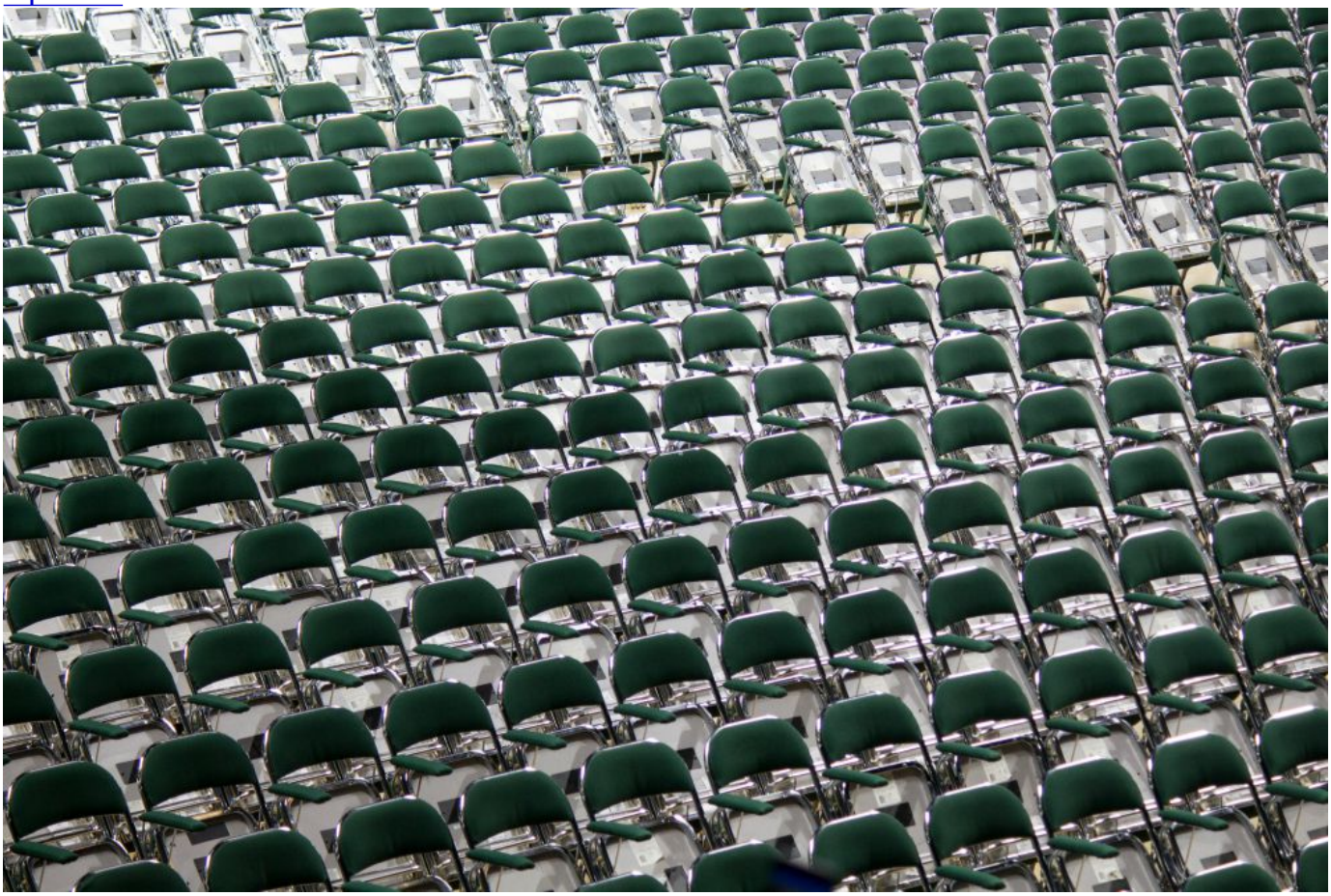
Opinion



(Unsplash/Katie Montgomery)



by Mariam Williams

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I've spent the past several weeks (and will spend the next several) marketing the online courses I've developing and feeling gross and conflicted about it. All goods and services need to be marketed; otherwise, how will anyone know they exist? And if the people who need them don't know they exist, how will they get whatever it is they need to eat, groom themselves, keep warm, maintain their health, or improve their lives in some way?

Still, it feels very capitalist and false. I have to post to social media more than I like to, spend more time on it than I like to, write captions I don't usually write in a voice that's not my own, and write and edit them carefully because I still maintain my primary occupation as "writer," and I don't want an agent to come across a poorly-written Instagram post. I have to nudge people to take an action. "Comment below! Tap the link in my bio! Get on my A-List! DM me!" I have to use exclamation points. My writing almost never includes exclamation points.

Considering my courses will be rooted in black feminism, a theoretical framework that is authentic and anti-capitalist at its core, marketing myself feels extra slimy. But it's also the same framework that reminds me this situation isn't my fault. Various systems of oppression are so deeply ingrained in our society that they've made shameless self-promotion necessary. Black feminism is also the framework that edifies me, reminds me of my intersectional identity and my authentic self, and allows me to recognize and defend my choices to myself while experiencing this conflict.

If this were an Instagram post, I'd flip the perspective here and ask something like, "What edifies you? What theoretical (or other) frameworks do you use to remind yourself of who you are?"

Some of my marketing is research, and one way I did research over the past month was by talking to other black women. I spoke to one woman who probably could identify with my inner conflict about self-promotion because she's experiencing conflict as a woman of color in Catholicism. She treasures her faith but feels like its rituals don't make room for her intersectional identity and lived experience.

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Makes sense. When leaders of various religions entered quiet rooms hundreds or thousands of years ago and emerged with books of rites, how many were thinking of black women, indigenous women, or other women of color? What framework were they using when they decided what our rituals would be? Whose identity and lived experience was at the forefront of their thoughts?

And if that identity is different from the demographics of our churches now, why do we continue with these rituals?

I know — because it takes prayer and conferences and assemblies and votes and more rituals and years to make large-scale change. But what if that change were in the homily or a prayer that hadn't been standardized?

It always feels awkward to ask those flip-the-perspective questions. It's not that I don't want to know; it's that I feel like the question is intrusive. You were just going to Instagram to see what shade of lipstick someone you follow is wearing today, and here's someone asking deep questions about your life. But when people do respond, they seem eager to share and grateful for the opportunity. They get the chance to share and reaffirm who they are.

Let's find more opportunities for everyone to do that, even in the most rigid of rituals.

[Mariam Williams is a Kentucky writer living in Philadelphia. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing and certificate in public history from Rutgers University-Camden. She is a contributor to the anthology Faithfully Feminist and blogs at MariamWilliams.com. Follow her on Twitter @missmariamw.]

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