known as the 'video ho,' or the 'video vixen,' a Black woman who embodies physical objectification, submission, and sexual availability to men. This oversexualized image is used as a prop for the man or men who are always the focus and protagonists of the song" (214). Men are afforded the autonomy to sexually exploit women. Megan's lyrics directly combat hip-hop misogyny. Her song, "Hot Girl Summer," is an anthem dedicated to her #hotgirl movement. Like many of her songs, she plays upon her sexuality and approach to engaging with men, she sings, "got a whole lot of options 'cause you know a bitch poppin' (hey, hey)/I'm a hot girl, so

you know ain't shit stoppin' ²(hey, hey, hey),” Megan’s lyrics puts a spin on objectification and oversexualization of women in hip-hop. She is confidently owning her sexual power by referring to herself as “poppin,” a slang term for popular or yearned for. She goes on to sing that as “a hot girl” she’s unstoppable. These lyrics illustrate the level of self-definition present within the foundation of the #hotgirl movement. The hashtag promotes proudly dictating how women exercise their sexual availability and how they maneuver sexual relationships.

There is no single meaning for #hotgirl; it can be interpreted based on a range of personal identity markers. All of the women users in my analysis are seemingly happy, inspirational, motivational and uplifting. Social movements, like #hotgirl, that aim to free women from the burden of respectability politics are threatening to those opposed to Black women exercising their agency. Black women exist in a society that simultaneously exploits their sexuality for entertainment and dehumanizes them based on their choices, appearance and lifestyle. Each Instagram post showcases the variety and diversity of Black women's identities. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins discusses Black feminist thought in relation to how Black women view themselves, she writes,

Through the process of rearticulation, Black feminist thought can offer African-American women a different view of ourselves and our worlds. By taking the core themes of a Black women's standpoint and infusing them with new meaning, Black feminist thought can stimulate a new consciousness that utilizes Black women's everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge. Rather than raising consciousness, Black feminist thought affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists.

² Megan Thee Stallion, et al. “Hot Girl Summer,” 300 Entertainment, 2019.

More important, this rearticulated consciousness aims to empower African-American women and stimulate resistance (32).

Black feminist thought allows Black women to view themselves through a multifaceted lens. The diversity of Black women exists when they “rearticulate” their identity. Rearticulation in Black feminist thought provides Black women the tools to stand firm in their identity by vocalizing desires and ideals that are already present. By affirming a new consciousness they are able to utilize everyday knowledge that has been overlooked and de-centered. This new consciousness is illustrated in how Black women Instagram users affirm their identities through the use of #hotgirl based on knowledge they already possessed. While the knowledge of their intersectional identity may have been present, #hotgirl serves as a Black feminist tool for users to rearticulate their identities.

For my analysis, I pinpointed images from Black women Instagram users via the application’s explore page and searched through the #hotgirl hashtag. One major commonality I noticed from the posts is the lack of mention of Megan Thee Stallion in the caption. While many #hotgirlsummer posts directly paid homage to Megan’s “Houston Hottie” image, the posts selected from #hotgirl did the opposite. This illustrates how #hotgirl has transcended the “party girl” expectation many critics stereotyped. It has also transcended Megan as an individual and artist. It also illustrates how Megan successfully created a movement to combat monolithic ideas about Black women’s identity. The hashtag reveals itself to be a fluid identity marker.

In my analysis, I include a list of key hashtags included within each post. I chose the hashtags based on its marker as an identity or a phrase used to describe an identity. I

also listed the common hashtags mentioned to illustrate the dichotomy of Black women identities and the users similarities. The hashtag #blackgirlmagic shows up three times. Black Girl Magic is a social movement created by CaShawan Thompson in 2013. An interview of Thompson discussing the phrase reveals, “she coined the phrase in 2013, in response to hateful articles published online about black women. ‘Psychology Today did an article saying that black women were the most unattractive of all people on earth, and that really bothered me,’ Thompson said” (Thande). The significance of #blackgirlmagic in conversation with #hotgirl reveals the latter as positive affirmation for Black women. Its repetition throughout the posts exposes the journey of multiple Black women on a quest to uplift themselves.

Hashtags with the word *melanin* also show up three times. Melanin refers to a dark brown or black physical pigmentation. The hashtag #brownskingirl shows up once lending itself to the conversation of melanin. By including words or phrases related to skin complexion the users are celebrating their race. Melanin shows up in different varieties with tag words including, “queen” and “on the map.”

In “From Princess to Queen: A Black Feminist Approach to Positive Sexual Identity Development,” Evans and Dyson provide five contribution elements of development necessary to transform from being a Black Princess to a Black Queen: (1) Modeling, (2) Experience, (3) Personal Value, (4) Relationships, and (5) Freedom (47). They describe this “metamorphosis” to contribute to their theory to be the Transformational Theory to Becoming a Black Queen. They describe this transition to be a coming of age for young Black “princesses” after being provided with the tools from

elder Black women on how to become a “queen” (48). There are both negative and positive views of referring to Black women as “queens.” However, much of the opposition's argument stems from “queen” being used as a divisive tool or controlling image. When Black women call themselves “queen” it is a term of endearment to satisfy their confidence. The term serves as to combat the gendered and racial oppression of Black women that places them beneath their peers in society.

The other common key hashtags include, #glowing and #hotgirlsemester, which all show up twice. The use of glowing refers to complexion, similar to the use of melanin. The term expresses an aura that is physically displayed through a particular sense of happiness or fulfillment. The phrase #hotgirlsemester is a direct acknowledgement of Megan Thee Stallion. As discussed, Megan takes pride in sharing her experience as a student with her followers. In September 2019, the rapper announced a movement to motivate her fans for the upcoming fall school semester. She began to post photos of herself studying with the hashtag listed in the caption. This further illustrates the influence of Megan and how #hotgirl works in multiple contexts.



User: @latoy_boitoy

Key hashtags: #influence #femalerappers #creative #explorelife #independentartist

This photo stuck out to me because of the user's appearance. The woman's hair color, makeup and jewelry are common female hip-hop fashion aesthetics. The first line of the caption states, "one thing I'll always be is myself." This user's caption expresses female empowerment and agency. The caption lends itself to the conversation of authenticity used to promote Black women liberation by Megan Thee Stallion. Black feminism exists to articulate how Black women should always strive to represent their authentic selves in any setting. This user's #hotgirl persona is characterized by their confidence level. The hashtags #influence, #creative and #explorelife signifies what's most important to their identity. All three hashtags reveal a sense of intrigue and the desire to inspire others. As a music artist, the user utilizes #hotgirl to show up in Instagram's algorithms. Her use of the term showcases the influence Megan Thee Stallion has over other female musicians. Music solidarity is also exhibited through this

user's post, which is not unlike the solidarity illustrated by popular female artists sharing



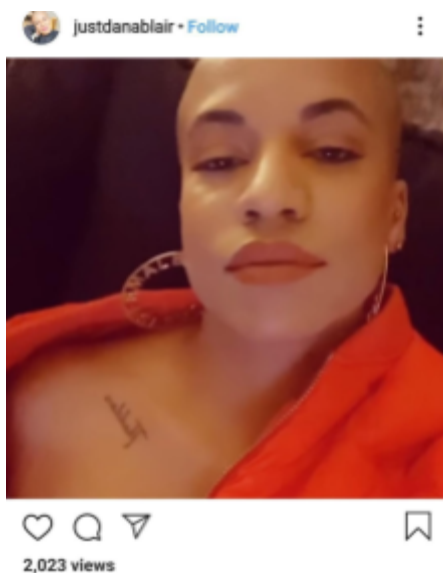
User: @k.leeg

Key hashtags: #hotmama #snatched

I chose this photo after reviewing the caption. The use of hashtags helps to prove the diversity of Black women identity. This user does a play on the #hotgirl hashtag by using the hashtag #hotmama to refer to herself. By combining two identities that, by respectability politics standards, do not typically go together this user is blurring the lines of Black female dichotomy. The stereotypical image of the Black mother is stringent and still connected to the controlling image of a “mammy.” In “The Terrifying Tale of the Philosophical Mammy,” Schroer asserts that Black women continue to bare the burden of

the “Philosophical Mammy” image, “the central charge against the Mammy is that she sacrifices her own interests and those of her kindred to serve an Other who oppresses her” (102). Schroer goes on to explain how the figure was created out of an ideological service to slavery. The stereotype which has morphed into a type of archetype, was produced to paint a picture of a desirable white-washed Black female imitation. It was used as a tactic to persuade people to believe that Black women were most happy when we were employed to cook, clean, and perform domestic duties. Mammy is portrayed as the ideal black woman; happy, respectful, tolerable, useful, and knowledgeable of her role in society.

This user's content fights back against the harmful caricatures used to wrongly depict Black women. They use #blackmama, and other identifiable hashtags to express her motherhood, in conversation with #hotgirl as a source of liberation. More than one identity can be present at once. In this case, each identity marker is working together to propel the other. She's allowing herself to have both identities simultaneously. The #hotgirl identity is used as a tool to represent motherhood as being fluid.



justdanablair In my mind I'm a hot girl, but in my spirit I just want to watch serial killer documentaries and sit on the sofa. #balance #longhairdontcare #backonthegram #hotgirl #coldworld #countdown #losangeles #onthemove #lotd 🗨️ @fentybeauty

User: @justdanablair

Key hashtags: #balance

This image is a screenshot from a video of a woman on a couch. The caption expresses her conflicting feelings of being a #hotgirl with the desire to lounge and watch television. She identifies the juxtaposition of how she seeks to identify. This post stood out in my search because it reveals how many regard what #hotgirl is defined. The other users of #hotgirl submit to the fluidity of the phrase, while this user has trouble contemplating its duality. It is also fair to mention the sarcasm present with the caption. The user includes the phrase #longhairdontcare to poke fun of them not having hair.

However, the user's reference to #hotgirl being in their mind reveals the phrase as a mental state or emotion. It removes #hotgirl as an action revealing its interpersonal

relation to identity. The identity is not solely performative. It is possible to feel like a #hotgirl. It works as a mental framework to promote inner-wellness, confidence, self-love, liberation and duality.



User: @najaunabrenae

Key hashtags: blackgirlstraveltoo #blacktravelmoment #blacktravellers

#melaninonthemap #blacktravelfeed #twerkingismylovelanguage

I chose this image because of the carefree energy the user is exhibiting. This user illustrates the carefree identity of a hottie. The hashtag is used in conversation with other popular Black travel hashtags to promote international travel within culture. Their abundant use of Black travel hashtags reveals their appreciation for travelling. The phrase #blackgirlstraveltoo is used to combat negative assumptions regarding what a frequent traveller looks like. This user's agency to travel abroad while remaining carefree and unapologetic is a common portrayal of the #hotgirl image. By exercising two parallels, in this case travelling the world and promoting ratchet culture, i.e

#twerkingismylovelanguage, this user is dismantling respectability politics and complicating the stereotypical ratchet identity. This user is in motion and displaying her entire body in the photo, an anomaly compared to the selfies shared by other users. Their wanderlust and seek of adventure helps to better understand the identities expressed through the photo.



256 likes

lexie.michel A real hot girl know how to keep em heated 🥵😏 #explorepage #viral #repost #goldenhour #photooftheday #selfies #explore #follow #lakers #forever21 #glowingskin #glowing #melanin #melaninqueen #blackgirlmagic #brownskingirls #savagebarbie #lashes @my_melanin_ #hotgirlsemester #megantheestallion @theestallion #hotgirl #newyork #ny @forever21 #livingmybestlife #doinme #thecity @teenvogue #teenvogue

User: @lexie.michel

Key hashtags: #melaninqueen #blackgirlmagic #hotgirlsemester #brownskingirls #doinme #glowing #melanin

This photo stood out to me artistically. The user embodies the essence of capturing a picture that displays the features of yourself you like best. The direct sunlight shining on her to properly showcase her melanin was captured dutifully. This user's selfie is notable for their use of hashtags that promote the beauty of Blackness. The hashtags chosen to work in conversation with #hotgirl directly uplifts Black women and their identities. This image is not solely for aesthetic purposes, but also a message of healthy self-esteem and confidence. Selfies are modern self portraits that seek to capture the individual's best angle. They represent how the individual views themselves and how they want the world to view them. There is a level of self-love involved with sharing a selfie via social media. The user's hashtags contextualize their selfie. The use of #hotgirl along with the abundance of hashtags express how the user feels about themselves. It tells their story through hashtag form.



User: @chelseakay

Key hashtags: #hotgirlsemester #collegegirl #beatthosebooks #getitsis #studyinspiration

This user shares a selfie in their work uniform. Their use of #hotgirl works in conversation with their professional and academic life. As a college student, Megan Thee Stallion made a play on #hotgirlsummer by creating #hotgirlsemester, showcasing the multifacet of the #hotgirl image. An article in Teen Vogue promotes Megan Thee Stallion's academic spin on #hotgirl, "Synonyms? *Hot Nerd Fall*, as stated by Thee Stallion herself in an interview with Access Hollywood. Basically, you take all that hot girl energy to the classroom and be the best student you can be" (Nieves). Megan reiterates #hotgirl as being more than a summertime persona by reimagining how the phrase works in multiple contexts. In a tweet, Megan Thee Stallion revealed her hit song, "Cash Shit," was written in between classes. As a Texas Southern University student and award-winning rapper, Megan Thee Stallion #hotgirl identity is timeless and works in diverse settings.

My research reveals that the hashtag #hotgirl as a performative identity works as a tool for Black women to rearticulate their identities. My analysis uncovers that #hotgirl helps Black women to reimagine the phrase based on how they view themselves. Through this reimagining, they are exposed to other identity markers, which may have already existed without the verbiage to fully express them. Using the phrase as a tool for self-exploration and expression is important for Black women agency. From an early age Black women are given negative words and phrases to limit their individuality. By garnering tools that expands their linguistic repertoire ensures that Black women can dutifully express themselves confidently. Megan Thee Stallion's movement to liberate women started as a personal identity marker that was expressed through her music and

social media platform. This illustrates the importance of sharing self-love to a larger audience. Her spread of influence does not rely solely on coming up with a catchy phrase, but continuously living in the truth of the identity.

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Vita

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name | <i>Dasharah Green</i> |
| Baccalaureate Degree | <i>Bachelor of Arts, John Jay College, NY Major: English</i> |
| Date Graduated | <i>May, 2017</i> |