

"Erotic Revolutionaries" Defy Gender Double Standard

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The conventional wisdom for polite conversation is that one should avoid hot-button topics such as sex, race and religion. Having tackled religious figures in previous works, sociologist Shayne Lee now wades into the dicey currents of race and sex in his new book, *Erotic Revolutionaries: Black Women, Sexuality and Popular Culture*.

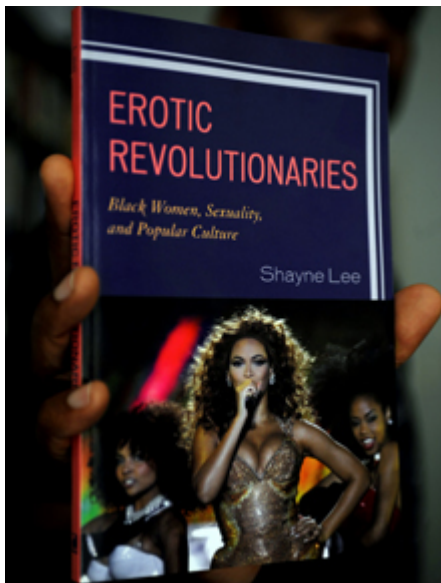


Sociologist Shayne Lee calls for feminists to support “erotic revolutionaries” who are challenging what he calls “the politics of respectability.” (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Academic scrutiny, of course, plays a different role in society than does polite conversation, yet [Lee](#), who also is the author of *T.D. Jakes: America's New Preacher* and co-author of *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace*, acknowledges his role as provocateur.

“Black feminist thought has preoccupied itself entirely in a defensive stance against the hypersexualization of black female bodies in pop culture,” says Lee.

“Here I come saying we shouldn't throw away all the pop culture, because if we lean too far to this defensive side, presenting black women only as dignified, we create a double standard in which men are allowed sexual agency and to relish their sexual power in ways that women are not allowed.”



In his new book, Lee discusses cultural icons such as Beyoncé.

The book surveys a number of cultural icons including pop stars Beyoncé and Janet Jackson, tennis great Serena Williams and “erotic queens of comedy” Mo’Nique and Barbara Carlisle ? all of whom, contends Lee, have introduced “empowering sexual scripts for women so they don't have to buy into the narrative that says women must be chaste, that they must live with a certain kind of dignity that men are not forced to live with.”

While the “third wave feminism” that emerged in the 1990s encourages women to proactively embrace their sexual identities, black feminists, particularly those in academia, have distanced themselves from this approach.

Lee says he understands the reluctance.

“Because black women have been sexually exploited ? whether it was by the slave master or later through the media, it has been the fervent [black] feminist message to say stop hypersexualizing black female bodies.”

Rather than looking down on these erotic revolutionaries or branding them as “sluts,” society, says Lee, should “sit at their feet and learn about sexual agency from the various ways they deconstruct these norms of respectability.”