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BRIEF REPORT



From Practice to Praxis: Advancing Anthropological Practice Through Black Feminist Methods

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ABSTRACT

Black Feminist methods provide a framework for understanding and challenging the intersecting systems of oppression that shape Black women's lives. By centering Black women's voices and lived realities, these methods resist dominant narratives and create space for alternative knowledges. Drawing on the work of pioneering Black anthropologists, contemporary scholars use Black Feminist methods to generate knowledge outside of white theory and explore Blackness, womanhood, and multiple truths. The application of Black Feminist methods in anthropology has gained relevance in analyzing cultural phenomena through an intersectional perspective. These methods are essential for practicing anthropologists dedicated to advancing equity. They are performed through centering day-to-day experiences, asking identity-forming questions, advancing Afro-futurism, building solidarity, exploring ongoing imperialistic control of Black American culture, and developing scholarship that counters colonial practices. Expanding methodological practices by including Black Feminist approaches creates a more equitable world. Practicing anthropologists should build on the guidance in the literature and use these methods to detach Blackness from white frameworks and reposition belonging.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Black Feminist methods help understand and fight the interconnected oppressions Black women face. They center Black women's voices, challenge mainstream ideas, and create new knowledges separate from white theories. Building on pioneering Black anthropologists' work, these methods explore Blackness and womanhood from an intersectional view, considering how identities interact. They focus on everyday experiences, identity, positive Black futures, solidarity, and resisting imperialism and colonialism. In this article, we share the importance of Black Feminist methods and how anthropologists can promote equity, separate Blackness from white frameworks, and redefine belonging.

KEYWORDS

Black feminist; Black feminist methodology; Afro-futurism decolonizing anthropology; anthropology

What do we understand by Black Feminist methods?

Black Feminist methods help us understand the positionalities from which Black women navigate interlocking systems of oppression, including racism, classism, and sexism, and ageism, in a society that has created identities for them that they have had to and continue to reframe and rebuild. Black Feminist methods are chiseling tools to dismantle anti-Black ideologies. Black Feminist methods have an underlying assumption that there is more than a knowledge—there are *knowledges*. Black Feminist methods give us a concrete approach to combat dominant narratives and imaginaries.

Keeping in mind the quote about Black women being “the mule of the world” from anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston 1937/1990), Black Feminist methods can be used to center Black women's voices and understand their lived experiences.

What is “new” about applying Black Feminist methods in practicing anthropology?

Black Feminist methods are not new. They have powerfully shaped anthropological practice since Hurston pioneered ethnographic fiction (Hurston 1934/1990). Black anthropologists developed new

methods during the Harlem Renaissance and on through the second generation in the 1950s to 1960s (Harrison et al. 2018). McClaurin (2001) led the current generation in developing and teaching methods Black Feminist anthropology. Methodological innovations led by Black anthropologists continue to bring forth underheard and underserved communication. The intersectional perspective, long nurtured by Black anthropologists, is becoming increasingly relevant to the analysis of cultural phenomena.

Applying Black Feminist methods is a vehicle that gets new information about forces that affect Black women's day-to-day experiences. To reference the title of Giddings' (1996) *When and Where I Enter*, Black women have had to be hyperaware of how they enter spaces, and this methodology is providing new opportunities to enter, contribute to, and fully participate in anthropological conversations on their own terms. Therefore, it is new for formulating what Blackness and women mean outside of exclusionary dominant anthropological epistemology. Black Feminist methods can help push forward a Black consciousness to theorize Black identities that are not bound to one knowledge, allowing for recognition that there are different experiences wrapped in the complexities of sameness inextricably attached to white supremacy.

What is the importance of Black Feminist methods in anthropology?

Black Feminist methods are important because they are part of a movement for Black liberation. Black Feminist methods can facilitate a movement for social change through resistance. Black Feminist methods are performed (as a *method*) and performed (as an *act of service*) in the following ways:

- Center on commonplace day-to-day experiences, drawing on ethnography
- Ask questions that form identity, like, "How do you define woman and Blackness?"
- Create a point of connection and place for organizing
- Advance Afro-futurism and formulate new imaginaries
- Build solidarity through exploring the best ways to represent misappropriated voices and histories
- Explore the contemporary implications of ongoing imperialistic efforts to control Black American culture
- Develop approaches to scholarship that reject and counter colonial practices.

How can teaching Black Feminist methods advancing practicing anthropology?

These methods benefit anyone who wants to embrace a meaningful understanding of Black experiences. Using the methods enable scholars to generate knowledge outside of white theory. The methods are designed to excavate insights around Blackness, womanhood, and truth—multiple truths. For any anthropological practitioner dedicated to advancing equity (instead of equality), Black Feminist methods are essential.

Expanding methodological practices by including Black feminist approaches can help create a world in which the majority of humans benefit. To do this, practicing anthropologists should be purposeful. Build on the strong guidance that already exists in the literature (McClaurin and Brown 2023, Mitchell 2023). Don't use these methods as a means to engage with colonial or Eurocentric methods—but as a seam ripper to detach Blackness from white frameworks and reposition belonging. We encourage everyone to use this perspective and methods, regardless of the researcher's own identity.

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