Gatherings
an interdisciplinary, intersectional feminist journal

Lessons in Feminist Placemaking

"Family Reunion" - Art quilt by narrative artists Ellen M. Blalock | *ellen-blalock.squarespace.com*

This volume attends to the simultaneity of the questions that make up feminist placemaking: Where do feminists gather? How do they gather? What is the purpose of their gathering? What is the impact?

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Welcome to Gatherings: Studies in Feminism

The Editors-in-Chief

Our first volume of *Gatherings* is complete, and we welcome readers to this place for peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary, intersectional approaches to feminist research, narrative, art, and criticism. Feminist journals featuring long-form research are thriving and deeply needed in this time when higher education is facing threats to faculty, staff and student free speech, DEI initiatives, and institutional funding and equity efforts.[1] *Gatherings* is a journal that adds to these current offerings and is distinct in its three-part mission:

- a commitment to inclusion rather than academic gatekeeping (About This Journal[2]
- a challenge to academic hierarchies of social difference and academic rank and distinction,
- and a welcome approach to genres of writing and expression beyond the long-form journal article. *Gatherings* provides access to new forms of feminist knowledge creation and co-creation.

Our Editorial Board[3] features feminist leaders primarily in the western and central New York region where the Journal is founded. However, the content of the Journal is not limited by geography, and we seek national and international contributions. *Gatherings* features feminist interventions into the justice issues of our time, from our first volume interrogating intersectional methods of

[1] *See:* Gretzinger, Erin, et al. "Tracking Higher Ed's Dismantling of DEI." *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* July 15, 2024, www.chronicle.com/article/tracking-higher-eds-dismantling-of-dei.
[2] "About This Journal", *Gatherings,* fisherpub.sjf.edu/gatherings/about.html
[3] "Editorial Board", *Gatherings,* fisherpub.sjf.edu/gatherings/editorialboard.html

feminist placemaking, to upcoming volumes examining transnational feminisms on college campuses, transnational wellness studies, and undergraduate and graduate student research. We welcome special issues to nurture specific themes and problems, as well as general submissions: Submission Guidelines[4] Again, welcome: we hope you find in *Gatherings* a provocative, relevant, action-oriented journal that meets our moment.

[4] Submission Guidelines, *Gatherings,* fisherpub.sjf.edu/gatherings/policies.html

Introducing Volume 1 of Gatherings: Lessons in Feminist Placemaking in the Present Time

Jill Swiencicki
St. John Fisher University

Is it possible to be a feminist while mostly laboring in solitude? To be a feminist and rarely or never commit to being in community with other feminists? Those of us who founded this journal see many feminists succeed, and even thrive, by doing individual research, service, teaching and art. In professional and community contexts that are still largely designed by and for male leaders and that resist diversity and equity, there are clear benefits to feminists in working independently. Adding the messiness of feminist coalitional work onto the pressures of navigating places not designed for diversity and equity creates additional power dynamics to manage. Feminist gathering also risks the possibility of inertia as those coalitional dynamics get addressed or worse, as they fester, replicating the erasures of dominant contexts.

These risks are real and maybe even inevitable. Yet despite all of them, our region's feminists have historically sought to bring together feminists in western and central New York with the purpose of discovering shared paths of experience, inquiry and action. One of these recent feminist places of connection was the Seneca Falls Dialogues (hyperlink https://tbsfd.wordpress.com/), which convened scholars, community members, artists, students and teachers in the town of Seneca Falls every two years to dialogue on topics of importance to the moment. This work extended the feminist promise of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's 1848 suffrage meeting in the town's Wesleyan Chapel (hyperlink https://www.womenofthehall.org/). Instead of mythologizing such places though, this feminist placemaking reckoned with the betrayals of the past

to critically investigate and transform them (Swiencicki et. al. 25). Even still, the ongoing and historic betrayals of white feminists to robust equity-seeking endures, and these betrayals showed up in our early efforts with the Seneca Falls Dialogues. The challenge of feminist placemaking here and everywhere is to gather for impactful work while robustly attending to the differences within the collective. That is, in great part, the goal of this new journal.

As sociologist Asma Mehan asserts, place is, after all, always designed within struggles for power. "Despite the enduring influence of patriarchal and hierarchical structures that render these spaces overtly gendered," Mehan argues that "it is within these contexts that women's actions become particularly transformative" ("Informal" 1). Mehan's research is central to understanding the strategies of feminist placemaking in Iran and in the global south and has critical applications for feminists broadly responding to repressive hegemonic systems. Mehan emphasizes the potential of placemaking "to reshape and imbue spaces with feminist ideals," encompassing "physical modifications and embedding social narratives, historical events, and cultural values" into a given place ("Digital" 3). Indeed, as Cresswell asserts, place "is not simply a passive outcome of social processes; place is, once established, a tool in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation" (Cresswell 46). The social and spatial are mutually constitutive of each other. For those not in the hegemonic majority, we know this dynamic of political and cultural imposition and resistance all too well.

That is why placemaking has been a central feature of feminist agency and action. Feminist placemaking happens wherever feminists gather: in communities, legislatures, classrooms, scholarship, organizations, economies, artistic projects, in language and discourse, public protests, families. It has created some of the most clear and compelling designs for and enactments of just, equitable structures in which human rights and flourishing can be realized. We see this in the discursive placemaking of the Combahee River Collective, and the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, for just two examples—collectives that open new imaginative realms for intersectional knowledge building and material change. In the decades of commentary on and analyses of feminist placemaking across the disciplines, familiar concepts

persist, concepts such as safety, agency, betrayal, solidarity, difference, voice, and allyship. Through the different ways these concepts have been treated across generations and movements, foundational assumptions about feminist gathering exist:

- Feminist methods of analysis, praxis, and organization offer a vision of equity, justice, and flourishing in the face of oppression.
- Whiteness has for too long been the structural and normative racial component of feminist gathering.
- Historical intragroup betrayals and enduring distrust still needs reparative and restorative practices.
- Intersectional, transnational, decolonial, queer methods of analysis of difference, among others, have enhanced our ability to understand and design feminist spaces.
- The political and cultural problems of our present time—climate change, settler colonialism, genocide, the rise of authoritarian politics and the weakening of democracies—are too urgent for feminists to balkanize and retreat into our places of comparative safety.

In this volume, Roberta Hurtado sums up this knot of constraint and opportunity, arguing that we must reject "the lessons [we've] learned from the colonial state around [us]: separate and survive…so that those with power can [not] divide and conquer." We do so, she urges, by listening with the intent to find "the ways to speak to myself and others, to hear myself and others." Hurtado concedes that "even in safe spaces, it's hard to be with each other in all our differences," yet she chooses to focus on what she calls feminist "horizons of potential," the outcomes of our commitment to equity. In Volume 1 of *Gatherings*, scholars identify such horizons of potential, and we see new concepts emerge in these reflections–terms like vulnerability, rupture, performance, vigilance, humility, violence, care, listening, and virtual/digital modes of presence. The contributors in this volume attend to the simultaneity of the questions that make up feminist placemaking: where do feminists gather? How do they gather? What is the purpose of their gathering? What is the impact? In their answers to these questions, two major areas of inquiry emerge.

Methods of design for feminist placemaking are a prevailing area of reflection. Inspired by the Black women's club movements of the 1800s, Katrina Overby

describes designing virtual and physical spaces for Black women academics to gather in support of their research, and to give voice to their experiences in higher education. Overby discusses the profoundly motivating experiences of these gatherings and cites McKittrick as she urges others to engage in connection: "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." Danika Medak-Salzman echoes these observations in her description of the virtual and face-to-face gatherings of her writing group and its core practices of setting intentions, addressing trauma, and holding space. Working in the tradition of Anna Julia Cooper, Jaynelle Nixon reflects on the often-unstated assumptions of normalcy that guide feminist gathering. Nixon argues that "when the most marginalized people feel (and are) safe, seen, acknowledged, and welcomed, all will be safe, seen, acknowledged, and welcomed." Cassandra Scherr takes the racial politics of the academy head-on, creating public performance art with her colleagues that calls up these exclusionary norms in order to critique them. Scherr reveals the inherent performativity of our professional identities, the stakes of our performance of self, and how collective performance can help us imagine new forms of truth and agency. Finally, in gathering feminist pragmatist philosophers in Seneca Falls, New York, Barbara Lowe reflects on her intentional feminist conference design: the centering of indigenous women in the region, allowing space and time for critique and repair, and the need for humility in design when decentering Western philosophical traditions of knowing.

A second area of inquiry are contributions that address the mitigation of injury and trauma in feminist gatherings and examine how to proceed as injury occurs. In combating the isolation that can lead to violence, Catherine Cerulli reflects on her decades-long career of domestic and intimate violence prevention, focusing on the community impact lab she founded, one that welcomes survivors to the investigative and advisory team, and on the "delicate balance between doing this work while protecting team members from secondary trauma." She sees how this work adds "benefits to our city, such as the development of a transdisciplinary clinic to address domestic violence, while also growing as individuals and a community of colleagues, striving to do our best." Focusing on mentoring, Lisa J. Cunningham reflects on her students' presentation at a

regional, undergraduate queer theory conference where they experienced first-hand exposure to how "existing gender and power dynamics can be reified in the very spaces that purport to uphold equity—whether within the academy or outside of it." Queer conference themes do not automatically create queer-designed places, and Cunningham addresses how "language can perpetuate oppression, but it can also resist it." She outlines a politics of refusal, stating, "I see my role in part as developing students' ability to respond to marginalization in whatever place they find it . . . Sometimes, the greatest student growth is possible when they enter places designated as inclusive and discover that there is much feminist placemaking yet to do." Finally, Smriti Jacob is a feminist community leader who embodies the work of designing spaces that create equity, from founding Rochester's only independent news organization, *The Rochester Beacon*, to the creation of *The Oasis Lab*, a pipeline to support student journalists committed to independent media. In her reflection, Jacob focuses not on these gatherings, but on confronting the isolation and loneliness of negotiating patriarchal structures.

Along with these contributions, this volume features two specific cases of present-day problems: feminist responses to the assault on reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare, and divisions within feminism on the genocidal war in Gaza. The first case featured in this volume involves the sharp erosion of abortion rights in the wake of the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. In her tribute to Sarah Weddington, who argued successfully at the Supreme Court in the *Roe v. Wade* case, Barb LeSavoy argues for the importance of feminist leaders like Weddington as they gather in spaces of lawmaking to secure rights for the majority. In personal terms, LeSavoy lays out the stakes: "reproductive freedom is about being free to determine when, how, with whom, and if birthing a child is right for me. It is about being free. If I am not able to find a job, earn a paycheck, put a roof over my head, feed myself and my family, secure healthcare coverage, then I am not free. If I am not free, I cannot freely care for myself or others. We are not all free." Jill Swiencicki reflects on her placemaking role as a clinic escort at Planned Parenthood. "Bearing witness to this post-Roe landscape," Swiencicki states, "I am learning that a feminist place is one that's assembled for care, justice, equity and restoration, and it is always in danger of erosion or erasure. A feminist place must be vigilantly and lovingly tended, guarded. Feminist placemaking is the

constant struggle to secure a just and inclusive place for agency, solidarity, and action."

Asking "Where is the place for Muslim Feminists in the North American Academy?" Hasan, Jabr, Ali, Malik and Ternikar reflect on the inadequacy of national feminist organizations in responding to the precarity of Palestinians in Gaza and the diaspora. In describing their experiences at the 2023 NWSA meeting, this group of Palestinian, Pakistani, Indian and Black Muslim feminists discuss strategies of refusal and regathering, arguing that Muslim feminist places are being built "right now in the ruptures, not by individuals but through a collective, just as we write this reflection as a collective." The authors describe their marginalization in the conference programming and events, as well as ways they responded to it in the moment: creating new spaces to gather, as well as ceding their own panels to expand visibility for other Palestinian Muslim feminists. They write that "solidarities are not devoid of rupture, awkward moments, and uncertainties – but in the tension and stress points, placemaking opportunities show themselves."

Other inquiries into feminist placemaking beg our attention: feminist actions to mitigate our climate catastrophe and support renewable energy; feminist geographers and agricultural scientists rejecting our industrial food system, its exploitation of the land, and its interspecies oppression; feminist labor activists advocating for equity in all aspects of labor relations; feminist indigenous activists calling for reparations and return of indigenous lands here in the US and around the world. We seek feminist thought leaders to guide such special issues into fruition here, taking up the issues impacting us more deeply in the present time.

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Radical Methods

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Abstract: Feminist Spaces are hard to create and define. The construction of such space necessitates unpacking how power dynamics manifest among and between women, and the importance of deconstructing these. But such a task is fraught with difficulty. "Radical Methods" offers reflections on different ways that Feminists of Color, and especially Latina Feminisms, have attempted to work through such difficulties and my own engagements with scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa who have offered methods for moving towards such opportunities.

***Keywords**: Feminist theory, Methodology, Latina Feminisms, Space*

Place and space making is hard for feminists. I don't mean to over-generalize, but I think that statement is true. When I think of what it means for feminists to come together in the spirit of our belief in a better future, I think of scholars such as Chela Sandoval and her discussion of what it means to be a woman of color at the National Women's Studies Association Conference. I think of the Latina Feminist Group. I think of the Combahee River Collective. And I think of countless other examples where allies in the fight against gender violence find themselves confronted with the reality that even in safe spaces, it's hard to be with each other in all our differences. To not try to elide or hide from our differences in service of some sense of there being "one" gender violence that we rally to fight against.

In truth, I think that place and space making is about a methodology. And, like all good methodologies, it is as much based in concrete reality as it is the horizons of potential that we hope to continue reaching towards.

My method for place and space making begins with intentionally attempting to be my best self. This means that I must start where I always do when I'm trying to think and act from my best self: my bookshelves. Filled with the voices of

generations of writers, I look to the pages of *This Bridge Called My Back*. I look to *Making Face/Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. The words in both fill me with joy and hope, bringing me to tears as I move through the different raw entries that remind me that—in order to be truly in a space or place with others—I must make myself "vulnerable enough to love" (Jaramillo 78).

What an opportunity. What a terrifyingly beautiful opportunity. Terrifying, because what if the people I am being vulnerable with reject me? What if they enact the very behaviors that make it so that I can't be safely vulnerable as so happens when we need to be our most humble, our most willing to see ourselves and others as we truly are? Beautiful, because even if that happens we at least know where we stand with each other and if it doesn't then what a chance to actually see each other?

My next step is to consider what I need in order to be vulnerable. I think of Gloria Anzaldúa and the path to conocimiento that she describes in "Now Let Us Shift." When heightened emotions emerge, it is easy to forget to stay anchored in my best self. How easy it is to circle back to the lessons I've learned from the colonial state around me: separate and survive…so that those with power can divide and conquer. I see myself and others reenact the lessons we have been trained to do. These lessons, and what they bring to fruition, feel safe: whether it is because we are driven by ego, or a sense of self-righteousness, or jealousy, or our own traumas that we reenact. If I reenact these lessons, I can tell myself that other people are to blame, or that the differences between us are insurmountable. I can fall into the trap of seeing our differences as deficiencies, rather than creating a space of respect from which we can draw strength to build coalition. And I don't want to do that. If I am going to make place and space, I won't do it.

The next steps are about finding the ways to speak to myself and others, to hear myself and others. To self-reflect, to critique. To engage with myself and others with honesty and a belief in our abilities to speak and act from our best selves. To sit with one another and not give up faith and hope in one another. Vulnerable enough to be humble, to hear one another and see one another. To accept each other where we are and believe that—together—we are all worthy of working together to keep pushing forward to the horizons of potential we know exist.

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

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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 werk 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 werk. 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.

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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.

Feminist Community-Building in Transient Places

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Abstract: Cunningham discusses mentoring students to co-create intersectional and action-oriented feminist communities within and beyond the college campus. Using both a regional and national conference as brief case studies, she examines attempts at silencing student voices in purportedly inclusive places and exemplifies the necessity of modeling speaking out in response to oppression. Through a politics of refusal, she argues that a central part of her role as a Gender and Sexuality Studies professor is to help students develop their ability to respond to marginalization wherever they find it, even and especially when it exists in places that claim to be feminist and inclusive but that instead offer resistance.

K***eywords***: *Feminist mentoring, Placemaking, Politics of refusal, Marginalization*

In my career in Gender Studies, and specifically as Director at a liberal arts university with a minor, feminist placemaking is complex, not the least of which because the communities I am building and the places in which they are built are themselves transient. When placemaking focuses on the arc of undergraduate learning, time is ephemeral. I may have a semester, a course, or, as an ideal, a four-year opportunity for knowledge- and relationship-building, but the timeline is always finite. As an academic, I have a largely pedagogical focus where intersectional feminist communities are co-created with students both within and outside of the academy, as well as within and outside of our campus location in Upstate New York. My career is spent navigating the consistent challenges and joys of co-creating intersectional and action-oriented communities on campus, regionally, and nationally. In working with students, place is necessarily broadly defined, as they come from diverse regions and will graduate and dissipate, ideally with the means of continuing to form their own inclusive feminist communities. In my work with students, I occupy a liminal

space between present and future. In many ways, the lesson is to help students understand feminist praxis and the importance of place enough to recreate, with new specificity, the feminist communities they will develop and encounter in the future. In short, it is a lesson on claiming their voice in whatever space they find themselves.

My work is grounded in my own positionality as a white, cis, queer-identified woman who grew up in a working-class family. It is also grounded in pedagogical practice on how to build intersectional feminist communities with students as future scholars and activists. In my doctoral work in Women's Studies, the most impactful lessons came from three scholarly camps grounded in feminist social and political theory: (1) the Black intersectional feminism of scholars like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins who demonstrate that racism and sexism are inextricably bound with gender-identity and class-based oppression; (2) the merits and limitations of standpoint epistemology from Dorothy Smith and Nancy Hartsock, who questioned how and by whom knowledge was produced and who argued that socially and politically marginalized groups may be particularly positioned to critique social structures and dominant groups via their status as possible outsiders; and (3) queer and trans theorists who critiqued binary and essentialist categories of gender identity and orientation. These frameworks provide my own students a structure from which to think about place and their location within it. For me, feminist placemaking is both potentially fraught and liberating. While there is opportunity to create community and belonging, existing gender and power dynamics can be reified in the very spaces that purport to uphold equity—whether within the academy or outside of it. For that reason, I see my role in part as developing students' ability to respond to marginalization in whatever place they find it.

Students benefit from opportunities to blend the theoretical with the experiential–to apply the frameworks they learn to specific feminist places. This happens via discussion within the WGST classroom, but also through discussion with broader audiences across campus and in conferences across the nation. Sometimes, the greatest student growth is possible when they enter places designated as inclusive and discover that there is much feminist placemaking yet to do. To illustrate the pedagogical challenges and successes in helping students

claim inclusion in feminist places both on and off campus, in and out of NYS, I offer two examples.

Just prior to the COVID pandemic, I took three white undergraduate women students who were part of the LGBTQ+ community to present at a regional Queering Religion conference hosted by a Catholic college. Our conference presentation was on the inclusion of same sex marriage in chapels at Catholic affiliated universities. Even though I was listed as the official contact person for the proposal, organizers of the conference contacted my students (via social media, since their emails were not on the form) to request that they "omit the topic of weddings/marriage inclusion in on-campus chapels'' and change their topic to something less potentially divisive. The organizers emphasized that "it can be harder/unlikely to have that inclusion in spaces that are highly/exclusively religious." My students were distressed and felt pressured to change their topic, even though the entire focus of the conference was on intersections of queerness and religious identity. The students considered not going or redoing all their work to quickly create something less polarizing. For me, it was an opportunity to help the students claim their right to be in a purportedly inclusive place and participate in the conversation. I emailed a response declining their request to "omit" our entire topic with a reminder that they had, in fact, knowingly chosen to host a queer conference and that our topic provided an important opportunity for students to engage with their own intersections of queerness and religious identity—a conversation particularly important at religiously affiliated institutions. To their remark that it was "harder/unlikely to have inclusion" in such places, I responded that that made the conversation more rather than less worth having. Our original proposal was ultimately accepted, and despite their trepidation, the students were determined to demonstrate the merit of their work.

Once at the conference, I discovered that our particular panel was "accidentally" not announced among conference participants; consequently, there were only three people in the audience at our session. Again, my students felt discouraged and disappointed, but I encouraged them to engage in conversation about their work during the mealtime as well as in between conference sessions. All of us ended up having meaningful conversations on our topic with other participants that day. To me, this is the best kind of feminist placemaking for its refusal to be

silenced in a location that proclaimed inclusion. I wanted to help them to be unapologetically queer. Feminist research on places of exclusion is critical. The students had encountered many examples of historical resistance to queerness in the semester readings, studied many literal places that reified structures of oppression, but being confronted in the immediacy of their own location underscored the necessity to continue the struggle—particularly in a political climate with such a high degree of anti-queer backlash.

There have been many such opportunities to help students claim their place. While it sometimes comes through researching, and even participating, in places of exclusion, it also comes through informed speech—particularly in moments of anti-queer discourse. At a recent national conference on race in Texas, I brought three Black and Afro Latina women students to present their work with me on building resources for queer inclusion on campus. There were both queer- and straight-identified students in the group, and it was their first ever conference. After the presentation and before any audience member could speak, the moderator of the session, a man of color, spent five minutes talking about why the word "queer" was inappropriate, didn't belong in an academic conversation, and otherwise policing identity while ignoring the content of the actual presentation. His rhetoric was designed to silence and exclude people in marginalized queer and gender positions and deny them the right to name their own identity. In this way, discourse can itself be a kind of contested place. The language we use reflects the values of the culture—what it seeks to endorse and to oppress.

It was another important moment to demonstrate claiming a place. While the students looked at me for guidance and with trepidation as he spoke, I cut off the moderator after five minutes to respond with a brief history of the word and its importance as an identifier, as well as to briefly comment on the 30+ years of academic scholarship on queerness. After I spoke, one of the senior queer-identified students calmly told him that his reaction was one that she had often received, and it was the very reason why queer-inclusive campus resources were necessary. Her discourse resisted the language of oppression; her comment appeared to register with him, and she then led a very eloquent and productive conversation with the audience about discrimination and identity policing on

campuses and the consequent necessity for queer student resources. Language can perpetuate oppression, but it can also resist it. This was an incredibly proud moment in teaching for me where I witnessed a student reclaiming her right to exist in that place.

Over the years of teaching, there have been many opportunities to co-create intersectional feminist communities with students. It is critical that marginalized students learn to claim feminist places as their own, even and especially when such locations offer resistance. While their location on campus may be transitory, owning their authentic voices is a lesson that can persist wherever they ultimately land.

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Black Queer Feminist Placemaking and the Normalization of Difference

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Abstract: This article examines feminist placemaking through a Black feminist lens that employs queer of color critique. It argues that the most important aspect of Black feminist placemaking is an acknowledgment of nonhierarchical difference. Once difference is acknowledged as the norm within any truly feminist space, Black feminist placemaking must be active. This form of placemaking cannot be merely theoretical. Black feminist placemaking must be praxis.

***Keywords**: Placemaking, Othering, Black feminism, Feminist theory, Queer of Color Critique*

In *A Voice from the South* (1892), Anna Julia Cooper claims, "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing for special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'" (31). The term "intersectionality" did not exist during Cooper's lifetime, but she is unequivocally arguing that the intersection of misogyny and racism that Black women experience is such that when Black women are free to enter spaces/places without fear or threats of violence, all Black people will be able to do so. This is because when the most marginalized people feel (and are) safe, seen, acknowledged, and welcomed, all will be safe, seen, acknowledged, and welcomed. She is arguing for normalcy. Contrary to what many believe, normalcy does not negate the power or beauty of difference. Feminist placemaking must recognize and normalize difference.

The recognition of difference is often viewed as a way of "othering" those who do not fit into the norm. Yet, as Adrian Piper explains, "I am, after all, not an other to myself" (2003, 243). In other words, othering is reciprocal. We may see people or groups as "others," but to those people or groups we ourselves are the "others." Imagining oneself as an "other" can be jarring, especially if one is part of a dominant group. Nonetheless, this realization of the reciprocal nature of othering can be liberating and result in the normalization of difference. If we are all an other's other, we are all different, and difference no longer serves to reinforce artificial hierarchies of normalcy. At its most basic definition, "normal" simply means typical, usual, or ordinary. If we are all different in comparison, difference is the norm.

Furthermore, race and gender are not the only forms of difference that must be acknowledged in feminist placemaking. The intersections of queer and disabled must be attended to along with class difference. When queerness, disability, and class are accounted for, the compounded nature of marginalization becomes apparent. This is what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to when she discusses "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (1987, 3). Put another way, these are people who deviate from established norms in myriad ways that include sexuality, gender nonconformity, and physicality. In her discussion of borderlands, Anzaldúa is analyzing normalcy through the culturally established hierarchy that relegates those of us who are multiply othered to the borders of normalcy. A feminist place does not relegate anyone to the borders. Difference cannot be equated with deviance in a feminist space.

A feminist space/place does not ask that we conform to societal norms. Additionally, a feminist space does not ignore difference. Difference must be met head on with acknowledgment, respect, and acceptance. As Audre Lorde explains, we are not separated by difference. We are separated by hierarchical assumptions of difference (1995, 376). Once the oppressive hierarchies of difference are removed, difference is no longer deviant. Difference simply becomes the natural state of being. When this occurs in a feminist space, all will feel welcome in that space.

However, feminist placemaking is more than mere feeling. A feminist place/space is not simply metaphorical or theoretical. Feminist placemaking is praxis. It necessitates action, dedication, and determination that result in

physical feminist space. The need for material reality cannot be ignored. Those of us who experience violence based on our differences do not have the luxury of limiting feminist placemaking to discourse. Katherine McKittrick discusses the violence that occurs when racism and space converge and argues that "part of our intellectual task is, then, to perhaps get in touch with the materiality of our analytical worlds" (2020, 11). In other words, our discourse should aim for material reality. How does the physical place I have been discussing look? How does it function? What is present in this space?

If difference is truly recognized, the feminist place will be apparent. For example, feminist placemaking requires accessibility. People of all abilities will be accommodated within this space. A space that excludes by design is not a feminist place. If all are welcome, it will be assured that all can physically enter. Feminist placemaking also necessitates diversity. Even feminist places that are group specific should be diverse because no group is a monolith. Marginalized groups (and multiply othered members within a group) should be able to see themselves in the artwork, literature, programs, staff, and volunteers of a feminist place. Finally, a feminist place must provide resources for those who need them because a feminist space recognizes economic disparities.

Understanding the myriad ways people are othered and queered and actively working to normalize difference is the praxis of Black queer feminist placemaking. This requires intention and action on the part of those with the power to create feminist spaces. Asking questions and listening to the needs of others is of the utmost importance, but being proactive is a necessity. A feminist place is not one that simply tells marginalized people to share their needs and concerns. No one should have to ask to be included. People should know they are included by the accessibility and diversity of the space. A long history of excluding marginalized groups and a long history of marginalized groups needing to fight for basic rights places the onus of normalizing difference squarely on the shoulders of those in power.

To paraphrase and broaden Anna Julia Cooper's concept, when a queer, disabled, Black woman from any socio-economic class is able to enter a space "in the quiet dignity" of her personhood, "without violence and without suing

for special patronage, then and there, the whole [Human] race enters with" her into that welcoming feminist place.

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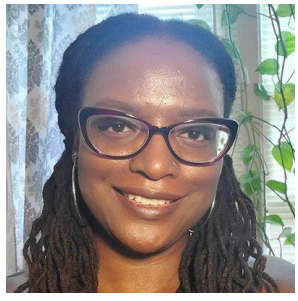

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‘Your body is your story . . . & only you can write it’: Feminist Placemaking at Planned Parenthood

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Abstract: In this reflection, Swiencicki makes the argument for the value of public art in feminist placemaking. Through an analysis of the mural on the Planned Parenthood building in Rochester, New York, she posits that art can hold a space for pregnant peoples' personhood amidst a thoroughly contested place for accessing healthcare. Working from a reproductive justice lens, she delineates how the mural's composition helps the organization hold a space for agency and care in the present moment. Swiencicki suggests that art can go even further and open the possibility of spatial repair—acknowledging the exclusions that are built into the history of cities like Rochester—as well as the repair of legacies of abuse: the history of unequal and abusive treatment of women and people of color in medical settings. She argues that feminists need to affiliate with such places and adopt a stance of care and vigilance.

Keywords: *Feminism, Architecture - Psychological aspects, Abortion services - North America, Public art*

There is a mural at our Planned Parenthood clinic in Rochester, New York. It spans the length of the wall facing the street. It features Rachel McKibbens, a Mexican American poet living in Rochester. McKibbens is rendered gazing upward, framed by a kind of halo. Her extended arm and open palm suggest she is freeing the blue bird that is taking flight.

Figure 1. Rutherford, Sarah. Her Voice Carries: Rachel McKibbens. 2017, Rochester, New York. Used with permission of the artist.

Flowers are featured across the scene, and they are in full bloom. The image behind McKibbens is a pink door, a reference to the Pink Door Writer's Workshop, a writing retreat she founded for LGBTQI poets of color that culminated in public readings across the city. McKibbens supports poets who have been marginalized in their creative process and in their daily lives and helps them find community. In an interview with the artist who painted the mural, Sarah Rutherford, McKibbens sums up her motives for doing this literary, antiracist, queer-positive work by saying, "It makes us less killable" ("Rachel's Voice").

The statement at the top of the mural is McKibbens's, and it reads: "Your body is your Story/its chapters full of Adventure & Hardships & Living/& only you can Write It." I am grateful to dwell amidst this mural during my volunteer shifts as a clinic escort at this Planned Parenthood. En route to my shift, I drive past the mural and turn into the clinic's driveway, avoiding eye contact with the protesters, their shrill bullhorns, waving their "gift bags" for the clients. In the United States, abortion clinics largely exist under siege in defensive, crouched positions in their neighborhoods—no murals, and certainly no affirmations about a person's right to their own life "story." This embattled existence is chronicled in numerous places, such as Lauren Rankin's history of clinic escorts, *Bodies on the Line*, and in Eyal Press's book *Absolute Convictions* which chronicles the violent clinic protests of the 1990s in Buffalo, New York. Abortion clinics are what feminist architect Lori A. Brown calls "thoroughly contested spaces" (2). To

get access to care, pregnant people are often forced to run a gauntlet of restrictions: misinformation, physical obstacles, verbal threats, legislative obstacles and, increasingly, state legislative bans.

Feminist architects, urban planners, and geographers are motivated to design places to mitigate the politicization and vulnerability of pregnant people's bodies, the bodies of poor people, people of color, people seeking aid against violence. Bearing witness to this post-Roe landscape, I am learning that a feminist place is one that's assembled for care, justice, equity, and restoration, and it is always in danger of erosion or erasure. A feminist place must be vigilantly and lovingly tended, guarded. Feminist placemaking is the constant struggle to secure a just and inclusive place for agency, solidarity, and action.

Our Rochester, New York, Planned Parenthood stands emplaced in part through this mural. Art can be this sentinel, and I believe that public art plays a role in helping feminists keep hold of our contested places. The mural is part of Rutherford's Rochester-based series, *Her Voice Carries*. As she explains on her website, Rutherford's aim is to connect our "fragmented," segregated city through murals that feature women of color community organizers in Rochester. This aim of pulling fragments together to form a new connection echoes Manuel DeLanda's argument about place: that the meaning of a place is always, inherently unstable. He argues that a place is an assemblage of component parts—those components can be discursive, material, architectural, geographic and/or virtual, and feature flow, movement, and mobility (54). The social and spatial are mutually constitutive of each other, with some components stabilizing the intended meaning of the place, and other components forcing it to transform into a different assemblage with a different meaning or purpose. In other words, place is always designed within struggles for power. As Cresswell observes, "Place, then, is not simply a passive outcome of social processes; place is, once established, a tool in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation" (46).

Places like Planned Parenthood and its city block are social constructions, and we need to examine how they are serving the aims of equity and resisting the "wider processes of . . . conditions of capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, post colonialism, and a host of other social conditions" (Cresswell 46). The

reproductive justice (RJ) framework put forth by Loretta Ross and SisterSong encourages us to read the conditions of a place in just this way. Let's start with the mural. This mural identifies and amplifies a community organizer of color using their own words, chosen symbols, and location in the city. Rutherford's aim resonates with reproductive justice commitments to stop the erasure of the bodies, histories, and experiences of women, especially of color, and encourage just, imaginative placemaking with them at the center. Beyond the mural, though, other components of the spatial assemblage—the Planned Parenthood sign at the entrance to the parking lot, the nearby bus stop, the ample, well-lit parking lot, the absence of trash and litter, the friendly security guard, the accessible building, the vestibule for waiting indoors—all communicate access, welcome, safety, care.

But my point about feminist placemaking as requiring constant vigilance returns here, because as we assemble the supportive components of a place like Planned Parenthood through acts of medical expertise, accessibility, relations of care, and visual symbols of beauty and flourishing, we must acknowledge elements of the place that attempt to reroute access to care. For example, across the street is a brick-and-mortar crisis pregnancy center (CPC) called Focus Pregnancy Help Center. On the other side of the building there is sometimes a mobile CPC called Compass Care Pregnancy Services. Both organizations are affiliated with local churches and offer free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, and "medical counseling." These attempts to reroute care from Planned Parenthood to CPCs are deceptive: they don't offer healthcare, just misinformation, shaming, and propaganda, as Thomsen, Baker, and Levitt chronicle in a recent investigation into CPCs for the *The New York Times*. Another element at the scene of our clinic are the anti-choice protesters on foot who make it hard to look at the mural undisturbed. Recently a protester started videotaping me as I stood to appreciate the mural after my shift, and another yelled that I was "supporting murderers" for looking at "abortion art." The protesters also deploy symbols to counter the mural's message of a client's rights to their own "story." For example, I regularly find tiny pink, plastic fetuses pushed into the spaces between the mural's bricks, disrupting the mural's focus on the client and replacing it with a focus on the fetus. As Carol Stabile observes, in order for the embryo/fetus to emerge as

Figure 2. Rochester, New York.

autonomous—as a person, patient or individual in its own right—all traces of a female body . . . must disappear (180). In the assemblage, these plastic figures vie for primacy with the figure of McKibbens, as well as the "you" in the "your story" message.

Ross urges us to "work toward the reproductive liberation of people who are socially, culturally, and economically subjugated and whose lives are peripheralized in the arenas of class, gender, and racial struggles" (174). We do this in part, she writes, by paying "close attention to many types of barriers preventing autonomy and self-determination, and thereby affecting the symbiotic relationships within communities in which individuals seek to manifest their reproductive options" (174). Here Ross suggests that we cannot simply be vigilant about the current placemaking at Planned Parenthood but must also be honest about its historical components. In Rochester that means acknowledging the eugenics discourses that motivated our modern reproductive technologies and services; the redlining of neighborhoods that limited access to care and stigmatized communities of color; the medical research that abused women of color in the name of advancing research.

For my part, I remove those plastic fetuses when I see them during my shift. I do it because I am a component in the client's story, the place they are making, and they deserve a fresh page upon which to write their life. I'm holding a place for their story.

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Where is the Place for Muslim Feminists? Placemaking in the Ruptures of the North American Academy

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Abstract: This reflection explores both solidarities and ruptures in feminist placemaking at the National Women's Studies Association 2023 soon after October 7. As Palestine had become a source of tension and critical reflection in many feminist spaces, this collective of Muslim feminist scholars also found it to be a source of transnational and intersectional solidarity work. This piece is written by tenured and untenured Palestinian, South Asian and Black Muslim feminist scholars as a model of feminist praxis challenging individual knowledge-making and redefining collective care.

Keywords: *Muslim women, National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), Palestine, racism, Transnational feminism*

Our essay begins with this question: As mainstream North American feminism has embraced intersectionality, queer theory, and transnational feminism, where is the place for Muslim feminist placemaking? Do Muslim women still "need saving" as Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) suggested in response to Laura Bush? Or is Muslim feminism still seen as an oxymoron? Or do only model minority Muslim feminists have a place at the feminist table?

As an informal collective of Muslim feminists who convened at NWSA (National Women's Studies Association) soon after October 7, 2023, we asked this question. We looked around and wondered where the place for us was and whether we belonged here. We found each other in reluctant eyes and informal disruptions. It was the first NWSA conference for many of the Muslim feminists who would then go on to help form the Muslim caucus at NWSA. By sharing our reflections here, we hope to explain why it seemed the right time, and finally the right place, to do so as we navigate our place in both North American feminisms and the North American academy.

When we think of Western feminists, many still picture the works of white feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler. But for Muslim feminists, this focus on white women's embodiment narratives highlights the chasm between mainstream feminism and lived experiences of Muslim women. Instead, Muslim feminists have relied on the writings of feminists on the margins: Black, Chicana and Indigenous women. We learned intersectionality from Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins. We learned about the importance of our voices from Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Nawaal El Saadawi, Amina Wadud, Suad Khabeer, and Sara Ahmed. We grappled with the unrelenting nature of colonial violence from Audra Simpson, Eve Tuck, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. We value them but does the North American academy value feminists in hijab, Black Muslim feminists, and Palestinian feminists? The academy does not see them and undermines their work and perspectives.

In this piece and in our subsequent conversations, we reflect on the space we have created for ourselves in the ruptures at NWSA. Much of this coalesced around two significant moments during the 2023 conference. First, when our group of Muslim feminists filled the room in solidarity with Palestinian scholars Wafaa Hasan and Besan Jaber, who spoke passionately and urgently about Arab, Palestinian, and Iranian women in the face of western feminists. And secondly, when we all came together to reflect and reconnect over dinner at a Palestinian restaurant in Baltimore, a radical act of community when other NWSA participants were at a pro-Palestinian protest downtown.

The movement towards this nascent solidarity had begun the night before. Crenshaw was delivering the NWSA keynote and, on the stage not a word was uttered about the relentless mass murders of Palestinians and the unfathomable experiences of women under siege. It was a disappointment coming from the Black feminist who first defined intersectionality, and the organizers for curating the silences. It was not until the pre-recorded video of Angela Davis was shown at the end of the event that the word Palestine was even spoken. This striking omission and afterthought politics guiding the engagement with Palestine had sparked the convening of a circle of conference-goers in a space made available by NWSA for "conversations." However, that discussion was led by non-Palestinian scholars, and the statement made by Feminists for Justice in Palestine, which called out "the leadership's betrayal of Palestine solidarity," and was printed and shared among conference-goers, was not directly addressed.

Many of us left this uncomfortable gathering feeling out of place as if there were many self-appointed allies but no real sense of community. As the group disbanded, we encountered Wafaa outside the room. She shared her uncertainty about attending NWSA not only in the wake of the Feminists for Palestine action, but more acutely, as the constant stream of information from Gaza broke the news of more and more deaths in her intimate circles. Wafaa spoke emotionally to a small group of racialized women who had gathered around her, talking about the toll the days had taken on her and her loved ones and it was clear in that moment just how urgent her work on Palestinian women is, especially at this time.

The next morning, Pakistani American scholar Asmaa Malik proposed that we cancel our panel on gendered representations of Muslims, which was scheduled for the same time as Wafaa and Besan's panel. We wanted to support and center Palestinian feminist voices and make our presence known not only for Wafaa and Besan, but for the rest of the NWSA attendees. With a room overflowing and all seating real estate called for, a session slotted as another paper panel turned into a plenary in front of our eyes, running well past the allotted time and captivating a type of engagement rarely seen in academic forums. We listened closely and rose to our feet when they were finished, all of us coming up to express our gratitude to the panelists, our arrival as a collective punctuated with

each tight hug. Wafaa was moved to tears and the white allies in the room who were called in during the presentation were forced to reckon with our enthusiastic support.

This solidarity was also unique because of the internal racism within and outside of the North American Muslim community, including anti-Black racism but also anti-Palestinian discrimination. Within our own Muslim communities persist racial and ethnocultural divides manifesting as material barriers to substantive and sustained solidarities. But somehow at NWSA, we were able to form some semblance of a community and find a place for us. But we are not naive that these ruptures and tensions don't exist even within our feminist spaces. Yet an understanding formed that solidarities are not devoid of rupture, awkward moments, and uncertainties – but in the tension and stress points, placemaking opportunities show themselves.

That evening, a group of conference-goers—including ones we were critiquing—loudly announced they would attend the protest in downtown Baltimore. We asked the two Palestinian scholars in our group: "Should we also go protest?" One of them who had just engaged in deep emotional labor to call out white allies on Palestine in a previous panel replied: "I need to eat." Our group of Palestinian Muslim feminists, South Asian feminists, Black Muslim feminists and Arab Muslim feminists decided to gather at Zaatar over shawarma and hummus and to other-affirm each other.

The atmosphere felt warm, and we felt grounded as if we had known each other for years. We were all moved by the solidarity that we experienced from Muslim feminists of different ethnicities and racial backgrounds. We shared stories, laughed, and thanked each other for standing with one another. We got to know each other. We awkwardly discussed the place of our piety in our feminist ideologies, navigating internalized forms of self-doubt. We reflected on 'the Muslim' category in relation to 'the Feminist.' We talked about ways to meet up, collaborate, and continue the bountiful conversation.

Where is the place for Muslim feminists in the North American academy? The place is being built right now in the ruptures, not by individuals but through a

collective, just as we write this reflection as a collective. Basarudin et al. (2023) recently wrote,

> While all ideas are collective, the academy—and the humanities as part of the larger academy—rewards individual scholarly production. Decentering the standpoint of the individual, sole knower, we engaged in a mode of collaborative knowledge production that enabled us to refract our memories and lived experiences through a wide range of transnational feminist ideas.

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Asmaa Malik

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Asmaa Malik's research examines how journalistic practices and media representations impact nondominant communities in North America. She has studied portrayals of niqab-wearing women in Quebec media, as well as the role of social media and news in Pakistani diasporas and is currently researching the experiences of Muslim journalists in Canadian newsrooms. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including *The Walrus*, where she has written about the erasure of Palestinian narratives in western media and racial surveillance in neighborhood social media groups.

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Thankful for Difficult Work: Navigating a Workspace Where Trauma is the Focus

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Abstract: This reflection addresses the delicate balance between the work of violence prevention and the often-significant impact on researchers' health, from a feminist placemaking position.

Keywords: *Violence -- psychological aspects, Wellbeing, Caring, Secondary trauma, Workplace occupational support, Feminist research*

In 2002, the University of Rochester Department of Psychiatry created the Laboratory of Interpersonal Violence and Victimization. The lab supported a transdisciplinary group committed to violence prevention and understanding the biopsychosocial impacts of victimization. At the time, we didn't consider putting the word prevention in the title. As we grew in numbers, we quickly understood the need to include people across a greater spectrum of disciplines, including but not limited to, law, physical and mental health, education, and policy. Within each field, we included students across educational levels: federally and grant-funded post docs, graduate students (medical and legal), college undergraduates, and even an occasional high schooler. Many of these scholars continue their important work on violence prevention, securing a future where there is a new way of primary prevention in addition to treating the aftermath of violence. This reflection focuses on the importance of doing this work, standing alongside the often-significant impact on researchers' health who are doing this work, from a feminist placemaking position. There is no doubt

there is a delicate balance between doing this work while protecting team members from secondary trauma.

While the lab's efforts have been largely impactful and meaningful, the work leaves its mark on one's heart and soul. The team debriefed weekly when in an active study recruitment period to explore how survivors' stories impacted the team. During one study, a perpetrator murdered a survivor. The team navigated ethical issues around human subject regulations regarding what to share, with whom, while simultaneously managing how the research assistants handled the news that they interacted with someone who was no longer living. While the IRB board made an ultimate decision the study did not impact the homicide, we still walked through a new awareness that our work could save lives.

As our team developed our portfolio of research, we became more committed to Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). We believed the best experts to help guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of services were the people who were receiving them. That transition meant welcoming survivors as part of our investigative and advisory team.

Stories abound on how our efforts intersected between life and death. During one study funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), our community health worker colleague explored an intervention to address depression. During a brief recruitment period, the community health worker helped several individuals navigate suicidal thinking. After hours one Friday night, a participant feeling suicidal reached out for help. Our colleague was at her desk, making up work hours as she was also a graduate student. The employee immediately reached out to the senior team, and the participant gained access to immediate mental health care. What became evident was the need to help our research teams address such serious situations without paying a heavy personal cost.

Our feminist perspective was to center on our survivors' needs, recognizing that our team members had a one in four chance of also having experienced violence – known or unknown – to the senior scientific team. This need to prevent secondary trauma for the team remained constant, but the need for our

community partners to have support also became urgent as one agency had to address several patients attempting suicide while receiving services.

We partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to create, disseminate, and test a curriculum that included the prevention of secondary trauma for domestic violence hotline workers. The curriculum, free and available to the public, is transferable beyond hotline workers.

Now at retirement stage, I have worked in the domestic violence space for forty-two years. I understand something now I couldn't have guessed when I finished my graduate training. A colleague and I were cleaning out files from our multi-office lab. We retained some files for regulatory reasons, while we shred others in a HIPAA-protected fashion. As I placed files into shredding bins, I lamented how many papers felt unfinished. We began papers that we didn't publish for various reasons: some graduate students started papers in fits and starts who then moved geographically and/or in their areas of focus. My colleague shared a poignant reflection—which was different than mine. She viewed the glass half full. She commented, with each discarded study, how they provided opportunities for learners to grasp difficult concepts, survivors to receive evidence-based or informed services, and for community partners to learn about research.

The "unfinished" studies also provided invaluable opportunities for our team to grow and develop into a creative partnership that valued each other's insights—even at times when our views varied. We grew into a family, creating a supportive place to celebrate personal life milestones including birthdays, educational achievements, new babies. We also mourned the tragic losses of loved ones and close colleagues taken from us too early despite their respective ages. We had successfully offered benefits to our city, such as the development of a transdisciplinary clinic to address domestic violence, while also growing as individuals and a community of colleagues, striving to do our best.

As we move into the next generation of growing scholars to study violence prevention interventions, we can bear in mind the toll this takes on our own physical and emotional health. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has funded The TRANSFORM Center, at Mt. Hope Family Center

(psych.rochester.edu/MHFC/transform/), which offers toolkits to create communities of practice for organizations wanting to address violence and join academic partners. TRANSFORM scholars create fact sheets to enhance readers' understanding of complex concepts on the impact of violence, particularly for children.

As I reflect on feminist placemaking that centers on violence prevention, I invite researchers to consider the following: let us be mindful of the impact working to prevent future violence has on us and our staffs. Let us be equally thankful for the spirit with which such work is carried out as we encounter life's darkness. We can find light in each other and our institutions with thoughtful planning.

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Since 1983, Dr. Cerulli has worked with survivors of violence in a variety of capacities including as a counselor, advocate, prosecutor, defense attorney, and researcher. Following a T32, she completed a K01 NIMH randomized control trial (RCT) in Family Court. She has also focused her research and intervention studies on suicide, homicide, and recruitment and retention methods among high-risk vulnerable populations using Community-Based Participatory Research principles.

Black Feminine Performance Meets Feminist Placemaking

Cassandra A. Scherr, PhD
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Abstract: From the clothing we adorn ourselves with to the playful role of our eyes or the careful words of accusation, we all engage in performances. In an ideal world, these performances would reflect or share our authentic selves. But in spaces burdened by social hierarchies and power dynamics for many BIPOC people, and particularly for black women, these personal performances become a necessary self-protective tool. This raises the question of how we effectively engage in feminist placemaking when we know that some people participating in these places are engaging in a self-protective performance. This essay will explore one answer to this question: to make room for these performances as one step toward building the trust needed to create safe and effective feminist places.

***Keywords**: Performance, AFAM, Safe Space, Black Feminism*

In the spring of 2024, I was honored to participate in a dance, poetry, and spoken word performance called "Black Women in Academia," hosted as a special session at the Northeast Modern Language Association's 55th Annual Convention. The session reimagined a performance two fellow graduate students and I created and performed in graduate school as part of an MFA dance recital. This new performance came with unique challenges deeply connected to the realities of being black women in academically focused feminist spaces. There is always a concern about the consequences of attempting to authentically discuss race in spaces built on academic distance and fallacies of objectivity. In short, we were navigating how honest we could be about our experiences and realities in what we knew would be a very white space. This concern is multiplied when one considers that as black women and early career academics, anything that we say could be taken as criticisms of institutions we

depend on and are encouraged to perform gratefulness to. We quickly realized that for our peace of mind, we would have to develop a performance within the performance, creating personas and "fictionalizing" our experiences to give us a platform to discuss issues that impact us while adding distance to these experiences. This distance was intended to keep us safe from the potential emotional labor of defending or being fetishized for our experiences and any potential backlash for justifiably critiquing the systems and institutions that sustain us. While I am happy with how the event went, what the audience response highlighted, particularly those of other black women, is that these challenges and concerns are far from unique. Reflecting on these conversations has helped me think through some of the challenges of feminist placemaking and how black feminine performance should be thought of within these spaces in a way others may find productive. Ultimately, I will argue that for many, performance is a tool that communicates and protects the needs and experiences of the performer.

For this discussion, I'll focus on the kinds of performances we do every day. The smile you plaster on your face the moment an unlikeable member of your church marches up to you. The playful dialog you engage in when flirting with a new love interest. The careful costume selection you do for an interview. We engage in numerous mini-performances as a regular part of day-to-day social interactions. In an ideal world, these performances would be both authentic and unnoticed, even by the performers, because they would be a natural extension of who we truly are. But in a world filled with social hierarchy, alarming often dangerous power dynamics, and normalized interpersonal and systemic oppression, these performances become an essential armor for those who dare tread where they are unwanted or unexpected. Our "Black Women in Academia" performance reimagined this armor by turning our poetry and spoken word performances into a fictional podcast called "Girl It Ain't That Bad … Or Is It." This allowed us to discuss topics, such as burnout, microaggressions, emotional labor, isolation, and anger, but gave us distance from those topics by writing these experiences as anonymous social media posts. The dance portion of the performance turned into a satirical "commercial break," commenting on the need for black women to "keep dancing" no matter what they face. Doing this reaffirmed all the ways performance has fascinated and protected me both

personally and professionally, and reflecting on the relationship between black feminine performance and feminist placemaking has highlighted that a genuinely inclusive dedication to feminist placemaking has to consider the safety needs of all of its members. While this statement includes physical safety, for this discussion, I am more interested in what a mental, emotional, and socially safe feminist place looks like. From the perspective of black femininity, what does it look like when a feminist place legitimately considers that the needs of those who participate in this space are intersectional and complex?

Something I've always known but struggled to articulate is that performance is normal and needed for many BIPOC people to feel safe, particularly when in spaces that have traditionally been limited or hostile to them. This is particularly true for black women. In a society that, at best passively and at worst violently promotes narratives of black criminality, promiscuity, excess, incompetence, and aggression, black women frequently find themselves "performing for their lives." When one knows that there are those in the workplace who see their presence as a DEI hire, performances of extreme confidence and competency are needed to maintain one's workspace. Yet, as that same confidence can be perceived as arrogance, one also quickly learns when to perform gratitude, grace, and admiration. Disagreement is often perceived as aggression, and agreement too often results in the appropriation of one's work and/or image, so every conversation becomes a complex tap dance of firmly maintaining one's boundaries while simultaneously soothing any hurt feelings or pride. For many black women in academia, classrooms, hallways, and offices are ever-shifting stages. These performances can manifest in many ways. For example, you may have noticed that I switched from first-person to third-person within this paragraph. That wasn't a writing error; that maneuvering of closeness and distance was part of the performance that keeps me safe.

However, these performances are part of a problematic exchange described by Toni Morrison when she said,

> The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't

> shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.

A good performance will help one maintain that minuscule tap dance board's worth of space, but it also distracts from the necessary work of placemaking and social change. As such, any feminist place that wants effective change must be safe for a wide range of people to be their authentic selves by not demanding that "one more thing." Establishing this safe place will result in the nonperformative communal connections needed to understand how inequity manifests and impacts at communal and individual levels. This communication is necessary because it creates understanding and connection through a deeply vulnerable sharing of lived experiences. Yet, part of being a safe place means understanding and making room for the performances that are needed due to those very same lived experiences. This raises the question: how does a feminist space do the necessary labor of social change when that space knows some of the participants can't or are not ready to be authentically vulnerable within that space?

The answer is to do the work to prove that the feminist space is a place everyone can trust to be *truly* safe. Prove that when one sets aside protective layers and trusts that place with their vulnerability, this vulnerability will be respected and protected. There are many ways to start earning that trust. For example, just as a safe feminist place doesn't ask women to take on the responsibility of managing men's emotions, it also can't actively or passively ask BIPOCs to take on the emotional labor of managing white confusion, aggression, or guilt. Few people enjoy or accept invitations with poorly hidden and unequally distributed additional labor. That is one thing these black feminine performances are intended to protect against. Another way to earn trust is to take seriously lived experiences. Work to recognize when to center yourself and when to be an ally. When being an ally, be prepared to listen as much, if not more, than when you speak. Resist the urge to diminish or silence anger and pain expressed by BIPOCs, and for black women in particular, do not give in to social narratives that black anger is a threat. Where no one should require anyone to be a punching

bag, rage and pain are a normal part of fighting oppression and will be part of an authentic discussion.

A truly safe place is populated with people willing to take the time to earn trust. Furthermore, they make room for and even encourage the strategies people need to feel safe while that trust is earned. Not only is this trust-building work ethical and kind, but it is a fundamental building block of the deep, long-lasting, authentic connections that are necessary for legitimate social change. Because of this, any feminist placemaking project that is realistically and authentically ready to do the challenging work of social change would be more than happy to engage in the time and labor needed to build this trust. My experience with black feminine performance has highlighted that to create an equitable and safe world, we must start by creating equitable and safe feminist places.

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Dr. Scherr's research primarily focuses on African American and Ethnic Literature with a particular interest in the utilization of speculative and artistic elements when creating and telling activist narratives. She studies how these narratives continue to create conversations throughout time and across the African diaspora. Furthermore, she explores how the Black Imaginary has become a necessary tool of activism that helps people from all walks of life understand and participate in the larger social and scholarly discussions that frame our lives.

Elbowing Across Continents: A Journey for Space

Smriti Jacob
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Abstract: We must transcend mere numerical representation and delve deeper into dismantling the entrenched biases that persist within the corridors of every home and institution, and streets of towns, villages, cities and nations.

Keywords: *Feminism, Placemaking, Women--India, Social justice, Groundbreaking, Immigration, Patriarchal norms, Feminist commitments*

I quit my first job to make room for a man.

I had seniority, but he was getting married, and needed the cash. I was single, living in a working women's hostel and could afford to wait a year, or so my boss said. I walked out in defiance of societal expectations and a complex web of gender norms.

That was 1996. In New Delhi, India. I was 25.

It is 2024. I'm in the United States, still elbowing for room.

I first heard the word feminist from my mother. A trailblazer herself, she was known in our small community, and among my classmates, as the woman who left two children under the age of 10 in the care of her husband and mother, to pursue graduate and doctoral degrees in another city.

The Feminine Mystique was a dog-eared copy on our bookshelf. *You Just Don't Understand* by Deborah Tannen also caught my eye and I was convinced my school friends were right. My parents were secretly divorced.

She taught by example, Grace did. Her debates with young women on campus tackled issues like beauty pageants and body image, while the plays she directed challenged the role of women in society. That was her making room for me.

What is feminist placemaking? Another fancy term that says I'm free to be who I am, and my sisters are free to be who they are? I am oversimplifying a weighty movement for behind that freedom lies a collective effort that empowers women, and those who identify as such, to bring about change.

Free to be—that's what brought me to the U.S. Imagine my surprise when I came here: some things were better, but others were just as bad or in some cases, even worse. I am free to be, but I have learned that I'm still a minority, when it comes to gender and race.

As a woman of Indian descent, I am a two-fer. I fly the flag for women and for people of color. I'm often asked to represent diversity through race and gender. I do it because it is necessary. I cannot diminish our numbers.

My first reporter job in a U.S. newsroom was lonely. We had one person of color, who would leave shortly after I arrived, leaving me to represent a group that several see as monolithic and devoid of nuance. At first it was a shock. However, as an immigrant on a visa, I had to summon strength and the hide of an elephant.

My accent was the first to transform. I made a conscious effort to learn the twang and desert my colonial Indo-British accent to get answers from sources and not spend time discussing my heritage (which happened anyway). There were times when I slipped, and I still slip, inserting British pronunciations into the mix. I don't know what I sound like anymore.

People ask me why I bother to change. They plead with me to celebrate my "uniqueness." My distinctiveness is mine to have and share. I don't want to be a museum artifact.

My "uniqueness" is on display here, and the irony isn't lost on me. However, I highlight it to say: let's unite as women, no matter where we've been. We all have stories. In the age of DEI let's not beat the drum on how we're needed

because we're different. Let's beat the drum to talk like women of brilliance and power, or else we'll have to keep making room.

We must transcend mere numerical representation and delve deeper into dismantling the entrenched biases that persist within the corridors of every home and institution, and streets of towns, villages, cities and nations.

It's time to recalibrate our mindset. Our virtuosity and ideas need to move past acknowledgement into the realm of recognition.

I try to move the needle by:

- finding female voices who push against the status quo,
- seeking writers who have traveled different paths to sisterhood,
- collaborating with business owners who aren't afraid to break the mold, and
- inking partnerships with organizations that see the bigger picture—where women aren't a nod to demographic diversity but contribute to intellectual capacity.

Let's not drag our feet. Join me in rewriting the narrative.

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Points of Necessary Return: A Feminist-Pragmatist, Place-Based Approach to Social Justice

Barbara J. Lowe, Ph.D.
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Abstract: This paper promotes an inclusive, place-based approach to addressing past and present injustices and argues that the 2019 Feminist-Pragmatist Colloquium in Rochester, New York—though certainly not perfect—offers one example of such an approach. The Colloquium revisited various Rochester-area historical sites to highlight advancements in social justice while also interrogating past and ongoing harms associated with these locations. The author suggests that ameliorating past and ongoing harms requires that we revisit relevant spaces, places, and events and that we do so with a feminist-pragmatist orientation. Approaching issues in this way can lead to learning, healing, and movement towards more socially just communities.

Keywords: *Feminist-pragmatism, Feminist-pragmatist Orientation, Place-based, Problem-based, Social justice, Social ethics, Feminist-Pragmatist Colloquium*

> *[S]ocial ethics is not attained by traveling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road in order to see the extent of one another's burdens.*
>
> — Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*

I am a white, cis-gendered woman philosopher. I believe understanding past harms, addressing current injustices, and progressing towards a more just society is best achieved through problem-based, place-based, and inclusive

inquiry. My feminist-pragmatist orientation suggests that by extending, expanding, and deepening our circles of experience, we have the potential to effect positive change toward more socially just conditions. Doing so ethically requires inclusive participation and adopting specific qualities and dispositions welcoming to marginalized or otherwise missing perspectives. These qualities and dispositions include a problem and place-based approach, a commitment to working "with" others rather than "doing to" or "doing for" others, an empathetic disposition characterized by humility, and a focus on gradual progress towards the amelioration of present situations and conflicts. When informed by these qualities and dispositions, returning to past places of injustice and conflict may facilitate the understanding and growth needed to realize a more just society. It was this orientation that informed the 2019 Feminist-Pragmatist Colloquium.

This Colloquium, which focused on the theme ***Looking Back to Move Forward***, occurred November 14-17, 2019, at St. John Fisher University and Rochester area historical sites. This was a "traveling" conference with multiple historical venues utilized for conference activities, discussions, performances, and tours. Rochester, NY, is an ideal location to host the Colloquium as it was the home for

Figure 3. Feminist-Pragmatist Colloquium Attendees at the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, Seneca Falls, New York, November 16, 2019.

both Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass. Rochester is within short distance of Seneca Falls, where the first Women's Rights Convention occurred. In addition, Rochester and Seneca Falls are also within the traditional Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) territory, which is not only the oldest living participatory democracy but also a matrilineal confederacy that inspired first-wave feminism.

Figure 4. Mt. Hope Cemetery, Susan B. Anthony & Frederick Douglass gravesites, November 14, 2019.

Figure 5. AKWAABA Living History Presenters, St. John Fisher, presenting "A Gathering of Women," November 15, 2019.

Though these sites and historical figures associated with them are often lauded for their role in advancing social justice, these were also individuals and events that marginalized and perpetuated injustices toward others. For example, the work of the first-wave feminists at Seneca Falls marginalized women of color. It failed to fully advocate for all women's right to vote and, until recently, has been unable to give due recognition to the role Indigenous culture played in the formation of our Western democracy and in inspiring the work of the first-wave feminists. Some might argue that, because of these injustices, returning to these sites serves to perpetuate the marginalization, sanitize the history that occurred, erase past wrongs, and thereby perpetuate these wrongs into our present day. I acknowledge that this could result from some efforts, especially those that gloss over history and offer only uncritical and laudatory remembrances of historical events and individuals. However, the fact that this might occur does not mean we should avoid returning to these historically complicated sites. Instead, because of these complicated histories, we must revisit these locations, the events, and the historical figures associated with them, and we must do so in a certain way and with a particular orientation. I believe feminist-pragmatism

offers an effective and ameliorative orientation for this purpose. It is this orientation that informed the 2019 Feminist-Pragmatist Colloquium.

The Colloquium emphasized the value of philosophy, especially feminist-pragmatist philosophy, in promoting the understanding of our past to address our future. This work requires returning to points of past social injustice but doing so with a feminist-pragmatist lens to understand the wrongs that occurred and often continue today and to realize an improved future.

The feminist-pragmatist orientation involves engaging in an iterative dialogue and doing so with others and, ideally, doing so on location, at places and spaces relevant to the past and present concerns. Though these efforts will be imperfect, and progress will likely be inconsistent, the alternative—retreating from controversial spaces and places of the past—risks maintaining the status quo and reinforcing social divisions. Therefore, we must return but, when returning, it is essential that we engage with humility and openness to hearing new perspectives in these places of past and possible ongoing harm. This offers an opportunity to understand better and create new, more socially just civic communities. An example from the Colloquium may help.

As part of the Colloquium, we visited locations of past conflict and ongoing controversy. The conference aimed to honor the figures and events of social justice in the Rochester area while also recognizing the missing perspectives, problematic issues, and slowed progress for some. For instance, during a lecture and dinner at the National Susan B. Anthony Museum and House, the museum's President and CEO, Deborah Hughes, and feminist-pragmatist philosopher Marilyn Fischer presented different perspectives on Anthony and race, opening a dialogue for additional voices to be heard. While universal agreement was not reached, all participants were left with

Figure 6. Deborah Hughes and Marilyn Fischer discussing feminism, race, and suffrage at the National Susan B. Anthony Museum and House, November 15, 2019.

an expanded understanding of the issues and the perspectives involved.

The next day, the conference attendees visited the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls. To the curated docent-led tours, we added and expanded on voices of those often forgotten when conveying the history and events of the women's rights movement. One of the noteworthy aspects highlighted was the impact of the Native American Haudenosaunee culture on the formation of the United States democracy and its role in the early women's rights movement at Seneca Falls.

Figure 7. Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, Seneca Falls, New York. Tour and discussion on universal principles and social justice. November 16, 2019.

The Colloquium brought attention to how these elements of the Haudenosaunee culture inspired the women's rights movement in the 19th century. Wakerahkáhtste Louise McDonald Herne, Clan Mother of the Mohawk Nation, and Sally Roesch Wagner, a scholar of feminism and Native American culture, spoke with the Colloquium participants about the Iroquois matrilineal tradition and its influence on the suffrage movement.

Each of these place-based dialogues was marked by a concerted effort to be more inclusive of under-represented voices and perspectives. Though not perfectly achieved, the ensuing discussions resulted in a deeper understanding of the subject, including what was progressive and what was not as progressive about the efforts of first-wave feminists in the 19th century.

Figure 6. Wakerahkáhtste Louise McDonald Herne and Sally Roesch Wagner, Seneca Falls, November 16, 2019.

There is always room for improvement and growth in our efforts toward achieving socially just conditions in society. We must continue to strive for even greater inclusivity and representation of more perspectives. However, it is necessary to begin somewhere, even if imperfectly or incompletely. We must begin and continue with humility and with the courage to move forward together.

In the words of Jane Addams, a 19th-century social reformer and co-founder of the Hull House in Chicago, "[S]ocial ethics is not attained by traveling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road in order to see the extent of one another's burdens" (Addams 7). This is best achieved not by avoiding these sites of past and ongoing controversy but by returning with an orientation that makes possible extended, expanded, and deepened circles of understanding.

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Barbara Lowe earned her PhD from Fordham University. Her scholarship focuses on pragmatism, feminism, and applied contemporary social ethics. Recent scholarly contributions include chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Jane Addams, The Oxford Handbook of American and British Women Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century*, and *Women in Pragmatism: Past, Present and Future*. Her current project is focused on how park-based philosophical engagement can foster community connections. Dr. Lowe is a past board member and program co-chair for the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. Currently, Lowe chairs the Jane Collective for the Advancement of Feminism in American Philosophy. Honors include the Trustee Award for Distinguished Scholarly Achievement, the Trustee Award for Excellence in Teaching, the Father Dorsey Award for Dedication to the Life of the Student, and the Jane Addams Prize.

Dear Sarah Weddington

Barb LeSavoy, PhD
SUNY Brockport

Abstract: The essay is a retrospective, creative, non-fiction, personal narrative on reproductive justice written in the form of a letter to Sarah Weddington, the attorney who argued and won the 1973 landmark abortion rights case, Roe V. Wade. Sarah Weddington passed away on December 26, 2021, preceding the June 24, 2022, Supreme Court reversal of Roe v. Wade.

Keywords: *Reproductive Justice; Abortion; Roe v. Wade; Birth Control; Teenage Pregnancy*

Dear Sarah Weddington:

August 3, 2022

It's been a little over a year since you passed away. Hell has broken loose on reproductive rights. And pretty much everything else around this. I think about your work a lot and sometimes imagine talking in person even though we're not friends. We met once. At the October 2014 Planned Parenthood of Central and Western New York Luncheon held in Rochester, NY, where you were the invited keynote. Your talk was inspiring. I can see you standing at the podium in the packed dining room as if it was yesterday. In a region noted for the fight for gender equality and women's rights, your presence was larger than life. After the luncheon, we shook hands, and you signed a copy of your memoir, "A Question of Choice," using a medium point black sharpie, penned in elegant cursive: ***"To Barbara. Thanks for sharing lunch! Enjoyed the visit. Sarah Weddington."***

June 24, 2022

I use "A Question of Choice" in my teaching often, citing your historic and well-argued 1973 landmark abortion rights case, Roe v. Wade. In the wake of the Supreme Court takedown of Roe v. Wade, your memoir was the first thing I grabbed off my shelf, a justifying anchor to reproductive privacy decisions that I

needed then and continue to grasp. The earth must have trembled around you that day. Tragically, it trembled for many of us, near and far, young and old, in body and spirt. Writing now, tears well up in my eyes as I consider the ebbing away of our reproductive freedoms and the reversal of the United States constitutional right to abortion. It's hard to fathom this step back in time. You knew this contested terrain then even in celebrating your 1973 Supreme Court victory; you expected it now, decades later, as you navigated repeating contests in the abortion rights battlefield.

September 13, 1974

I was 16 and still in high school. Like many in my age group, I lived on the cusp of womanhood. It was a liminal space where I was no longer a girl but adulthood was a logistical reach. I also lived on the cusp of the sexual revolution where birth control made sexual freedom accessible. It was a heady and empowering time to be young and female. I had what I would loosely describe as a first boyfriend, or really, a boy who liked me. I sort of like him back, but really, I liked the idea of having a boyfriend more than I actually liked the boy. I was excited to have sex for the first time. I wanted to have sex for the first time. I think I wanted to have sex for the first time. I think. I was new to the birth control pill, so we used a back-up condom that we fumbled with correctly. Maybe correctly. Maybe.

October 11, 1974

I missed a period. I was 16 years young. I was pregnant. I was living in emotional and financial turmoil. I wanted to talk with my mom, divorced, single, and raising three kids, but I couldn't muster the strength to do so. The twists and turns to my unwanted pregnancy were scrappy. Gritty. Complex. But because of you Sarah, I was able to access a legal and safe abortion. I exited the clinic with a weighted weightlessness that is hard to fully describe. My body was mine again. I could be a teenager. I could finish high school. I could go to college. I could care for myself better than I had. I could try. I got pregnant again two years later. I was using birth control pills. I was older. I was a teenager still. It was a much more complicated story. I was fortunate to muster the strength and courage to terminate my pregnancy. Because of you Sarah, I did so freely. Legally. Safely.

November 11, 2011

When my oldest daughter was 14, she had her first boyfriend. He was two years her senior. I discovered them standing in our driveway kissing one afternoon as I pulled in early from work. I panicked a bit about sex. Her. Having sex. Worried

is better. I am a worrier. I wanted her to tread carefully in sexual intimacy. I remember saying, please don't have sex until you're ready for intimacy. Intimacy. It's such a mature, adult responsibility. She was so young. I told her about my abortions. I leaned on this as a dramatic element of caution, to say, it was hard to be young and pregnant before I was ready. It. Was. Hard. I didn't say it well. I didn't ask her, are you having sex? I didn't advise her on or offer to help her with birth control. I wish I could turn back the clock and say it better. Parent better. Do it better. I wrote a poem about that day. It's buried somewhere deep. I wish I could find it. I wish.

June 27, 2022

I worry intensely for my two daughters, ages 22 and 26, and for all young people navigating reproductive healthcare access in a country that valorizes heteropatriarchal values. I am especially attuned to amplified challenges marginalized black, brown, and trans populations face whose identities and bodies are already over scrutinized. As abortion access across the United States falls away, they face even hasher obstacles. Sarah, I know you get this, but it deserves a space on the page: I am not pro-abortion. I am not against life. I stand with and support anyone who chooses not to get an abortion. I stand with and support anyone who chooses to get an abortion. I am ardent in recognizing the tenets of your Roe v. Wade argument: Pregnancy is a private matter. It does not belong in the hands of government or corporations. Reproductive freedom is about being free to determine when, how, with whom, and if birthing a child is right for me. It is about being free. If I am not able to find a job, earn a paycheck, put a roof over my head, feed myself and my family, secure healthcare coverage, then I am not free. If I am not free, I cannot freely care for myself or others. We are not all free.

July 3, 2022

I am political. An activist. Older. Old. I am fortunate to have lived on the edge of freedom. I am grateful for this and my abortion choices. Sarah, please accept this long, overdue, belated thank you. Thank you for arguing and winning Roe v. Wade. Thank you for securing my right to decide what to do with my own body. Thank you for codifying abortion law that shifted the course of my life. Shifted. The. Course. Of. My. Life. This letter is a radical act. A feminist act. A revolution.

August 13, 2022

You dedicate "A Question of Choice" to *"those who are willing to share the responsibility for protecting reproductive privacy and freedom."* I read this dedication to students. I recognize that they are diverse in their views. I acknowledge and respect this. I remind them that you were only 26 years old when you argued and won Roe v. Wade. I stress that we live and learn in Western New York, a region known for fighting for gender equality and women's rights. That I met you. That we shook hands. That this is your handwriting. That someone, here in the class, might be the one to stand up. To carry your torch. To lead us forward in the ongoing battlefield of reproductive justice.

Someone will. Someone must.

Rest in Power Sarah Weddington. February 5, 1945 - December 26, 2021

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Finding and Filling the Inkwell: Gathering, Cultivating and Writing in an Intersectional Feminist Scholarly Community

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Abstract: The author describes feminist writing collectivities inspired by Michelle Boyd's *InkWell* Academic Writing Retreats. The collectivities are an example of feminist placemaking where members relish each other's career or personal wins, and triage writing roadblocks, all while nurturing and reinforcing individual writing endeavors and sustaining writing practices.

Keywords: *Writing Groups, Women of Color*

During the second COVID summer, otherwise known as 2021, I managed to secure funding to attend a week-long online version of "Composed", Michelle Boyd's signature offering through *InkWell Academic Writing Retreats*.[5] As I have been telling anyone who will listen ever since, this experience, quite literally, changed my life, and my relationship with writing. Through *InkWell* I found a generous, deeply knowledgeable, incisive, and effective writing coach, and also gained access to an incredible community of fellow academics familiar with Boyd's methods—some of whom have since formed small ongoing and/or occasional writing collectivities where we can implement learned strategies and foster supportive, confidential, and generative writing sessions. Before I provide more detail about *InkWell*, and the instantiation of feminist placemaking it has made possible in my life, let alone how Boyd's methods have also fostered the

[5] The *Inkwell* website offers a sample request letter and provides suggestions about how one might solicit (even partial) funding (inkwellretreats.org/fund-your-retreat.html).

cultivation of other unique feminist writing communities, I want to draw the reader's attention to the InkWell website (inkwellretreats.org). There the reader can find the first chapter of Boyd's book *Becoming the Writer You Already Are*[6] as a free download. The site also provides a link to purchase the book at a discounted rate, should the reader wish to do so. In this way, the *InkWell* website signals a deep understanding that individual access to personal and professional resources and funding are not the same by providing readers with the means for a first (or continued) encounter with Boyd's style via *Becoming* that is also more cost effective and accessible than a writing retreat might be. In short, *Becoming* presents a comprehensive introduction to Boyd's approach, while demonstrating that her methods are grounded in scholarship on writing and draw on a rich array of material on "best practices" for fostering academic productivity.[7]

Since attending "Composed", I rarely[8] rely on the binge-writing practices that saw me through grad school, a dissertation, and book manuscript drafts. While such intensive sprints may sometimes be necessary in facilitating project completion or the meeting of editorial deadlines, using them as a principle writing strategy always came at an inevitable price for me: leaving me depleted, demoralized, detached from the enjoyable parts of writing, and desperate to find

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[6] A free copy of the first chapter of *Becoming* is available as a download (and it comes with a 30% off coupon code for those interested in reading more) on the website inkwellretreats.org/becoming.html

[7] Additionally, Boyd periodically offers free workshops that are accessible to those who do not have the personal or institutional resources for a full retreat.

[8] I do not say "never" here because like other unhealthy behaviors acquired in the face of challenges, successfully managing binging behaviors requires intentional effort, a commitment to practice, accountability, and support—it is an ongoing process, one that has become routinely successful in my life thanks in no small part to space the online feminist community of writers InkWell has encouraged me to cultivate.

[8] When my regular writing partners are unavailable, I turn to web accessible tools like focusmate.com which provide virtual co-working spaces. While some might be turned off by the idea of working with a literal stranger, neurodivergent writers often find that such opportunities for "body doubling" to be effective means of facilitating task initiation and completion. Focusmate, for example, pairs co-working partners, based on the time frame selected, from around the globe. It also allows you to "favorite" co-working partners that you would like to work with again, or who you may know IRL, and will prioritize such matches, when they are available. Notably, focusmate.com allots users five free sessions each month, so it can be tried risk-free, or utilized without cost, a few times a month.

an alternative to this primary writing process. I now write, near-daily, most often "in community" on zoom, primarily with other "Composed" alums from various social locations, time zones, and disciplines, who attend on a drop-in basis as time and schedules allow.[9] Our group, whom I fondly call the "InkWellians" is made up of U.S.-based humanities scholars, broadly speaking, and includes two Black women, an Indigenous woman (myself)[10], a South Asian woman and three white women accomplices.[11] Together, with each convening, we co-create a feminist gathering space where our individual writing endeavors are undertaken as part of a confidential, community building, and accountability project.

Rather than being anomalous, our small community of InkWellians represents a key aspect of Boyd's vision for participants. Boyd explicitly encourages alums to seek each other out for continued support, to serve as resources to one another as we continue implementing and reinforcing InkWell strategies collectively, and foster a sustaining writing practice, alone, together—mirroring the way that *InkWell* retreats and workshops cultivate environments and modes of engagement with, and among, participants that are grounded in intersectional feminist approaches that encourage us to come to our writing as whole people, not simply as our academic selves. This can mean recognizing, naming or bearing in mind/ bearing witness to the ways that our social locations impact us and the projects we undertake to varying degrees. In contrast to the way that (white) cisgendered, ableist, hetero-patriarchal systems require a particular kind

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[10] I am a first-generation descendant Turtle Mountain Chippewa woman, with roots in Red River as well as in French, Slavic, Spanish, and Jewish cultures.

[11] Indigenous Action Media. "Accomplices not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex: An Indigenous Perspective and Provocation." May 2, 2014. indigenousaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Accomplices-Not-Allies-print.pdf Accessed June 11, 2024; Michelle Mijung Kim. "Allyship (& Accomplice): The What, Why, and How". medium.com/awaken-blog/allyship-vs-accomplice-the-what-why-and-how-f3da767d48cc Accessed June 11, 2024.

of disassociation that mandates a cleaving of the intellectual self from emotional and embodied experiences affecting our wellbeing and, therefore, also our academic work, in order to be considered objective, professional, and/or scholarly, Boyd reminds her participants that the personal is political, that silence will not protect us, and that, whether we are willing to admit it or not, writing can be an emotional, political, layered and taxing process for many of us for any number of reasons. In this way Boyd models for her participants how one can create shared collective space, even virtually, where the complicated emotionality of the writing process can be addressed—a topic largely unacknowledged and unaddressed in academe. To be clear, this does *not* mean creating a space for therapy, or for providing one another with unsolicited advice. Instead, what Boyd teaches are techniques to stave-off, overcome, or push through the (sometimes emotionally charged) blocks to writing that can manifest unexpectedly (or even expectedly) during a given writing session.

It took a few times of me hearing Boyd mention that *InkWell*-like environments can be, and have been, co-created elsewhere, before I understood this as a call to action—a way to carry the work forward and honor the feminist praxis and pedagogy that are the heart of *InkWell*. With Boyd's blessing and encouragement, members of multiple *InkWell* retreat and workshop sessions continue to reach out to one another in efforts to form such small feminist writing collectivities. This was particularly important during the mid-covid moment when I was first exposed to Boyd and *InkWell*. Although, in my case, manifesting a sustained *InkWell*-informed writing community took time, persistence eventually paid off and our group of "Inkwellians" began to coalesce.

The intersectional intellectual feminist gathering space we create as "Inkwellians" stands in stark contrast to the oft championed image of the isolated ivory tower intellectual—emblematic of academic productivity and success, yet whose accomplishments are rendered possible because of access to significant and usually uncompensated, unacknowledged, and invisible labor (and/or access to financial resources that make outsourcing such labor feasible). Akin to an academic version of rugged (cisgendered heterosexual masculinist) individualism, this fabled intellectual worker also exists amid a mythos of erasure that obscures the human, temporal, and environmental costs of projects that, at their core, are rooted in, utilized by, and ultimately rely on the very entrenched and interlocking systems of oppression that intersectional feminism insists be

recognized and dismantled. In contrast with the celebrated isolated neoliberal employee in academe, our Inkwellian co-working sessions manifest as a place where we can engage as a community who are invested in each other's successes, recognize that there may be any number of life issues that can impact our daily ability to show up for ourselves, and we manage to show up for one another even when we struggle to do so for ourselves. Working in such an environment has become my preferred way to write, in part because it facilitates a space where a specific group can better hold themselves individually and each other collectively accountable to the time we have committed to writing. There is something about looking up from your document to see your fellow writers on the zoom screen who are also toiling away—it is at once inspiring, motivating, and grounding.

To be clear, working together-apart, in this way, still allows for, requires, and values the alone-time where our projects take shape and develop. Part of the utility of zoom for working is that one can notice, either via the screen or in the chat, when another has stepped away from their work for longer than a short break—which might then, on occasion, prompt questions about things that came up during our allotted writing time during "checkout", but I am getting ahead of myself.

Although what *InkWell* offers has been profoundly helpful to me and for many alums, it is not a one size fits all program. While multiple other writing support options exist, for those among us who find that the feelings that their writing brings to the surface (whether related to content, subject matter, the alleged "imposter syndrome", or something else entirely) are getting in the way of writing, there is *InkWell*. Boyd's system is not a new way or method of writing, per se. Instead, and on some level, it is a reminder that somewhere along the way many of us stopped trusting our abilities—or, more likely, our faith in ourselves. Our abilities have been slowly eroded by the elitist, ableist, and exclusionary culture of the academy. *InkWell* programs, on the other hand, encourage a reckoning with this reality by reminding us that we already *have* effective writing processes we can trust—after all, it is no accident we have gotten this far!

While my Inkwellian collectivity may have begun as an attempt, at least initially, to mediate the all-encompassing social isolation that COVID imposed, it has become so much more. From inception to now, my Inkwellians and I have continued to zoom-gather, to write in community and in feminist solidarity,

despite semester- or summer-based schedule changes or fluctuations in our individual lives that might requires additional and unexpected attention. Our membership reflects those who tend to be drawn to *InkWell*: scholars—primarily BIPOC, and women academics who, like other underrepresented and marginalized faculty at HWCU (historically white colleges and universities) across the United States, are often isolated, or are one of few in their departments and/or on their respective campuses. As such, our gatherings are also an important space for holding space for one another and sharing (briefly!) some of the frustrations and challenges that go unspoken in our day-to-day academic lives. We begin our writing sessions with *brief* check-ins (we stress brevity to respect one another's time and because it is *not* therapy), where we acknowledge how it has been going, what we plan to work on, and/or what is, or might be, standing in our way, and whether, on that given day, we are looking for "help, a (metaphorical) hug, or simply to be heard". Sometimes this leads to opportunities to share what has worked for one of us in the past, or to remind one another to "separate the situation from the story" or that "no to them is yes to you." My personal favorite occasion is when one of us (who is particularly gifted in doing so) says "as Michelle would say…" before gesturing to an *InkWell* strategy particularly well-suited to the issue-at-hand. After that, we write (with mics muted): together, apart. Then, a few minutes before the scheduled end of our writing session (at a prearranged time), we check-out—reflecting on and sharing how our writing session went and giving voice to at least one good thing that happened (negativity bias is real!) which allows for us to leave with at least some small measure of accomplishment, even during particularly grueling moments.

These co-writing sessions are energizing and encouraging because we hold ourselves and one another to account. It is a community investment in our work and in each other's processes that is, in and of itself, sustaining and feminist: we find joy in one another's successes (no matter how minor), and find a renewed sense of trust in our processes and in a faith that grows from the collective satisfaction of hearing how writing happened despite trials faced along the way. On occasion, we provide each other with confidential support, harnessing the power of our hivemind to strategize, commiserate, and root for each other—enacting a different academy in the process. I am heartened knowing that ours is but one manifestation of *Inkwell* inspired gatherings—free feminist writing collectivities where we relish each other's career or personal wins, and triage writing roadblocks, all while nurturing and reinforcing mutually beneficial,

sustained, and sustaining writing practices. Here's to gathering, together, apart—and, as my Inkwellians say, happy writing!

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Making Place in the Midst of Catastrophe and Change

Yamuna Sangarasivam, PhD
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We are called to gather in times of catastrophic wars and climate change. Making place is our challenge as transnational feminists in the midst of global pandemics both viral and racist in content and form. Let us call on the wisdom and foresights of Octavia Butler who, as one of many forward-thinking feminist ancestors, invites us to understand the powerful forces of change in the face of catastrophic environmental disasters, human failure, and denial. In *Parable of the Sower* (1993), she articulates the essentials of adapting with change by sustaining an ecological awareness that is grounded in forethought, care, education, and work to support community life.

The symbolic weight of transnational feminist gatherings is to break down the walls, which uphold those capitalist, patriarchal, white-supremacist, heteronormative structures of economic, political, educational, and social institutions that corrupt and erode our ethical responsibilities toward all living beings on the planet. The work of transnational feminist gatherings is to make space for the voices and knowledges of marginalized people and to gather and support the work of making place where communities are falling apart in city centers and rural deserts where poverty takes root to enable fear and isolation; to make place where refugee and migrant communities gather to find respite and resolve to risk everything for their own and their family's survival; to make place where sea levels are rising, fires are burning, and earthquakes are disappearing places people once called home; to make place where fossil fuels, pharmaceuticals, and capital flow with ease through pipelines polluting sacred rivers and lands; to make place where families are separated at militarized borders policed by reprogramed dogs and rabid humans. Feminist place-making in the 21st century calls on us to conscientiously connect with transnational, multicultural, non-binary youth to create communities that are dedicated to critical pedagogical practices in preparation to embrace/shape change while

building the conceptual and practical tools to survive and thrive in the midst of catastrophic environmental and colonial disasters and radical ecological evolution. Let us gather to learn with K-12 students making place in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools. Let us gather to learn with migrant and refugee community members and border patrol agents making place at militarized borders, checkpoints, and detention centers. Let us gather to learn with coastal communities making place while listening to the wisdom of oceans and rivers. Let us gather to learn with more than human beings making place in forests and deserts where we can learn and teach outside/beyond the capitalist model and expectation of success.

We will
make place
amidst
catastrophe and change

We will
gather where
communities
come apart

We will
make place
where compassion
unites

We will
gather where
crumbling economies
create migrant communities

We will
make place
where ecologies
thrive

We will
gather where
crumbling borders
create prisons

We will
make place
where love leads

We will
gather where
crumbling wars
create refugee communities

We will
make place
where children
laugh

We will
gather where
crumbling conscience
create rising seas

We will
make place
where water
speaks

We will
gather where
crumbling curriculums
create fear and distrust

We will
make place
where forests
teach.

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Yamuna Sangarasivam is professor of anthropology and director of the Women & Gender Studies Program at Nazareth University in Rochester, New York. She engages her interdisciplinary training in musicology, dance ethnology, cultural-political anthropology, transnational feminist and queer epistemologies and ontologies to inform her studies of terrorism, nationalism, resistance, and the intersectional politics of race, class, genders, sexualities, national and transnational identities, and divergent abilities. Her book, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Patriotism: A Speculative Ethnography of War* (2021-2022) was published by Palgrave Macmillan. Dr. Sangarasivam's recent scholarly and artistic endeavors in the studies of transnational feminist formations, transnational Asian feminist collectives, and transnational food cosmogonies invite her to journey into the fabulatory arts of culinary worlding to build solidarities across space and time.