

Gatherings

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Exploring Feminist Place-Making*

Article 5

April 2024

The Familiar Feels Like Family: A Black Feminists' Approach to Placemaking and Gathering for Black Women in the Academy

Katrina Marie Overby
Rochester Institute of Technology, kmogpt@rit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/gatherings>



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Overby, Katrina Marie (2024) "The Familiar Feels Like Family: A Black Feminists' Approach to Placemaking and Gathering for Black Women in the Academy," *Gatherings*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 5.
Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/gatherings/vol1/iss1/5>

This document is posted at <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/gatherings/vol1/iss1/5> and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at . For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjf.edu.

The Familiar Feels Like Family: A Black Feminists' Approach to Placemaking and Gathering for Black Women in the Academy

Abstract

As a Black feminist and activist, cultivating supportive and thriving communal spaces for Black women academics has been central to the growth and success of my peers, colleagues, and myself.

Keywords

feminism, African American women, education, popular culture

The Familiar Feels Like Family: A Black Feminist's Approach to Placemaking and Gathering for Black Women in the Academy

Katrina Marie Overby, PhD
Rochester Institute of Technology

Abstract: As a Black feminist and activist, cultivating supportive and thriving communal spaces for Black women academics has been central to the growth and success of my peers, colleagues, and myself.

Keywords: *Feminism, African American women, Education, Popular culture, Placemaking*

I am a community connector, conduit, and collaborator. It is my personal and professional responsibility and praxis to engage in intentional placemaking for Black women in the academy. My work largely explores Black digital and social media practices and identity formation, Black women's digital discourse online, and sisterhoods in the academy. In collaboration with other Black women scholars, we've contributed to the understanding and knowledge of Black women academics' digital placemaking and the gathering of academic sisterhoods.

For instance, our chapter “#BlackInTheIvory: Utilizing Twitter to Explore Black Womxn's Experiences in the Academy”, we explored narrative agency and created a found poem that expressed Black women scholars' collective stories of experiencing cultural taxation, racism, invisible labor, microaggressions, tokenism, and barriers in the academy. We argue that social media has been used by Black women academics as a liberatory space to be seen, heard, validated, and supported (Fields and Overby, 2022).

For me, healing in the academy takes place when I collaborate and network with fellow Black women scholars, activists, and creatives in the digital and physical spheres. Seeking and establishing spaces for Black women scholars who can empathize with my lived experiences, encompassing both the joy and challenges, aligns with and reflects a commitment to the longstanding tradition and history of placemaking for Black women. According to Baldwin et. al (2020), "At the organizational level, Black feminist space- and placemaking in higher education dates as far back as the late 1800s and the rise of the Black women's club Movement" (p. 9). As a Black feminist and activist, cultivating supportive and thriving communal spaces for Black women academics has been central to the growth and success of my peers, colleagues, and myself. In these spaces I am made visible.

Leaning on Katherine McKittrick's book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* on the geographies that Black feminism creates, she states:

I suggest that black feminism can, and in many cases has, contributed to geography through meaningful political practices and agendas. What I mean by this is that black women have an investment in space, and spatial politics, precisely because they have been relegated to the margins of knowledge and have therefore been imagined as outside of the production of space (2006, p. 54).

I argue that intentional placemaking for Black women in the academy creates fictive kinship (Howell et al., 2022), fuels our commitment to advocating for change, cultivates long lasting connections and curates progress toward scholarly contributions and pedagogical praxis. Reflecting on my own approach and experience with placemaking for Black women scholars, I am invested in the transformative production of placemaking even when this type of labor is not rewarded within the academy yet necessary.

Lately, my Black feminist principles have guided me to actively bring together Black women academics supported by institutional grants. Seeking internal grants to support these efforts challenges the institution to support its most overused and undervalued faculty population. With the support of a team of six other Black women faculty members from my institution (Lomax, 2023), the realization of hosting one of the most significant gatherings of Black women faculty in Upstate New York proved to be a success. We hosted the *inaugural Sister Scholars Connect: Black Women*

Faculty Writing Retreat in September 2023, at a private and secluded lodge with a mission of (1) facilitating scholarly accountability and progress, and (2) building connections and networks.

The enthusiastic gratitude for hosting the retreat suggests our participants had long awaited the opportunity for new connections, time to focus on research, and in a beautiful place surrounded by water and nature to breathe and process. Several requests were voiced to keep our sister scholars connected and engaged. In the near future, we are hosting a book club series coupled with virtual writing sprints, guest speakers, and a small scholarship symposium to share our work. This effort continues to intentionally impact our growing network of Black women scholars in Upstate New York.

I have benefited from and continue to seek spaces with Black scholars, feminists, and activists. My sisterhoods in the academy continue to fill the holes I didn't know existed. To be clear, placemaking is vital for Black women academics. And when we gather—it feels like family.

References

- Baldwin, A. N., Brantuo, N. A., & Pichardo, J. P. (2020). Black Feminisms and Pedagogical Space-Making: Public Knowledge and Praxis in the Contemporary Moment. *Handbook of social justice interventions in education*, 1-24.
- Fields, C. W., & Overby, K. M. (2022). # BlackInTheIvory: Utilizing Twitter to Explore Black Womxn's Experiences in the Academy. In C. J. Porter, V. T. Sulé, & N. N. Croom (Eds.), *Black Feminist Epistemology, Research, and Praxis* (pp. 107-114). Routledge.
- Howell, G. L., Fields, C. W., Williamson, F. A., & Overby, K. M. (2022). Let's "SLAY" Together: Building Sisterhood, Scholarly Identity, and Solidarity among Black Women Doctoral Students. In T. B. Jones, D. Davis-Maye, S. Rahming, & J. Andrew (Eds.), *Black Sisterhoods: Paradigms and Praxis* (pp. 145-158). Demeter Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2dd470m.12>

Lomax, J. (2023, October 2). RIT Faculty Host Inaugural Sister Scholars Connect Writing Retreat. *Diversity and Inclusion News*.
<https://www.rit.edu/diversity/news/rit-faculty-host-inaugural-sister-scholars-connect-writing-retreat>

McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle*. U of Minnesota Press.



Katrina Marie Overby, PhD

Assistant Professor
School of Communication
Rochester Institute of Technology

Dr. Overby specializes in communication, race, gender, and identity through a Black feminist perspective. Her research focuses on Black social and digital media, digital discourse about and by Black women, and Black women's epistemologies. She recently led the Sister Scholars Connect: Black Women Faculty Writing Retreat and has been a keynote speaker at events honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at RIT and Women's History Month at Le Moyne College. Finally, Dr. KO is an activist scholar, and her praxis is rooted in Black women's placemaking.