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### Black Feminist Citational Praxis and Disciplinary Belonging

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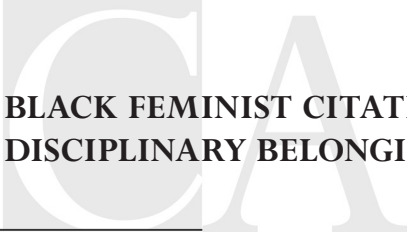
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## Colloquy



## BLACK FEMINIST CITATIONAL PRACTICE AND DISCIPLINARY BELONGING

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Black feminist citational praxis is one of the major interventions Black women scholars make in the academy. The commitment to reading texts frequently excluded from the canon, and acknowledging those who challenge and contribute to our thinking, constitutes a significant form of intellectual labor, though some may not recognize it as such. Whether it is Octavia E. Butler, Christina Sharpe, Faye V. Harrison, Saidiya Hartman, or the women in our families, Black feminists create new concepts, subfields, methods, and lines of inquiry, establishing intellectual genealogies that cannot be contained by disciplinary and academic boundaries.<sup>1</sup> And yet, Black women's ideas are often uncited, even as calls for papers, professional organizations' strategic plans, and funders' priorities give indicators that their innovations continue to move anthropology and the academy forward. Here, I argue that the decision to disregard Black women's work in citational practices indicates a larger problem related to disciplinary belonging in anthropology.<sup>2</sup> Citation politics are not only about footnotes and works cited pages. They also beg the question of who is read as an anthropologist, what is valued as anthropological knowledge, and how intellectual genealogies are established. Moreover, I suggest that the commitment many Black women anthropologists show to interdisciplinary, commu-

nity-based, anti-racist, and feminist work further marginalizes them, both in the anthropological canon and in other institutional practices.

Black women have a tenuous relationship with anthropology because of the discipline's colonizing, anti-Black, sexist past and present. Yet some feel energized by the puzzles that humans and cultures offer, the political and creative possibilities of ethnography, and in understanding experiential knowledge as a theoretical tool. Many of us are vocal critics of the discipline. Yet we remain committed to taking up space because we recognize our contributions and find anthropology an effective tool for thinking and doing.

Based on conversations I've had with Black women anthropologists, many of us have had a hard time being legible to hiring committees in anthropology departments, even though we were trained in the discipline and publish in its journals. It seems the more interdisciplinary fields such as Africana studies, gender studies, and ethnic studies, or disciplines like sociology and psychology embrace (and cite) us, the less anthropological we appear (Bolles 2013). This marginalization of Black researchers and our intellectual contributions affects which departments we get hired into and, in some cases, results in dual appointments that carry a disproportionate amount of labor. Some of these interdisciplinary arrangements certainly occur by choice. And some exist because academic institutions and grant-making agencies use disciplinary boundaries and identities to dictate the types of theoretical and political work acceptable for Black (women) scholars. This predicament of disciplinary belonging affects Black women's ability to remain in the academy at tenure review, when the very interdisciplinary departments that were initially happy to hire us find it challenging to assess our work. Citation, in this way, is directly connected to the flows of institutional opportunities and resources that demarcate disciplinary boundaries.

In 2013, A. Lynn Bolles initiated a discussion about citational practices and the invisibility of Black feminist intellectual thought in anthropology. Since 2017, the Cite Black Women Collective (CBW) has generated a multidisciplinary conversation about the plagiarism and erasure of Black women's writing. In sharing their experiences as Black (cis) women anthropologists, CBW founder Christen Smith and Bolles generated widespread discussion about the ways Black women are written out of anthropology and pushed out of the academy. For example, audits of curricula, department mission statements, and promotion standards are beginning to take place at universities. Journals like *Feminist Anthropology* established more inclusive citational requirements by drawing authors' attention to citational politics before submission. Alongside these discussions about citing Black women, both

Bolles's and CBW's efforts help us examine how citation affects the social and material conditions of the academy, particularly in anthropology.

Bolles's (2013, 66) research shows that while some disciplines like sociology and psychology at least minimally cite Black women anthropologists on issues of race and gender, feminist and anthropology journals frequently neglect to do so. In fact, when Black women anthropologists *are* cited, it is most often by other Black women anthropologists. This isn't new. One only has to look at the quintessential example of Zora Neale Hurston to understand two things: first, that (white) anthropologists continually marginalize Black women's research, even as the pertinent questions, insights, and innovations rooted in Black feminist research transform the discipline; and second, that across generations, Black women have persistently labored to document and reclaim our contributions to knowledge-making through attention to citational practices.

Oftentimes we are read for our methodological innovation and ethnographic detail, but not cited for our theoretical insights. During doctoral training, students are told to read Black feminist theorists on their own time, outside of class, to learn about racism, sexism, and identity-related issues. This type of intellectual apartheid and gendering of anthropological knowledge teaches graduate students a variety of lessons, including that the ethnographic isn't theoretical, and that Black feminist anthropology is singularly useful for teaching about race and gender. It actively constructs a discipline that both benefits from Black feminist anthropology and simultaneously diminishes the value and ingenuity of its work.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Black graduate students learn about their own belonging in the discipline as they are forced to read for dual degrees: one in the traditional anthropological canon (the white, mainstream discipline) and another in marginalized anthropologies, where Black (feminist) intellectual thought lives. The inherent message is that Black scholars may be great for informing your thinking, but when you demonstrate expertise through citation, you must cite the most cited to show your understanding of what anthropology is. And yet, we have very little discussion about the politics and practices that frame particular texts or scholars as essential.

One might ask: "What does a Black feminist citational practice look, sound, and feel like?" When I write and give talks, I shout out mentors, collaborators, and peers that have contributed to my work and made room for me in the academy.<sup>4</sup> I do this not only because I'm grateful for their generosity but also because citations are theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical imprints. They let readers and audiences know where you have been, who you have been in conversation with, and where you want to go. Community members, friends, students who teach and

help us cultivate ideas may not get cited in our bibliographies because they may be unpublished. But we find ways to cite these important contributors to knowledge-making in our texts and presentations. In a Black feminist praxis of citation that values a diverse set of knowledges, this citational practice is also important.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to what much scholarly training seems to suggest, citation is not merely about finding gaps in other's arguments. It is about dialoging *with* those you have learned from, marking and valuing the collaborations between your thoughts and their work to create something generative.

Citation is not simply consuming another's knowledge; it constitutes a call and response. In this way, citation isn't passive; it can be a very active and intentional process of intellectual genealogy and community formation. As part of a Black feminist praxis of collectivity and affirmation, citational practices not only concern an individual knowledge-making journey but also connect to mentoring and community-building. Citations enable us to call others into the room, especially when we feel alienated. This collaborative naming work is essential to our process of becoming anthropologists—and to how many Black women and Black feminists survive the academy.<sup>6</sup>

Some may be skeptical to discuss disciplinary belonging. I recognize that disciplines form part of Westernizing and Eurocentric practices that are racist and work to regulate not only writers but also readers. Black feminist anthropological thought sometimes becomes marked as outside *because* it disrupts and troubles disciplinary boundaries (Harrison 2008). I wonder, is it that we are in conversation with, collaborate with, and serve too many communities—academic and non-academic? Is it that we trouble conventional and hegemonic questions about what knowledge is, how it looks, and how scholars speak?

Like some of our Black feminist predecessors, many of us choose to do the work regardless—while being unapologetically Black, intellectually promiscuous, and willing to fan the flames that may lead to anthropology's burning (Jobson 2020). Yet I feel the need to discuss disciplinary belonging, because *not* acknowledging the material costs and conditions of our exclusion perpetuates the very forms of discrimination I have described, as well as the modes of citation central to those exclusionary practices.

## ABSTRACT

*What does a Black feminist citational practice look and feel like? This contribution to the #CiteBlackWomen colloquy focuses on two arguments: First, that Black feminist citational praxis is one of the major interventions Black women scholars con-*

tribute to the academy; and second, that anthropology's neglect and erasure of Black feminist anthropologists relates to disciplinary (un)belonging. I explore how citation and "disciplinary belonging" influence hiring practices, doctoral training, intellectual genealogies, and what is valued as anthropological knowledge. [citation; Black feminism; race; gender, belonging; higher education; interdisciplinarity]

## NOTES

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1. Black feminist writers like [Christina Sharpe \(2016\)](#), [Saidiya Hartman \(2008, 2020\)](#), and [Octavia E. Butler \(2003\)](#) have transformed how we understand both pasts (contemplating the archive, memory, "in the wake," and "afterlife") and futures (reimagining world-making and liberatory possibilities). Generative concepts like these not only challenge ideas about *who* can create theory but also *how* we might ask more constructive research questions using both scholarly and creative methods. And it makes space for those who thought there was no place for them in academic and literary worlds. Similarly, one might argue that a generation of (Black) scholars may not have remained in anthropology without Faye V. Harrison's and Angela Gillam's demand for "decolonizing anthropology" during the Association of Black Anthropologists' first invited session at the American Anthropological Association meeting in 1987 ([Harrison 1991](#); [Allen and Jobson 2016](#); [McGranahan, Roland, and Williams 2016](#)), which culminated in a pathbreaking edited volume. Writing three decades later, [Davis and Craven \(2016\)](#) theorize "feminist ethnography," [Maya Berry et al. \(2017\)](#) demand a "fugitive anthropology," while [Savannah Shange \(2019\)](#) calls for an "abolitionist anthropology." It is not incidental that these calls for more creative, community-focused, and liberatory anthropologies are often pushed forward by Black feminist anthropologists (and their allies). Like #CiteBlackWomen, these interventions generate theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological innovations that have lasting effects on anthropology and other fields.
2. To be clear, this exploration of "disciplinary belonging" should not be read as an assimilationist aspiration. This does not mark a desire to "belong" to or be in alignment with the anti-Blackness, patriarchy, and white supremacy that has upheld anthropology. My hope is that an examination of disciplinary belonging enables one to: (1) be more aware of the assumptions and stereotypes that undergird anthropology, and the interpersonal and structural barriers that affect Black women researchers; and (2) create strategies for (materially) valuing Black feminists who use anthropological tools to produce knowledge about the discipline's key questions regarding power, culture, and humanity. This exploration should not be limited to Black women anthropologists in higher education but should also extend to those researchers who get pushed out during graduate school or academic hiring processes ([Navarro 2017](#)), where stereotypes reign supreme and difference marks disciplinary (un)belonging.
3. For an introduction to the theoretical and methodological contributions of Black feminist anthropology, one might begin with [Irma McClaurin's 1991 \*Black Feminist Anthropology\*](#).
4. I provide a demonstration of my citational practice in an *AnthroPod* podcast interview with [Cory-Alice André-Johnson \(2020\)](#) titled "What Does Anthropology Sound Like: Activism."
5. Though space is limited here, I want to acknowledge how citational practices that mostly draw from U.S.-based scholars and English-speaking sources constitute one way Black women researchers and organizers are frequently made invisible. Black feminist anthropologists working in Brazil, such as [Luciane de Oliveira Rocha \(2020\)](#), [Keisha-Khan Perry \(2020\)](#), [Christen A. Smith \(2016\)](#); see also [Smith, Davies, and Gomes 2021](#)), [Kia L. Caldwell](#) (see [Caldwell et al. 2018](#)), [Nessette Falu \(2019\)](#), and [Erica L. Williams \(2013\)](#),

provide a model for how U.S.-based scholars can use their citational praxis to make room for Black feminist researchers and practitioners in other countries.

6. Black cis women anthropologists are not the only ones who survive the academy through this type of citational praxis and collaborative work. In my own experience, I have benefited from the generosity and intellectual labor of Black trans and queer anthropologists and scholars such as Jafari Sinclair Allen (2011), Shaka McGlotten (2014), and C. Riley Snorton (2017), who both contribute to and challenge the canon of Black feminist anthropology.

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